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## Barbara Livingston, a longtime giant in Carmel politics, dies at 92.



Sara Rubin Feb 23, 2021 0



Barbara Livingston outside of her Carmel-by-the-Sea home in 2017.

Nic Coury

Barbara Livingston took civic engagement to a new level, attending every Carmel City Council meeting for more than 30 years, during 12 of which she served as an elected member of the council.

Livingston led the Carmel Residents Association for 10 years, served on the boards of the Carmel Preservation Foundation and Carl Cherry Foundation, and was founding president of Friends of the Carmel Forest.

In many ways, she became synonymous with Carmel, her chosen home and a city that she loved. She died on Tuesday, Feb. 23, at 92.

"She had a purposeful life," says Brian Livingston, one of her two sons. "She had no regrets and was very at ease that she was going to be leaving us."

Livingston was born in 1928 in San Mateo, then in 1936 moved to Carmel where she attended high school, then went to Hartnell College before going on to Stanford, graduating in 1950.

After college she moved to San Francisco, where she began a career in interior design.

"She was fabulously successful at it," Brian says. "She had the perfect personality to be an interior designer. She'd just go through the house and get rid of stuff and start all over again. She had that personality [clients] trusted her."

In her later years, Livingston's own Carmel home was something of a gathering place—in an hour-long meeting there, it was not infrequent for an unscheduled visitor or two to pop in unannounced. She decorated her home meticulously, from paint colors to decor to converting a desk into a bar.

Even when she was not at home, Livingston was outgoing and conversational and knew seemingly everyone in Carmel personally.

Her energy declined in the last six months, and painful neuropathy kept her from walking. For years prior, painful scoliosis and vision impairment—Livingston was legally blind—did not keep her from remaining a force to be reckoned with in the village she loved.

She was honored by the city of Carmel last August for 50 years of service, [with a proclamation presented by City Council in an outdoor, socially distant ceremony in her front yard.](#)

Mayor Dave Potter read the proclamation: "Barbara Livingston has served the residents and city of Carmel-by-the-Sea for over 50 years with passion and integrity...Barbara has forcefully, consistently, compassionately and successfully promoted the imperative need to preserve the unique character of Carmel-by-the-Sea."

Livingston thanked the council and city staff, and said, "I just believe we all have to have more passion in our lives to get more done."

Her motivation to get involved in city politics, after moving back to Carmel in 1986, was to connect to her community. "I just felt disconnected," she told the *Weekly* in 2014. "I like the dynamics, the personalities. I like the interactions; I just find it fascinating."

Her reason for remaining involved was to protect what she described as "village character," and the city's resolution credit Livingston for coining the phrase "a Village in a Forest by the Sea."

"The main thing is to preserve and protect the village character," Livingston said. "It all sounds very trite, but we built our reputation on the narrow little streets, the urban forest, the beautiful beach, and the quaint downtown."

Protecting that character was sometimes fraught with controversy, and in her years as president of CRA, Livingston was opinionated on issues from the appropriate number of wine tasting rooms to beach bonfires to live music and noise at night.

But it was part of her personality to meet even her political enemies with a friendly greeting.

"While at first she was a bit of a bomb thrower when it came to politics, she became a facilitator," Brian says.

"Part of her wanted to be a movie star. She performed on the Carmel stage, mostly to rave reviews."

And hers will be a tough act to follow.

Livingston is survived by her two sons, Brian and Michael Livingston, and five grandchildren, Shayla, Ryan, Zoe, Rory and Alix, all of whom live in Vermont.

The family is planning a virtual ceremony for a future dates and details are TBD.

Per Livingston's wishes, she is lying in state in her home today, Feb. 23, and tomorrow, Wednesday Feb. 24 from 10am-5pm. Those who wish to pay their respects should contact Partners For Transitions to ensure social distancing (Shary Farr, 831-235-4988 or Michele Wilsdon, 206-920-3821).

Livingston also shared her life story in 2016 as part of Harrison Memorial Library's oral history project. You can view her talk [here](#).