

**CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS**  
**AGENDA ITEM DEPARTMENT HEAD'S SUMMARY FORM**

**DEPARTMENT:** Parks and Recreation

**AGENDA DATE:** October 23, 2012

**CONTACT PERSON/PHONE:** Nanette Smejkal, Director (541-4283)

**DISTRICT(S) AFFECTED:** 8

**SUBJECT:**

**APPROVE a resolution / ordinance / lease to do what? OR AUTHORIZE the City Manager to do what? Be descriptive of what we want Council to approve. Include \$ amount if applicable.**

Approve a Resolution to rename Sunset Heights Park located at 631 Stewart Court, City of El Paso, El Paso County Texas, as John R. Karr Park.

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:**

Discussion of the what, why, where, when, and how to enable Council to have reasonably complete description of the contemplated action. This should include attachment of bid tabulation, or ordinance or resolution if appropriate. What are the benefits to the City of this action? What are the citizen concerns?

The naming of parks and recreation facilities follows a Council adopted policy. The Applicant provided the naming application, citizen support petitions, and research. The Naming Subcommittee and the entire Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) reviewed the naming application. Consensus was reached and the PRAB recommends naming the park "John R. Karr Park." Attached please find background materials.

**PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:**

**Has the Council previously considered this item or a closely related one?**

N/A

**AMOUNT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:**

**How will this item be funded? Has the item been budgeted? If so, identify funding source by account numbers and description of account. Does it require a budget transfer?**

The cost of signage related to the naming shall be borne by the applicant, per the Council policy.

**BOARD / COMMISSION ACTION:**

**Enter appropriate comments or N/A**

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board voted unanimously on September 10, 2012 to forward the naming application to City Council for consideration with a recommendation to approve.

\*\*\*\*\*REQUIRED AUTHORIZATION\*\*\*\*\*

**LEGAL:** (if required) \_\_\_\_\_

**FINANCE:** (if required) \_\_\_\_\_

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** \_\_\_\_\_

(Example: if RCA is initiated by Purchasing, client department should sign also)

*Information copy to appropriate Deputy City Manager*

**APPROVED FOR AGENDA:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY MANAGER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the Mayor and City Council accept the recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to rename Sunset Heights Park located at 631 Stewart Court, City of El Paso, El Paso County Texas, as **JOHN R. KARR PARK**.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EL PASO:**

**THAT** the park located at 631 Stewart Court, El Paso, Texas, shall henceforth be renamed and known as **JOHN R. KARR PARK**; and,

**THAT** the Karr Family (“Applicant”) shall incur the customary costs associated with the renaming of a park, such as installing or replacing signs with the park name or any other signs posted or affixed to a facility. Any proposed signs shall be acceptable to both the Parks and Recreation Department and Applicant. (District 8)

**PASSED AND APPROVED** this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2012.

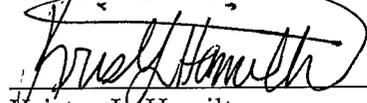
CITY OF EL PASO

\_\_\_\_\_  
John F. Cook  
Mayor

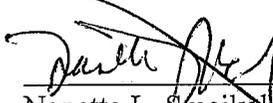
ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Richarda Duffy Momsen  
City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kristen L. Hamilton  
Assistant City Attorney

APPROVED AS TO CONTENT:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Nanette L. Smejkal, Director  
Parks and Recreation Department



# City of El Paso PARK NAMING/CHANGING Application



### Applicant information

Please print or type the information in black ink

Applicant Name: Stephanie Karr

Mailing Address: 520 Prospect City: El Paso Zip: 79902

Home Phone: 892-9072 Work Phone: 593-1000 x403 Cell Phone: 892-9072

Email Address: stephaniekarr11@gmail.com

Organization \_\_\_\_\_  Non-Profit

### Proposed Name / Change

Park/Facility Location/Address: Sunset Heights Park, corner of Los Angeles & Stewart Court

Current name of Park or Facility: Sunset Heights Park  Not Applicable

Suggested Name: John R. Karr Park

Category:

