

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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February 4, 2016
Start: 10:37 a.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm
14th Fl.

B E F O R E: MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Darlene Mealy
Fernando Cabrera
James G. Van Bramer
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
Mark Treyger

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

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [gavel] Good

4 morning, everybody. We're going to get underway.

5 I'm Mark Levine, Chair of the City Council's

6 Committee on Parks and Recreation. Today, we have two

7 matters that we'll be voting on. First up is

8 proposed Intro 856-A, the bill that would require the

9 Parks Department to created discounted membership

10 fees at its recreation centers for seniors, youth,

11 veterans and person with disabilities. We are also

12 going to be voting on our Semi-Annual Street Co-

13 Naming Bill, which will ceremonially name 42

14 thoroughfares and public places throughout the city.

15 I'm going to say more on both of these items shortly,

16 but we're going to kick it off with testimony from

17 two public witnesses who have asked to speak, and so

18 I'd like to ask Sarah Fisher, and Jacob Morris to

19 please come on up. [pause] Sergeant, if you could

20 just put it--we'll put a five-minute on the clock.

21 Yeah. [pause] All right, welcome to you both.

22 Sarah, if you're ready, you can kick us off.

23 SARAH FISHER: [off mic]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right, Jake is

25 ready. Jake, was born ready. [laughter]

2 JACOB MORRIS: Oh, wow. Yeah, this is
3 good quality. So I'm very happy today. I'm happy
4 because as I was sitting here waiting for the hearing
5 to start, this nice lady sitting next to me was
6 looking over the proposed names in the--in the co-
7 name package, and when she said, Gee, there's some
8 nice names in the package--the sign--I--I would like
9 to live on Hip Hop Boulevard. [laughs] in particular
10 and that--that really made my morning. It's been--
11 it's been a long time coming for Hip Hop Boulevard.
12 I first proposed the name in 2007, and this was after
13 Sunny Carson, the controversy over Sunny Carson. You
14 know, because that's where well Sedgwick especially
15 1520 Sedgwick was where Kool Herc had the first hip
16 hop party, which is historically acknowledge and--and
17 the location of 1520 Sedgwick is--it is on the State
18 Registry of Historic Places. And so, you know, I was
19 doing a lot of street co-naming in Harlem in
20 particular and a district manager in Harlem told hey,
21 you know, could you take a look at the Bronx, Jacob,
22 because you're good at this. [laughs] And so I said
23 well, you know, they changed the guidelines. You've
24 got to be dead. [laughs] So to name it after Kool
25 Her, you know, and then there might be some rivalries

2 involved with the founders of hip hop. So I said but
3 if you name it Hip Hop Boulevard then everybody gets
4 celebrated who was involved with the founding of hip
5 hop. And so that's how the name came about, and it
6 really resonated with a lot of people. There's been
7 television coverage about the name of--they had three
8 hearings in Community Board 5 in the Bronx on this
9 and community was like gee we should have done this a
10 long time ago. [laughs] So, this is the culmination
11 of a long, long road with jumping through many, many
12 hoops and many, many obstacles, but here we are in
13 2016, and--and it's going to come before your
14 committee, and hopefully it will pass with all the
15 other proposed namings and then get voted by the full
16 City Council and signed by Mary de Blasio, and--and
17 we will have an absolutely wonderful celebration, and
18 [coughs] I got to say here in New York City, and
19 especially the Bronx this honors the Bronx. I mean
20 Hip Hop is a worldwide phenomenon. And it's not just
21 the music. It's not just the music. The music
22 talking over the beat, you know, that's--that's where
23 it happened whether it's fashion, it's dance, it's
24 art, it's a multiplicity of creating endeavors, and
25 it's inspired our youth and--and--and our entire

2 society. It's given a liveliness and a ferment to
3 our entire society. Hip Hop that it started here in
4 this unique mix of--of what was going on in the Bronx
5 in the early 1970s, it's just very, very special.
6 So, I thank you. I want to thank you very much

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.
8 Morris. Thank you for your advocacy and your
9 testimony today. Sarah, please.

