

July 6, 2022

To: Mayor Compton and Town Councilors  
Re: HPC review comments on the proposed community garden

John:

Bruce Daggy and Anne Vincent presented the Edible Garden Group's (EGG) proposal to create a pilot-scale (approximately 500 sq.ft.) edible garden in Washington Grove to be located in Woodward Park in a grassy portion within the fenced-in area of the hard tennis court, near Grove Road.

The objectives for the garden, as described in the proposal, are threefold: to educate residents, including children, in the practice of growing food; to increase local food security beyond the municipal boundaries; and to make a positive contribution to the social cohesion of Washington Grove.

Their proposal was presented to the Town Council and was approved at the Council's June meeting.

The HPC subsequently reviewed the proposal for issues of compatibility and impacts on the integrity of the Washington Grove Historic District.

### **Consistent with Town's History**

The proposal for the Town to underwrite the cultivation of food for human consumption on Town land recalls the Washington Grove Camp Meeting Association's founding on a 267-acre tract in Montgomery County that comprised the corner of a farm owned by Elizabeth Magruder Cooke (1804-1886), the widow of Nathan Cooke Sr. (1803-1869). Relying in large part on the uncompensated labor of the enslaved, Nathan Cooke grew crops on his farm and raised sheep and swine. The portion of Cooke's farm selected for the camp meeting site included springs, wooded groves, and fields.

As described in the National Register of Historic Places designation for the Washington Grove Historic District, the community in its early days was "ensconced in Montgomery County's agricultural landscape." Historic maps and early aerial photographs show a network of farm roads converging upon Washington Grove. At least two farms were located on the Grove's immediate borders. One of these belonged to William H. Brake who farmed it during the first half of the twentieth century. Washington Grove residents apparently considered Brake "a neighbor and friend." Today, a portion of this property lies within the Town and is the site of eight houses located within the 500 block of Brown Street.

Historically, Washington Grove was also the focus of activities associated with these rural neighbors. Local farmers were drawn here by Washington Grove's B&O Railroad depot. Not

only was the depot essential for shipping produce to market but it was also surrounded by a group of agricultural-related enterprises, including a grain mill and stores dealing in farming supplies and services. In the summer, when large numbers of people gathered for Washington Grove's camp meetings and other events, a special market-house was open three mornings a week. According to a newspaper account "fifteen or twenty farmers visit the camp with wagonloads of vegetables, fruit, chickens, mutton, beef and general farm produce which they display in the market."

Later, during World War II, the Town made available a large amount of undeveloped municipal land in support of **Victory Gardens**. At a special town council meeting in March 1943, a committee was appointed to "locate proper garden plots for Victory Gardens and to assign plots of 50 x 100 feet to those desiring garden plots within that area selected, preferable west of Chestnut Road and North of Center Street." With the purpose of increasing food production during the war, these gardens were temporary in nature. (After the war, this area of the Grove would be rededicated for residential development.)

The Edible Garden Group's proposal reflects foundational values in Washington Grove's history. Reverence for nature was central to the Methodist Camp Meeting movement, now expressed as the "creation care philosophy" of today's United Methodist church. The educational aspect of the EGG's objective harkens to the Chautauqua movement's principle of self-improvement through life-long learning.

The Progressive Era was another formative period in Washington Grove's development. Its targeted goals were extraordinarily broad and included (although not primarily) food safety and teaching standardized ways of gardening. The three aforementioned movements shared the spirit of altruism and stewardship as well, and these are apparent guiding principles of the EGG's proposal.

### **Compatibility with the 2020 Washington Grove Historic District**

Woodward Park, the edible garden's proposed location, is considered a contributing site to the Washington Grove Historic District. Background research conducted by Robinson & Associates, authors of the Historic District's nomination (see Cultural Landscape Analysis, The Town on Washington Grove) reminds us that Woodward Park has its origins in the 1897 Maddox plan, which set aside three blocks along the west side of Maple Avenue as a public park named in honor of William Ryland Woodward, one of Washington Grove's founding trustees and the vice president of the Washington Grove Camp Meeting Association for its first fifteen years.

In 1905, the park was informally expanded west to Grove Road. A plat map dated January 6, 1930, records that the lots south, west, and north of Woodward Park (including the area known as Athletic Park) had been officially dedicated as "Park" by the association on May 30, 1925.

Historically, Woodward Park has provided Grove residents and visitors areas for both passive and active recreation. The park's tennis courts and athletic fields were and remain popular with residents and the public.

Between 1905 and 1963, an auditorium stood in Woodward Park north of Oak Street and east of the tennis courts. It was used for Chautauqua as well as other activities. A large stone fireplace (contributing structure to the Historic District), built by the Athletic Club in 1935, remains in Woodward Park.

In 1965, a town nursery was established in the southeast section of the park. In 2007, it was redefined as an arboretum.

Washington Grove's agricultural heritage is clearly acknowledged in the Historic District designation's listing of contributing resources. "Agriculture/Subsistence" appears in the Introduction among the several categories that describe the District's "Historic Functions." Specifically identified as historic landscape elements associated with the history of farming within the Town and along its borders are the following: Ridge Road and its viewsheds encompassing the Meadow Conservation Park; and Washington Grove Lane's viewshed encompassing the agricultural buildings lining the railroad corridor." Both are classified as "historic associated features that contribute to the significance of the Washington Grove Historic District."

## **Conclusion**

The EGG's proposed garden will have minimal impact on the historic landscape elements enumerated above and will not negatively impact the integrity of the Historic District.

The HPC recognizes the stewardship value of the garden, endorses the plan, and has no specific recommendations for its implementation.