Acadian name change stirs emotions

By STEVE CULPPER
Advocate staff writer

It appears that two things will most affect whether Acadian Thway becomes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thway.

Black and white.

The northern end of Acadian is predominantly black. The southern end is mostly white.

In an informal poll of people who live and work along the length of the street, blacks favor changing the name, whites don't.

By paying a $200 fee to the Planning & Zoning Commission last year, a group called People for a Change applied to change the name of Acadian in honor of the civil rights leader.

The Planning & Zoning Commission meets in the council chambers at 5:30 p.m. on Monday to hear both sides and make a decision. Their decision will go in the form of a recommendation to the Metro Council, which will make the final decision.

Since March 13 when the commission sent out notices of the hearing to each address on Acadian, petitioners have been circulating around the white-dominated southern end of the street in an attempt to halt the name change.

Bobbie Murray, whose parents bought the first lot and built the residence on Acadian's Ogden Park Subdivision in 1929, is one of the people strongly opposed to changing the name.

"I'm not fighting Dr. Martin Luther King, but we've had this name for years and I think it's cultural," she said. "I think it stands for what we are."

Originally, the land that became Ogden Park and eventually part of South Acadian was Schoonmaker Plantation, which gave way to the subdivision in the 1920s.

Until the 1950s, what eventually became Acadian was several different streets running north and south, unconnected in the middle.

Part of what is South Acadian was once Stanford. Another part was Oakwood Drive. To the north, it was Eureka Street and later North 33rd.

"They decided they needed a street that would connect North Baton Rouge and south Baton Rouge," Bobbie Murray said. "That was the reason they opened the road, cut the trees down and made the thoroughway. Then they made the whole road north and south Acadian Thway. It's a cultural name and we don't want to lose that. And on our property we have, 'Please sign our petition because we want to save our identity.'"

"The name of the street is also a matter of identity to Buddy Stewart, who owns Buddy's Rock Shop, a record store in the 1700 block of a name change from Acadian to anything.

"We have no quarrel in naming something in honor of Dr. King. We'd just prefer naming something that doesn't already have a name," Maginnis said.
Gene and Pat Cabral of Gene's Texaco on South Acadia are among those who favor not changing the street name.

Buddy Stewart, owner of Buddy's Rock Shop on North Acadia Thruway, favors changing the name of the thoroughfare to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thruway.

naming it after Dr. King. It won't end up making any difference.

Pitts' family has lived on the street for 40 years. "I don't know what Dr. King would say if he was living now, but I have no problem with changing. Maybe he wouldn't even want a street named after him, being so modest. But he's gone now and they want to have something to remember him by I guess."

To the south, Jeff Cobb owns a garage on South Acadia.

"My objection is, it's stupid," Cobb said. "Bottom line is bottom line. Grab another street. Grab a piece of interstate. It'll cost me $900 to change my invoices. And I do not want my street named Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thruway South. It's too long. If I was moving into this street, into a new building and this street didn't have a name, that'd be fine to change it. But I'm totally against it for money reasons, logic and finance reasons."

Sen. Cleo Fields, D-Baton Rouge, had drafted legislation to change the name of 1-110 in honor of King, but he put his idea on hold after he found out People for a Change had already applied to rename Acadia. G. Washington Eames, president of the local NAACP chapter, also has said his group wants to rename Florida Boulevard in King's honor. Neither Fields nor Eames have taken any official steps to fulfill their ideas. Jerome King, a spokesman for People for a Change, said his group did not choose Acadia Thruway by random process.

"We started out with five major streets in Baton Rouge: Sherwood Forest, Scenic Highway, Acadian, Government and Plank Road. We did surveys on all the streets."

The organization eliminated state or federal-owned streets and narrowed the list down to Acadia and Sherwood Forest. Finally, they chose Acadia because there are more blacks property owners on the street and fewer businesses than on Sherwood.

"I think our chances are good," King said. "When it all boils down, it'll be up to the people who own the property, not just the people who work on Acadia.

Those people come from Sherwood Forest or somewhere at 8 o'clock in the morning and once they leave in the afternoon, they're going back out to Sherwood Forest. All they do is come to work on that street."

King said his group's survey of Acadia indicated that blacks make up 85 percent of the property owners on the street.

"Now it's up to the people who live on Acadia to have the final say-so," he said.