- Outstanding Individual(s)  
*Acknowledges the sustained contribution that has been made by such individual(s) to the City of El Paso and/or the development and management of the City's park and recreation system.*
- Common usage identifying the Neighborhood  
*Acknowledges the geographic location or common name that gives a particular identity to a neighborhood.*
- Historical Event, Person, Place  
*Preserves and honors the history of El Paso, its founders, other historical figures or local landmarks.*
- Natural or Geographical Feature to the area  
*Acknowledges a prominent or unique natural or geological feature in the surrounding area.*
- Benefit/Organization Acknowledgement  
*Major gift, acknowledges the significant benefit of a donation*
- Other  
*Describe:*

**PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS AREA**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**STAFF ONLY**

Date Received by PARD: 7/19/12 mgj

Date of Committee Meeting: ~~8/2/12~~ 9/10/12 mgj

Date of PRAB Meeting: 9/10/12 mgj

Date of City Council Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



## PARK NAMING/CHANGING



### Supporting Documentation

Suggested Name: John R. Karr Park

Please provide a written narrative that supports the nomination for consideration. If proposing to name a park or facility after an outstanding person, a biography must also be attached and include material that identifies the individual's significance and notable reputation in the City of El Paso.

### PROPOSAL TO RENAME SUNSET HEIGHTS PARK TO JOHN R. KARR PARK

John R. Karr arrived in El Paso in the summer of 1950, searching for a dry climate for health reasons. He fell in love with the city and remained here for the rest of his life.

Ten years after his arrival, John Karr bought an unfinished home in Sunset Heights, the beginning of his passionate commitment to the neighborhood. He moved his family into the house, establishing relationships with neighbors, schools, community groups, churches and others.

He recognized that Sunset Heights was a neglected city jewel. He saw the need to secure a "historical District" designation for the neighborhood, which would bring attention, funds and restoration projects. He was instrumental in working with the mayor, city council and multiple layers of city and state government to achieve the historical designation.

The City of El Paso's website describes the evolution of Sunset Heights in this manner:

"By the 1970s, Sunset Heights had been adversely impacted through the decline of single family residences and the rise of spacious homes being altered for use as apartments. In an effort to reverse this negative trend, the City Council designated Sunset Heights as a local historic district on June 5, 1984. As improvements were made and the neighborhood reclaimed some of its former splendor, Sunset Heights was subsequently designated a National Register of Historic Places district on December 8, 1988." Archival records document the pivotal role John Karr had in those two designations. He completed applications, researched the history, convinced city leaders of the importance of historical designation and garnered support for the national register designation.

Once that goal was achieved, economic benefits for homeowners, low interest loans and investment in the infrastructure followed.

The Sunset Heights Park was one of Mr. Karr's many neighborhood projects. He enlisted the help of Kent Halla, owner of Sierra Vista growers, a landscaping business, to grade the site and plant low water vegetation. He then persuaded the city to improve the park's sidewalks.

His subsequent leadership in the Sunset Heights Neighborhood Association resulted in several neighborhood clean-ups, which always included the park. The association continues this tradition set by Mr. Karr.

To this day, families and children living in Sunset Heights use the park. Their quality of life is enhanced by the work John Karr did 25 years ago – a vision that he achieved. It is fitting that the park be renamed the John R. Karr Park.

SATURDAY IN DEPTH



CAROLYN COLE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Historic preservationist John Karr of Sunset Heights stands in Prospect St. Karr is asking the city to start enforcing laws that would clean up Sunset Heights.

# Activists say historical area needs restoration

## Sunset Heights center of debate for city and those who want it upgraded

By Ken Baake

El Paso Herald Post

The Sunset Heights neighborhood of downtown El Paso is about to be named to the National Register of Historic Places.

But a group of neighborhood restoration activists say the listing will mean little.

Sunset Heights is already on a city list of historical places, they say, which regulates zoning and construction. But these activists say Sunset Heights is not living up to its historical status — in short, it's a mess.

"Sunset Heights is a no man's land because the city doesn't care," says John Karr, an insurance and real estate agent who lives on Prospect Street. Karr worked to have the neighborhood declared historic in 1984.

Karr plans a trip to City Council Tuesday with a hit list of five city departments he says don't enforce the law.

