Legislation Details (With Text)

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File created:	11/17/2022		**In control:**	CITY COUNCIL	
On agenda:			**Final action:**	12/1/2022	
Title:	Also naming the 1500 block of Wharton street “James Mtume Way,” to honor the life and legacy of renowned musician, activist, and Philadelphia native James Mtume.				
Sponsors:	Councilmember Johnson, Councilmember Bass, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson, Councilmember Driscoll, Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Gym, Councilmember Gauthier, Councilmember Brooks				
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Attachments:	1. Resolution No. 22093000, 2. Signature22093000				

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
12/1/2022	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		
11/17/2022	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed On Next Week's Final Passage Calendar		

Also naming the 1500 block of Wharton street “James Mtume Way,” to honor the life and legacy of renowned musician, activist, and Philadelphia native James Mtume.

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s own James Forman, known as “James Mtume” for his entire adult life, was a visionary whose influence still resonates today; and

WHEREAS, Mtume was born on January 3, 1946. He was the biological son of legendary jazz saxophonist Jimmy Heath, but was raised by his mother and James "Hen Gates" Forman, who was a professional jazz pianist himself; and

WHEREAS, Mtume’s childhood was spent around musicians who frequented his childhood home, including Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Dinah Washington, and John Coltrane. His biological uncle, the jazz drummer Albert “Tootie” Heath, gave him his first conga drum; and

WHEREAS, Mtume grew up on the 1500 block of Wharton Street in South Philadelphia. He attended Overbrook High School, where he swam competitively. He eventually became the first Black backstroke champion in the Amateur Athletic Union’s Middle Atlantic District. In 1966, he entered Pasadena City College on a swimming scholarship; and

WHEREAS, In college, he joined the US Organization, a Black nationalist cultural group that introduced the holiday Kwanzaa, and he took an African last name: Mtume, Swahili for “messenger”; and

WHEREAS, While in California, he also delved more seriously into music and made two jazz albums thematically focused on Black cultural identity. The first, *Kawaida*, was made under his uncle’s name, and also featured his father along with jazz legends Herbie Hancock and Don Cherry. However, Mtume was a driving force behind the album, not only contributing percussion and vocals but also writing all of the songs; and

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WHEREAS, During this time, Mtume developed a close relationship with renowned poet and activist Amiri Baraka, with whom he recorded a spoken word album. At Baraka's request, Mtume moved back east to help elect Newark's first Black mayor, Kenneth Gibson; and

WHEREAS, Once in New York, Mtume established himself among the jazz elite, ultimately joining Miles Davis's band in 1971. He worked with Davis until 1975, touring and appearing on several albums, including *On the Corner.* Davis credited Mtume with influencing his turn towards Afrocentricity and even named a tune "Mtume" on the *Get Up With It* album; and

WHEREAS, In 1972, Mtume made his official recording debut as a bandleader with *Alkebu-Lan: Land of the Blacks*, credited to the Mtume Umoja Ensemble. It opened with a spoken manifesto that praised "the role of Black music as a functional organ in the struggle for national liberation"; and

WHEREAS, In 1978, Mtume and Reggie Lucas formed a band with Tawatha Agee called Mtume. The band distinguished itself for the sophistication, musicality, and sensuality of its music. After signing a major-label deal with Epic Records, the band had a number of hits, including "Juicy Fruit" and "You, Me, and He"; and

WHEREAS, Mtume also became a prominent songwriter and producer, working with artists including Donny Hathaway, Roberta Flack, Phyllis Hyman, Teddy Pendergrass, and Stephanie Mills. Mtume and Lucas co-wrote Mill's 1980 hit "Never Knew Love Like This Before," which won a Grammy Award for best R&B song; and

WHEREAS, As popular music evolved and hip hop became a major musical genre, Mtume made his mark there as well. Hip hop artists have since drawn upon Mtume's work heavily, most notably "Juicy Fruit," which has been sampled over 100 times, by artists including Notorious B.I.G., Alicia Keys, Warren G, Jennifer Lopez, Keyshia Cole, and Faith Evans. Mtume also found success making music for film and television, most notably the 1990s TV series *New York Undercover*; and

WHEREAS, In the mid 90s, Mtume began to work as an on-air radio personality, eventually co-hosting on the weekly show "Open Line," where he discussed politics, activism, news, and culture. Mtume also recorded a TED Talk in 2018, "Our Common Ground in Music," in which he discussed "the cross-pollination of culture, politics and art"; and

WHEREAS, James Mtume's career had a profound influence on music and the industry. He shaped the sound of multiple generations of music. His influence extended past that of a musical innovator, but was also an influential advocate and activist for Black culture and history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Also names the 1500 block of Wharton Street "James Mtume Way" to honor the life and legacy of James Mtume, renowned musician, activist and Philadelphia native.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of James Mtume as evidence of the admiration and respect of this body.