

Final Report of the Special Committee to Consider Renaming Airport Road

Submitted to the Chapel Hill Town Council
December 1, 2004

Prepared by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chapel Hill Town Council charged the Special Committee to Consider the Renaming of Airport Road with making recommendations about renaming to the Town Council by its December 6 meeting. In response, the OpenSource team designed a process that provided structure and tools for interracial dialogue, an exploration of conflict as a force for change, and consensus building.

Consensus allows all participants to have a voice in the decision-making process. All participants work together to craft possible recommendations. The vote is not a simple “yes/no,” but allows each participant to indicate the degree of support for each recommendation. Thus, consensus respects the will of the majority while also acknowledging the opinions of the minority.

Through the consensus process, the Committee made a recommendation on renaming, as well as nine related recommendations. The “Related Recommendations” can be grouped into three themes – (1) the Town Council’s process going forward, (2) additional ways to honor Dr. King and Chapel Hill’s diverse history, and (3) opportunities for ongoing interracial dialogue. The specific recommendations under each theme are listed in order of the degree of support they received (i.e., those with the strongest support appear first; those with less support, but still passing, appear last). More information about the consensus process and details about the vote on each recommendation appear later in this report.

Primary Recommendation:

Change the name of Airport Road to “Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.” and also have separate street signs underneath with the designation “Historic Airport Road.” Implement the change 6 months from the date of approval by the Town Council or by Independence Day 2005.

Related Recommendations – Town Council’s Process Going Forward:

1. (*Passed*) The Town should support individuals impacted by renaming, possibly including money, technical support, time to adjust, publicity campaign, information meeting with USPS. Look for funds/resources to help Airport Road residents/owners with transition (addresses, labels, web pages).
2. (*Passed*) Thank and commend the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the NAACP for introducing the issue and giving us the opportunity for these discussions.

3. (*Passed*) Issue a proclamation to the Town of Chapel Hill: We ask you to recognize that the Airport Road community is broader than ownership and includes commuters and others, many of whom are priced out of Chapel Hill. We ask you not to be narrow on seeing who is sacrificing in Chapel Hill.

Related Recommendations – Additional Ways to Honor Dr. King and Chapel Hill’s Diverse History:

1. (*Passed with unanimous support*) In addition to renaming, create a room at the Library with a collection of materials honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights in Chapel Hill.
2. (*Passed with unanimous support*) Support a museum exhibit about Airport Road that includes oral histories, publications, etc. that the Town Council oversees.
3. (*Passed*) Further honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with information signs saying “Peace, Racial, and Economic Justice.”
4. (*Passed with weak support*) Establish a branch of the Library in the African American community.

Related Recommendations – Opportunities for Ongoing Interracial Dialogue:

1. (*Passed with unanimous strong support*) Continue addressing racial and power issues in Chapel Hill by creating a racial justice commission/task force to coordinate activities such as:
 - An annual weekend meeting similar to this forum for a committee of unlimited size to address and discuss race issues in Chapel Hill.
 - A Town proclamation of “Racial Justice Week.”
 - An annual publication on the state of Black Chapel Hill that includes indicators of housing, jobs, education, political power, social issues, health status, etc.
 - A seminar series.
 - Public arts.
 - Oral history.
 - Annual Brown vs. Board of Education Forum.
2. (*Passed with unanimous support*) Advocate and voice support for the mission and work of the Orange County Human Rights and Relations Commission.

Recommendations that were not approved by the Committee:

- Use a combination name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.).
- Dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (city limits to city limits) to Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Don’t change Airport Road – Rename Library and Library Road, and create a room/collection, possibly in the African American community.

THE COMMITTEE'S PROCESS

Composition

The Town Council adopted the following motion on June 14, 2004:

That the Council appoint 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. by appointing a committee composed of:

- *Members of the Council*
- *Members of the NAACP*
- *Residents and business owners of Airport Road*
- *Diverse group of citizens at large*
- *Persons familiar with the history of the community, the facilities involved, the person(s) being honored, and other contextual issues.*

who would meet to arrange and conduct public forums, workshops, and such other meetings as would be useful in developing options and recommendations for the Council's consideration; and that the opportunities for participation by citizens interested in participating 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.

