

# Town Council Reports for January 2023 Council Meeting

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## Conservation Meadow

### Dave Cosson

The County removed the concrete drainage pipes from the woods between the meadows. Further work remains, including replacing bollards along Ridge Road.

## Contracts

### Dave Cosson

**Landscaping/Maintenance:** An RFP will be drafted this month for Landscaping/Maintenance.

## Dog Park Committee

### Christine Dibble

Steve Werts kindly repaired the gate to the Dog Spot.

## Forestry & Beautification Committee

### Barbara Raimondo

#### Forestry and Beautification Canopy Tree Replacement Response

The Forestry and Beautification Committee shares your dismay over the increasing loss of our beautiful Town tree canopy. We have already responded by increasing the number of trees installed over the three past years. Our committee has planted 246 trees over the past 12 years. We estimate an overall survival rate of at least 95%. From 2011 to 2019 we planted about 16 trees per year. From 2020 to 2022 we planted about 28 trees per year. This is only possible because we now have two highly knowledgeable team leaders. Both longtime member, Audrey Maskery, and new member, Jay Everhart, who is a Master Gardener, have been critical to our greater number of tree installations.

In considering Mayor Compton's request for adding 26-28 new trees per planting season (which would be 52-56 new trees per year) the F&B Committee started by doing a survey of available planting locations. Audrey and Jay spent multiple days over two weeks walking the Town to make both a list and a map of potential tree planting sites. They took into consideration appropriate spacing for each mature tree while allowing for limitations on Town land due to water and sewer lines and overhead power lines. Areas where we know specimen trees are likely to be removed in the near future were also assigned new trees. In total, Jay and Audrey

say we have planting sites for about 95-100 new trees. We suggest that planting a minimum of 20 trees (75-80% upper canopy) per year over the next 5 years would fulfill the Town's needs. At two years and five years we would do a complete reevaluation of our tree planting sites.

We share the mayor's concerns over our loss of canopy as the large old trees die, but then we remind ourselves that it takes approximately 65 years to grow an oak to 50 feet of height and commensurate spread. The 200-year-old oaks we are currently losing are closer to 80 feet tall. No matter how many trees we plant, we will not see the canopy of our current old trees in the near future. However, in 2006 our residential canopy was 59% mature trees and 41% immature canopy trees with 89% of the trees in good health (Dan Landry, 2006 Urban Forest Management Plan). And we have added substantially to the number of immature canopy trees in the past 12 years.

One area we have been focusing on is to continue increasing the species diversity of our trees. The Landry report points out that in 2006 our residential forest consisted of approximately 39% white oak, 11% red oak, 6% red maple, 9% dogwood and 5% or less of other species. This could be disastrous if a tree disease specifically affecting white oaks was to occur as happened with the American Chestnut tree. The decline and death of large white oaks in recent years in town due to natural causes is a reminder of how devastating a major infestation could be.

Dan Landry's report proposed aiming for 35 % oak trees (but only 8 % white oak), 37% other canopy trees and 28% flowering understory. In the past 12 years our committee has installed 28% oak (6% white oak), 45% other canopy trees, and 27% flowering understory trees. The Landry report also suggested utilizing some of the faster growing, urban-hardy trees like Pin Oak, Willow Oak, American Basswood, Sweet Gum, American Sycamore, River Birch, and Bald Cypress.

The F&B Committee agrees that increasing our diversity is an excellent goal. We have been diligent in buying fewer White Oak and adding other species. We find that nursery centers typically have a large number of trees of a few species at any one time. Over several seasons, a wider range of trees are available. Going forward we will look at using other vendors if we find good trees which are not available through Stadler. We have been exploring other vendors and can research contractors who would pick up trees, bring them to Washington Grove, and plant

them. However, this is not a viable option for planting very large numbers of trees. Even if the committee does not actually plant the trees, we would need to continue to select sites, identify the right tree to plant in each unique site, supervise the planting, and monitor the tree care after that for at least 1-3 years, all of which is labor intensive for our small committee.

