

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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June 20, 2011  
Start: 1:12 pm  
Recess: 1:29 pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E: MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Elizabeth Crowley  
James Vacca  
Daniel Dromm  
James G. Van Bramer

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Frank Carucci  
President  
La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club

Tracy Steward  
Concerned Citizen

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2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We  
3 project this hearing will be quite quick, but good  
4 afternoon, everybody. I'm Council Member Melissa  
5 Mark-Viverito, Chair of the Committee on Parks and  
6 Recreation, and we're here today to do what we do  
7 maybe just twice a year, which is a package of  
8 street namings, and so this is the hearing of  
9 proposed Intro 590-A, which seeks to co-name 56  
10 thoroughfares and public places throughout the  
11 city of New York, and if there is anyone that is  
12 here to speak on any of the street namings, we  
13 would ask that you speak now or let us know that  
14 you are going to speak. You would have to sign  
15 in, but we can have you do that afterwards if you  
16 want to get up on the table—yes, and after we hear  
17 from the public on any of these, then we would ask  
18 any colleagues that want to speak to any of the  
19 street namings that they could do so. So with  
20 that, if you would like to—I think you have to  
21 turn on the mic. It's behind. Yes. There's a  
22 button.

23 FRANK CARUCCI: I should know how  
24 to do this.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: If you

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can identify yourself for the record—

FRANK CARUCCI: [Interposing] Yeah, hi. My name is Frank Carucci, former vice president for the United Federation of Teachers and now in a different capacity, long term president of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club on East 4<sup>th</sup> Street. I'd like to speak, if I may, on the renaming of East 4<sup>th</sup> Street for Ellen Stewart, the founder and artistic director of La MaMa.

Okay. I guess many people know of Ellen and her work internationally with theatre groups, bringing people together, young people, new artists, giving them opportunities to create, but I want to talk about her involvement with the community. It was in the late '60s that my college drama teacher brought me to La MaMa, when they opened at 74 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street. My experiences ever since watching that community change and grow from an area that you would be afraid to walk around in the '60s and '70s to a flourishing community now filled with people, artists, restaurants, other theatre groups—I call East 4<sup>th</sup> Street the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street of off off Broadway because there's so many theatres working there now. Ellen

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2 was a visionary. She found two buildings on that  
3 street that she saved that might have been ripped  
4 down. One of them has since been landmarked, but  
5 she has used those buildings to help with the  
6 community. We've had wedding receptions there.  
7 We've had memorial receptions, and of course, we  
8 do shows every night of the week--three or four a  
9 day, sometimes ten or twelve different productions  
10 going on--again, many of them with international  
11 companies, bringing new cultures and new ethnic  
12 groups to La MaMa and to the street. We are  
13 planning a block party on Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup>,  
14 which is the actual 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the  
15 founding of La MaMa, and we're hoping to rename  
16 the street for Ellen Stewart, the founder.

17           Ellen died on October 13<sup>th</sup> this  
18 year, and I have to tell you, we had the most  
19 beautiful funeral mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral  
20 on Martin Luther King Day, but the actual wake was  
21 held at the Church of the Nativity on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue,  
22 right around the corner from La MaMa, so that the  
23 community and people would have an opportunity to  
24 visit. I think you will find that her reputation  
25 and her popularity walking around that

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2 neighborhood--everybody would pop out from  
3 windows, from stores to say and greet her. So I  
4 think she's a beloved personality and certainly  
5 has done so much to make that community what it is  
6 today. I don't if you have a question or--I just  
7 feel that's my passionate words on her behalf.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want  
9 to thank you for taking the time to come down to  
10 speak on behalf of this street naming. I know  
11 that my colleague, Rosie Mendez, who introduced  
12 this, is here. I just want to recognize my  
13 colleagues on the Parks and Recreation Committee  
14 that have joined us. We've got Danny Dromm. We  
15 also have Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, and I  
16 know that Council Member Rosie Mendez is joining  
17 us to speak on behalf of this street naming, so  
18 colleague Mendez, if you would like to say a few  
19 words...

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Thank you,  
21 Madam Chair, and if I could speak on another  
22 street co-naming just slightly outside my district  
23 after this?

