

Legislation Text

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Honoring Mabel “Chi” Chan and her lasting legacy and contributions to the Philadelphia community.

WHEREAS, Mabel Chan was born in 1957 in Fujian Province, China as the second oldest daughter in a family of seven kids. Ms. Chan’s family moved to Hong Kong, where she was able to attend the most prestigious secondary high school on a full scholarship; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Chan’s father immigrated alone to the United States in 1970, in hope of eventually reuniting with the rest of the family. In 1970, after three years of non-stop work and with the support of friends, Ms. Chan’s father was able to purchase a take-out restaurant on Lehigh Avenue; and

WHEREAS, During this time, Ms. Chan had severe appendicitis and was deemed by doctors as “unsavable.” At the time, Ms. Chan wanted to become a monk after being exposed to Buddhist philosophies. After surviving appendicitis, Ms. Chan decided that she would dedicate her life to doing good deeds; and

WHEREAS, In 1974, four years after Ms. Chan’s father immigrated to the United States, Ms. Chan and her mother reunited with him. The family settled on the second-floor apartment of the take-out restaurant in North Philly that Ms. Chan’s father owned; and

WHEREAS, Three years later, Ms. Chan, with the support and blessings from her father, took over the management of her father’s restaurant. Ms. Chan worked early mornings and late nights, which allowed her to learn essential management skills for her future; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Chan and her family longed to move to Chinatown, a noticeably underdeveloped neighborhood given its proximity to Center City, where the Chan family could find a community whose members spoke their language of Cantonese. After six years of backbreaking labor, Ms. Chan, her sister, and her father were able to purchase a paper factory warehouse at 1026 Race Street. The Chan family converted the warehouse into a restaurant named Joy Tsin Lau; and

WHEREAS, Joy Tsin Lau officially opened on October 25th, 1983, and became a monumental success that influenced business and investment in the Chinatown community. The restaurant is recognized as aiding the Chinatown community to secure its economic footing in Philadelphia. The eatery attracted a host of well-known figures from the Philadelphia community, such as Ed Rendell, Mike Stack, Bob Brady, and Tom Fugliato; and

WHEREAS, Joy Tsin Lau has always been more than a mere restaurant venture for Ms. Chan. Ms. Chan operates Joy Tsin Lau as a space for community cultivation for individuals who do not have a sense of belonging anywhere else in the City due to language and cultural barriers. This commitment has made Ms. Chan known as a “Second Sister” in the Chinatown community -the big sister who always looks out for everyone; and

WHEREAS, Joy Tsin Lau has also been a starting point for many revered chefs and restaurant owners who

have established anchoring institutions in Chinatown, such as Jade Harbor, Yakitori Boy, K-Top, and Ocean City; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Chan established a longstanding commitment to her community. For years, the restaurant was a stable source of employment to many students, who worked part-time at the restaurant and were provided housing on the fourth floor of the building. Ms. Chan also donates her restaurant's profit to elderly centers in Chinatown, where she also performs traditional Chinese opera and serves bento boxes to the elders. In addition, Ms. Chan began the tradition of the annual Chinatown Independence Day Celebration Banquet and brought community members together to participate in the parade; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Chan has used her resources and personal fortune to support victims of domestic violence and to connect crime victims to free legal services. In 2008, following a series of violence incidents at South Philadelphia High School, Mabel took the initiative to hold a meeting of community leaders to address the persistent issue of bullying against Asian immigrants; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Chan is a trailblazer in her community and became the first female president of Chinese Benevolent Association, and in 2007 was appointed as the Chairwoman of the Association's board, which has made tremendous contributions of service to the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Mabel "Chi" Chan has been credited with uplifting the Chinatown community and has been an integral part of fostering a neighborhood where everyone, regardless of the barriers they face, can thrive. Ms. Chan's story is that of many Philadelphians - a narrative of people who choose to call this City home and dedicate their lives to improve their neighborhoods through strong community building. Her lasting legacy is deeply intertwined in the recent history of Philadelphia, especially that of Chinatown; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors Mabel "Chi" Chan and her legacy and contributions to the City of Philadelphia.