

THE SIGNS, THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’

Cantrell Update Set, New Name Or Not

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HARRISONBURG — The presence of “Cantrell Avenue” was trending downward before City Council decided to rename it Martin Luther King Jr. Way last week.

In 2010, the Federal Highway Administration set new standards for street signs that included a call for “retroreflectivity” requirements — so markers can be seen in dark and light — and the use of lower-case letters, eliminating all caps, as in “CANTRELL” Avenue, presumably making it easier to read.

For example, a new sign would read “Cantrell” Avenue. Harrisonburg residents probably have noticed new signs throughout the city already, including at some intersections along Cantrell.

In 2011, the Obama administration removed deadlines the FHWA had set, allowing localities to comply with regulations on an as-needed basis, instead of by 2018. Localities, according to media reports in 2010, detested what they saw as an “unfunded mandate” coming from the federal government, prompting the deadline removal.

For Harrisonburg, the regulations mean the cost associated with changing Cantrell to Martin Luther King Jr. Way is not necessarily an entirely new expense, just earlier than planned.

On Thursday, city spokeswoman Mary-Hope Vass said buying and installing the new signs would cost an estimated \$26,600, a figure that includes expenses such as labor. “Historic Cantrell Avenue” markers to go underneath the new street signs also must be bought and installed.

Even without a name change, though, the city would have had to buy new signs and pay for labor to replace current Cantrell signs to comply with regulations at



In 2010, the Federal Highway Administration set new standards for street signs that included the elimination of only capital letters. Cantrell Avenue sports a number of signs that would have required replacing, new name or not. (Photos by Michelle Mitchell / DN-R)

some point. The Public Works Department covers costs associated with sign upkeep in its annual maintenance budget, Assistant Director Drew Williams said.

As for how much of the \$26,600 would be added costs to the city, that's not yet known. Williams said the new name, because it is longer, will require a bigger sign, costing more than a straight "Cantrell" for "Cantrell" swap would.

Street signs are replaced after they are deemed to have aged and don't "look good" or when knocked down by a vehicle, he said. The normal lifespan of a sign is about 20 to 25 years, Williams said, though some last much longer.

The Cantrell name change takes effect Jan. 1.

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For Harrisonburg, regulations set by the Federal Highway Administration mean the cost associated with changing Cantrell to Martin Luther King Jr. Way is not an entirely new expense, just one that comes earlier than planned. Some signs along Cantrell Avenue already meet the new regulations that include the elimination only capital letters.