The Town Council received approximately 60 applications for the 20 slots on the Committee. They selected an initial 20-person Committee. (See Attachment A for a full list of Committee members and applicants).

In late September, the Town Council issued a Request for Proposals for facilitation of the Committee's work. In October, the Town Council selected the proposal submitted by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc., a Triangle-based consulting practice.

OpenSource's seven-week process included interviews with members of the Committee selected to make a recommendation on the issue, an intensive two-day workshop and discussion session with a ½-day follow-up, and an emphasis on facilitated dialogue. Rather than a more traditional committee style of several short meetings over an extended period of time, OpenSource designed this structure to allow Committee members to build trust and deepen their conversation through focused, sustained discourse, while also fulfilling the Town Council's goal of having a recommendation by its December 6 meeting.

Honest and courageous dialogue leading to consensus required full participation in the two-day discussion session (November 5-6) and ½-day follow-up (November 20). The Town Council replaced

Committee members not able to commit to the full process with other applicants. The following members made up the final Committee:

Council Member (3)

Mayor Kevin Foy
Edith Wiggins
Sally Greene

Familiar with History (2)

Yonni Chapman
Aidan J. Smith

NAACP Member (4)

Jesse Gibson
Bishop L. Gene Hatley
Mae B. McLendon
Ashley Osment

Citizen At-Large (7)

Brenda Brown
Justin Coleman
Curtis Harper
Joe Herzenberg
Creighton Irons
Tom Jensen
Chuck Stone*

Airport Road Resident or Business Owner (4)

Bruce Allen Johnson
Catherine Holland
Stephen Largent
Sheila Mikhail*

* Sheila Mikhail was called away just before our first session, with too short notice to replace her. Chuck Stone left after lunch on November 5 and did not return. Thus, the Committee proceeded with 18 members – 7 people of color and 11 white people.

The OpenSource Approach

OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc. helps organizations and communities *be* the change they seek in the world. Our consulting partners – Gita Gulati-Partee, Calvin Allen, Chantelle Fisher-Borne, and Graig Meyer – have extensive experience in assisting groups to engage in courageous conversations about race, racism, and other forms of oppression. Our model builds on proven methods for engaging in healthy conflict around difficult issues. Our intention is to challenge groups to move through the discomfort necessary for change and growth, while we provide a context and guidance that makes this process non-threatening and productive. The team is intentionally diverse – consisting of two women and two men, two people of color and two white people, two heterosexual people and two gay/lesbian people – in order to provide multiple perspectives on many social issues as well as a model for courageous conversations across myriad lines of difference. (See Attachment B for further information about our approach, capacity, and track record.)

OpenSource recognizes that issues like the Airport Road renaming are immediate, tangible manifestations of ongoing unspoken tensions between different parts of the community. The OpenSource team designed a process to engage the Committee in dialogue to address the renaming issue, as well as its link to broader racial relations in Chapel Hill. In this way, the Committee's work would open a pathway to authentic, courageous conversations throughout the community.

The team customized its design based upon information gathered from individual conversations with Committee members and from the members' applications. We also framed the Committee's process with a set of core "ground rules" (adapted from Pacific Educational Group) designed to work in contrary fashion to our culture's usual non-productive discussions about racial issues:

- **Stay engaged** – Full participation in the process is required for the process to be successful.
- **Speak your truth** – Share stories, experiences, and thoughts from a personal perspective.
- **Experience discomfort** – This process is designed to challenge all participants. Discomfort is a sign that you are being challenged and perhaps even growing from the experience.
- **Expect and accept non-closure** – While this process will resolve an immediate question, it will raise far more questions than answers about the larger issues uncovered through this dialogue.
- **The process is the task** – Engaging in the dialogue and process of working together will reap far greater rewards than simply making a decision about what "to do."

Our process provided structure and tools for interracial dialogue, an exploration of conflict as a force for change, and consensus building. (See Attachment C for meeting agendas. See Attachment D for notes that came out of the Committee's discussions. See Attachment E for a summary of evaluations about our work.)

OpenSource had no preference for or predetermined notion of what the Committee would recommend. Our focus was to facilitate a process that would help the Committee make its own collective recommendation. We designed the meetings to move the Committee toward three outcomes:

1. Promoting constructive dialogue across lines of difference.
2. Sharing and understanding individual constituent needs.
3. Collective decision making about the recommendations.

