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June 15, 2021

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As our city and the great Borough of Queens continues to reopen, we are excited to move forward with this meaningful art campaign and the installation of a monument honoring iconic late singer Billie Holiday. We are aware that Queens Borough Hall was suggested as the home of the monument in preliminary conversations. However, in full appreciation of the founding principle of the She Built NYC initiative, which highlights the importance of representation and elevating stories often pushed far from the mainstream narrative, a group of local leaders and our office agree that placing the statue at Queens Borough Hall would be a missed opportunity to honor the community of Addisleigh Park, the historic Southeast Queens neighborhood Billie Holiday called home.

The historic district of Addisleigh Park was built as an exclusively white community and despite racist restrictive covenants prohibiting the sale of properties to Black people, in the 1930s composer Clarence Williams, singer Eva Taylor, Jazz icon Fats Waller, actress Lena Horne and Jazz musician Count Basie were among the first to establish Addisleigh Park as a safe haven for the African American middle class. In 1948, the US Supreme Court held that racially restrictive covenants violated the Equal Protection Clause and more Black residents were able to move into the area. Among its most notable residents, Addisleigh Park was home to stars Milt Hinton, John Coltrane, Roy Campanella, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois and Ella Fitzgerald.

We know that the She Built NYC Campaign is ambitiously committed to uplifting the image and stories of important woman figures who created history, and in honoring the distinguished women of the Addisleigh Park community, it would be especially meaningful to the local leaders to add alongside Billie Holiday monuments to actress Lena Horne and to “The First Lady of Song” Ella Fitzgerald.

Addisleigh Park is an irreplaceable piece of Queens and its evolution from an exclusively white area into a historically distinguished community for luminaries and leaders of the African American community illuminates the story of struggle and achievement of civil rights and home ownership for Black New Yorkers. Addisleigh Park holds the once-residence of Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Lena Horne as a point of pride and as such there could not be a more appropriate location for the monument in their memory in Queens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donovan Richards", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

DONOVAN RICHARDS

President

Borough of Queens

Cc: Kendal Henry, Director, Percent for Art, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Sergio Pardo López, Program Manager, Percent for Art, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs