

City Street Named After Former Mayor

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There is a tiny gravel street in Fifeville that is easy to drive past, barely noticeable next to a busy home construction site. But the path that has yet to be covered in asphalt will have a name more recognizable than most.

The street, which leads into a mixed-income neighborhood of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville, has been dubbed Francis Fife Way, after the former city mayor.

Fife may be the only former mayor to have a city street named after him, and it also sits in the city neighborhood that bears his family name. “That’s a special honor,” said Margaret M. O’Bryant, librarian of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society. “It’s not the normal practice.”

There are other roads in town that share names with past mayors — such as Michie Drive and Barbour Drive — but there is no evidence that they were named for Thomas J. Michie and Charles Barbour themselves.

Of Michie and Barbour drives, O’Bryant said, “Those names may have come from a different source. Those are both very common names around here.”

Dan Rosensweig, the local Habitat’s executive director, said the organization suggested naming the street after Fife because of the work he has done to provide affordable living choices in Charlottesville.

“He’s kind of an inspiration to all of us who are trying to do affordable housing work,” Rosensweig said. “I think it helped that we consulted his family, and they were excited about it.”

A lifelong resident of Charlottesville, Fife was the city’s mayor from 1972 to 1974.

“He didn’t exactly ask for permission,” Fife joked in an interview. He said that typically he turns down recognitions like this one and was taken aback by the request. But, he said, “I’m an admirer of what Habitat does, so it made it easier to for me to accept, I guess.”

Though there will be four Habitat units with Francis Fife Way addresses, none of them is actually situated on the street — a feeder road into the rest of the neighborhood. The row houses were physically built on Lynne Place — named after a longtime chairwoman of Habitat’s Board of Directors — but Rosensweig said city rules dictated that they needed to be penned under Francis Fife Way because the former street is a private alley.



Francis Fife Way contains new homes being built by Habitat for Humanity.

The units were constructed as a part of Habitat's Blitz Build held earlier this month, the last of 22 Habitat homes built in the mixed-income neighborhood off Cherry Avenue. Rosensweig said the nonprofit had intended to keep Fife's street under wraps, but with the building blitz, "I had to let the cat out of the bag."

While a street sign has not been installed along the road, the name has been posted on Habitat's Web site, and a list of city building permits for the rowhouses also show their addresses as 1341, 1343, 1345 and 1347 Francis Fife Way.

"He's certainly well deserving," said Mayor Dave Norris, another affordable housing advocate. "He's been a champion for housing opportunity for decades now."