Dialogue Across Lines of Difference

Throughout the process, we emphasized to Committee members that the goal was to listen and understand each other – not to convince each other. Rather than a formal training or a series of presentations, our process allowed participants to explore concepts like power, privilege, and oppression – and connect them to their lived experiences – through each other's stories.

We opened Day 1 by sharing hopes for the process, then moved into a series of small groups to explore (1) reasons for renaming Airport Road in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., (2) reasons for not renaming Airport Road in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., (3) alternative options, and (4) common interests. Getting beyond surface "positions" (what you want) to deeper "interests" (the needs, concerns, hopes, fears that you are seeking to fulfill by taking a position) allowed Committee members an opportunity to seek a "win-win" resolution to fulfill everyone's needs.

With all of the issues (see Attachment D) out in the open, the Committee considered the question, "What does renaming Airport Road have to do with racial relations in Chapel Hill" through a "Kiva" conversation. The Kiva is a structured way to have a difficult conversation. It comes from a Native

American tradition that allows all members of a community to have their voices heard in a conversation without regard to the amount of power they hold in the community.

In our Kiva, we formed three concentric circles – one with people of color only, one with white people only, and one with a mix of people of color and white people. In this way, the Kiva balanced racial power in the conversation. People of color spoke about how the road renaming is just a symptom of deeper issues; it provides a unifying force to open the dialogue and acknowledge that race matters in Chapel Hill. White people discussed the meaning of symbols like road names and the difference between personal and community responsibility for bearing the costs of change. In a debrief about the exercise, participants said they appreciated the opportunity to share their stories through this new tool.

We closed Day 1 with a large-group discussion of “What does it mean to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. and respect the needs of all residents?” This led to a series of “bridge questions” for the remainder of our process:

- How can we talk about race?
- How can we have future discussions of race in Chapel Hill beyond the Airport Road issue?
- How can we come to a compromise to have a win-win solution?
- How can we address the concerns of those opposed to the renaming?
- How can we make a change without requiring sacrifice?

We opened Day 2 with a reflection and sharing exercise called “What’s on Your Mind?” Committee members considered what they had experienced the previous day, the role and make-up of the Committee, and what might happen in Day 2. This led to an open discussion about the feelings and concerns of the three Committee members representing residents and business owners of Airport Road. They expressed their sense that the Committee was stacked in favor of renaming, and that their participation would have limited impact. The Minority Report below further details their concerns.

Building Consensus

“Consensus” does not mean “everyone agrees.” The OpenSource model of consensus building means everyone is engaged in the decision-making process. Consensus incorporates the best thinking of everyone, yielding better options and decisions. The group may not always succeed in pleasing all members, but it must make a good faith effort to get to solutions that could work for everyone.

Consensus allows everyone to have a voice in the process. At its best, consensus promotes a spirit of cooperation rather than competition or right vs. wrong. The goal is to be heard and understood, not to convince each other. Participants must keep in mind that being heard does not mean always getting what you want. Consensus is not easy – it requires a great deal from each participant:

- Commitment to the process
- Active participation and cooperation
- Disciplined speaking and listening
- Respect for the contributions of every member
- A willingness to encourage and support conflict and the resolution of that conflict

A consensus vote is not a simple “yes/no.” Instead, we asked Committee members to indicate their degree of support for each recommendation. For each recommendation, Committee members were asked to literally “take a stand” at different points along the “Levels of Consensus or Gradients of Agreement” continuum (adapted from Community at Work):

5 ←				→ 1
I strongly support this decision.	I support this decision.	This decision is okay with me. I can live with it.	I dislike this decision, but I am willing to defer to the wisdom and will of the group.	I do not support this decision. We definitely need to discuss this matter further.*

* Anyone who stands at position 1 must propose realistic ways they could be moved to a 2 or above. No one can shut down the process. After reasonable time and discussion, the vote can proceed with a report that reflects the feelings of anyone remaining at the 1 position.

Consensus is not just a vote – it is a process. It respects the will of the majority, while also capturing nuances within the majority vote as well as the views of the minority.

