

MLK debate continues, decision postponed



DTH/GILLIAN BOLSOVER

Michelle Cotton Laws interrupts a council meeting to speak her mind on the MLK Road naming issue, which proved a divisive point among locals.

Naming committee to mull options

BY SHANNAN BOWEN
AND JOSEPH R. SCHWARTZ
SENIOR WRITERS

June 17 — More than 100 citizens showed up to Monday night's Town Council meeting seeking closure to an issue that many claim has escalated from renaming a road to uncovering thick racial divisions in the town.

But they'll have to wait a little longer.

Instead of settling the ongoing debate, the council voted 5 to 4 to create a committee comprised of about 20 townspeople and experts for continued dialogue on renaming Airport Road in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

The vote caused a literal uproar among some residents, including Michelle Cotton Laws, who deliberately interrupted discussion of the resolution, saying that Rosa Parks

rose up and she will rise, too.

"We have silently sat, protested here and there," she said in an interview Tuesday. "I could no longer sit and be subjected to that ... I rose to make the statement that gone are the days that are sitting passively by."

Mayor Kevin Foy, who proposed the resolution, began the public forum by stating that he personally thought renaming the road was an appropriate way to honor King.

But, he said, "This is about race."

Foy admitted that the council had not approached the matter appropriately and that further discussion was needed to proceed in a direction that addressed not only the issue of renaming Airport Road, but also issues of race and community relations that have become more tense since the debate was first brought to the

table almost a year ago.

"I don't feel comfortable taking action this evening that I think will result in people shouting at each other not talking to each other," he said. "We do what we do when we have a thorny issue. We don't impose the will of nine people in the community; we do what members of this community think is best."

But Council members Mark Kleinschmidt, Bill Strom, Cam Hill and Sally Greene, who were in opposition to Foy's proposal, said they did not want to delay action. Kleinschmidt said Foy's proposal was merely a defacto vote in opposition to renaming the road.

But Wiggins disputed that notion. "No one is this room would like to see a road named after Dr. King more than I would," she said. "I have been in favor of the renaming but not in an 'in your face, I don't care what you think way,' and that has been part of the process."

Wiggins, who led the Renaming Committee, said in the end she was uncomfortable that the committee only queried the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

But proponents of the change said little will come from further dialogue, noting that those who live on Airport Road always will want to keep their address.

Resident Dan Coleman reflected on the 1960s and the struggle to pass the public accommodations law, noting that a similar committee was formed at that time.

"The result: Chapel Hill did nothing, and justice was delayed."

Foy said he will safeguard against concerns that a delay will diminish community support, but that an amicable solution must be reached. "I don't want this to be a racially divisive issue in our community."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.



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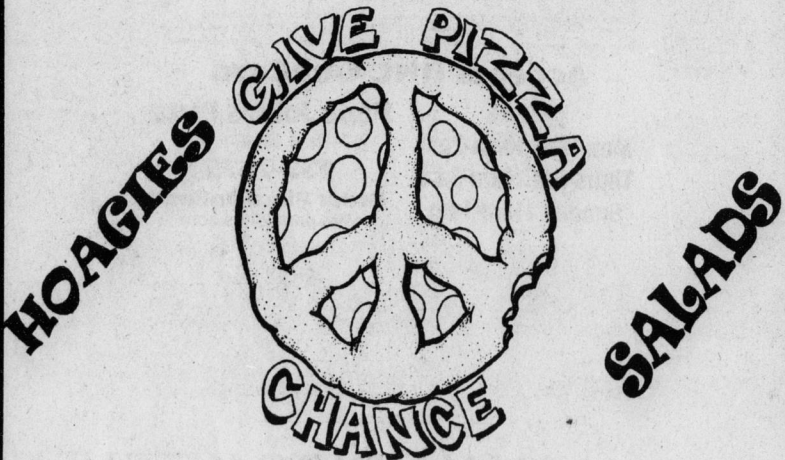
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