He also has pictures of deteriorating houses, alleys filled with trash, unpaved mud parking lots and backyards of junked old cars rusting in the sun.

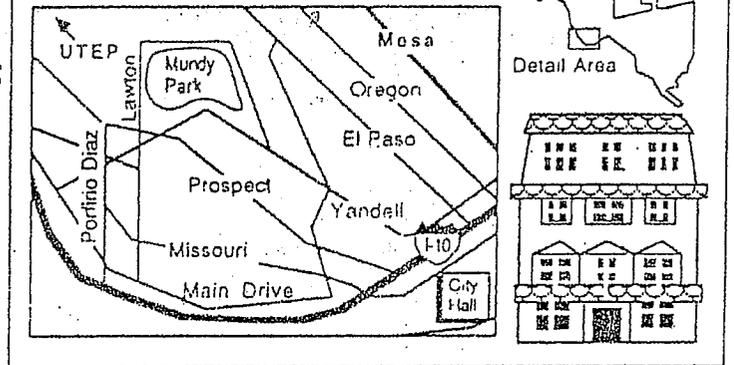
City officials counter that they do work to keep Sunset Heights clean, but they can only move as fast as the Municipal Courts. Citations against sloppy property owners — many who live out of state — must go through the due process of law, which requires proper notification and a court hearing.

And city officials say Sunset Heights is not in bad shape compared to other places where some people don't even have running water. City departments have been focusing attention on South El Paso, and nearly every week City Council hears condemnation cases against tenement owners there.

"There's no comparison between these (Sunset Heights properties) and the ones in South El Paso," said Gil Garibay, acting director of the city's Public Inspection Department.

But Karr says the city is so callous toward Sunset Heights that it even contributes to the blighted look. He points to a graffiti-filled city water pumping station at the Sunset Heights Reservoir with disgust: "How are you going to raise hell with private property owners when the

## Sunset Heights Historic District



ALEX GONZALES

main taxing entity" keeps property like this, he said.

Karr aims his sharpest barbs at the Public Inspection Department. Pointing to a pile of rubbish in an alley, he blurts out with exasperation, "I have shown this to Public Inspection and they won't do a thing about it."

Karr admits that he is "abrasive," and he does not hold back caustic comments when talking about city officials. He also has little respect for the Planning Department, which he accuses of producing lots of paperwork about historical renovation, without implementing any of it.

"The idea at City Hall is if you want historic preservation you go to lunch with somebody... and come back and write about it," said Karr. "That's bull... You have to do something."

Karr may be the most outspoken critic of the city's behavior in Sunset Heights, but he is not the only one.

Gary Sapp, a member of the city's Historic Landmark Commission and resident of Sunset Heights, says the city does not penalize property owners who make additions to their homes that are out of character with the historical architecture — even after the landmark commission has ruled against the construction.

SEE SUNSET (PAGE 6)

its regulations

MRS. WHITE  
at (915) 595-6301  
AIM MARKET RESEARCH  
10456 BRIAN MOONEY DRIVE  
EL PASO, TEXAS 79935

Police Department

**Borderland**

# John Karr, historical advocate, dies at 84

By Ramon Bracamontes  
El Paso Times

John Karr, a Sunset Heights resident and one of the city's premier advocates of historic preservation and renovation, died Wednesday after a short illness, his family said. He was 84.

It was Karr, officials said, who helped make city leaders aware of the need for historical preservation, and Karr is credited with helping create the Sunset Heights and Old San Francisco Historic Districts.

"He was a pioneer in those issues," state Sen. Eliot Shapleigh said. "John Karr was a stand-up guy. He had strong opinions about issues, and he let you know where he stood."

Starting in 1961 and until this year, Karr helped renovate numerous historic homes and art-

ments in the Downtown-Sunset Heights area. Often he did the work himself.

Karr's work in the 1960s, '70s and '80s led to the establishment of the city's historic landmark ordinances. He was a member of the Landmark Commission under Mayor Jonathan Rogers.

Karr also was known throughout El Paso for his work on civil rights issues and voter participation.

His daughter, Stephanie Dodson, said her father wrote letters to the newspaper so that people would know where he stood on issues.

