

EMERGENCY

City of Cincinnati

JRS

EESW

An Ordinance No. _____

- 2024

DECLARING that Linn Street at Clark Street in the West End neighborhood shall hereby receive the honorary, secondary name of “Robert O’Neal Way” in honor of Robert O’Neal, long-time resident of Cincinnati, Ohio, revered activist, influential grassroots leader, and esteemed visual artist, that has positively impacted the City of Cincinnati through his artist works and civic legacy.

WHEREAS, Mr. Robert Lee O’Neal was born in Covington, Kentucky on February 26, 1940, and was inspired by the cultural movements of the 1960s to establish himself as a community activist, grassroots leader, and artist; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal attended Withrow High School and later graduated from the Gebhardt Commercial Arts School; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal was married to his wife, Julia, for 48 years and they had four children, but Mr. O’Neil was also an “honorary father” to many; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal demonstrated an amazing artistic talent throughout his life and career, and his work has appeared in more than 400+ visual art exhibitions in the region and nationally, with his visual reference rooted in the urban issues of Cincinnati’s most challenging neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal had one of the first art galleries on Main Street in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood that showcased a body of work reflecting the experiences surrounding their community and became a “hub” for civil rights leaders and artists to plan aspects of the movement improving African Americans’ racial disparity and inequity; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal’s last solo exhibition was in 2013, hosted by the New American Art Gallery II and Cincinnati Museum Center Cultural Gallery, entitled The Retrospective of a Grassroot Griot, which was an exhibition that highlighted 50 years of art and photography, a fitting celebration of Robert O’Neal’s life’s work; and

WHEREAS, the 38 works featured in The Retrospective of a Grassroot Griot included Mr. O’Neal’s paintings, works on paper, sculpture, and photography, all of which encompassed the spirit of location, history, and his own presence among the people he touched throughout his journey as a civic leader and artistic force in the Cincinnati community; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal was the leader of the Culture and Recreation Task Force of the Model Cities Program in Cincinnati, which was a project that led to the creation of the Arts Consortium of Cincinnati in the West End neighborhood, which opened in 1972 and offered classes in drawing, painting, sculpting, photography, dance, acting, music, and writing rooted in African American culture; and

WHEREAS, for most of Mr. O’Neal’s life, he suffered from Rheumatoid Arthritis which led to his participation in a March on Washington for disability rights, and years later he served on the Disabilities Advisory Committee for the Ohio Arts Council; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal served in many roles, in both professional and civic capacities, at the Arts and Humanities Resource Center, the Very Special Arts Ohio Program, Adopt-A-School at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Hillcrest Youth Detention Center, the Arts Consortium, the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, and the Christ Chapel Art Center; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal volunteered his time, wisdom, and talent on many local committees such as Evanston Community Council, Walnut Hills Community Council, Over the Rhine Community Council, March of Dimes, Mallory Center African Historical Ball Art Committee, Applause Image Makers, Community Chest Advisory Committee, Arts Consortium of Cincinnati, and Services for the Blind, and he coordinated Black History programs at Cincinnati State Technical College, the University of Cincinnati, and Hamilton County Welfare Department, and in line with his passion for grassroots initiatives, Mr. O’Neal also assisted in the founding of WAIF Community Radio; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O’Neal received many honors throughout his life, including, but not limited to: recognition by Applause Magazine Image Makers in 1994; being featured as one of 25 African American artists at the prestigious Closson’s Gallery in downtown Cincinnati; recognized as one of WCIN Radio’s “50 Most Influential Blacks in Cincinnati” Award in 2003; served as the chairman of the board for the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone in 2010; inducted into the African American Chamber Black Business Hall of Fame in 2015; and received the Sanaa Legend Award from the Cincinnati Black Theatre and New American Art Gallery II in 2017; and

WHEREAS Robert O’Neal passed away in December 2018, but his legacy is still remembered as his artwork was featured at the Contemporary Arts Center in Downtown Cincinnati April - September 2023 with a Roundtable on “Inclusivity” that included his daughter, Toilynn O’Neil Turner; and

WHEREAS, Robert O’Neal has made a lasting impact to the Cincinnati community and to the City of Cincinnati’s citizens, and his contributions and dedication as an artist and his impact to the City of Cincinnati will long be remembered; now, therefore,

BE IT ORDAINED by the Council of the City of Cincinnati, State of Ohio:

Section 1. That Linn Street at Clark Street in the West End neighborhood shall hereby receive the honorary, secondary name of “Robert O’Neal Way” in honor of Robert O’Neal and in recognition of his contributions and dedication to the City of Cincinnati through his artistic talents and impact to the Cincinnati community.

Section 2. That the appropriate City officials are hereby authorized to do all things necessary and proper to implement the provisions of Section 1 herein, including the generation and installation of appropriate secondary street signage, which shall designate Linn Street at Clark Street in the West End neighborhood as “Robert O’Neal Way” in accordance with the Department of Transportation and Engineering’s procedures relating to street designation and related signage.

Section 3. That a copy of this ordinance be sent to Toilynn O’Neil Turner, the daughter of Robert O’Neal, via the office of Vice Mayor Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney.

Section 4. That this ordinance shall be an emergency measure necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health, safety, and general welfare and shall, subject to the terms of Article II, Section 6 of the Charter, be effective immediately. The reason for the emergency is the immediate need to allow the Department of Transportation and Engineering to move forward with the administrative requirements related to the honorary naming of streets to provide for the ceremony and dedication of the honorary street name at the earliest possible time.

Passed: _____, 2024

Aftab Pureval, Mayor

Attest: _____
Clerk