



Chairperson, Martha Taylor

The City of New York
Borough of Queens

Community Board 8
197-15 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423-2126
Telephone: (718) 264-7895
Fax: (718) 264-7910
Nyc.gov/queenscb8



District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Public Hearing Meeting Minutes
Co-naming of 169th Street (Hillside to Highland Avenues) to Kali Way

Date: May 14, 2018
Chaired by: Kevin Forrestal, Area 3 Chair
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Community Board 8 Office
197-15 Hillside Avenue

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Area 3 Chair, Kevin Forrestal.

Board Members: Kevin Forrestal, James Gallagher Jr., Marc A. Haken, Bhitihara-Martha Fulton and Dilip Nath.

Also in attendance: Ashook Ramsaran, President – Indian Diaspora Council, Shobna Tomescu, Rayjendra Kalicharan, Jagdesh R. Kalicharan, Farouk Samaroo, Patricia Jordan- Langford, Santram Dukhbhanjan, Jeff Gottlieb, Rev. Seopaul Singh, Romanee Kalicharran, Judith Kalicharran, Basmat Kalicharan, Juliet Tajeshwar, Henry Yam representing Council Member Rory Lancman, Marie Adam- Ovide, CB8 District Manager and Alma Karassavidis, CB8 Staff Member.

Mr. Forrestal called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Purpose:

This meeting is regarding the co-naming of 169th Street from Hillside Avenue to Highland Avenue to “Kali” Way in honor of Ramesh D. Kalicharran. The request was made by the Ashook Ramsaran, on behalf of the Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC). We will first hear from the applicant, Ashook Ramsaran, who will have as much time as needed. Then the Board Members will be allowed to ask any questions. Finally those who have signed up for public speaking time will be called upon to make their statement. Each speaker will be given up to three (3) minutes of speaking time.

Public Participation:

Ashook Ramsaran – Mr. Ramsaran expressed thanks to the Community Board and the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to address the Transportation Committee at the meeting of April 26, 2018. He stated that there was unanimous support by the Committee regarding co-naming one block of 169th Street from Highland Avenue to Hillside Avenue in honor of Ramesh

D. Kalicharran aka “Kali” Way after Ramesh Kalicharran who passed away on December 3, 2017. He acknowledged the presence of Ramesh Kalicharran’s family members: Mrs. Judith Kalicharran, Ms. Romane Kalicharran, Mr. Jagdesh Kalicharran, Ms. Shobna Tomescu and Mr. Rayjendra Kalicharran. Mr. Ramsaran stated that as per his discussions with Kevin Forrestal, each of the speakers will be allocated up to two minutes or less in support of this request. The speakers have been briefed by Mr. Ramsaran to stay within the 2 minutes and to avoid repeating what others have said.

Mr. Ramsaran noted that this request has been made following all the protocols and following steps with excellent guidance from Marie Adam-Ovide, District Manager of CB8 and Council Member, Rory Lancman. He mentioned that there were five (5) items that were presented and included with the request at the April 26th Transportation Committee Meeting. He believes that these items serve as qualifications for this co-naming request as they relate to Mr. Kalicharran’s service to the community and his contributions to Queens. His biography is extensive and his contributions have made an indelible and long lasting impact on the community as well as meaningful cultural and economic differences.

He noted that there is overwhelming support and he urges the Community Board to approve this request. He believes it is the right thing to do and it will acknowledge one more significant milestone to our great county of Queens and the City of New York.

Mr. Ramsaran stated that the name, Ramesh D. Kalicharran “KALI” Way has already been approved. The locations are identified as the SW corner of 169th Street and Highland Avenue; NE corner of 169th Street and Highland Avenue; NW corner of 169th Street and Hillside Avenue and the SE 169th Street and Hillside Avenue. He pointed out that it was mentioned that there is a merge of one of the streets onto 169th Street which could create a problem. He stated that does not believe that it will as there are no street signs at that point.

Area 3 Chair, Kevin Forrestal asked if there were any questions from the Board Members.