"He was a great civil libertarian and a champion of civil rights," Dodson said. "When he took a stand on an issue, people knew it."

He is survived by his wife, Joyce V. Karr; three sons, Michael, Chesley and John Sedgwick; and his daughter, Stephanie Dodson.



Times file photo

John Karr helped create the Sunset Heights and Old San Francisco Historic Districts.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Ramon Bracamontes may be reached at  
rbracamontes@elpasotimes.com;  
546-6142.

RAYMOND C. CABALLERO  
MAYOR



**CITY COUNCIL**

JAN SUMRALL  
DISTRICT NO. 1

ROSE RODRIGUEZ  
DISTRICT NO. 2

LARRY M. MEDINA  
DISTRICT NO. 3

JOHN COOK  
DISTRICT NO. 4

DANIEL S. POWER  
DISTRICT NO. 5

PAUL J. ESCOBAR  
DISTRICT NO. 6

LUIS G. SARIÑANA  
DISTRICT NO. 7

ANTHONY COBOS  
DISTRICT NO. 8

June 6, 2002

John R. Karr  
520 Prospect  
El Paso, TX 79902

Dear Mr. Karr:

I am sorry to hear that your health is forcing you to take a lower profile this summer in regards to Sunset Heights revitalization. I hope to build on your good work in Sunset Heights, and most importantly, I hope for your speedy recovery and your good health.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Caballero  
Mayor

# The El Paso County Historical Society

## Certificate of Appreciation

Presented to

**John R. Karr**

*for exemplary contribution  
toward the goals of  
the El Paso County Historical Society*

25 Feb. 1990

*Dated*

*James W. Ward*  
President



# The Senate of The State of Texas

SENATE PROCLAMATION NO. 329

In Memory  
of  
John Ross Karr

WHEREAS, The Senate of the State of Texas joins the citizens of El Paso in mourning the loss of John Ross Karr, who died March 12, 2008, at the age of 84; and

WHEREAS, John Karr was born on June 18, 1923, in Lyon County, Kansas, to Chesley Green Karr and Gertrude McCrea Karr; he attended Emporia State University, where he met his future wife, Joyce Van Gundy, and then enrolled in the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he trained as a pilot and was commissioned as a first lieutenant upon graduation in 1945; after World War II he flew P-47s in Europe; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Karr was a 57-year resident of the City of El Paso; while searching for a place to live, he and his wife entered El Paso just after a summer cloudburst, and they were taken with the city's fragrant, fresh-washed feel; even though they quickly learned about the city's more typical climate, they never left; and

WHEREAS, John began his career as an insurance adjuster and soon founded the John Karr Insurance Agency, which he managed for 40 years; he also founded MPA, Incorporated, a company that leased banking equipment; and

WHEREAS, Active in his community, Mr. Karr was deeply involved in local politics and was an ardent supporter of social reform; he was an enthusiastic member of the El Paso chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union; John and Joyce were also strong advocates of historical preservation, renovating several homes in their neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, John Karr was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, and he leaves behind memories that will be cherished by his family and countless friends; now, therefore, be it

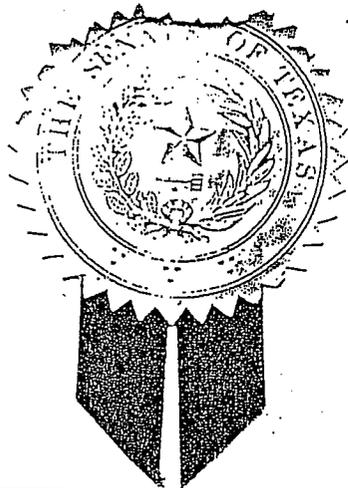
PROCLAIMED, That the Senate of the State of Texas hereby extend sincere condolences to the bereaved family of John Ross Karr: his wife, Joyce Karr; his children, Michael Karr, Stephanie Karr Dodson, Chesley W. Karr, and John Sedgwick; and his five grandchildren; and, be it further

