

The Post and Courier

BRIAN HICKS: Memorial to be more than a dream?

By [Brian Hicks](#)

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Martin Luther King III was delighted when the city set up a memorial district to honor his father.

In 2001, he sent a letter to then-city Councilman Wendell Gilliard, thanking him for initiating this great tribute to his dad. King seemed particularly pleased that the district included the Septima Clark Expressway.

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King wrote at length, and with great affection, about the Charleston native's efforts during the Civil Rights movement, when she worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr. at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to get African- Americans registered to vote.

"It is appropriate that Mrs. Clark and my father would be honored by your city," King wrote.

It was an awfully nice letter to thank the city for a couple of road signs and a highway that doubles as a part-time creek, which is all we have to show for our efforts so far.

Because, unfortunately, the road honoring Clark is dysfunctional and the planned MLK monument and park for Charleston remains just a dream.

Priorities?

As Yvonne Wenger reported Saturday, Charleston's King monument committee has been working on a plan for 12 years.

They want to build a monument to King on Liberty Square, overlooking the harbor where this nation's slave trade was headquartered.

It's a good idea -- so where is it? Mayor Joe Riley says these things take time, and he's right. It takes money too -- about \$500,000, which isn't chump change. But it takes this long? The National Park Service, which controls Liberty Square, is onboard. Let's get with it.

No doubt a lot of people have noticed several other projects -- for instance, the Gaillard Auditorium renovation -- have been announced and started in that same period. The Gaillard rehab only came up a couple of years ago, and it's already in the design phase. And at \$142 million, it's a lot more expensive than a King monument.

In fact, the Gaillard renovation cost just about as much as the infinitely more important Septima Clark Expressway drainage project.

In fairness, the Gaillard got fast-tracked because some anonymous donor is putting up half the money.

But you've got to admit, it doesn't look good.

Honor history

Charleston has had a much easier time with race relations than a lot of Southern cities, a testament to its officials and residents.



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This is a town that honors and reveres history, and the legacy of people like Clark and King deserves equal treatment with Wade Hampton and John C. Calhoun.

Sen. Robert Ford, who worked with King back in the day, says a monument would help because he fears that today's youth have no idea who Martin Luther King Jr. was.

Well, he was the guy who 48 years ago today gave the "I Have a Dream" speech on the mall in D.C., an important moment in establishing civil rights in this country.

Hopefully by the time the 50th anniversary rolls around, Charleston's King monument will be more than just a dream.

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