

AGENDA #2.1
SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council Members

FROM: Mayor Kevin Foy

SUBJECT: Further Consideration of Proposals for Honoring the Memory and Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

DATE: June 14, 2004

When the Council initially received a petition from the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) requesting that Airport Road be renamed to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we referred the petition to the Council Naming Committee.

The Council Naming Committee was established by the Council in 1992 as a standing committee “to make recommendations to the Council for naming Town facilities.” The duties of the Naming Committee and the procedures it is to follow are spelled out in the Town Council Procedures Manual. Although the Manual mentions that the Naming Committee also may propose re-naming of facilities, it is clear that the primary purpose of the Committee is to receive, consider and submit recommendations to the Council for naming of facilities that have not been previously named.

The Naming Committee has operated effectively through the terms of several seated Councils, and has been valuable in the process of naming a number of Town facilities (e.g., James C. Wallace Parking Deck and Plaza, Homestead Community Park) and dedicating Town facilities in honor of specific persons (e.g., section of Bolin Creek Greenway dedicated to Alice Welch, landscaped area at Fire Station Three dedicated to Alice Ingram). However, I am aware of only three cases in which the Naming Committee has recommended that a public facility be re-named, and none of these were controversial:

- The public housing neighborhood at what was formerly 751 Pritchard Avenue Extension was re-named Trinity Court by petition of the residents.
- A road providing access to the Friday Center was re-named Friday Center Drive.
- Clark Road was re-named North Columbia Street by petition of the residents.

Based on our recent experience, I have concluded that referral to the Naming Committee and consideration of a petition in the normal process followed by the Naming Committee is not the most effective means for considering a request for re-naming of a public facility. Because of its nature, the re-naming of a public facility almost always will involve costs as well as benefits, effects that will apply only to specific individuals and groups, and controversy exacerbated by

emotional attachment to whatever is being proposed for re-naming. The previous naming recommendations that have been put forward by the Naming Committee for consideration by the Council have not been accompanied by such difficulties.

I believe that a different process should be followed for consideration of any proposed re-naming of a public facility, a process that would involve a larger number of citizens in developing recommendations for the consideration of the Council and that would be in keeping with our community tradition of open, honest, fair and deliberate consideration of issues important to citizens.

Specifically, I recommend that the Council appoint a special committee to lead the public process for considering any re-naming proposal that the Council refers for recommendation. I believe that the Committee should include:

- Members of the Council Naming Committee;
- Any individual submitting a re-naming petition, or representatives of any group submitting such a petition;
- Individuals and representatives of groups directly affected by any proposed re-naming, especially those who will bear a cost or gain a benefit if re-naming proceeds;
- Persons familiar with the history of the community, the facilities involved, the persons being honored (if a person is involved), and other contextual issues; and
- A diverse group of citizens at-large.

I also recommend that the Committee receive appropriate staff support to conduct its business; that the Committee arrange and conduct public forums, workshops, and such other meetings as would be useful in developing options and recommendations for the Council's consideration; that the opportunities for participation by citizens interested in the proposed re-naming and any related matters be widely publicized through multiple media; and that the Committee conduct its business at the deliberate pace necessary for effective civic process.

Finally, I recommend that the Council act now to create a Special Committee to consider the petition submitted by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the NAACP and to develop recommendations for appropriate memorials to the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and that the Council direct the Manager to advertise the Council's desire to nominate candidates at its meeting on September 7 and make appointments to the Special Committee at its meeting on September 13, 2004.

The Committee could begin its work by reviewing the information, options and recommendations developed by the Council Naming Committee before initiating a process of greater citizen engagement.