The Forestry and Beautification Committee recommendation is to continue with our current planting rate of no fewer than twenty new trees per year while continuing to increase the overall species diversity. Although Washington Grove now looks different from the “Town within a Forest” many of us moved into 20-40 years ago, the Forestry and Beautification Committee is confident that we are providing what is needed for Washington Grove to continue to be a healthy and beautiful “Town within a Forest” we all love.

## Gateway Committee

### Eva Patrone

- There has long been graffiti on the Washington Grove Marc Station sign. Because of the success of getting the other train station graffiti removed, Peter Nagrod contacted (through an online form) GRaffiti ABatement Partners, Inc. (GRAB), a not-for-profit private-public partnership supported by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) that works to eliminate graffiti vandalism in Montgomery County. The graffiti is still there, so Peter plans to make a phone call next.
- There was a vehicle accident in December on Washington Grove Lane; two SUVs drove into the Woods right before the entrance to the lake. They had to be towed out of the ditch. The committee feels this emphasizes the need for guardrails in certain places along WGL.
- The Gateway Committee held a meeting via Zoom on December 8 at 7:30pm. Highlights of the meeting include:
  - The committee will move forward with the welcome sign corrections; Peter will see if Sign City will accept \$1600 for all 3 signs.
  - The committee will continue to ask Montgomery County to put up guardrails along Washington Grove Lane in the locations where there is currently caution tape.

- Peter made a motion to approve the estimate from RJ to install bollards at Center and Oak and put up walkway signs. Approved by the committee.
- Peter showed the estimate for 6 sections of identity fencing along WGL: \$1,275. Discussion that maybe there was some confusion in the estimate -- go back to RJ for clarification.
- Peter made a motion to approve the surfacing of Grove Ave and 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. from McCauley to WGL. Approved by the Committee.
- The committee scheduled a meeting to walk down WGL to determine possible places for identity fencing. The meeting was held Sunday Dec. 11 at 10:30am.
- Jonathan offered to reach out again to Montgomery County Police and request speed cameras on WGL.

## **Historic Preservation Commission**

### **Rob Gilmore**

On Tuesday, December 20, 2022, the HPC met by zoom, starting at 7:30 p.m. and adjourning approximately 1.5 hours later. After reviewing and approving the agenda and minutes from the prior meeting, the HPC first discussed the application to request that the Town sell to the Van Nostrands two portions of 404 4th Avenue. In light of the preceding Town Council meeting, at which it was requested that the Van Nostrands split up their request to the Town to address the two pieces of property separately, it was decided to table any further action on that request by the HPC.

The committee then discussed planning for the Town's 150 Year Anniversary Celebration, the preservation / demolition ordinance plan, corrections to the Town's architectural survey, and the efforts by RASEC regarding the history of racial animus against nearby African American neighbors and committees. The next meeting of the HPC will be on Tuesday, January 17, 2023.

## **Lighting Committee**

### **Barbara Raimondo**

In preparation for the January 26 meeting with Pepco and the Public Service Commission, the Lighting Committee has developed a set of principles and goals for an agreement between municipalities and Pepco.

The Committee is contributing to the document on this topic being prepared by the MML.

Former state representative Al Carr has filed a complaint with Pepco regarding their street light policies. Pepco responded that he does not have standing to bring such a complaint, however, it suggested that the Public Service Commission order mediation. Since Mr. Carr does not represent any municipalities, they would not be bound by such mediation. However, the Lighting Committee is providing feedback to Mr. Carr on a proposed agreement.

## **Maintenance**

### **Rob Gilmore**

See the Contracts section.

## **Maryland Municipal League**

### **Rob Gilmore**

No updates. The next meeting of the Montgomery County chapter is January 19.

## **McCathran Hall**

### **Barbara Raimondo**

Nothing to report this month.

## **Planning Commission**

### **Christine Dibble**

- No new permit applications.
- A potential buyer for the Kershaw/Higdon property attended the last PC meeting to discuss the possibility of extending the basement to construct an indoor underground pool with patio above it. Dave Hix will review the

materials provided by the potential buyer and will provide him with guidance re: the conditions under which a permit could be issued.

