

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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December 10, 2008

Start: 10:00 am

Recess: 10:36 am

HELD AT: 250 Broadway, 14th Fl.  
Hearing Room

B E F O R E:

HELEN D. FOSTER  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.  
Letitia James  
Helen Sears

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Sharwind Norris  
Resident  
Brooklyn

Edward Atwell  
Resident  
Brooklyn

Jacob Morris  
Harlem Historical Society

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.

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I'm Council Member Helen Diane Foster, Chair of

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the Parks and Recreation Committee. Today's

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meeting is on Proposed Intro 877-A where we will

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be renaming 49 thoroughfares and public places.

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We've been joined by Helen Sears from Queens, Joe

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Addabbo from Queens, Walter Pitts. What is it,

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Pitts, Pitts, Pitts, from? I'm showing my age.

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The Odd Couple. Joe got it. Remember?

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COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: The

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oranges.

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Walter Pitts

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who is the new Finance analyst to the committee.

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Welcome. Lyle Frank, the attorney to the

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committee and Patrick. Where are you going

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Patrick?

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PATRICK: I'll be right back.

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: As of now we

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don't have anyone to testify. So this might be a

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very long meeting. Council Members, do you have

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any comments to make on the Intro? No? Okay,

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well this being the last Parks meeting of the

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year, I would be remiss if I didn't congratulate

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my good friend Joe Addabbo who will be leaving us.

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2 The Senate's gain is absolutely our loss. I loved  
3 serving with you when you were chair and then when  
4 you so graciously allowed me to be chair. I  
5 really am going to miss my partner in, not crime,  
6 but in good things. So thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Thank you,  
8 Madame Chair.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: I didn't  
10 realize that this was our last meeting so I really  
11 want to thank the chair and congratulate you  
12 because you have really run some very fine  
13 meetings, very punctual. And for one who goes  
14 back and forth as you do, I truly appreciate that.  
15 So I publicly want to thank you. I have to ditto  
16 your remarks about Council Addabbo. He is going  
17 to be missed.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: But I wish  
20 you all the very best. Thank you Madame Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We have one  
22 person signing in to testify. Technically our  
23 last meeting will be the morning of the 18th when  
24 we vote this out. But this was our last real  
25 meeting.

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We have to testify Sharwind Norris [phonetic]. Did I say that correctly? Bethany Baptist [phonetic], Edward Atwell and Jacob Morris. Please all go have a seat.

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Please feel free to get started.

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SHARWIND NORRIS: Good morning.

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.

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SHARWIND NORRIS: My name is

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Shawind Norris and I'm a resident of Brooklyn, New York. I live on MacDonough Street between Throop and Tompkins. I'm also a member of Bethany Baptist Church. I'm in support of co-naming the street Reverend William Augustus Jones Junior Way because he was a longtime activist in the community as well as a prominent pastor and speaker. So today I'm just here in favor of co-naming the street. I did speak with other people on my block and they as well were in favor. I do want to make a comment about a letter that was received that caused some confusion. The actual

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2 letter did not say who it was from. It was just  
3 one of these form letters that most people write  
4 directed to Al Vann. But a lot of times because  
5 it had Al Vann's name at the top and that was the  
6 only address, some people thought it was coming  
7 from Al Vann. It was actually supposed to be to  
8 him. So I had to explain some of that to some of  
9 the neighbors on the street. So I do want to  
10 speak against that as well because it did cause  
11 some form of confusion.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

13 SHARWIND NORRIS: You're welcome.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mr. Atwell.

15 EDWARD ATWELL: My name is Edward  
16 Atwell.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Turn the  
18 microphone on. Never mind, that one is one.

19 EDWARD ATWELL: My name is Edward  
20 Atwell. I'm also a resident of MacDonough Street.  
21 I found out on the 3rd of November that the block  
22 was going to be co-named for Reverend Jones. What  
23 I did is I got my block association's approval to  
24 canvas the blocks and see how many people were for  
25 and against it. I distributed questionnaires

1 asking people if they were for the co-naming,  
2 against the co-naming or had no opinion. I put  
3 out about 200 of these and a little over 70 of  
4 them came back and 69 of them were against the co-  
5 naming. Also, on MacDonough Street, on the  
6 section to be co-named, there are four churches  
7 that open their doors to MacDonough Street.