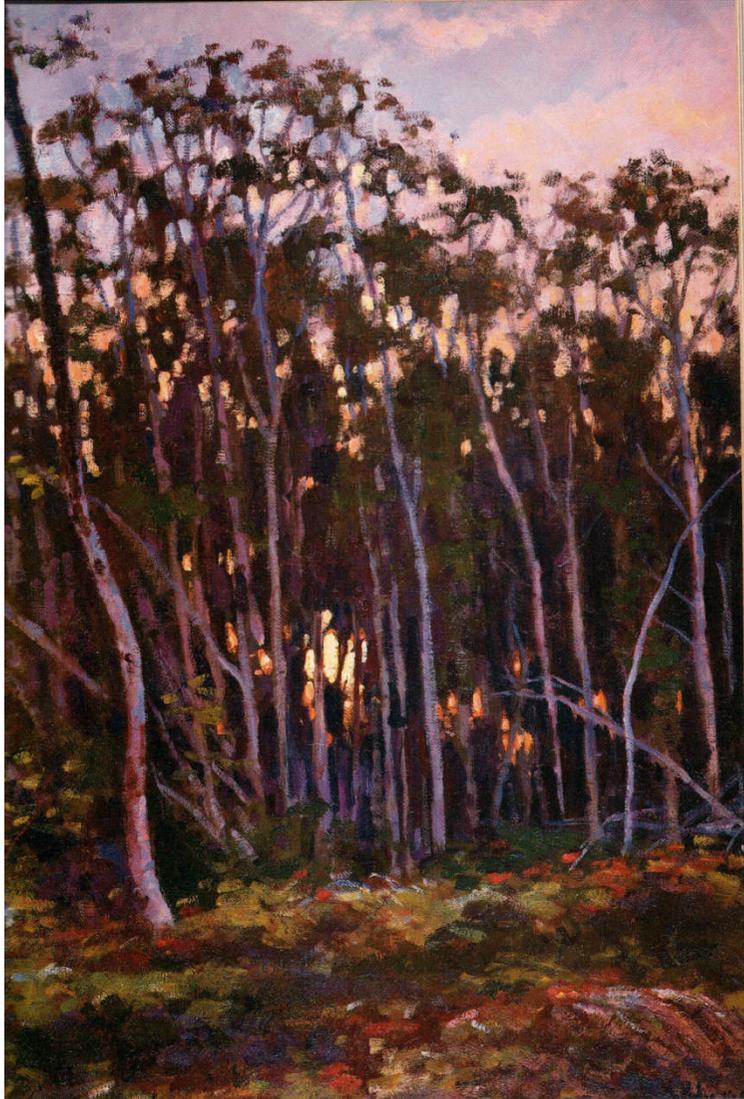
PROCLAIMED, That a copy of this Proclamation be prepared for his family as an expression of deepest sympathy from the Texas Senate.

Shapleigh

Member, Texas Senate

I hereby certify that the  
above Proclamation was adopted.

  
Secretary of the Senate



# Park Naming

October, 23 2012





**Proposed Name / Change**

**JOHN R. KARR  
PARK**

**For Sunset Heights Park located at  
631 Stewart Court, El Paso, 79902**





Sunset Heights

PROSPECT

MUNDY

UPSON

STEWART

MISSOURI

LOS ANGELES



**John R. Karr** *(June 18, 1923– March 12, 2008):*

- Arrived in El Paso in 1950; moved to Sunset Heights in 1960
- Instrumental to Sunset Heights' designation of State Historical District June 5, 1984 as well as National Register of Historic Places District December 8, 1988
- Park was key in his vision of revitalizing historic neighborhood
- Enlisted help from local businesses to beautify and improve the park and sidewalks around it
- Through decades of his leadership in Sunset Heights Neighborhood Association, frequent neighborhood clean-ups always included the park.
- Received : Letter of Commendation from El Paso Mayor Caballero, Certificate of Appreciation from El Paso County Historical Society, and Texas Senate Proclamation from Senator Shapleigh

S E R V I C E   S O L U T I O N S   S U C C E S S



11/2/2010



S E R V I C E   S O L U T I O N S   S U C C E S S



11/2/2010

S E R V I C E   S O L U T I O N S   S U C C E S S





**John R. Karr**



# QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