10 SARAH FISHER: [off mic] Hi, I'm here to
11 speak on I think it's--

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your mic, please.

13 SARAH FISHER: [off mic] Is that in here?

14 JACOB MORRIS: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And--and while--
16 while you fumble for that, I do want to acknowledge I
17 forgot to acknowledge that we have colleagues here in
18 the room I want to thank for being here. We have
19 Council Member Gibson from the Bronx, and we have a
20 special guest from the Parks Committee today, Council
21 Member Cohen also from the Bronx and Council Member
22 Mealy from Brooklyn. I'm sure I'll be hearing from
23 the shortly, and please proceed.

24 SARAH FISHER: Great. My name is Sarah
25 Fisher. I'm the Co-Founder of Friends of Inwood Hill

2 Park, which if you don't know it is the most
3 beautiful park in Manhattan, and also our last
4 natural forest and salt marsh, and also a member of
5 Fountain House for the last ten years. The reason I'm
6 here is to ask you to consider a slight important
7 amendment to 856-A , and that is to--is to consider
8 adding not just recreation center membership fees,
9 but also tennis permit fees to the bill. And if I
10 can find my copy. I testified--I tried to get here
11 actually for the hearing that you had in October,
12 another rainy day actually rainier than this, and I
13 got here. I think it was a quick hearing, and I get
14 here a few minutes late, enough time to hold an
15 umbrella in front of--over Edith and the person who
16 was here from Parks. The reason I ask, and think
17 that this is a logical change--and I find the
18 language in a minute--is I think it's also logical to
19 the Parks Department. When they raise the tennis
20 fees initially a few years ago, when they double the
21 fees, it was not only doubling those fees for
22 recreation--recreation centers, but also for tennis
23 courts. And, in fact, their rule that they proposed
24 and adopted was to--was a reduction of fees for
25 recreation centers and tennis permits for people who

2 help this cause. So they just proposed a rule and I
3 can read the language of it. They said the purpose
4 of it--the purpose of the rule is to enhance access
5 to recreational opportunities for New York residents
6 at the Parks Departments--sorry, I'm reading on a
7 phone--recreation centers and tennis courts. The
8 rule will establish a new reduced membership fee and
9 a reduced tennis permit fee for adults with a valid
10 New York City Identification NYIDC card. I think
11 that the language that you all have it could be
12 adopted pretty quickly by inserting a few words. And
13 what I would say is I live--if I can find the words
14 to write and then yes I can give you specific
15 language that I would suggest. But I--Inwood Hill
16 Park does not have a recreation center. We do have
17 tennis courts, and we would like to increase access
18 to those tennis courts for--for veterans and for
19 people with disabilities. The language in the
20 proposed law would just be an addition of a few
21 choice words, *discounted recreation center*, and I
22 would add after that *and tennis permit fees*. The
23 next sentence annual membership--annual recreation--
24 insert the word *recreation center membership fee* and
25 *tennis permit fees* for each recreation center and

2 tennis court under the jurisdiction of the department
3 shall be reduced for a person 62 years of age and
4 older. Persons between 18 and 24 years of age,
5 veterans and persons with disabilities. Such reduced
6 fees shall be no greater than 25% of the highest
7 annual member and tennis permit fees charged at such
8 recreation centers and tennis courts. I think it's
9 a logical change. I think that it would make sense
10 to the department. When they make adjustments to
11 their fee schedules, those are the two they always
12 adjust together, and I see no reason why this
13 committee and the City Council cannot consider both.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Sarah,
15 for your advocacy on this. This bill is already
16 begun the aging process for voting on Friday.

17 SARAH FISHER: Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So, we're not able
19 to amend it at this late date, but you make a very
20 compelling case on tennis fees. I think it's
21 something that this committee should take up as
22 future legislation. So, I'm happy you brought it to
23 our attention, and thank you for speaking out today.
24 We are still waiting for quorum. So, my colleagues,
25 Council Members Mealy and Cohen are going to be

2 locked in their seats with me for a little bit, but I
3 would like to ask Council Member Gibson, because she
4 may have a busy day, if you would like to speak at
5 all. I believe--is Hip Hop Boulevard in your
6 district?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [off mic] Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is that right?

