

WHEREAS, Joan Gray was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 29, 1949; and,

WHEREAS, attended Willard Elementary School, Vincennes Upper-Grade School, Hyde Park Academy High School, North Central College, and Roosevelt University; and,

WHEREAS, in 1968, while attending Roosevelt University, she joined the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party; and,

WHEREAS, rose to the rank of Field Lieutenant, conducted investigations for political prisoners, helped build the Free Breakfast for Children Program, and was responsible for the edict forbidding misogynistic treatment and marginalization of women in the Party; and,

WHEREAS, in 1977, Joan became affiliated with Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago, which was founded in 1972 by a group of artists but did not immediately join, and from 1979 to 1986, worked as an administrative assistant at South Shore Bank; and,

WHEREAS, in 1984, Joan Gray joined Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago as a Principal Dancer; and,

WHEREAS, just three years later, became president of Muntu Dance Theatre in 1987; and,

WHEREAS, under Joan's 30-year leadership, Muntu Dance Theatre became world-renowned as a professional dance company; and,

WHEREAS, in 1997, the Illinois Arts Alliance awarded her the Sidney R. Yates Award; and,

WHEREAS, in 1997, was a founder and served on the board of directors of the African American Arts Alliance, also known as the Black Arts and Culture Alliance, and awarded the Paul Robeson Award; and,

WHEREAS, in 2002, was awarded a Stanford University Fellowship for her leadership in the arts; and,

WHEREAS, in 2009, received an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Fine Arts from her alma mater, North Central College in Naperville, Illinois; and,

WHEREAS, in 2017, Joan Gray was honored by the city of Chicago in a mural adorning the Chicago Cultural Center by artist Kerry James Marshall; and,

WHEREAS, in 2022, she was the Legacy Award Winner for See Chicago Dance; and,

WHEREAS, in 2023, inducted into the Chicago Black Arts Hall of Fame; and,

WHEREAS, in 2023, received a People's Service Award from the Historical Preservation Society of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party for her outstanding service and dedication to the people; and,

WHEREAS, served as a Chairperson of the Chicago Dance Coalition and on the board of the International Association of Blacks in Dance; and,

WHEREAS, was on the board of the National Endowment of the Arts and thereby reviewed grant proposals, recommended projects, and influenced funding to artists; and,

WHEREAS, Joan Gray’s dance mastery and professional accomplishments inspire her country, her state, her city, and her mentees. As Regina Cary-Carr writes, “Joan’s legacy of excellence, mentorship, and passion for dance will forever inspire those who had the privilege to know her.”

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Joan Gray will be honored by the citizens of Chicago, Illinois, from this day forward.

Approved and adopted on the 17th day of July 2024.

Desmon Yancy, Alderman 5th Ward