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© The Carmel Pine Cone Article By Mary Schley

A WOMAN who single-handedly impacted the character of Carmel-by-the-Sea through her strong voice, devotion to preservation, and political activism died at home early Tuesday morning. Barbara Livingston, a 12-year city council member and key figure in several community organizations, was 92.

“To talk about Barbara means talking about Carmel’s history,” said former Mayor Sue McCloud, who was often at odds with Livingston politically but also collaborated with her — including organizing the city’s centennial in 2016 — and had known her since childhood.

“Her passion and dedication were unsurpassed,” said councilman Bobby Richards, who has frequently said he was proud to earn Livingston’s support since taking office more than four years ago. “I will miss her upbraiding as well as her praise.”



(Picture caption) After attending her last meeting as a city council member in April 2004, Livingston was honored for her 12 years in office. But her service to the community didn’t stop there.

‘A loss for words’

“The loss is so close that I’m at a loss for words, for a change,” commented city administrator Chip Rerig, who knew Livingston for decades, beginning with when he first came to work for the city’s planning department more than 20 years ago. “She was an amazing individual who championed preservation of the urbanized forest and the character of the village, and she always put residents first. And she was always kind and always a lady, and I will miss her dearly.”

Livingston moved to Carmel as a child with her family in 1936, and McCloud remembered their homes being so close that when Livingston babysat McCloud and her sister, all she had to do to get to the back door of their house was walk through a neighbor’s yard. Livingston later left to attend Stanford — a choice that also impacted McCloud’s trajectory, since an invitation to attend an event there led to her decision to go to school there, too.

A political organizer in high school and college, Livingston worked on former Republican U.S. Congressman Pete McCloskey’s campaign against Shirley Temple Black — a campaign she once recalled as being “fun” and “exciting.” She married, raised two sons, Michael and Brian, who now live on the East Coast, and ran an interior design business in Menlo Park.

There, she served on the board of the Palo Alto Junior League, was president of the Peninsula Volunteers, one of the first groups to develop public-private partnerships for senior housing and was chair of the Palo Alto branch of Guide Dogs for the Blind. “I’ve always been an activist,” she told *The Pine Cone* in 2003.

In 1978, she moved to Carmel Valley but sold her house there 10 years later, because it was too far from Carmel, and found a home on San Carlos Street near 13th Avenue. Soon after returning to town, she began attending planning commission and city council meetings, and friends encouraged her to get more involved by running for office, which she successfully did in 1992. She was elected to the city council three times, but often found herself the lone dissenting voice during her final term, which ended in April 2004, when she decided not to run for reelection.

“While we may have gone about it differently, we were both grounded in our respective interests in preserving the unique qualities of Carmel-by-the-Sea, as is evident by Barbara’s serving on the city council and working to establish what is now the Carmel Residents Association,” said McCloud, who was elected mayor in 2000 at the start of Livingston’s final term in office.



PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

Barbara Livingston campaigned with council candidates Jim Wright (at left) and Ken White when she ran for mayor in 2002.

In 2002, Livingston ran for mayor against McCloud and joined forces with two council candidates, former Mayor Ken White, and former councilman Jim Wright, to try to take back control of city hall, but all three lost.

While in office, Livingston helped develop the Design Traditions Project guidelines which govern the appearance of housing in town, and worked with residents and then-assistant city administrator Greg D’Ambrosio to write “Carmel from A to Z,” a handbook answering basic questions about city rules.

A force of nature

After her council career, Livingston devoted herself to the CRA and became its longest-serving president, holding the position for 12 years. She was president of the Friends of Carmel Forest and a vocal advocate of historic preservation, and always strove to represent “the residential interests in Carmel-by-the-Sea,” as she would put it.

To that end, Livingston could almost always be found seated in the front row in the chambers of city hall during council, planning commission and

other public meetings, and she frequently and passionately spoke about issues that concerned her or the CRA. Even after macular degeneration took her vision, she continued attending, accompanied by friends who would assist her.

“Most people would probably never know how significant her vision challenges were,” commented realtor Adam Moniz, who befriended Livingston and her late partner (and eventual husband), Bob Kohn, in 2009. “She recognized people mainly by voice, and she could almost instantaneously match a voice with a name. In my last phone call with her the other week, she told me, ‘Adam, of course it’s you, I’d recognize your voice anywhere.’ And I think there are probably thousands of voices she could easily identify.”

Moniz said Livingston had a “zest for life that was contagious” and described the impact she had on Carmel as “monumental.”

Friend and former city administrator Doug Schmitz said Livingston tended to the city with loving devotion. “If metaphorically Carmel was a garden, Barbara was its civic gardener,” he said, taking care to protect it while scrutinizing and eventually accepting and caring for newcomers who understood her vision.

A proclamation

In recognition of Livingston’s 50-plus years of service to the community, last August, Mayor Dave Potter and the city council presented her with a proclamation extolling her “passion and integrity” and crediting her with “the most apt description of Carmel-by-the-Sea as ‘a village in a forest by the sea.’”

“Barbara has forcefully, consistently, compassionately and successfully promoted the imperative need to preserve the unique character of Carmel-by-the-Sea,” Potter said, reading the proclamation while standing next to her on the deck of her home during a ceremony that friends and fans gathered on the street below to witness.

“I believe we all have to have more passion in our lives to get things done and to support everybody with passion,” Livingston said as she received the honor. “We need to spread that word and that effort throughout the village. New people in town really need to come to understand what we’re all about and why Carmel is the way it is, and hopefully we can continue to keep the integrity of the village for quite a while.”

When the CRA announced Livingston had died this week, Cindy Lloyd, who knew her since childhood, recalled her “relentless spirit, energy and enthusiasm,” which weren’t at all diminished by her vision loss. It’s up to those Livingston left behind to carry on her mission and activism, Lloyd said. “After serving on the city council, she became the voice of the residents with the ardent hope that Carmel’s character would be preserved and protected,” she said. “We owe it to Barbara to carry on voicing our concerns when our longstanding traditions are in danger of erosion.” ~END~