9 Okay, well, if you'd like to say a few words on that,
10 please.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Sure. Thank you
12 and good morning Chair Levine, and to all of my
13 colleagues on the Parks Committee. Thank you for the
14 warm welcome. I truly appreciate it, and I know
15 before us is legislation that will rename and co-name
16 several thoroughfares throughout the City of New
17 York, and I just want to in addition to Hop Hop
18 Boulevard, speak very quickly about a few others that
19 are very important to me. Obviously, we're going to
20 rename a section in Far Rockaway in honor of fallen
21 NYP Detective Randolph Holder, who was a Housing cop
22 in PSA-5 who was unfortunately killed just several
23 months ago, as well as honoring Carey Gabay, who was
24 one of the counsel that worked for Governor Andrew
25 Cuomo, very important as well. In my district in the

2 Bronx, we're also honoring a dear friend of mine who
3 was one of the founders of the Morris Heights Health
4 Center, Loretta Ruddock Smith was a community
5 resident of Community Board, very, very active. So
6 much that we did in Community Board 5, and I'm truly
7 honored that we're going to re-name the street that
8 she lived for over 30 years in my district in her
9 honor. I also want to recognize Dr. Derrick E.
10 Griffith Way, who was a professor at Medgar Evers
11 College. Although he had a Brooklyn nativity, he was
12 from the Bronx, lived, born and raised, and certainly
13 was the founder of CUNY Prep School. Which is a
14 program that provides young people an opportunity to
15 ascend for college. So I'm very proud of that, and
16 obviously Hip Hop Boulevard is extremely important to
17 us in the Bronx. We know that there's been a lot of
18 talk, but we always say that Bronx has and will
19 always be the birth place of Hip Hop. It is
20 recognition. It is an acknowledgement of the work
21 that hip hop has done, the contributions, the value
22 it has brought to the music industry to up and coming
23 artists, all of the incredible trailblazers and
24 pioneers in Hip Hop history, DJ Kool Herc, Grand
25 Master of theatrical (sic) whiz; Melly Mel and

2 Grandmaster Caz. I can name them all because many of
3 them I know, and I've been working with. Because
4 renaming 1520 Sedgwick Avenue where DJ Kool Herc--
5 Herc's first scratched and--and started his DJ
6 skills in the community room. We have had a major
7 transformation at 1520, and I'm very proud. The new
8 owner's workforce advisors have renovated the
9 building. We have had to support all the way up to
10 Senator Chuck Charles Schumer, and we had a wonderful
11 opening about a year and a half go. And DJ Kool Herc
12 returned, him and his sister, and it was really for
13 us just-it was memorable. And this is certainly
14 attributed to all that we have done in the Bronx to
15 recognize that no matter where you go in this
16 country, Hip Hop is a part of the fabric, and it
17 started in the great borough of the Bronx. And I'm
18 very proud that 1520 will not only stand out in that
19 way, but this is a part of a much bigger plan that we
20 have in the Bronx to finally create the first ever
21 hip hop museum. Because we want to have cultural
22 institutions that recognize the growth, and the value
23 of hip hop, not just from the perspective of the
24 Bronx, but the entire city. And so, we have been
25 working with all stakeholders including Windows of

2 Hip Hop, an incredible group led by Melissa Libran
3 and Jacob Morris. I thank you for your tireless
4 efforts. Not only have you been extremely consistent
5 to coming to hearings, but you have really made a
6 difference in Community Board 5 to get them on board
7 to be supportive, and making sure that 1520 is
8 renamed Hip Hop Boulevard. So I'm very proud of
9 this. I know it's a long time coming, but with any
10 struggle, there's always strength, and certainly we
11 always have the right vision. We just have to get
12 there. So I'm thankful for the support of my
13 colleagues, and I know that my wonderful members of
14 the Parks Committee I hope you will certainly support
15 this because for us we struggle often to look at
16 positive images of the Bronx. And everyday we strive
17 as elected officials, as residents to make sure that
18 we portray positive images of the Bronx because we
19 are on a renaissance. We are on the cusp of economic
20 development that is going to transform our borough.
21 And I believe hip hop is a significant part of that.
22 So I'm very proud to represent this district. I live
23 in Morris Heights. I'm not too far from 1520
24 Sedgwick Avenue. So I look forward to a wonderful
25 event, and certainly every time I'm at 1520 I will

