



Industrial renaming put on hold

12:00 AM CDT on Wednesday, June 11, 2008

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A Dallas City Council committee on Tuesday sidestepped, if only briefly, a growing controversy over the renaming of Industrial Boulevard.

After an hour of discussion, the council's Trinity River committee voted to postpone until Aug. 5 a vote on Industrial's new name in hopes of crafting a compromise that probably would prevent the road from being named for civil rights pioneer César Chávez.

Several committee members suggested that in August they will vote to rename Industrial as Riverfront Boulevard and designate another street in honor of Mr. Chávez.

"The charter of the council for this committee is to deliver the Trinity River Corridor Project for all of the city. [We need] to try to bring people together to support a project that will not divide the north and the south and the east and the west," said council member Dave Neumann, chairman of the Trinity committee.

Mr. Neumann and his committee have found themselves in the middle of a controversy they didn't expect after the results of a city-sponsored survey on Industrial's name took an unexpected turn late last week.

Of 20,594 votes cast in the informal telephone and Internet poll, more than 52 percent were in support of renaming Industrial for Mr. Chávez, who led the movement for farm workers' rights during the 1960s and beyond.

Mr. Chávez's status as a hero in Dallas' Hispanic community complicated the desire of many council members and Mayor Tom Leppert to rename Industrial for some feature of the Trinity River project.

And the council's three Hispanic members were not about to let the city's own survey be ignored simply because the results didn't turn out the way others on the council had hoped.

"We had 10,000 people express that they have a very strong support for César Chávez Boulevard. It would be wiser and prudent to step back and say let's have a look at this," council member Steve Salazar said.

Mr. Salazar successfully moved that Tuesday's vote be postponed, saying the committee should take its time and come up with a solution that "could be very good for the Trinity."

Mayor Pro Tem Elba Garcia and council member Pauline Medrano also supported postponing the vote and suggested they would accept a compromise that would see another street named for Mr. Chávez.

The process for finding another street to rename for Mr. Chávez was not clear. But the committee could direct the staff to find a street. The council would then have to vote to rename that street for Mr. Chávez.

The complicated process would be worth it to honor Mr. Chávez and those who voted in the survey, several council members said.

"Give the people who voted so heavily in the survey respect. When we ask for people's opinion, we need to show that we honor their vote," Ms. Medrano said.

Opposed to delay

The only member of the committee who opposed delaying the decision was Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway, who said he fears time will only inflate the controversy.

Mr. Caraway urged the committee to vote Tuesday for the name Riverfront Boulevard and at the same time to recommend that another street, possibly Jefferson Boulevard, be renamed for Mr. Chávez.

"This is something that's going to be nipping at us and nipping at us and dividing this city," he said. "If we wait, we're only opening up ourselves for a new controversy that may come when we could have wrapped it up today." By late Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Caraway's comments appeared prescient.

Michael Gonzales, chairman of the Hispanic Leadership Forum, sent the council an e-mail urging them not to compromise on naming Industrial for Mr. Chávez and calling on them to respect the results of the survey.

"Latinos and African-Americans currently constitute 66 percent of the city of Dallas. Collectively, our communities have not received the proper respect with regards to the naming of streets for several decades," Mr. Gonzales wrote.

At the same time, several council members said they have received dozens, if not hundreds, of messages opposing the renaming of Industrial for Mr. Chávez, a man with scant ties to Dallas.

Council member Mitchell Rasansky reflected the view of many of them, saying it would be foolish to rename Industrial for Mr. Chávez when the city is in the midst of trying to market the billion-dollar Trinity River Corridor Project.

"This has turned into a political agenda," he said.

Complications

One subject the committee largely avoided was how the renaming of Industrial had become so complicated.

Assistant City Manager Jill Jordan told committee members that the city's Trinity River project staff thought the survey was a good idea.

"We thought it would be nice to get the whole community's input on a name," she said.

Ron Natinsky, who is not on the Trinity committee, was the only council member to wonder publicly why the city had caused itself such trouble.

"In the midst of trying to bring the various parts of the city together, we find the subject of trying to name the street has now caused a great chasm in the city. It may have been a good plan, but it went awry," he said.

If the Trinity committee does go forward with recommending a name for Industrial on Aug. 5, the full council probably would vote on the name later that month. Industrial's name would then be officially changed in summer 2009.