8 Bethany Baptist Church opens its doors to Decatur  
9 Street and Marcus Garvey Boulevard. It does not  
10 open its doors to MacDonough Street. After I got  
11 back all the fliers and all, I took them to  
12 Councilman Vann's office and left them. I tried  
13 on a number of occasions to catch him but I was  
14 unable to even though he lives six doors away from  
15 me on MacDonough Street. But at any rate, I  
16 didn't have time to check with all of the  
17 churches, but I did check with St. Philips  
18 Episcopal Church and Our Lady of Victory. And  
19 both of them were appalled that they had not been  
20 notified of the co-naming. I went on a Sunday to  
21 St. Philips because it's next door to me. I  
22 talked to one of the elder women there. She took  
23 the petitions from me and took them into the  
24 church after the service. She came back and  
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2 brought me 35 signings against the co-naming. I  
3 would like to at least postpone the voting until  
4 such time as I can do a more sophisticated study  
5 to find out how people really feel. But the thing  
6 is it's difficult in the winter. I'm 67-years-old  
7 and walking up and down MacDonough Street at my  
8 age, but I did walk the length of MacDonough  
9 Street. I rang bells and talked to as many people  
10 as I could. Like I said, of the 70 people that  
11 answered, 69 of them were against the co-naming of  
12 MacDonough Street.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Excuse me,  
14 have you reached out to anybody on the community  
15 board?

16 EDWARD ATWELL: I went over to the  
17 community board and I talked to them. One of the  
18 first questions that people would ask me is why  
19 MacDonough Street when Bethany is on Decatur  
20 Street. So I went to the community board to find  
21 out why they chose MacDonough Street. Four of the  
22 six blocks they want to co-name are in the  
23 Historic District which means changing the  
24 historic signs. That was another reason that  
25 people gave me for being against it. It's been



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2 done before. They have changed the historic  
3 signs. But we're very much against changing the  
4 signs in the Historic District.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: It would just  
6 be a co-naming. But my question specifically, and  
7 I understand your objections, but were you able to  
8 speak to someone on the community board?

9 EDWARD ATWELL: Not about this, no.  
10 I spoke to the people that work at the community  
11 board. The people on the community board, two of  
12 them live on my block and neither of them bothered  
13 to notify me that this was coming up.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

15 JACOB MORRIS: Jacob Morris, Harlem  
16 Historical Society. I'm really proud to be here  
17 today. A goodly number of the streets in this  
18 particular co-naming legislation were our  
19 proposals and we deeply feel that they're  
20 historic. I'd like to speak to the two prior  
21 speakers and the issue that was raised by them.

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: If you could  
23 just speak on the co-namings that you came to  
24 speak on, that would be most helpful to me please.  
25 Thank you.

JACOB MORRIS: First, I'd like to make a constructive criticism. I was also involved with the Dr. Susan McKinney Stewart co-naming in Brooklyn which we're very, very proud of. She was the first African American woman doctor in Brooklyn. She was an early abolitionist. I know that her family sheltered members of Freedom Seekers that escaped slavery on the underground railroad in Weeksville. She was an organist at the House of the Lord Church during and prior to the Civil War. She graduated valedictorian of the New York Medical College in the year 1870, established two hospitals in Brooklyn as well as an old age home. She was a fantastic lady. We absolutely feel that getting this co-naming approved for her is just a wonderful thing and she'll be hopefully a role model for young women in Brooklyn to perhaps go into the health profession. We're looking forward to establishing a scholarship fund to make that possible. There is a historic giant from Brooklyn in this package and her name is Shirley Chisholm. One of the things that we operate on in our proposals to co-name streets after great longtime

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2 deserving people is what I call the theory of  
3 relative historical significance. We're really  
4 serious about that. So in regards to Shirley  
5 Chisholm and I've discussed this with the great  
6 staff of the committee, some people get a place,  
7 some people get a plaza, some people get a  
8 boulevard, some people get an avenue. Shirley  
9 Chisholm deserves more than a place. So I'm going  
10 to actually propose that in the interim because I  
11 believe she deserves even more than a plaza. I  
12 believe she deserves a boulevard or an avenue  
13 given her role in American history and in  
14 Brooklyn's history and New York City history.  
15 That the co-naming as submitted be modified so  
16 that that intersection that is proposed to be  
17 named Shirley Chisholm place be co-named Shirley  
18 Chisholm Plaza. I submit that to the committee  
19 with due respect. I hope that that is adopted.  
20 The names that we put forward, James Brown Way, we  
21 were responsible for persuading the community  
22 board to move James Brown Way's proposal from  
23 145th Street to the street behind the Apollo  
24 Theater, 126th. We're very proud of that. Of  
25 course he was a giant. We don't have to go into