2 always remember that it is and will always be the
3 birthplace of Hip Hop. Thank you very much, Chair
4 Levine.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
6 Member Gibson for your very eloquent statement on
7 this topic. I'm going to take a moment to talk about
8 the piece of legislation that we are hopefully voting
9 on shortly. Intro 856-A, which as has been mentioned
10 earlier would provide discounted fees to our
11 recreation centers for important populations in New
12 York City. There are 35 recreation centers all--in
13 all five boroughs, and they provide everything front
14 indoor basketball courts to indoor pools, art
15 studios, after school programs, weight rooms, dance
16 studios, yoga studios, even libraries. And they are--
17 they are just an incredible resource for New Yorkers
18 who want to live healthy, and want to enjoy social
19 interactions of a positive nature with their
20 neighbors. We think that they are particularly
21 important for two groups: Veterans and people with
22 disabilities who themselves often are involved in
23 physical rehabilitation regimes that can--regimens
24 that can benefit from access to recreation centers,
25 and groups that can benefit from the social

2 interaction, which rec centers provide. Because too
3 often seniors and people--veterans and people living
4 with disabilities are socially isolated, but there's
5 a challenge here and it's economic. The average--the
6 current membership for rec centers is \$150, and that
7 is out of reach, \$150 a year. It's out of reach for
8 many people who are struggling economically. It
9 turns out that among our veterans, the Food Bank of
10 New York City estimates that 70,000 veterans, about
11 30% of the total population every year turns to food
12 banks, soup kitchens, food pantries, an indication of
13 the poverty that so many are struggling with. And
14 among people with disabilities, the unemployment rate
15 is 30%, more than double what it is for the general
16 population. We don't want people who are struggling
17 economically who so desperately need the services
18 that they can access, you know, recreation centers to
19 be blocked because they just can't afford the
20 membership. So our bill, Intro 586--excuse me--856-A
21 would provide an 80% discount in these fees so that
22 it will be \$30 instead of \$150, and far more
23 accessible to the average New Yorker. My colleagues
24 on the committee will remember this is the bill we
25 discussed a few months ago. There has been, as it

2 sometimes happens, there's been no watering down in
3 our negotiations with the Administration. In fact, a
4 rare thing has happened. The bill has gotten even
5 better and stronger since we heard this several
6 months ago. We are now codifying in this legislation
7 discounts for youth and seniors. So all four of
8 these groups, veterans, people with disabilities,
9 youth and seniors will have in this legislation a
10 discount of 80% off the standard fee, an 80% discount
11 on a fee that's currently \$150. We just feel great
12 about this bill, and what it will do for populations
13 which are so badly in need of access to these
14 wonderful resources. I'm going to pause there, and
15 see whether either of my colleagues on the committee
16 have comments on street renaming bills. If you
17 don't, I have some of my own. Council Member Cohen,
18 any comments for your street names?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [off mic] I'd like
20 to help you build another one. (sic)

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [laughs] No
22 problem. Council Member Mealy take it away.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, thank you,
24 Chair. I see that my colleague is not here, Laurie
25 Cumbo, but I just wanted to say I'm thankful that

2 you--we doing the street name of Reverend Clarence
3 Norman, Sr. He's the father Clarence Norman, Jr. who
4 used to be our Democratic leader of King's County,
5 and this was--we called him the Lion King in our
6 area. He's strong, pastor of his church. His church
7 has 2,000 members, still strong, and just recently,
8 his wife passed away also. So it's--it's sad and
9 it's rewarding also that we are acknowledging him
10 right away. So I just want to thank this body for
11 putting--and my colleagues for putting their name
12 forward, and I hope this body votes unanimously on
13 this. This is a street name that is worthy of the
14 esteem of all of this great city of New York, and I
15 thank you for Reverend Clarence Norman, Sr. Way.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] All
17 right.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
20 Member. I'm pleased to be introducing street co-
21 namings for two locations in my district named after
22 two incredible people. The first is we are creating
23 Normal Rockwell Way at 101st Street and Broadway.
24 Now, who knew that this American icon wasn't from the
25 corn fields of Iowa. He was from 101st Street right