- The PC is sending a letter to the Mayor and Council re: the rationale behind its recommendation to discourage the sale of surplus parcels owned by the Town.
- Re: the possibility of regulating owner-occupied rentals, Georgette and Paula Puglisi will determine if the County regulates these rentals, and if so, how, but if not, they will ascertain why the County has determined not to regulate them.
- The PC discussed moving the permitting process to a more electronic-based version. Dave Hix will contact the County to determine what they recommend municipalities do. (The County has moved to an all-electronic permit submission process.)

## **Racial and Social Equity Committee (RASEC)**

### **Barbara Raimondo**

*Anti-Racism Resolution.* The Committee ratified the Resolution draft. Council liaison, Barbara Raimondo, will let the Council know to expect the resolution for the February Council meeting. Dick has sent the ratified document to the HPC so they can give comments, if any, to the Council prior to the February meeting.

*Covenants.* Charlie submitted 5 Racially Restrictive Covenant Modification Packets with the owner's signatures for filing in the Land Records for Montgomery County. He prepared the packets for the property owners and assisted them in completing the forms. The submissions were approved and filed November 30. So now when the deed is searched, the restrictive covenant is clearly struck.

There will be a bulletin announcement asking if other owners would like to submit the forms for their property. Concurrently, the Town will continue to work with legislators to sponsor a bill which will allow municipalities to submit the forms with only the mayor's signature on behalf of the Town. Barbara will continue the work of former Councilor, Darrell Anderson, as the legislator's contact person.

*Film and Discussion Project.* "Deconstructing Karen" is a documentary film about two nonwhite facilitators who invite white women to dinner to discuss race. Chazz and Paula have just begun planning the format for viewing and follow-up

discussion. There is consideration for various group viewings and discussions. The goal is to start the project in the spring.

*Communications.* The RASEC domain-based email is [rasec@washingtongrovermd.org](mailto:rasec@washingtongrovermd.org). The current gmail messages are automatically being forwarded to the new address. The transition should be complete by the end of January.

*Town Inclusivity.* The workgroup is still aiming to release the data by February.

*Housing.* The third and final Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) informational program regarding the impact of ADU's on increasing diversity was held. There were 22 attendees. Our speaker noted that there the data was scarce and mixed. They do not conclusively increase racial and ethnic diversity, but some jurisdictions have instituted incentives with that purpose. The data regarding an increase in economic diversity and housing opportunities is positive. Based on survey comments from the 2<sup>nd</sup> program, we invited attendees to share their opinions about ADU's thus far. There were several people who were open to allowing them and some were enthusiastic to use some of the incentives. There were still some concerns and a question about whether anyone had asked any nonwhite people if they wanted to live in WG.

*Planning Commission issues related to RASEC.* At the Nov. 18 Planning Commission (PC) work session, the PC discussed licensing room rentals. This is of interest to RASEC because the licensing of rooms demonstrates the Town's acceptance of rentals and provides regulations which also can be applied to ADU's if the Town decides to allow them. Both room rentals and ADU's offer an opportunity for economic diversity and possibly other diversity. Gaithersburg rental licensing was explored. WG can decide if want to adopt some of the same policies. WG already has a list of Montgomery County ordinances that the Town has adopted. Montgomery County regulates those ordinances. The rental licensing can be added to that list as well as the ADU licensing if the Town decides to allow them.

The Town already uses the Montgomery County rules for Landlord-Tenant Relations which includes inspections for safety. The county has a spreadsheet showing which municipalities have adopted county ordinances and on the WG website Article 13 lists the Montgomery County chapters that apply to WG. If a



Montgomery County ordinance is based on a zoning requirement, we would need to change the WG zoning as well.

*Neighboring Communities.* New member Paul Thorne-Keziah shared information about his Divinity Internship and Peace Degree Project. He is committed to contributing to RASEC efforts in any way possible. His focus is helping with inter-community communications, facilitating conversations with leaders and others willing to help and creating events which could acknowledge the past and move forward.

*Storytelling Project.* Chazz has a structure and format in place to begin this virtual storytelling project by around the end of January. Residents from neighboring communities along with WG residents will be invited to share a story with the purpose of building trust and learn about each other.

Stories will revolve around a theme and will take place 2-3 times per year. The first session's theme will be food. People may use the theme to tell a story which embodies family or cultural traditions or recent experiences. The registration will come out soon and a 2-hour time slot will be reserved. Each person can speak 3-7 minutes.

