



City of Chicago



R2014-725

Office of the City Clerk

Document Tracking Sheet

Meeting Date:	10/8/2014
Sponsor(s):	Burns (4)
Type:	Resolution
Title:	Call for an Honorary street renaming to memorialize Oscar Brown, Jr.
Committee(s) Assignment:	

**RESOLUTION CALLING FOR
AN HONORARY STREET RENAMING TO MEMORIALIZE
OSCAR BROWN, JR.**

WHEREAS, Oscar Brown Jr., a native of Chicago and the Hyde Park neighborhood, began his career as both an actor and singer at the age of 15, making his professional debut on the national radio series, “Secret City,” and was the first to broadcast news about “America’s largest minority” on his daily local radio program “Negro Newsfront” while still in his 20’s; and

WHEREAS, he released his first album ‘Sin and Soul’ in 1960 on Columbia Records and upon its release secured an engagement at the Village Vanguard in New York City, becoming an overnight success and giant in the jazz world, revered as a lyricist, songwriter, composer, singer and entertainer; and

WHEREAS, culturally, Brown pioneered the “*black is beautiful*” attitude that would become prevalent in pop and jazz culture a half decade later; and

WHEREAS, musically, he was among the first to pen appropriate lyrics to the great jazz standards of the day, thereby bestowing hardbop anthems like “Work Song,” and “Dat Dere” with verbal and social relevance; and

WHEREAS, he is most often described as a jazz singer, and initially achieved fame by putting lyrics to well-known jazz instrumentals, that description doesn’t do justice to the breadth of his work, since as a performer, he acted his songs more than he sang them, and as a songwriter he drew as much from gospel, blues and folk music as he did from jazz; and

WHEREAS, Brown has also starred on television, being featured as host of the syndicated television series, “Jazz Scene U.S.A.” and PBS series “From Jump Street” in addition to appearing on “Roc” and the ABC television series, “Brewster Place” with Oprah Winfrey; and

WHEREAS, he was awarded a Chicago Emmy Award for his television special “Oscar Brown’s Back in Town”; and

WHEREAS, Brown persevered through a time when few African Americans were given the opportunity to showcase both their intellect and their artistic talents, becoming known for his use of art as a way to celebrate African-American culture and to denounce racism; and

WHEREAS, he was active in the Civil Rights Movement, marching alongside Dr. Martin Luther King on Chicago’s South Side; and

WHEREAS, Brown was a pioneer of rap music, rapping well ahead of its time, reciting blues poems in Shakespearean iambic pentameter and becoming known as “the High Priest of Hip” and “The Grand Pap of Rap;” and

WHEREAS, he wrote over a dozen musicals including many that are written entirely in verse; and

WHEREAS, he made a commitment to use his gifts as a tool for change, as was most evident in the numerous stage shows he wrote and directed that addressed social issues that often cast underserved young Black teenagers as performers; and

WHEREAS, the most popular of these shows, “Opportunity Please Knock,” was produced with the then-notorious street gang Mighty Blackstone Rangers; and


WHEREAS, Brown produced his musical stage plays “Big Time Buck White” at the Hyde Park Methodist Church which used to stand at 54th & Blackstone; and staged “Summer In The City,” at the Harper Theatre in Harper Court, featuring great talents including, among others, Spanky & Our Gang and Grammy award recording artist, Gavin Christopher; and

WHEREAS, more recently, the “Great Nitty Gritty” was staged in Englewood, at Kennedy King College from 2002–2004 until his illness and untimely death in 2005; and

WHEREAS, Brown remains a proud son of Chicago and the Hyde Park neighborhood, having spent his early years at 51st and Champlain, then to return to the South Side after four decades on the road; **THEREFORE**

BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Mayor and members of the Chicago City Council assembled this 8th day of October 2014, do hereby rename a section of road in his home neighborhood in his honor so that his cultural and social contributions to American society live on in his memory; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Oscar Brown, Jr.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William D. Burns". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William D. Burns
Alderman, 4th Ward
City of Chicago