THE COMMITTEE’S RECOMMENDATIONS

We divided the Committee members into three small groups to craft recommendations about the renaming of Airport Road and other related issues. Based on our earlier dialogue, we asked the groups to seek recommendations that address the questions:

How do we...

1. Further honor Martin Luther King, Jr.?
2. Honor the history and contributions of African Americans in Chapel Hill?
3. Acknowledge and recognize the history of Airport Road?
4. Address the needs of people who are asked to sacrifice?
5. Continue the work of addressing racial/power relations in Chapel Hill?

The three residents and business owners of Airport Road asked to be together in one group, and they requested that Council Member Edith Wiggins join them. Two other Committee members also joined this group; the other two groups formed randomly.

The three groups offered a total of 24 recommendations. They collectively combined similar ones, resulting in 13 unique recommendations.

We then asked Committee members to indicate, using colored dots, which recommendations they individually felt were the best, which ones they could live with, and which ones they could not live with. They identified six recommendations that all Committee members could at least live with. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Continue addressing racial and power issues in Chapel Hill by creating a racial justice commission/task force to coordinate activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An annual weekend meeting similar to this forum for a committee of unlimited size to address and discuss race issues in Chapel Hill. ▪ A Town proclamation of "Racial Justice Week." ▪ An annual publication on the state of Black Chapel Hill that includes indicators of housing, jobs, education, political power, social issues, health status, etc. ▪ A seminar series. ▪ Public arts. ▪ Oral history. ▪ Annual Brown vs. Board of Education Forum. 	18	0	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous <u>strong</u> support.
Support a museum exhibit about Airport Road that includes oral histories, publications, etc. that the Town Council oversees.	17	1	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.
Advocate and voice support for the mission and work of the Orange County Human Rights and Relations Commission.	11	7	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.

Thank and commend the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the NAACP for introducing the issue and giving us the opportunity for these discussions.	15	2	1	0	0	Passes.
Issue a proclamation to the Town of Chapel Hill: We ask you to recognize that the Airport Road community is broader than ownership and includes commuters and others, many of whom are priced out of Chapel Hill. We ask you not to be narrow on seeing who is sacrificing in Chapel Hill.	12	5	1	0	0	Passes.
Further honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with information signs saying "Peace, Racial, and Economic Justice."	4	10	3	1	0	Passes.

Two other recommendations required additional discussion before all Committee members could at least live with them. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
In addition to renaming, create a room at Library with a collection of materials honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights in Chapel Hill	15	3	0	0	0	Passes with unanimous support.
Town should support individuals impacted by renaming, possibly including money, technical support, time to adjust, publicity campaign, information meeting with USPS. Look for funds/resources to help Airport Road residents/owners with transition (addresses, labels, web pages).	14	3	0	1	0	Passes.

One recommendation received virtually unanimous, albeit lukewarm, support. The one dissenting Committee member said that nothing could move him from his position. The following chart captures the specific vote on this recommendation:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Establish a branch of the Library in the African American community.	3	1	10	3	1	Passes with <u>weak</u> support. The dissenting member expressed concern about the cost of a new Library branch.

One recommendation did not pass when the majority of the group opposed it, and no compromise could be found with the minority who supported it. The following chart captures the specific vote on this recommendation:

Recommendation	Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Don't change Airport Road – Rename Library, Library Road, and create a room/collection, possibly in the African American community.	1	0	2	3	12	Does not pass.

The remaining three recommendations required the greatest discussion and two votes each. The following chart captures the specific vote on each of these:

Recommendation		Strongly support	Support	Can live with it	Dislike, but will defer to the group	Do not support	Outcome
Use a combination name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.)	1 st Vote	3	0	3	3	9	Does not pass.
	Final Vote	3	0	1	4	10	Included in Minority Report.
Dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (city limits to city limits) to Martin Luther King, Jr.	1 st Vote	3	4	0	2	9	Does not pass.
	Final Vote	3	2	2	1	10	Included in Minority Report.
Change the name of Airport Road to "Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd." and also have separate street signs underneath with the designation "Historic Airport Road." Implement the change 6 months from the date of approval by the Town Council or by Independence Day 2005.	1 st Vote	14	1	0	0	3	Passes.
	Final Vote	14	1	1*	0	2	Include dissent in Minority Report.