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Of  
25 course.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Okay. So  
3 first, I'm here to ask the Committee to support  
4 the co-naming of 4<sup>th</sup> Street to Ellen Stewart Way.  
5 As mentioned, Ellen was the artistic director for  
6 La Mama Experimental Theatre and a known and loved  
7 figure on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and before I got to this City  
8 Council, she with Margarita Lopez [phonetic] and  
9 many others organized what is now the 4<sup>th</sup> Arts  
10 Block and we have a whole block of theatre that's  
11 just thriving there and very beautiful. This is  
12 something that the community is very supportive of  
13 and to honor Ellen in this way would be a very  
14 great thing and would also help keep 4<sup>th</sup> Arts Block  
15 alive and well on 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

16 On another matter, I always forget  
17 because our districts are so close—I want to talk  
18 in support of Harry Wieder Way, which is just  
19 slightly outside my district in Council Member  
20 Margaret Chin's district; however, Harry Wieder  
21 was my appointee to Community Board 6 and  
22 Margarita's appointee to Community Board 3 during  
23 my tenure and during Margarita's tenure. Harry  
24 was a renowned gay rights and disability activist.  
25 He was a man of short stature, but great heart.

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2 It was pretty incredible to be out with Harry in  
3 the street because inevitably, when we would be  
4 campaigning on some issue, kids would stare and he  
5 would engage the kids in a conversation and say,  
6 "Yes, I'm a small adult" and he would help get  
7 kids over their curiosity or any prejudices and he  
8 was tragically run down by a taxi cab when he was  
9 leaving a Community Board 3 meeting approximately  
10 a year ago. To my good friend and a great  
11 activist, Harry Wieder, it would be wonderful to  
12 rename the street—it's on Forsyth Street where he  
13 lived, and we look forward to that. Thank you,  
14 Madam Chair and thank you, Frank, for coming here  
15 today and speaking on behalf of Ellen Stewart Way—

16 FRANK CARUCCI: [Interposing] Thank  
17 you all. I appreciate the opportunity.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
19 you, Council Member Mendez. I know we have been  
20 joined by someone else from the audience who does  
21 want to speak on one of the street namings... Okay,  
22 Tracy Steward, when they return, we will get them  
23 to speak. I know that Council Member Jimmy Van  
24 Bramer had a statement he wanted to make.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank



1  
2 you very much, Madam Chair. First, I wanted to  
3 encourage my colleagues to support Winged Fist Way  
4 in my district, which is going to honor the Irish  
5 American Athletic Club, which was founded there  
6 and operated there for many, many years, and it  
7 has been a terrific effort on the part of Ian  
8 McGowan and some terrific folks in my district to  
9 have that history recognized where the Celtic  
10 apartment complexes now reside, and I'm proud to  
11 sponsor this legislation and look forward to it  
12 being passed and unveiling that street sign.

13           And then I also just wanted to say  
14 because many of us knew Harry Wieder up here, and  
15 I know Council Member Dromm feels the same way,  
16 Harry was a very, very special person. I knew him  
17 for a very long time. He came to my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday  
18 party a long time ago. He was a lot of fun. He  
19 used the Queens Library all the time 'cause even  
20 though he lived and did much of his activism in  
21 Manhattan, his parents lived in Queens and so he  
22 was always at the Central Library in Jamaica and I  
23 would see him often just using the computers when  
24 I was working at the Queens Library. I'm so happy  
25 this is happening for him.

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2                   And then I also just wanted to—if  
3 it's alright with you—because Councilwoman and  
4 Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito is honoring Phil Reed,  
5 who I was friends with and admire and is one of  
6 the two openly gay men serving in the City Council  
7 now. Phil Reed was one of the few openly gay  
8 Council Members back in the day, and he did so  
9 much for so many people. He was really, really  
10 funny and always supported me, so I want to thank  
11 the Chair for honoring Phil Reed in that way.  
12 Thank you.

13                   CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
14 you for those words and I am the Council Member  
15 that came after Phil Reed, and obviously, he is  
16 very loved in the community, and so this was a way  
17 of being supportive of what the community had put  
18 forth, which is to name a street in the district  
19 that he represented for so many years in honor of  
20 the work and commitment that he gave. I was  
21 enjoying Council Member Dromm's street naming—that  
22 looks like the letters of the Scrabble game, so I  
23 don't know if you wanted to say a few words,  
24 Council Member?

25                   COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you.

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2 I wasn't really going to say anything, but yes,  
3 Scrabble was invented in Jackson Heights, and we  
4 had a sign up there, but it was not properly  
5 placed in the past, but this time around it will  
6 be. The number designations after the letters are  
7 indicative of the value of each letter in the game  
8 of Scrabble, so we thought that would be something  
9 very nice for the community to have and to  
10 recognize part of the history of Jackson Heights,  
11 and in particular, the corner on which that's  
12 going to be placed is the Community Methodist  
13 Church, which also has a very long history in the  
14 community.

