

Jonesboro City Council Meeting 12.02.10

Dr. Richard K. Freer: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther MLK renaming of Commerce

1. **Good evening. Mayor Perrin, Members of the City Council.** My name is Dick Freer, so who I am and why am I here? I have lived in Arkansas for 40 years. I retired as Faculty Emeritus from Arkansas State University after 21 years of service in the social work department where I focused on social justice. So, I thank you for the opportunity to advocate for **honoring** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by naming a street after him

2. **Who is Dr. King whom you may honor today?** Dr. King was first a pastor and scholar with an earned Ph.D. along with 50 honorary doctorates. He was a peace maker. At a time when segregation and denial of the right of Black Americans to vote threatened to tear the nation apart, he led the civil rights and social justice movements through non-violent actions. For this work, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and the National Medal of Honor. **Presidents Reagan and Bush** dedicated a holiday to honor Dr. King. A national monument honoring Dr. King is aptly located across the pond from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. All 50 states celebrate the MLK holiday. King remains and inspiration to millions of people at home and around the world.

3. **David Alderman, U-T Knoxville expert** estimated that there were over 900 streets named after King in 41 states in the U.S (2014). Arkansas is one of those states. The 10 Arkansas cities with streets named after Dr. King are: Rockport, Malvern, Forrest City, West Memphis, Kensett, Arkadelphia, Texarkana, Hot Springs, Little Rock and Fayetteville. By your actions **Jonesboro can be #11.**

4. **In 1965, in Brown Chapel** in Selma, Alabama, just days after the police attack on non-violent freedom marchers at Pettus Bridge, a man short of stature stepped to the podium. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said,

“God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. Today God worked through the Supreme Court of the United State of America which ruled that Alabama must permit us to march to Montgomery.”

The packed crowd rose as one to cheer this announcement. **I was one of those who stood and cheered.** I was thrilled at the time, but I had no idea that this was an historical moment and one that would **profoundly** change my life. King's words and actions inspired/challenged me to pursue a life dedicated to equality and social justice and a career in social work. History choose **me**, I just showed up in Selma.

5. **The near term needs of businesses** affected should and can be addressed as they were in Fayetteville with accommodations by the U.S. Post Office and a transitional period (3-5 years) for giving businesses time to adjust. That said, it is my understanding that having a street named after Dr. King conveys a positive climate which attracts new businesses. I believe that a Jonesboro street named after Dr. King would aid recruitment of faculty and staff at ASU as well. In the words of a highly respected African American educator describing prospective university faculty and staff, and I quote:

Professional colleagues of color looked for signs of progressiveness within our cities that show a greater understanding of his, King's, message of equality and acceptance. Signs that we matter and progress is being made.

6. **Research shows** that nationally MLK streets represent important "memorial arenas" to African-Americans... The naming of a small (er) less prominent street represents a degrading of King's historical importance and the legitimacy of all African Americans. (Alderman, 2003).

After compromising on renaming Southwest Drive, Johnson, and Aggies. The proposal on the table is the least acceptable option, one that does not degrade.

Therefore, **I urge** you to vote in favor of the amended motion to declare **all** of Commerce Drive, both current and in the planning stage, after Dr. King. When your children, nieces and nephews, and grandchildren ask, "How did you vote on honoring Dr. King?" Will you say, "I voted no because some of my friends and voters opposed it." Or will you say "**I voted yes**, because Dr. King's message is needed to promote unity and hope in our hometown of Jonesboro?"