* See the Minority Report below for further information about this particular vote.

Other Issues

Committee members asked that the Town Council investigate three additional issues:

1. Changing signs on I-40.
2. Ways Committee members and others can have input into the design of street signs.
3. Clarification from USPS about mail delivery if the street name is changed.

On this last point, Connie Blakesley of the US Postal Service's Greensboro District Office provided the following information to OpenSource:

A street name change does not require mail to be "forwarded." Residents and business owners on the street do not need to fill out change-of-address forms indicating the street name change. Within two weeks after the county informs the Postal Service of the street name change, the USPS changes the name in its database. It keeps "aliases" in its database in perpetuity. So, for example, any future mail that comes to the old street name would be checked against the database and delivered correctly. The USPS encourages postal customers to begin using the new street name to ensure prompt delivery.

OpenSource recommends that the Town invite representatives from the Postal Service to talk directly with residents and business owners on Airport Road before a name change takes place.

Rationale for the Majority Recommendation

Committee members who supported the recommendation to rename Airport Road for Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted the community to understand the importance of this action. They emphasized that a road has more permanent visibility than a library, statue, or monument. A road weaves its way into the very fabric of the community in many ways, tangible and intangible.

They wish to emphasize that the renaming would be an acknowledgement by the entire community of the contributions and sacrifices of African Americans, as symbolized by the life, death, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In Chapel Hill and throughout the nation, the black freedom movement was carried out in the streets, through marches and demonstrations. It is fitting, therefore, that Chapel Hill rename one of its most prominent thoroughfares for Dr. King.

Town Council and Committee member Sally Greene helped connect the Committee to the national context for road renamings. She pointed to the work of ECU scholar Derek Alderman who says that more than 700 roads across the country are named for Dr. King, providing a national memorial to his legacy. However, he notes, most are not major roads through major parts of town. Committee members who supported the majority recommendation stressed the importance of Chapel Hill being part of that national memorial, and doing it in a major way that makes a visible statement.

As a Committee member representing "citizens at large," Creighton Irons added, "I also feel like many in Chapel Hill (and elsewhere) don't realize how white power and privilege have been cemented and 'institutionalized' by such seemingly trivial things as the names of roads and buildings. I think that if people understood the racism and injustice that the lack of physical testaments to black history in this town represents, then many more folks would be in favor of renaming Airport Road for Dr. King. I see the renaming of the road as one of the early steps in dismantling an unjust system and building a society where King's dream of racial equality will actually be attainable."

Yonni Chapman, one of the Committee members "familiar with history," noted that although some have said that the road naming is not the best way to honor Dr. King, among African Americans in Chapel Hill the proposal submitted by the NAACP enjoys overwhelming support. "Changing the name of Airport

Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard is how the black community of Chapel Hill, which has paid the price and made the sacrifice, along with Dr. King, wants him to be honored,” Chapman said. “Further, the NAACP’s proposal enjoys broad support throughout the community.”

Opposition to the renaming of Airport Road has focused on two main factors: preserving history and avoiding unnecessary cost to business owners. Committee members who supported the renaming believe that recommendations in this report sufficiently address the concerns of those opposed to the renaming – i.e., honoring the history of Airport Road and supporting those who will be impacted financially by the road name change. They hope the renamed road will not only honor Dr. King but also keep his dream and struggle alive.

Minority Report

The three representatives of residents and business owners on Airport Road – Catherine Holland, Bruce Johnson, and Steve Largent – dissented with the key recommendation of the Committee. Their report follows.

This group objects to the Committee’s proposal to rename Airport Road. These three Committee members preferred either of two alternate recommendations:

- Use a combination road name (e.g., Airport Road/Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard).
- Dedicate Airport Road, Columbia Street, and 15-501 (from city limits to city limits) in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the consensus process, these three members indicated that they “strongly support” these recommendations. These three members would like to indicate that they do not support in any way the renaming of Airport Road. Initially, Catherine Holland indicated that she “could live with [this recommendation].” However, after the meeting she indicated that she wished to change her stance to “don’t support.” She said, “I can live with it because I know we’re going to have to live with it, but I really do not want the road renamed.” If the road is going to be renamed, it is important to have signs designating Historic Airport Road.

