



CITY OF NEW YORK MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10

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Hon. Marquis A. Harrison
Chairperson
Minah Whyte
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Resolution To Support the Renaissance Casino Sidewalk

Commemoration

WHEREAS The Black Fives Foundation is seeking consideration for usage of sidewalk fronting the former Renaissance Casino Site at West 138th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd to honor and commemorate the pioneering New York RENS Historic African American Basketball Team; and

WHEREAS The mission of the Black Fives Foundation is to inspire excellence in youth by preserving, teaching, and honoring the pre-NBA history of African Americans in basketball by advocating tirelessly for their proper recognition; and

WHEREAS The Black Five Foundation is committed to the basketball community and Harlem-at-large, to the pioneers and to their descendants to preserve this history; and

WHEREAS The Black Five Foundation met with the Department of Transportation and discussed the city's need to (1) protect itself against the potential future neglect or abandonment of the project, (2) future maintenance, (3) place funds in escrow, and (4) have the design conform with the urban context of the existing sidewalk and area; and

WHEREAS The Black Five Foundation is open to other venues of physical commemoration alternatives; and

WHEREAS 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the New York Rens in 1923, and their first season during 1923-1924; and

WHEREAS The New York Rens as well as other teams, players, and pioneers from the Black Fives Era are featured in detail in the book, *The Black Fives: The Epic Story of Basketball's Forgotten Era* (Abrams, 2022); and

WHEREAS The New York Rens were the first Black-owned, all-Black, fully professional basketball team in history, formed in Harlem in October 1923. That year, basketball manager Robert "Bob" Douglas made a deal with Harlem real estate developer William Roach, the owner of the Renaissance Casino, a newly opened ballroom; and

WHEREAS Mr. Douglas previously owned and managed an African American basketball team called the Spartan Braves, which was a leading contender for the Black national championship title. His basketball club had no home court. The Renaissance Ballroom, with its perfect location in the center of Harlem, its spacious floor, and its balcony seating that looked down from above, would be the ideal venue; and

WHEREAS By 1924-1925 the "Rens" had won the first of many Colored Basketball World Championships and thereafter proceeded to dominate not just Black basketball, but all of basketball for the next 25 years. During that period, the Rens routinely beat championship-caliber White basketball teams such as the Original Celtics, the Philadelphia SPHAS, the Oshkosh All Stars, and the Indianapolis Kautskys. The irony is that the leagues in which these teams played did not allow African American players or teams to join; and

WHEREAS In 1939, the New York Rens won the inaugural World Championship of Professional Basketball, an invitation-only tourney with a field made up of America's twelve best pro hoops teams. The title game saw the Rens defeating the Oshkosh All Stars. Oshkosh had been the champion of the National Basketball League, a Whites-only league; and

WHEREAS The Black Five Foundation presented before the Parks and Recreation Committee on October 9th, 2024 where the Committee voted unanimously; On November 6, 2024, Manhattan Community Board 10 voted with 36 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions, 0 Recusals; and

THEREFORE NOW be it resolved that Manhattan Community Board 10 supports the recommendation to honor and commemorate the pioneering New York Rens, a Historic African American Basketball Team through the installation of a sidewalk commemoration fronting the former Renaissance Casino Site at West 138th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.