



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

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**File #: 22-4570, Version: 1**

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### PROPOSED RESOLUTION

#### HONORING THE LIFE OF JIM SCHWALL

**WHEREAS**, Jim Schwall, singer-songwriter, photographer, and co-founder of the legendary Siegel-Schwall Band died at the age of 79 at his home in Tucson, Arizona; and Jim was born in Evanston and grew up in Wilmette, attending New Trier High School; and

**WHEREAS**, growing up, Jim bought his LPs from legendary Chicago record store owner Bob Koester. “He played Lead Belly records and a lot of bluegrass and blues music, like Lightnin’ Hopkins, Ahmad Jamal,” his brother said. “There was a lot of folk music happening,” his brother said, “and at a party once, one of his friends brought a guitar down from the attic.” It was a Gibson B-25 acoustic. He started to play and just took off with it, continuing to perform with that same B-25, later amplified; and

**WHEREAS**, Jim played guitar, mandolin, bass guitar, accordion, and other instruments. He studied music at Roosevelt University where he met Corky Siegel and became interested in electric blues music. They formed the blues duo in 1964 and began playing at Chicago bars and clubs. They played with and were inspired by blues greats Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, and Willie Dixon as well as the next generation of blues legends, including Buddy Guy, Junior Wells and Little Walter; and

**WHEREAS**, Siegel-Schwall got a regular Thursday night gig at Pepper’s Lounge at 43rd and Vincennes, where they apprenticed with blues greats. When the Paul Butterfield Blues Band left Big John’s in Old Town to hit the road, Siegel-Schwall started a residency, performing there with others influenced by the blues musicians, including Mike Bloomfield and Harvey Mandel. One of their records, “953 West,” is named for another favorite venue: the old Quiet Knight at 953 W. Belmont Avenue, by the “L”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Siegel-Schwall Band became quite popular, and by 1967, were touring nationally, playing San Francisco’s famed Fillmore West with Janis Joplin and the Jefferson Airplane, producing a demo for Joni Mitchell’s “The Circle Game,” and performing with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Pops. The group recorded for Vanguard Records, RCA’s Wooden Nickel, Deutsche Grammophon and Alligator Records; and

**WHEREAS**, they charmed Seiji Ozawa, then music director of the Ravinia Festival, which led to the commissioning of a piece by William Russo, “Three Pieces for Blues Band and Orchestra.” They performed that piece with orchestras across the country; and

**WHEREAS**, “Jim Schwall created a unique blend of folk-blues guitar and electrified Chicago style,” said Alligator Records founder Bruce Iglauer. “His playing was melodic and subtle, and his original songs were filled with humor and fun. He could always make an audience feel better because his music was full of joy;” and

**WHEREAS**, “The songs that I like tell a story,” Jim once told the Wisconsin State Journal, “or paint a picture of a person or place.” His solo albums included the 2014 release “Bar Time Lovers” on the Conundrum InterArts label. One of his most popular compositions, “I Think It Was the Wine,” includes lines that invited singalongs: “I’ve always been a pacifist, been known to run from a fight. I didn’t never hit nobody with no 2 X 4 till last night... Maybe that old moon was full - but I think it was the wine;” and

**WHEREAS**, except for some long sabbaticals and solo and side projects, the band came together to play in different incarnations each decade from the 1960s until 2016, with Mr. Schwall and Siegel always at the core. Schwall was also the leader of his own blues-rock band, the Jim Schwall Band. This band formed in the mid-1970s, and versions continued playing live on an intermittent basis into the 2000s; and

**WHEREAS**, Jim was also involved in numerous other musical projects. He played guitar and accordion in the band So Dang Yang and was the bassist for the Cajun Strangers. While at Roosevelt University, he wrote operas. But Jim never wanted to be pigeonholed, saying, “I’d rather operate a drill press than play Chopin.” He was a deejay in Madison at WORT-FM and in Davenport, Iowa; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1993, he earned his doctorate in music composition from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and taught music at

the college level. As a composer, he specialized in ballet, opera, and other music for the stage; and

**WHEREAS**, Schwall was also a professional photographer, and did different types of photography. In his later years he worked at creating art prints that combined human figures and natural landscapes. He sometimes used 19th-century photographic techniques such as kalotype, cyanotype, and gum printing, non-silver techniques that predate the gelatin silver process; and

**WHEREAS**, Jim was also politically active. He ran for mayor of Madison in 2002 and worked to get funding to reduce homelessness. He retired to Tucson in 2005; and

**WHEREAS**, Jim is survived by his brothers William “Chico” and Stephen Schwall.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County, honors the life and work of Jim Schwall and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a suitable copy of this Resolution be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that an official copy of same be tendered to the family of Jim Schwall.