Their reasons for objecting to the majority recommendation are mostly rooted in critiques of the Committee’s makeup and the Town’s process for making the decision. They believe the Committee membership was biased in favor of naming before entering the discussions. They feel that at least 12 Committee members already had their minds set on renaming before the discussion process began, and therefore another conclusion would have been impossible. They believe the Town Council was already biased in favor of renaming the road and therefore selected a Committee that would almost definitely support their views. In their minds, this prevented the Committee from engaging in a fair and open process.

Furthermore, they believe that the Committee did not truly represent a cross-section of Chapel Hill residents and their beliefs on the road renaming issue. They would have preferred a Committee that was equally balanced between proponents and opponents of the name change. Alternately, they wish that the Town had engaged a Committee process that included some mechanism for gauging the feelings of a

broader cross-section of town residents. One member, Steve Largent, said, "If I thought we had a true cross-section of Chapel Hill [on the Committee], I would have felt differently [about the outcome]." Another member, Bruce Johnson, said, "I would like to see the town have a Committee that is balanced. I would be willing to go through the whole process again if the Committee were balanced. This Committee was useless. Even though the facilitators were great, it was a waste of money to go through the process."

They also felt that the work of the Committee strayed from the Town Council's directive to form a Committee with the task of making a recommendation on renaming Airport Road or finding other ways to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They have acknowledged the importance of broader dialogue about racial relations, and they have expressed repeatedly that their objections were not rooted in racial motives.

Steve Largent asked that the November 7th letter he wrote to the Town Council and the press be included in this report:

I am a member of the "Special Committee to Consider the Renaming of Airport Road" in Chapel Hill. To date, this committee has met for 15 hours over the course of two consecutive days. By lunchtime of the first day it was obvious that those advocating the name change greatly outnumbered those opposing the name change (I believe the count at that time was 16 for versus three against).

It should be noted that the three against are the only committee members that are residents and/or business owners with property fronting Airport Road. Some of the committee members are not even from Chapel Hill.

I do not believe that this committee represents a true cross section of the residents of Chapel Hill. I do believe that the committee member selection process was seriously diseased. The Town Council knew who was going to serve on the committee and what their biases would be. I believe that this committee is intentionally stacked with members in favor of the name change.

The mayor and Town Council members on the committee tried to lead me to believe that the selection process was objective and non-biased; however, as I look back over the last 15 meeting-hours, I realize that this is just not true.

A great deal of time and money has been expended by the council assembling the committee and engaging the services of the facilitators. With the outcome so predictable, I have to ask, Why are we even having these meetings?

On a positive note, I found it very stimulating to partake in open conversations and discussions with African Americans about civil rights and the abuses of civil rights. For me, this brought about a new perspective of the humiliation and disrespect that the African-American community has suffered. I do hope that, out of this series of meetings, positive steps can be taken to address these very real and disturbing racial issues.

It is now more important to me than ever before that Martin Luther King be honored by Chapel Hill in a significant manner. To honor him using recommendations stemming out of a flawed process is just not the way to do it.

Follow-Up Meeting

The Committee re-convened for a half day on November 20 to engage in further interracial dialogue, review the draft report, and conduct an evaluation of its process. Evoking Dr. King's words from his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," participants considered what it would take to move the community from a "negative peace, which is the absence of tension" to a "positive peace, which is the presence of justice." Committee members generally agreed that, while they share an interest in ongoing dialogue across lines of difference, maintaining this level of engagement would be hard without a pressing issue like the road renaming to bring people to the table.

OpenSource shared a draft of this report at the meeting and through email, and incorporated the Committee's feedback into the final report.

Next Steps

The Town Council requested that representatives from OpenSource deliver this report at its December 6 meeting. At that time, the Town Council is expected to vote on the road name change as well as to accept the Committee's report. The Council will direct the Town Manager to develop a process for achieving the Committee's recommendations.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OPENSOURCE TEAM

First and foremost, we commend the Committee members for their time, service, and commitment to this process. We believe that the 18 members who participated in the full process were well intentioned, respectful of each other, and fully engaged in both the immediate task as well as the broader conversation about racial and power relations in Chapel Hill.