Marc A. Haken – On one corner on Hillside Avenue, there is Citibank and the opposite corner is “Ritchie’s Place” neither of which have street signs, but there is one big street sign hanging over the street. I have never seen a street sign designed like that (*the big overhead sign*) that has a second name on it. Has anyone on the board seen it?

Kevin Forrestal – I don’t believe there is any recommendation to go any further south than the beginning of Hillside Avenue, am I correct?

Marie Adam-Ovide - The other side of Hillside Avenue is not our Board. The south side where Citibank is located is Board 12.

Kevin Forrestal – What you are asking about is not applicable.

Marc A. Haken – But looking at the other side which is Board 8, the signs are the same. The signs are not the small signs attached to the pole, it is that long sign that he wants co-named, correct?

Kevin Forrestal – It is one of them yes.

Marc A. Haken – Have you ever seen a co-named street sign that size?

Kevin Forrestal – We will defer it to the Department of Transportation.

Marie Adam-Ovide – It’s up Department of Transportation, we don’t decide that. That is what DOT does. They will figure out what signs will be used.

Area 3 Chair, Kevin Forrestal asked Ashook Ramsaran to begin introducing the speakers.

Shobna Tomescu and Rayjendra Kalicharran (*sister and brother of Ramesh D. Kalicharran*) –

I am the youngest sister of Ramesh and the eighth of nine siblings. My brother Rayjendra is the third eldest. Ramesh was our eldest brother who made a lot of sacrifices to bring us to this country. We came here as children and grew up in his home along with his wife and children. His home and office located on 169th Street and Hillside Avenue was not just a home to us but a home to many in the community. His office was like a community center that brought and united people together from all different ethnic communities. I worked at his office for a few years and witnessed the constant revolving door for people coming in for help; whether it was family issues, letters of recommendation, referrals for jobs, or advice on families, health and finance and much more. He brought awareness to our people and the community. He was a great role model for all of us. He showed us how to be strong and to fight for what we believe in. His legacy will live on forever. He touched many hearts and showed many how to take on challenges. He built interpersonal relationships with the community, spread culture, religion and love and kindness. We lost a great asset to our family, the community and the world. On behalf of our family we want to thank you for this wonderful gesture. His name on a street sign will be a great honor and a reminder to us of our beloved brother.

Jagdish Kalicharran (*son of Ramesh D. Kalicharran*) – To know my father was to know many people at one time. He had so many facets and so many gifts. Before he came here, back home in Guyana he was a teacher. He taught by example and was a person of great moral character. His office served the community in many ways. He was always there and had many accomplishments. This would be a great landmark as a shining example in the community how one person can affect so many different religions and cultures.

Farouk Samaroo (*Community Advocate*) – I have been privileged to be a close friend and community collaborator with Ramesh D. Kalicharran for approximately two decades. He is significant not only to the Guyanese and Indian communities but equally to the wider community of Queens and the City of New York. “Kali” did not confine his civic works to a particular ethnic or religious community. His civic activities were for the benefit of all communities with this greater loyalty to our country, state and city. “Kali” was at the forefront in the assimilation of these new immigrant communities into the fabric of our nation. His advocacy, at every opportunity was first and foremost from his standpoint as an American and as a New Yorker. For him, it was self evident that the inclusion of the Indian Diaspora and the Guyanese Diaspora in our civic affairs is the process whereby these newly arriving immigrant groups would become good Americans. Good Americans who would seamlessly add to our noble tribe, bound together not by blood and soil but held together by shared values and ideals. I have here a recently passed law passed two years ago which amended the New York State Religious Corporations Law. Over a decade ago, Kali, myself and my friend Ashook Rasmaman conceived this amendment to the New York State Religious Corporation’s Law to address the inclusion of religious groups from a Non-Judeo Christian background. *He read the first line;* “An act to amend the Religious Corporations Law in relation to providing the means or incorporation for organized groups affiliated with the Hindu, Sikh and Islamic faiths. This is the first time to my knowledge, in New York State history, and perhaps the rest of the country, that those three words have been inscribed in the civil code of these states because of a man like ”Kali”. In addition, this is also important to us and incredibly important to our assimilation into the fabric of this nation. The term Clergyman and the term Minister will include a duly authorized Pastor, Rector, Priest and Rabbi but also Pundit, Swami, Guru, Imam, Mawlana. This is something that has not been done in more than two centuries of New York’s Civil

and Criminal Code. Because of the efforts of men and women such as my late friend, Ramesh Kalicharran, the City and State of New York has in a small but significant way, enlarged the tent to accommodate the newest members of the American tribe.

