



# Office of the City Clerk

City Hall  
121 N. LaSalle St.  
Room 107  
Chicago, IL 60602  
[www.chicityclerk.com](http://www.chicityclerk.com)

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** O2021-789, **Version:** 1

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Committee on Transportation and Public Way  
**DIRECT INTRODUCTION**

### **ORDINANCE**

WHEREAS, Rosie Lee Atchison (Big Ma) was born, August 15, 1911 in Bolivar, Mississippi. At the grave site of her birth mother, Rosanna Ford, and only 6 weeks old, she was taken into the care of her father, Henry Liner. Her father later relocated her to Clarksdale Coahoma, Mississippi where he married and fathered a total of 27 children. Rosie being the second eldest daughter of her siblings; and

WHEREAS, As a young woman, Rosie met and married her first husband Willie Alexander. To this union three children were born. After five years of a failing marriage, struggling to survive on plantation work, and experiencing the loss of a child, Rosie made a sound decision to leave Willie and migrated to the North. She and her two young children came to Chicago in 1935 in search of a better life. Rosie joined Greater Salem Baptist Church, church home of World-Renowned Mahalia Jackson, and was a faithful member of the Dr. Watt's Choir; and

WHEREAS, In 1937, she met and married Andrew Atchison who worked for the Diamond Glue Factory and two more children were born. They resided in what was known as Chicago's Black Metropolis, The Mecca Building, where they lived for approximately 14 years. During that time Rosie pursued her dream for better opportunities in the North, with only a second reader education, and was hired as a coach cleaner for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1940. While living in the Mecca Building, she unselfishly thought of others and helped those in need. She would take it upon herself to get on the streetcar and travel to Hillman's basement grocery store to purchase food not only for her family but for others in her building. She not only shared her food, but she gave of herself and her finances; and

WHEREAS, By 1951, residents of the Mecca Building were being forced from their comfort zone by the City of Chicago for the purpose of building what is now I IT" (Illinois Institute of Technology). Rosie along with other residents were furious and marched tirelessly around City Hall to no avail. As a result, these victimized families, including Rosie's family sought shelter at City Hall after being evicted from what they all knew as home. Rosie and her family spent several nights sleeping at city hall before authorities began to move the families to various locations around Chicago. After being displaced for several years, Rosie and her family found permanent housing at 31<sup>st</sup> and Giles where she lived with their children and grandchildren for 14 years. The death of her

husband in 1963 prompted Rosie to move into the Robert Taylor Housing with her eldest daughter and 8 grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Rosie continued to follow and pursue her dreams of a better life for her children and grandchildren and made another sound decision to move out of the Chicago's Housing Projects. Rosie remembers how it became more and more difficult to be the model employee at the merging Penn Central railroad yard because of the changing times. In spite of her challenges, she stuck to her dreams. On November 20, 1970, Rosie purchased a two-flat building in Chicago's West Englewood community. This was one of her greatest accomplishments. After 30 years of service with the railroad, Rosie retired from what is now known today as Amtrak. She became well known and loved by all in her community. Everyone who knew her loved her and to all was affectionately known as "Big Ma." Rosie helped to keep her community a safe place for every resident young and old by watching out for those in her neighborhood. Her door was always open to those in need and she was truly a pillar in her community and very well respected; and

WHEREAS, As the matriarch she instilled in her family hard work, determination, and perseverance. Her legacy will continue to live through each and every generation now and those to come; and

WHEREAS, Aged to Perfection, Rosie the first of 6 generations, leaves to cherish her memory 4 children, two which have preceded her in death, 18 grandchildren, two which have preceded her in death, 60 great-grandchildren, two which have preceded her in death, 95 great-great-grandchildren, one which has preceded her in death and, 24 great-great-great-grandchildren. She passed away into God's Kingdom on Monday, November 23, 2020.

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO:**

SECTION 1. Pursuant to an ordinance heretofore passed by the City Council which allows for the erection of honorary street-name signs, the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation shall take all necessary action for the standardization of South Marshfield Avenue, both sides of the street, between West 61st Street and West 63rd Street as "Honorary Rosie Lee Atchison Way."

SECTION 2. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and publication.