The media and others' focus on the "outcome" of the Committee's work – i.e., the recommendation to rename Airport Road for Dr. King – overlooks the richness of the Committee's interaction and dialogue. It does not capture the many important moments when Committee members experienced new awareness or understanding, or when they connected with each other in new or deeper ways.

Several Committee members commented on the scarcity of – and need for – authentic interracial dialogue to address the underlying issues of power and privilege in the community. Indeed, their unanimous recommendation that the Town Council create a vehicle for ongoing dialogue about race and power issues in Chapel Hill reflects and affirms one of our core ground rules: the process is the task.

While the call for further dialogue gratifies us, we also recognize the tension inherent in such an endeavor. On one hand, a pressing issue like the road renaming may be needed to get people to the table. On the other hand, these “surface” issues can distract the community from fully probing the root causes of oppression and its effects. As one person mentioned in the process evaluation: “The specific charge of the Committee prevented us from getting even deeper into other issues.”

Committee members engaged in important conversations that began to uncover the link between the road renaming and underlying racial dynamics. Their process revealed that the community needs and wants to continue this conversation. The Town Council has a unique opportunity and responsibility to lead the community to develop a collective vision about race relations in Chapel Hill and a strategic plan on how to continue this conversation.

With these opportunities and challenges in mind, we respectfully make the following recommendations to the Chapel Hill Town Council:

1. Support opportunities for community-wide training on power, privilege, and oppression.

Given our limited time together and the pressures associated with the Committee’s charge, the OpenSource team chose to structure our sessions as a dialogue rather than a training. This allowed participants to explore these difficult concepts through the context of each other’s stories and their own lived experiences. With the immediate issue resolved and interest in interracial relations heightened, we suggest a series of trainings to further unpack the interpersonal, institutional, and cultural manifestations of racism and other forms of oppression.

To reach the community as broadly as possible, consider hosting a “train the trainer” session – perhaps for Committee members and others who want intensive instruction on the core concepts as well as facilitation tools. These individuals could then provide training and facilitate dialogue in all corners of the community.

Additionally, we recommend that the Town Council itself engage in a customized process to build common language and understanding about the history and context of race and oppression in the US and how power and privilege play out in Chapel Hill. As elected leaders, you have a unique opportunity to model for the entire community how to talk – and listen – across lines of difference to reach consensus on challenging public issues, and we urge you to embrace the process yourselves.

2. Balance the use of various forms of knowledge and expertise about racial and power relations. We encourage the Town Council to share information from the growing body of research about road renamings and other race-related issues. But we also advise you not to privilege one type of knowledge (e.g., scholarly) over others (e.g., life experience). Keep in mind that throughout history, academia has been mis-used as a tool of power and oppression. Even academic pieces that support the progressive viewpoint should not carry greater authority than personal stories.

3. **Advance a “positive peace” by engaging diverse perspectives.** The renaming issue and our process allowed participants to disrupt Chapel Hill’s “negative peace” and explore underlying racial tensions. Yet, achieving a “positive peace” requires more than simply rearranging the hierarchy of power and oppression. Committee members representing residents and business owners of Airport Road clearly felt outnumbered and marginalized by the Committee’s composition. To create a true “positive peace,” which Dr. King defined as the “presence of justice,” the Town Council must find ways to engage those who don’t agree with the Committee’s majority recommendation or who feel marginalized by the process.

4. **Combine the installation of new street signs with celebration and community building.** This issue has generated enormous community interest and emotion. While the road renaming reflects the values described in the “rationale for the majority recommendation” above, it also serves as a lasting reminder of an important and challenging community-wide process. Use the occasion to recognize the important groundwork that the Committee laid as well as the difficult work that lies ahead.

5. **On a practical note, include the US Postal Service in an information session for Airport Road residents and business owners.** While we feel confident about the information provided by the Greensboro District Office, mis-information continues to circulate and fuel anxiety. A real-life representative could answer questions and share examples from other communities.

The OpenSource team feels honored to have worked with the Committee and the Town of Chapel Hill on this important and historic endeavor. We remain committed to supporting any future efforts.

Contact Information

OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc.
762 Ninth Street, #534
Durham, NC 27705
919-824-3914
info@opensourceleadership.com
www.opensourceleadership.com