15                   Also, I have another street naming  
16 in for Richard Cecere. He was a very close friend  
17 of mine and the founder of one of my democratic  
18 clubs, and the chair of Community Board 3. He  
19 passed away at a very early age—very sad disease,  
20 a type of cancer that's very, very rare. He was  
21 totally involved and dedicated to Community Board  
22 3, in particular, to Jackson Heights as well.  
23 It's a pleasure to be able to have that introduced  
24 at this time. Thank you.

25                   CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank

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2 you, Council Member Dromm. We've been joined by  
3 Council Member Vacca and Council Member Crowley.  
4 Is Tracy Steward here? You wanted to speak on one  
5 of the street namings, correct? If you could sit  
6 at the table, please... Once you sit down, if you  
7 could just identify yourself for the record, and  
8 then you can feel free to present your testimony.

9 TRACY STEWARD: Good afternoon. My  
10 name is Tracy Steward. I'm here to speak on  
11 behalf of my mother Odessa Steward, who worked in  
12 the 24<sup>th</sup> Precinct for approximately 43 years,  
13 basically all of my life. She grew up down south,  
14 but she moved to Frederick Douglas community in  
15 the projects in 1954. She worked in the precinct  
16 as a volunteer. She wanted to join the force, but  
17 they said that she was too short at the time, so  
18 she wound up working there for a year as a  
19 volunteer and they wound up hiring her as a  
20 receptionist. During this time working at the 24<sup>th</sup>  
21 Precinct from 1967, she became the first precinct  
22 receptionist within New York City. When she was  
23 offered the position to work full-time, she jumped  
24 on it immediately. She held this position for 30  
25 years.

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2                   During this time, she presented to  
3 the administration—being that the receptionist  
4 position was going so well, she wanted to add more  
5 receptionists throughout the precinct, and they  
6 agreed. They would up hiring 65 more  
7 receptionists for each precinct within the New  
8 York City area. At this time, she was the  
9 president of the receptionists.

10                   My mother has done a lot of things  
11 for this community. She worked with the  
12 homelessness. She started the housing tenant  
13 patrol in 1969. She was the vice president of the  
14 tenant patrol. She created the Children's  
15 Christmas Party, which still goes on to this day  
16 every year—where they give out toys to  
17 underprivileged children. She created the Mr.  
18 Peanut contest, which is a program that they do  
19 every year for kids to practice physical fitness  
20 and stuff like that. She has done a lot for the  
21 community. I could go on and on as to the things  
22 that she's done. She was given so many  
23 certificates and awards that I can't even name.  
24 My mother was a beautiful person. She passed away  
25 in December. Her memory in that community is

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2 profound. Everybody knew my mother from the  
3 precinct, all the precincts in the area, from the  
4 west side to the east side. I think renaming the  
5 street where I still live at and to look out my  
6 window and see this would mean so much to her  
7 memory because she has been such a positive  
8 enforcement in that neighborhood. Even kids today  
9 they ask me—some of them don't even know that my  
10 mother passed away—they ask me how my mother is  
11 doing and stuff like that. It would mean a lot to  
12 the community, not just to me and her family, but  
13 to the community in general. She's helped people  
14 get out of trouble. She helped people get jobs.  
15 She's just been a remarkable person in this  
16 neighborhood and I would like to keep her memory  
17 going, if we can rename that street after her.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well,  
19 Mr. Steward, I want to thank you for coming. I'm  
20 the Council Member that represents you and we are  
21 submitting this—I know you had contacted Joe  
22 Taranto from my office. I think you have been  
23 working on it. I'm glad that we were able to get  
24 it in for this package of bills. I think that  
25 what you've made out and looking at her

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2 information is a real example of what we need—real  
3 civic engagement, community involvement, really  
4 committed to making our community a better place,  
5 and all of that involvement that you laid out is  
6 indicative of what we need more in this city. So  
7 I want to thank you for doing this and I'm glad  
8 that we will be able to honor her memory and her  
9 commitment through this street naming. After  
10 this, we will be voting on it in another hearing,  
11 and then it will go before the full Council, so  
12 thank you very much for joining us here today—

13 TRACY STEWARD: [Interposing] Thank  
14 you. I appreciate it.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I don't  
16 know if any of the other colleagues have anything  
17 to say on any of the street namings? If not, I  
18 want to also thank the staff 'cause there's a lot  
19 of vetting that goes into all of these. It's 56  
20 street namings, so everyone has to be vetted and  
21 research has to be done to make sure that they  
22 meet the criteria and the guidelines. I want to  
23 thank Kris Sartori, Patrick Mulvihill and Cheema  
24 Albichair [phonetic] for their work on the Parks  
25 Committee, and if no one else has anything else to

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say, this hearing is adjourned.

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[gavel]



C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Uhlig certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature



Date

July, 2, 2011