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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director 
Legislative Policy Division Staff

DATE: August 30, 2024

RE: **RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING FEBRUARY 7TH AS J DILLA DAY IN DETROIT**

Council President Mary Sheffield requested that the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) draft a resolution recognizing February 7th as J Dilla Day in the City of Detroit.

Please contact us if we can be of any further assistance.

BY COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARY SHEFFIELD

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING FEBRUARY 7TH AS J DILLA DAY IN DETROIT

- WHEREAS,** James Dewitt Yancey (1974-2006), known professionally as Jay Dee or J Dilla, is a native son of Detroit and was one of the most influential musicians and music producers of our era; and
- WHEREAS,** Though he worked primarily in hip-hop – collaborating with artists such as The Roots, Busta Rhymes, A Tribe Called Quest, Common, D’Angelo, Erykah Badu and more – Dilla’s sonic and rhythmic impact is now felt throughout the music world across genres from pop to jazz and classical; and
- WHEREAS,** James Yancey was born in Detroit to Beverly Dewitt Yancey, a musician and songwriter who supported his family for decades as a Ford employee; and Maureen Hayes Yancey, known as “Ma Dukes,” who grew up in Black Bottom and worked for a time in civil service, and then in child care; and
- WHEREAS,** After the Yancey family grew to include James’ younger sister Martha and Younger brother John, the family moved to the Conant Gardens neighborhood and eventually settled into a small ranch house on the corner of Nevada and McDougall where James would eventually create the basement studio where he composed his music and collaborated with dozens of artists; and
- WHEREAS,** While enrolled in Conant Gardens’ Farwell Middle School, James Yancey played the upright bass in a citywide student orchestra, and soon became a multi-instrumentalist, a consummate student of sound, a voracious collector of records, and an expert at programming drum machines; and
- WHEREAS,** In high school, Yancey focused on building his career as a composer of hip-hop instrumental tracks using digital samplers under the tutelage of a local musician names Joseph Anthony “Amp” Fiddler who, in 1994, introduced him to Q-Tip from A Tribe Called Quest which unlocked the door to a successful recording career; and
- WHEREAS,** Yancey first began producing under the name Jay Dee, and his first release – “Runnin” by The Pharcyde – became a Top 5 Rap hit in 1995. Many of Yancey’s early productions, such as “Stakes is High” by De La Soul and “Find a Way” by A Tribe Called Quest, became classics of the genre; and
- WHEREAS,** By the late 1990s, Yancey began issuing music with his own group, Detroit’s legendary Slum Village, and in doing so began to change the sound of music and concepts of rhythm in fundamental ways; and
- WHEREAS,** Under the name J Dilla, Yancey displayed his mastery of composition and sampling by weaving together disparate elements into cohesive masterpieces, combing straight and swung pulses to create a signature woozy, limping beat that transcended genre and influenced not only hip-hop and electronic artists but also pop, soul, classical and jazz musicians; and

WHEREAS, Yancey launched his solo career with his first album *Welcome 2 Detroit* in 2001, which resulted in a multi-million dollar record deal with MCA Records; and

WHEREAS, In early 2003, Yancey was diagnosed with TPP, an incurable blood disease, but he continued working while undergoing a barrage of medical treatments in Los Angeles and produced two widely influential albums during this period – *The Shining* and *Donuts*; and

WHEREAS, Yancey tragically passed away in early 2006, survived by his family and two young daughters, Ty-Monae Whitlow and Ja'Mya Yancey; and

WHEREAS, In the following years, Yancey's music only became more popular and influential, and cities across the globe began hosting annual "Dilla Day" celebrations on his birthday, February 7th; and

WHEREAS, Yancey has been lauded by journalists from NPR to The New York Times, been the subject of an award-winning book – *Dilla Time: The Life and Afterlife of J Dilla, The Hip-Hop Producer Who Reinvented Rhythm*, been studied and interpreted by jazz and classical composers at major universities, and his musical equipment is on exhibit in the African American Museum of History and Culture at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, Amazon Studios is currently producing a major motion picture about Yancey's life, and Academy Award-winners Questlove and Joseph Patel are currently producing a documentary on Yancey; and

WHEREAS, Nowhere has the adulation of Yancey been more poignant than in his hometown of Detroit, where his music has been featured at the Detroit Institute of Arts, his legacy has been spotlighted at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and his music has been a focal point for the Detroit Jazz Festival; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, The Detroit City Council hereby recognizes February 7th as J Dilla Day in the City of Detroit.