



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

February 8, 2007

Honorable Margaret Forgione
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Re: Honorary Street Sign Naming at the Northwest corner of 55th St. and 9th Ave. for Alvin Ailey

Dear Commissioner Forgione,

At the January 17, 2007 meeting of the Transportation Planning Committee of Manhattan Community Board No. 4, representatives from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, including Sylvia Waters, the Ailey II artistic director, and Sharon Luckman, Executive Director Alvin Alley American Dance Theater, appeared to request an honorary supplemental street sign for Alvin Ailey at the corner of West 55th Street and 9th Avenue.

The Committee and the Full Board generally take an unfavorable view toward honorary street namings. The last three requests for honorary street namings that came before the Board were declined.

In fact, at the July 7, 2004 Board meeting the Board turned down the request for the above mentioned street naming. At the time there was vocal neighborhood opposition, and concern that Alvin Ailey Dance Theater had no particular historical connection to 55th Street and 9th Avenue or involvement in the community (though Mr. Ailey lived in the neighborhood for close to a decade before his death in 1989). However, after hearing testimony from the applicant and receiving a letter of support from the block association, the committee voted 9 in favor and 2 opposed in favor of recommending the street renaming. The committee supported the renaming for four reasons:

Mr. Ailey's extraordinary contribution to the cultural landscape of New York City. This request is not simply on behalf of a good community member who has contributed to his neighborhood, but for a New Yorker of great artistic vision and social leadership, who made legendary advances in his field and was a vital contributor to New York City's identity as a hub for artistic innovation.

The conditions of the original street naming at 61st Street. An honorary street naming for Alvin Ailey on West 61st Street was bestowed by the Mayor shortly following Mr. Ailey's death in 1989 when his theater established a new home at number 211 West 61st Street. Mr. Ailey did not have a historical connection with 61st Street, but the street was named for him in honor of the unique contributions Mr. Ailey made to the world of dance and the culture of New York City. The committee felt that this honor, bestowed by the Mayor, should not be taken away from Mr. Ailey simply because his theater had moved.

The testimony on behalf of the request by a number of community members/students at Alvin Ailey.

Several community members testified at the meeting about their extraordinary experiences growing up in New

York City and participating in educational programs run by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. They testified that those programs had reached out to them in all different neighborhoods of the City and brought them to a place of nurturing, learning and creativity, and by doing so had changed their lives for the better.

Increased Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater involvement in the community and in providing public services: We were impressed by the number of programs the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company operates and the amount of participation in the community:

- a. Over 3,000 NYC Public School Students participate in the Ailey Dance Kids residencies, including currently an 8 week residency at PS 111 on West 53rd Street;
- b. Over 13,000 students took part in Ailey II lecture/demonstrations during the last year, including at venues in the Community Board 4 area;
- c. Over 2,000 free tickets were distributed to students to attend performances;
- d. AileyCamp, (done in partnership with the Children's Aid Society) a summer day camp program providing dance classes with creative methods for increasing self-esteem and critical thinking for teens at-risk of dropping out, is held at IS 90 in Washington Heights, drawing 100 children participants from the New York City area
- e. Approximately 300 classes are offered each week at the Ailey studio's at 55th Street, many open to the public (with merit based scholarships available);
- f. Of the 5,000 students participating in the Ailey Extension education program, 787 reside in Community Board #4. Over 200 students receive scholarships per year, of which 13 recipients this semester were from the Community Board #4 area;
- g. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is a member of the West 55th Street Block Association and the Midtown West Business Association

While we are impressed by this level of involvement, we do hope in the future more can be done in the community, including providing some additional scholarships for low-income residents from the area, providing dance performances at area street fairs, and improved community outreach on their variety of existing programs.

In the meantime, we are proud to have the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company headquartered in our Community Board and support their proposed supplementary signage in honor of Alvin Ailey at the Northwest corner of 55th Street and 9th Avenue.

At its February 8, 2007 meeting, the full Board voted xx in favor, xx opposed, xx abstaining and xx present but not eligible to vote, to support the committee's recommendation to add supplementary street signage in honor of Alvin Ailey at the Northwest corner of 55th Street and 9th Avenue.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community
Board No. 4



Jay Marcus
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee