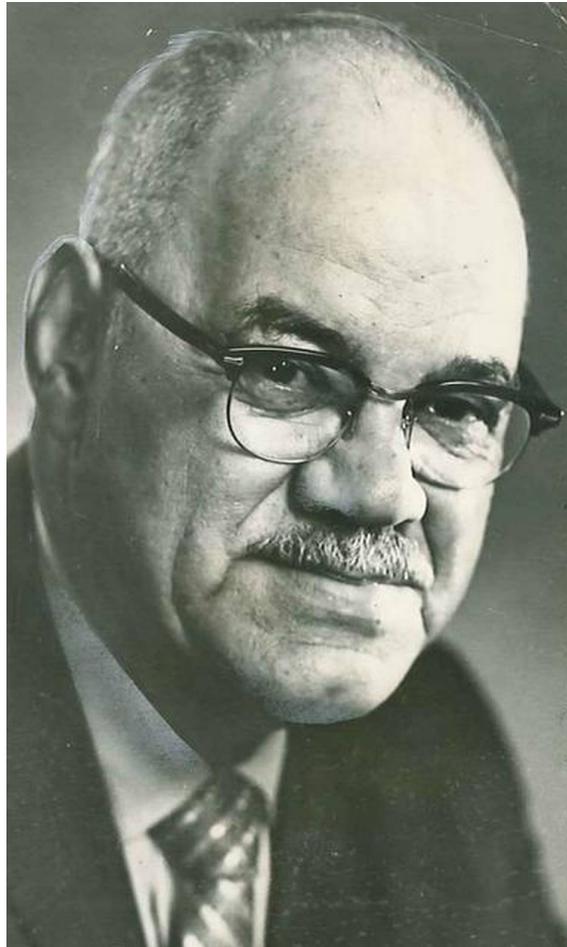


KC Council members reach compromise on naming East Patrol campus after Leon Jordan

BY LYNN HORSLEY - THE KANSAS CITY STAR
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The full Kansas City Council will vote next week on naming the East Patrol police campus after Leon Jordan, a slain civil rights leader and police officer.

The Kansas City Council is close to breaking with precedent and naming a police property after law enforcement pioneer and civil rights leader Leon Jordan.

The council's Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on Thursday unanimously supported the name Leon Mercer Jordan East Patrol Campus for the site at 27th Street and Prospect Avenue where a police station and crime lab are under construction. The full council is to vote next Thursday on the new name.

While the campus would be named for Jordan, the station itself would be called the East Patrol station.

Kansas City's police stations traditionally have been named for their geographic locations. But a proposal to name the new East

Patrol police station after Jordan drew an outpouring of support from Kansas City's African-American leaders and politically active clubs and groups.

So 3rd District Councilman Jermaine Reed and 3rd District at-large Councilwoman Melba Curls said a fitting compromise would be to name the entire campus after Jordan, while keeping the East Patrol designation as well.

"He was truly a gifted man," Curls told the committee about Jordan, whom she knew personally. "There's a first time for everything."

Mayor Sly James said after the committee vote that he personally would prefer to stick with the practice of naming the police campus for its geographic location, while memorializing Leon Jordan in some other way. But he said he would accept the will of the public.

"If that is what the community has decided and that's what the council wants, I'm fine with that," James said.

Some people have suggested that other worthy individuals should be honored, including former City Council members Alvin Brooks and Joanne Collins or Negro Leagues great Buck O'Neil.

But Councilman Dick Davis, another committee member, said he was impressed with the growing community consensus to honor Jordan in this way, and he thought it was time to support change over tradition.

Committee Chairman Russ Johnson noted that, while Kansas City's police stations have not been named for famous and worthy individuals, many other municipal buildings have been.

"It's OK to celebrate our history," Johnson said.

Jordan's prominent place in Kansas City history is undeniable. Supporters on Thursday said his legacy of promoting strong African-American political participation and leadership in the city is one reason why Kansas City has not erupted into violence and unrest as Ferguson, Mo., has. They said he laid the foundation for better relations between police and the black community today than exists in many other cities.

Jordan was a Kansas City native and one of the first African-Americans to join the police force, in 1938. He became the department's first African-American lieutenant in 1952. He also spent eight years training police in Liberia, in West Africa.

In 1962, he co-founded Freedom Inc. with Bruce R. Watkins. They helped desegregate the city's public accommodations and created an organization that gave blacks more political clout than they had ever had before in Kansas City.

Bruce R. Watkins' son, Bruce Watkins Jr., urged the committee Thursday to confer this naming honor on his father's political partner.

Jordan served three terms in the Missouri House of Representatives and was campaigning for a fourth term when he was assassinated in 1970 outside the Green Duck Lounge and Grill, his Prospect Avenue tavern located just north of the East Patrol campus site.

The Star in the past has revealed his loose associations with organized crime figures that may have contributed to his murder. But others have said the circumstances of his death should not disqualify him from consideration.

Former City Councilman Richard Tolbert told the council committee that there's a small and little-known pocket park named after Jordan at 31st Street and Benton Boulevard. But Tolbert said it's not a fitting memorial to Jordan's accomplishments.

Naming the police campus after Jordan could also be a great "recruiting tool" to get other African-Americans involved in police work, suggested former City Councilwoman Sharon Sanders Brooks.

The \$74 million campus will include not just the police station but also a crime laboratory, an evidence storage room and a community meeting room. Weather permitting, the target completion date is December 2015.

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