At a later date, on a personal note, I would like and will personally request that we consider re-naming not only this one block, but also from 169th where the Grand Central Parkway is, all the way to Hillside Avenue. I would also like to address Marc Haken's concern. We have long names. The Indo-European language includes English, German, Italian and also Hindi. We just happen to have more syllables than the rest. I was just clarifying a point. There will be a lot more signs in the future.

Kevin Forrestal – That wasn't his point.

Farouk Samaroo (*Community Advocate*) – I was just making my own point. On that note I thank you for your attention and urge you all to adopt this proposal to honor my dear friend Ramesh D. Kalicharran, who was a model Queens neighbor, New Yorker and American.

Mr. Forrestal granted Marc A. Haken's request for point of personal privilege

Marc A. Haken – My comment had nothing to do with the length of the name. I am very familiar with names that are long. The length of the name doesn't mean anything. I personally observed that these signs on major streets are huge and I have never seen one of them co-named. I was questioning how the sign itself will be formatted if we approve and the City Council approves it. That is what my question was. That question will go to DOT.

Marie Adam-Ovide – When a street is co-named there is another sign that is added to it. It's a standard sign and they just fit in the name. The size is standard. That might be something for the City Council.

Kevin Forrestal – As discussed at the Transportation Committee Meeting, the trade off between the naming is the question to the relationship of the fixed length of the sign to the font used for the name. You don't want it to be so small that no one will be able to read it.

Farouk Samaroo (*Community Advocate*) – Perhaps it was phrased incorrectly.

Kevin Forrestal – OK. We can move on.

Patricia Jordan-Langford (*Guyana Tri-State Alliance*) – To know him was to love him and learn from him. He was a great mentor to many people. He always wanted to make things better with change. Ramesh D. Kalicherran was an extraordinary community leader who led by example. Everyone called him "Kali". In recognition of his tremendous contributions to the Guyanese Diaspora, he has received several citations from the Asian Indian, Indio Caribbean and other ethnic American communities. In New York, Kali also received the Golden Arrowhead of achievement and distinction which was bestowed upon him by the Guyana Tri-State Alliance, the Guyana Consulate and the Guyana Mission to the USA. He was also recognized by the United States Congress, the United States Senate and the City Council. He was a proud Ambassador for Guyana, the Caribbean and the United States. "Kali" was born in April, 1949 and the eldest of eleven

children. His parents were second generations Indians, which means that they came here from India as indentured laborers. Though of Indian origin, he saw himself as beyond such limits. He worked consistently to promote the welfare of his community and he excelled in every endeavor. Never ceasing to understand the needs of immigrants, he also started a driving school. He was the owner and President of the Kali Group, which encompasses the driving school, real estate and all his other businesses. His passion for community work has won him widespread acclaim and numerous accolades. Kali was founding member of many organizations; Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), Gyaann Bhakti Satshangh (GBS) Mandir now called Prem Bhakti Satshangh (PBS) Mandir. He mobilized the umbrella organization of Hindu priests called Pandit's Parishad, founded Liberty Avenue Phagwah Parade, founding member of Indo-Caribbean Federation of North America, the Lakshmi Mandir, the Caribbean Voice Magazine, and served as director of the Indian Festival Committee. Kali promoted his culture and passed it on to new generations. He never said no to anyone and always found a way to make that person's life better. Kali's activism and advocacy have played a huge role in bringing our community's concerns to the attention of politicians in the New York area. I just wanted to let all of you know about some of the things that Kali has done. His imprint on this street is very important because the new generation coming up must know about the legacy that was left by Ramesh D. Kalicherran.