**THE LIFE HISTORY OF ROSIE LEE ATCHISON**

Rosie Lee Atchison (Big Ma) was born, August 15, 1911 in Bolivar, Mississippi. At the grave site of her birth mother, Rosanna Ford, and only 6 weeks old, she was taken into the care of her father, Henry Liner. Her father later relocated her to Clarksdale Coahoma, Mississippi where he married and fathered a total of 27 children Rosie being the second eldest daughter of her siblings.

As a young woman, Rosie met and married her first husband Willie Alexander. To this union three children were born. After five years of a failing marriage, struggling to survive on plantation work, and experiencing the loss of a child, Rosie made a sound decision to leave Willie and migrated to the North. She and her two young children came to Chicago in 1935 in search of a better life. Rosie joined Greater Salem Baptist Church, church home of World-Renowned Mahalia Jackson, and was a faithful member of the Dr. Watt's Choir.

In 1937, she met and married Andrew Atchison who worked for the Diamond Glue Factory and two more children were born. They resided in what was known as Chicago's Black Metropolis, The Mecca Building, where they lived for approximately 14 years. During that time Rosie pursued her dream for better opportunities in the North, with only a second reader education, and was hired as a coach cleaner for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1940. While living in the Mecca Building, she unselfishly thought of others and helped those in need. She would take it upon herself to get on the streetcar and travel to Hillman's basement grocery store to purchase food not only for her family but for others in her building. She not only shared her food, but she gave of herself and her finances.

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Rosie and her family spent several nights sleeping at city hall before authorities began to move the families to various locations around Chicago. After being displaced for several years, Rosie and her family found permanent housing at 31<sup>st</sup> and Giles where she lived with their children and grandchildren for 14 years. The death of her husband in 1963 prompted Rosie to move into the Robert Taylor Housing with her eldest daughter and 8 grandchildren.

Rosie continued to follow and pursue her dreams of a better life for her children and grandchildren and made another sound decision to move out of the Chicago's Housing Projects. Rosie remembers how it became more and more difficult to be the model employee at the merging Penn Central railroad yard because of the changing times. In spite of her challenges, she stuck to her dreams. On November 20, 1970, Rosie purchased a two-flat building in Chicago's Englewood community. This was one of her greatest accomplishments. After 30 years of service with the railroad, Rosie retired from what is now known today as Amtrak. She became well known and loved by all in her community. Everyone who knew her loved her and to all was affectionately known as "Big Ma." Rosie helped to keep her community a safe place for every resident young and old by watching out for those in her neighborhood. Her door was always open to those in need and she was truly a pillar in her community and very well respected.

As the matriarch she instilled in her family hard work, determination, and perseverance. Her legacy will continue to live through each and every generation now and those to come.

Aged to Perfection, Rosie the first of 6 generations leaves to cherish her memory 4 children two which have preceded her in death, 18 grandchildren two have preceded her in death, 60 great-grandchildren two have preceded her in death, 95 great-greatgrandchildren one preceded her in death and, 24 great-great-great-grandchildren.

**REASON:**

**Rosie Lee Atchison was a long serving, living, and contributing member of Chicago's Black community, West Englewood, and Chicago. Through her upbringing, triumphs and tribulations: losing her mother at 6 weeks old, charting to a new city, losing her home and fighting for a piece of the American Dream, she is a powerful reminder that faith and love will be everlasting, in her life as it now is in her death.**

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# Raymond A. Lopez

Alderman, 1 5th Ward

## CITY COUNCIL

City of Chicago

## Council Chambers

City Hall - 3rd Floor 121 North LaSalle Street Chicago, Illinois 60602 Telephone: (312) 744-4321

## Committee Memberships

Aviation Committees and Rules Contracting Oversight and Equity Economic, Capital and Technology Development Finance

## Housing and Real Estate

February 7, 2021

Office of Budget and  
Management 121 N. LaSalle,  
Room 604 Chicago, IL 60602

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Raymond A. Lopez, Alderman of Chicago's 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, hereby authorize the Office of Budget Management to withdraw the funds associated with the cost of installation for this honorary street designation for Rosie Lee Atchison Way from my Ward's 2021 Aldermanic Annual Menu Program budget upon passage of this designation ordinance, pursuant to Section 2-8-040 of the Chicago Municipal Code. Until then I remain,

Respectfully Serving the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward,

1 5th Ward Office - West Englewood 6412 South Ashland Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60636

Telephone:

1 5th Ward Office - Brighton Park

4286 South Archer Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60632

823-1539