

For Immediate Release  
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**NYC Department of Transportation  
Manhattan Borough President Brewer  
NYC Council Member Kallos  
Friends of James Cagney Place**

## **James Cagney Place Officially Designated a City Plaza** *After 42 Years, Closed Section of East 91st Street Becomes Official Plaza*

**New York, NY,**— Residents at James Cagney Place today, welcomed the news that a section of East 91st Street that has been closed to vehicular traffic for more than 40 years -- and renamed James Cagney Place in 1989 -- was officially recognized as a Pedestrian Plaza under the NYC Department of Transportation's (DOT) [NYC Plaza program](#) Round 10. The award notice came after three years of effort by Community Board 8 Members Rita Popper and Dave Rosenstein, with support from Council Member Ben Kallos, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and in partnership with sponsor Ruppert-Yorkville (R-Y) Management, which helped form Friends of James Cagney Place LLC.

In 2017, the Friends of James Cagney Place organized free events including a jazz festival, movie night, Halloween Parade, and the tree lighting to build community support and demonstrate the import of a protected plaza as a community resource. These events are in addition to daily use by residents walking their dogs, seniors enjoying passive recreation, and children sledding on this section of Carnegie Hill when it snows.

In September 2014, working with Council Member Ben Kallos, Manhattan Community Board 8 passed a resolution calling on the Department of City Planning and DOT to de-map or otherwise protect this urban enclave that existed for four decades without official recognition. How that came to be remains an urban mystery; the paperwork lost in the crisis that was NYC in the mid-1970s. Following a meeting with the DOT, Council Member Kallos, Manhattan Borough President Brewer, joined by urban planner CIVITAS in February of 2015, the CB8M team voted to apply to the DOT under the NYC Plaza Program as a step toward establishing the closed street as a permanent pedestrian enclave. In November 2016 as part of an initial application for Round 9, the community and R-Y Management formed the Friends of James Cagney Place.

Following advocacy by CB8M Members Rita Popper and Dave Rosenstein in 2017, Council Member Ben Kallos was able to work with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Capital Construction to restore portions of the block that were removed during Second Avenue Subway construction: remove a concrete highway ("Jersey") barrier where a gate had long been, to restore the bollards and swing gate, and to replace street signage marking the block as "James Cagney Place."

Originally, this was the site of the enormous Jacob Ruppert & Company's Knickerbocker brewery, which extended from 90th to 94th Street between Second and Third Avenue, and produced the best-selling beer in America in the early 20th Century. It was closed in 1965, according to The [New York Times](#).

According to the Department of City Planning, this block has been unofficially closed to traffic - lined with benches, paved with special z-bricks in lieu of asphalt, with gates at each end -- since approximately 1975 when Knickerbocker Plaza (40-story and 577 units), Ruppert Tower (34-story and 549 units) and Yorkville Tower (42-story and 710 units) were developed as Mitchell-Lama affordable housing. These buildings are part of a Large Scale Residential Development (LSRD) approved by the City Planning Commission (CPC) in 1971 (CP-21714) with boundaries coincident with the Ruppert Brewery Urban Renewal Area (RBURA) approved by the CPC in 1968 (CP-20197), which extends from East 90th Street to East 94th Street between Second and Third Avenues. The urban renewal plan expired in 2008, but the LSRD, which called for the closing of East 91st and East 92nd Streets, is still applicable.

DOT works with selected organizations to create neighborhood plazas throughout the City to transform underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces. The NYC Plaza Program is a key part of the City's effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space. Eligible organizations can propose new plaza sites for their neighborhoods through a competitive application process. DOT prioritizes sites that are in neighborhoods that lack open space, and partners with community groups that commit to operate, maintain, and manage these spaces so they are vibrant pedestrian plazas.

“As one of James Cagney’s film titles put it, it is truly 'something to sing about' that this part of E. 91st Street is finally getting official recognition as a Pedestrian Plaza,” said **DOT Manhattan Borough Commissioner Luis Sanchez**. “Thanks to Council Member Kallos, Community Board 8 and the Friends of James Cagney Place for all their work to make sure this continues to be a space where community members and visitors can meet, relax or enjoy cultural events.”

“James Cagney Place, a vehicle-free oasis in the midst of a crowded city, is now one step closer to being preserved as an “Open Air” space for this community district's more than 220,000 residents, one of the most densely populated districts with the least open space per capita,” said **Rita Popper**, the driving force behind the plaza, a leader of the Friends of James Cagney Place and Community Board 8 member.

“This is a good first step. Next on our list is seeing the Citibike station moved across Second Avenue, closer to the bike lane and away from sledding children,” said **Dave Rosenstein**, CB8M member and co-chair of the CB8 committee that was tasked with finding ways to protect this enclave.

“The designation of James Cagney Place as a DOT Pedestrian Plaza is wonderful news. We are grateful to all of those who have made this possible. We know how important this public space is to the residents of our community. All New Yorkers have good reason to celebrate today. The new Pedestrian Plaza status will ensure that this “civic gem” is preserved and enhanced for the future.” Said, RY Management on behalf of the immediately adjacent Knickerbocker and Ruppert/Yorkville housing complexes.

“I’ve always loved coming to the closed playstreet on East 91<sup>st</sup> especially for sledding after a snow, this playstreet is a staple of childhood on the Upper East Side. East 91<sup>st</sup> Street has been a

closed play street for longer than I have been alive,” said **Council Member Ben Kallos**. “Thank you to Department of Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg for making the East 91<sup>st</sup> Street an official pedestrians plaza and re-designating it James Cagney Place as well as to Rita Popper, David Rosenstein and RY Management for doing all the work necessary to make this pedestrian plaza a reality.”

“Protecting scarce open space and safe streets is a priority for Upper East Side residents, and I’m pleased the Dept. of Transportation is responding to this neighborhood’s needs,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “Permanently converting this space into a pedestrian plaza will ensure children, families, and all New Yorkers in the Yorkville neighborhood will have this wonderful space to gather, relax, and play for years to come.”

"CIVITAS has been working with the elected leaders and the community for several years to bring about this permanent park space. Parks are a critical component to neighborhood's quality in urban life," said **Alexander Adams** Executive Director at CIVITAS.

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