Santram Dukhbhanjan (*Indo-Caribbean Council*) – I knew Ramesh D. Kalicherran for over 30 years. He was very vibrant and involved in the community as well as in many other organizations. I considered him my mentor, a brother and a dear friend. In India he was referred to as a Mahatma. He was a huge influence on many who strive to emulate what he has accomplished.

Jeff Gottlieb (*Mid-Queens Civic Congress*) – Years ago, we co-named Abigail Adams Avenue/84th Avenue (*between Edison Vocational and Jamaica High School*). We also co-named Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Avenue/Jewel Avenue. Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Avenue has 28 letters and Ramesh D. Kalicherran has 33 letters, not much difference. Ramesh D. Kalicherran was an average man and was a very hard worker. I didn't know him personally. I think the street should be named Ramesh D. Kalicherran Street/169th Street between Hillside Avenue and Highland Avenue. If you want Kali Avenue that's fine also, but it is ultimately up to DOT as you know.

Kevin Forrestal – The application is what the application says, if you put anything that large on it, you will not be able to see it.

Jeff Gottlieb (*Mid-Queens Civic Congress*) – He played a huge part in the founding of the Phagwah Parade which celebrates pride in Hindu culture. I know many successful people from Guyana and the islands who live here and even if they were unable to attend college, their children are in college. I think that is a tribute to Mr. Kalicherran. He fought for his people and for all Americans. He instilled in his people great pride in their South Asian heritage. I recommend this co-naming as president of the Central Queens Historical Association.

Rev. Seopaul Singh (*Caribbean Network Enterprises*) – It is more than a privilege for me to speak about "Kali". He impressed me over the 29 years I have known him. In my 50 years in the ministry I have never met a man like "Kali". Anytime there was a need for any person in the community, he would make sure that something was done to help them. He displayed an aura of a Hindu leader. Prior to his passing, "Kali" was suffering with much pain in his legs. He broke the barrier of the limitation that may have existed with Hindu dharma and he asked me to pray for him. That spoke volumes to me about this man. One day I was alone at home and had an urge to talk with "Kali". When I went to talk with him I told him that I wanted to introduce him to Jesus Christ. Here was a

man who believed in the Hindu deities and brought Hindu leaders together. He bowed with me in prayer and I prayed for him to receive Christ as his Savior. That is something that I will always remember. “Kali” was a man who helped people of all descriptions; Hindu, Christians, Muslims, etc. He would come to functions at Faith Assembly Church in Richmond Hill and sit with me. Other leaders would also come and sit with me, all dressed in their cultural attire. It was amazing to see the influence that “Kali” had on others. He excelled in every aspect of relationships with people of other religions and beliefs. I hope that others will find an example to follow in Ramesh D. Kalicherran.

Romanee Kalicharran and Judith Kalicharran (daughter and wife of Ramesh D. Kalicharran –

Even though I knew this day was going to come I didn’t prepare. My dad also did not prepare his speeches in advance. He always knew how to read people and knew what people needed to hear at that moment. Because this is still so fresh in our minds and hearts, I have to do this as if it is someone else rather than my dad or I wouldn’t be able to do this. When I received the notice in the mail with my father’s name on it, was a proud moment for us. I thought about what he would have thought if he could see this. Community activist, leader, philanthropist, trendsetter, founder, awardee, liaison, adviser. These are all titles that many of you use to describe Ramesh D. Kalicherran. To me, he was my dad and I would like to give you a little glimpse of the home life and sacrifices that he made. We gave up our rooms to allow people to stay with us and they were just aunts and uncles to us. They were people my dad helped. We never knew until we were older who they were. They were politicians, performers and presidents. We had wonderful meals and conversations and sometimes went to sleep at 5:00 a.m. We all shared one common culture. I will never forget those days, those memories. His daily routine consisted of an early rise; prayers to the sun, ancestors and the gods for a good day; watered his plants because it is a bad omen to have dry plants in the house. As he headed to his office, he would greet his mother who lived two doors down and would always be waiting to say hello to her son, her pride and joy. On his way he made sure to greet the police officers, taxi drivers and would then stop to get his coffee. His days were long; showing houses, taking phone calls, booking tours to India, giving driving lessons, giving advice.