1  
2 all of his accomplishments and his significance in  
3 American music history and social history. Zora  
4 Neale Hurston, a great writer and a giant of the  
5 Harlem Renaissance, long overdue to be honored and  
6 she lived at that location for more than nine  
7 years in Harlem. Samuel J. Battle was the first  
8 African American hired by the NYPD. But it wasn't  
9 for that reason that the community board decided  
10 to honor him. It was because not only what he  
11 overcame in his life, the incredible adversity and  
12 racism as the first black person on the NYPD you  
13 can imagine. But for me and for those who  
14 approved of this co-naming which passed the  
15 community board unanimously, he exemplified,  
16 particularly in 1935 as a lieutenant at the  
17 precinct on 135th Street the triumph of brains  
18 over brutality. He basically stopped the Harlem  
19 riots of 1935 with a flier when this young  
20 Hispanic boy was alleged to have been murdered in  
21 the basement of Crest Department Stores for  
22 shoplifting. He found the boy and they circulated  
23 a flier of the boy smiling with him. That  
24 actually stopped the Harlem riots of 1935. So he  
25 was truly a hero. Ella Baker, if they had a Mt.

1  
2 Rushmore for the great women of the Civil Rights  
3 Movement, she would have to be carved on that  
4 mountain alongside Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott  
5 King. She lived in Harlem and Lenox Terrace for  
6 decades. It's just a credit to her and to Harlem  
7 and to New York City that she had this incredible  
8 role in the Civil Rights Movement and on American  
9 history. So many things she did but we know how  
10 profound her contributions were. Doctors Kenneth  
11 B. And Mamie Phipps Clark, it says in the blurb  
12 that they started and founded the Northside  
13 Children's Center. But really that's just an  
14 institution. Mamie, the second PhD from the  
15 Columbia Graduate School of Psychology, Kenneth  
16 was the first, actually came up with the doll test  
17 during Brown versus Board of Education. We know  
18 what that did. Kenneth worked with her to refine  
19 the doll test. Seminal people in American  
20 history, not just black history or African  
21 American history. It's so special to have the  
22 support of the community in making this happen  
23 finally. The location was chosen because that's  
24 where the Dunbar Apartment Complex is and they  
25 actually founded the Northside Children's Center

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2 in 1947 in the basement of the Dunbar. By the  
3 way, the purpose was in their use of sophisticated  
4 psychological metrics to save and they did save so  
5 many children in Harlem from getting labeled  
6 mentally defective. That really moves me.  
7 Charles Hamilton Houston.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: You're going  
9 to comment on everyone?

10 JACOB MORRIS: Well there's only  
11 about two or three more, Madame Chair. Charles  
12 Hamilton Houston was the gentleman that actually  
13 inspired us to start our initiative in Harlem. He  
14 was one of the giants of the 20th century in terms  
15 of the Civil Rights Movement. He actually  
16 establish civil rights law. They call him the man  
17 who killed Jim Crow. That's what they call him.  
18 But for me that he developed civil rights law as a  
19 field and it's not acknowledged, it's not really  
20 known in the history books. Everybody looks to  
21 Thurgood Marshall. Thurgood Marshall was his  
22 student. Thurgood Marshall would make speeches,  
23 we're just carrying Charlie's bags and they would  
24 go who is Charlie? Charles Hamilton Houston, the  
25 dean of the Howard University Law School who got

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2 it accredited and the gentleman who came up with  
3 the brilliant legal strategy to use the separate  
4 but equal doctrine embodied in Plessy versus  
5 Ferguson against itself to demolish segregation in  
6 America legally. He lived there as the first  
7 special counsel for the NAACP. So this is our  
8 opportunity to honor him appropriately. Billy  
9 Holiday, Lady Day, one of the all time greatest  
10 singers of the 20th century. Overdue to honor  
11 her. The thing that really gets me about Billie  
12 Holiday is she established herself as more than  
13 just a singer when she became known for singing  
14 the song "Strange Fruit" which so powerfully  
15 talked about lynching in the South. With that  
16 strange fruit hanging off the trees. So she was  
17 more than just a song stylist, she was a powerful  
18 voice. Paul Robeson, another giant of the 20th  
19 century. One who was really made to pay for his  
20 beliefs in equality and his struggle for equality  
21 by this concerted attack by American power elite  
22 in the 1950s.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mr. Morris I'm  
24 going to have to get you to wrap up please.