2 on the west side of Manhattan. He was born there.
3 He was raised there. He famously trained at the Art
4 Students League in Midtown. He actually began
5 painting at a young age, and even received
6 commissioned works while still living in New York
7 City. Now, he is known worldwide for his depictions
8 of everyday life in rural America, but those of you
9 who are more familiar with his work know he did
10 incredibly powerful paintings chronicling the Civil
11 Rights Movements, the very famous set of paintings
12 that depicted for four freedoms enunciated by
13 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This is a man
14 with a profound social consciousness, and I can only
15 imagine that living in the bustling diversity of
16 101st Street in the early 1900s where he would come
17 across people from all walks of life, all ethnic and
18 racial backgrounds, people of all economic levels
19 that that had a profound impact on this young child.
20 So I think it's so powerful that we commemorate his
21 roots on 103rd Street. I wish I could take credit
22 for uncovering this delicious historical morsel, but
23 neither I nor any elected official, nor for that
24 matter any historian or art expert can take credit
25 for this street co-naming. It was students at West

2 Side High School, right--just a few blows away,
3 students who brought this to the attention of my
4 office, to the attention of the City Council. And
5 it's thanks to them that we're going to be
6 commemorating this important historical link that I
7 hope will make 103rd Street a destination for art
8 aficionados, and historian globally to come see the
9 neighborhood that created this American icon. Hard
10 to top that one, but I do have one more street co-
11 naming in my district on 155th Street and Amsterdam
12 Avenue for the Reverend Dr. Jasper Simmons, who was a
13 pillar our community's religious and cultural life,
14 who was the longest serving pastor--who's known as
15 having been the longest serving pastor in the Tri-
16 State area. After founding the File Chapel Baptist
17 Church, and serving that fine institution and so many
18 other community organizations. We are now going to
19 pause for a few minutes as we await a quorum before
20 we take votes on Intro 586-A and the street co-
21 namings throughout the city. Thank you all for being
22 here. Stay tuned as we await a quorum and vote on
23 these important matters. If anyone knows any good
24 jokes, now would be the time to use them. [pause]

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 Never has a committee been happier to welcome Council
3 Member Mark Treyger. Thank you for joining us.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [off mic] I
5 really appreciate that. Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to ask our
7 Committee Clerk, William Martin, to please call the
8 roll for the vote.

9 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,
10 roll call vote Committee on Parks and Recreation.
11 Introduction 856-A and Preconsidered Introduction.
12 Items are coupled. Chair Levine.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I will be voting aye
14 on all.

15 CLERK: Mealy.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: May I explain my
17 vote? I just want to tell all the parishioners of
18 the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, Reverend
19 Clarence Normal Senior Way congratulations, and we
20 have lost a quite king, you could say and as soft as
21 an angel almost. He knew how to deal with the good
22 and the bad, and do it a peaceful and perfect way
23 that you would still be smiling. So I want to vote
24 aye on all. Thank you.

25 CLERK: Cohen.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Aye on all.

3 CLERK: Treyger.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Aye on all.

5 CLERK: By a vote of 4 in the
6 affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions,
7 both items have been adopted.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we will hold
9 the vote open for 20 minutes. All right. Thank you
10 all for joining us. [pause]

11 [background comments]

12 CLERK: Continuation roll call Committee
13 on Parks and Recreation. Council Member Van Bramer.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: I vote aye.

15 CLERK: The vote now currently stands at
16 5 in the affirmative.

17 [pause]

18 CLERK: Continuation roll call Committee
19 on Parks and Recreation. Council Member Maisel.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: [off mic] I'm in
21 favor.

22 CLERK: The final vote now Committee on
23 Parks and Recreation stands at 6 in the affirmative,
24 0 in the negative and no abstention.

25 [pause]

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 15, 2016