My mom wrote something which I will read to you because it is difficult for her to speak at this time. These are her words; *If you ask about Kali; his life is the people, the community, his heartbeat is the people. Community, their needs, he was their voice when they had none. At some point in time his life was no longer about him. Whether you were a dishwasher or a beggar or someone of a higher stature, he saw everyone the same. Whenever someone stepped into the office, he would stop what he was doing, make sure they had tea and a snack and listened to them however long it would take. Ninety nine percent of the time, it was not about business, but about the person’s personal life that needed to be sorted out. He was an advisor, much more than just a businessman or a leader.*

To us, the street naming would be another force of his that would stand as a pillar to our community and his accomplishments in having a permanent place. As a child growing up on 169th Street I recall our family members who also lived on 169th up to the GCP, having weddings and feasts. My mom is from Puerto Rico and dad was from Guyana. Both cultures merged during these open celebrations. He shared his love of music with everyone else in the community. He was a promoter; putting out records, live shows, music labels, showing culture across the board. He also inspired me and my brother who are both artists. As his life progressed, he made certain compromises. His compromise was not big, it meant not walking down the block. It was letting me, and only me, drive him down so that he wouldn’t be able to say hi to his friends or put a smile on their faces. Making sure that his favorite taxi guy, who he had on speed dial, drove him home. His biggest compromise long ago was giving millions of dollars to those who needed it without question or

payback. Giving away all of his riches. That's why he didn't live in a mansion and why he was always the same. He would never leave anyone back. He appeared with no cane, no walker and no aid. He passed away with his two feet, with no amputations. After his dialysis treatments, he would go back to his office, take a nap and then take his phone calls. He made his appearances and still appeared to be that pillar. As we look at that sign and my children get a chance to look at that sign, they will be proud.

Kevin Forrestal asked if there were any comments or questions.

Bhitihara-Martha Fulton – Did I hear you say that he was associated with the Guyanese Mission with the UN?

Patricia Jordan-Langford (Guyana Tri-State Alliance) – They acknowledged and honored him.

Marc A. Haken - I learned an awful lot. I am surprised that I didn't know the gentleman.

Dilip Nath – I came here when I was 16 as an immigrant. Several years ago, I met him and he helped me, he showed me how to get involved with the community. He helped anyone and everyone. I just walked into his office one and he didn't know who I was, only that I needed help. He was a true gentleman. We need more of these people in the community. I think that co-naming the street is a well deserved honor for this man.

Marc A. Haken made a motion to approve the co-naming of 169th Street from Hillside Avenue to Highland Avenue to Ramesh D. Kalicherran "Kali Way", seconded by Dilip Nath.

Kevin Forrestal – It is very clear that the loss and grieving is still present and we at the Community Board offer our condolences. The application, in my view is very extensive and thorough and certainly justifies the actions that are being requested. Although we do not have a quorum we will still take a vote. There appears to be no opposition and no problem with the application so I don't anticipate any issues with its approval. Of course it is not a guarantee. I cannot do that.

A hand vote was taken on the motion.

Vote: In Favor: 5 Opposed: 0 Abstained: 0

In favor:

Kevin Forrestal, James Gallagher Jr., Marc A. Haken, Bhitihara-Martha Fulton and Dilip Nath.

The motion passed unanimously and will be voted on by the full board at the Community Board 8 General Meeting on June 20, 2018 at Hillcrest Jewish Center, 183-02 Union Turnpike at 7:30 p.m.

Kevin Forrestal – It will then eventually go before the City Council. We acknowledge the presence of Henry Yam of Council Member Rory Lancman's office, who has already endorsed the co-naming. I can't remember any case where the City Council has opposed the local Council Member's recommendation. It is all just a process that is usually done twice a year and takes about 6 months. I attended one about a month ago, so figure approximately another 4 or 5 months for the

actual unveiling to take place. I commend you all for your action and speaking out for your family member and friend. It is a great honor to have this done for him.

Marie Adam-Ovide – I also want to say that you will have the opportunity to speak at the full Board Meeting if you wish. You can sign up for that.

Meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by,
Alma Karassavidis, CB8 Staff Member
June 11, 2018*