25 JACOB MORRIS: I apologize.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: No, don't apologize. I appreciate it and it's good to know that others know the history. It's just we need to bring it in.

JACOB MORRIS: Then I won't say anything more about Paul Robeson. There is a small problem. You see at 555 Edgecombe, which is at the corner of 160th and Edgecombe, that's one of the truly outstanding addresses in Sugar Hill in Harlem. An incredible number of luminaries lived at this address. So here it comes down to for the committee, because I wasn't able to get this cleared up because of problems a staff member with Councilman Jackson's office. We only got it like half solved. You see, Constance Baker Motley was also approved by the community board.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We're aware of that problem.

JACOB MORRIS: So what I'm going to ask is that you hold Count Basie Place and put it over--

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: [interposing]  
That will go through the Council Member. It came through the problem with Constance Baker Motley



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2 and we will work on that.

3 JACOB MORRIS: If I may?

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Sure.

5 JACOB MORRIS: And I appreciate the  
6 dispensation of the chair. You see, Count Basie  
7 lived at 555 and I felt strongly and I feel  
8 strongly that Count Basie needs to be honored with  
9 a street. But he lived at 555 for one year.  
10 Constance Baker Motley lived at 555 for more than  
11 20 years. So now we deal with a dilemma because  
12 we're dealing with a limited number of streets.  
13 He moved to Queens. So I've already been in  
14 contact with the Historical Society in St. Albans  
15 where he owned very nice property and we're going  
16 to get a street named after Count Basie in Queens.  
17 So I feel it's really important that we get a  
18 street named after Constance Baker Motley. What  
19 I'm asking the committee is to hold Count Basie.  
20 I'm going to bring this back to Community Board  
21 12. We're going to deliberate and we're going to  
22 go through the community board process, bring it  
23 back to Councilman Jackson and we're going to come  
24 up with the right way to do this and bring this to  
25 the committee properly. I plead with the

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committee to help us do that.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Atwell you had something to say?

EDWARD ATWELL: One of the things that I wanted to say is that there are any number of people that are deserving. I don't want in any way to imply that Reverend Jones doesn't deserve to be honored in some way, because that isn't the way I feel.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: It wasn't take that way. We understand.

EDWARD ATWELL: One of the elderly women that I talked to made a point of letting me know that in the 60s John Coleman was the pastor at St. Philips Church. He was also the first black member of the Board of Education. She said why didn't they think to name the street after him. The point is that there are so many people that are deserving, not just in black neighborhoods but in any neighborhood.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Of course.

EDWARD ATWELL: But I think that the people in that neighborhood should be consulted. I don't think that I should go to a

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2 community board meeting to find out that my street  
3 is going to be co-named. I don't think the  
4 churches should have to go to a meeting to find  
5 out either.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: The reality of  
7 the situation is that when you are responsible as  
8 an elected official or as a community board of  
9 representing 157,000 plus people, there aren't  
10 going to be individual notices going out and  
11 that's why community boards are in fact  
12 established, so they are liaisons. But we don't  
13 need to go into that here. You wanted to say  
14 something, Ms. Norris?

15 SHARWIND NORRIS: I do want to say  
16 that during the community board meeting, it was  
17 voted unanimously and comments can be made before  
18 the vote takes place. That's number one. Number  
19 two is Council Member Vann amended the proposal so  
20 that instead of it going from Marcy to Malcolm X  
21 Boulevard, it's only from Marcy to Lewis. So it  
22 does not include St. Philips and some of the other  
23 blocks that he named, and I think even the block  
24 that you live on. The other thing was, even in  
25 going to Our Lady of Victory Church and getting

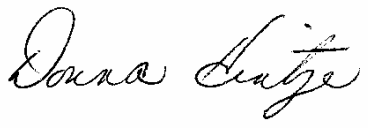
1  
2 signatures, I see a problem with that only because  
3 some of those members may not even live on  
4 MacDonough Street. I just wanted to make sure  
5 that everyone was aware of the changes.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. We  
7 do have the amendments. Thank you all for your  
8 comments. The committee will take all the  
9 recommendations. In all the cases, I would advise  
10 everyone to go back to their Community Board 12  
11 and Councilman Jackson about Count Basie and  
12 Council Member Vann. Thank you very much.  
13 Members, anything? That being it, no further  
14 testimony, this meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze 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 September 18, 2009\_\_\_\_\_