*Council Updates Related to RASEC.* The decision about which holidays will be recognized by WG was decided by the Town Council Meeting on December 12. This issue was initiated by RASEC. We took the position that Juneteenth and Indigenous Peoples Day should be formally recognized as a small symbol of the aspirational value of WG to be inclusive.

## **Recreation Committee**

### **Eva Patrone**

Nothing to report this month.

## **Recreational Facilities**

### **(Woodward Park, Playground and Tennis Courts)**

#### **Eva Patrone**

On January 3, a resident reported picking up lots of trash in the park. Probably from New Year's, and hopefully not a recurring event.

## Shady Grove Crossing

**Barbara Raimondo**

Nothing reported this month.

## Sustainability Committee

**Dave Cosson**

The Sustainability Committee met on January 3<sup>rd</sup> by zoom and discussed the following:

**Green Team.** Committee members will be working to improve the “Resource Center” so as to make information more readily available to residents, including links within the Town website. Information will include transportation alternatives. The Team will be exploring alternatives to help families that lack resources to convert to more climate friendly energy sources.

**Renewable Electricity.** The latest Town Bulletin included the Committee’s article on Community Solar. A resolution is being prepared for the Town Council which would authorize the Town to Join a Community Solar organization when openings become available.

**ICLEI Data.** Letters are being drafted for the mayor’s signature to utilities serving the Town requesting data on the carbon emissions attributable to Town customers. Arrangements have been made for discussions with Potomac Disposal regarding the volume of trash and recyclables picked up in Town.

**EV Chargers.** The Committee understands the Planning Commission has approved Pepco’s application to install chargers in the parking area along Center Street. If approved by the Town Council, it is expected construction will begin in the near future.

**New Climate Plan Actions.** The Committee discussed which actions in the 2022 were accomplished and which are ongoing, with the intent to creating a new plan for 2023. Included on this list was an energy audit of the Town Hall.

**Budget.** The Committee will adopt its budget request for the next fiscal year at its February 7th meeting.

## Website and Communications

### Christine Dibble

New content:

- Agendas and minutes for Council, HPC, Planning Commission; Council Report
- Home page features:
  - Upcoming events of note
  - Sustainability features
  - Notices from the Mayor box
- Next big project: organizing images for quicker retrieval

## Woods Committee

### Dave Cosson

The Woods Committee met January 2<sup>nd</sup> by Zoom and discussed the following:

**Deer Management Updates:** One additional doe was harvested in December in the lower meadow for a total of four deer harvested to date. The season ends January 31<sup>st</sup>. BHFFMD did not hunt in the East Woods in December, so the Committee has no updates on dogs running loose in the Woods.

**Trail Maintenance and Repairs:** A resident's letter stating his appreciation for the East Woods trail entrance markings and requesting additional markings at trail intersections was reviewed. The trail markings in the East and West Woods will be completed in the next few months. Alternatives for repairing the broken Cherry Trail foot bridge were considered. RJ Landscaping will be asked for a price estimate. Price estimates for removal of 2 dead trees threatening the property of 2 residents along the East Woods borders were obtained from Tom Laws and sent to Mayor Compton for approval.

**Storm Water Mitigation RFP.** The RFP was distributed to a list of potential bidders with a reply date of February 10<sup>th</sup>. Bids will be opened at the Town Council meeting the following Monday, February 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Preliminary Budget Review.** The Committee reviewed its current FY23 budget for consideration of the Committee's budget in the coming (FY24) fiscal year. A FY24 budget proposal will be adopted at the February meeting for submission to the Town Council FY24 budget discussions.

**Washington Grove Lane.** Discussions continue with County officials regarding installation of guard rails at the two exposed steep ditches where culverts carry town storm water under Washington Grove Lane and empty into the West Woods. Committee co-chairs held an on-site meeting with the Gateway Committee chair and town resident, Steve Werts, (representing RJ Landscaping) to determine best locations for additional identity fencing on the Washington Grove Lane boundary of the West Woods. The Gateway Committee chair will inform RJ Landscaping of these locations.

**Tree City Application.** An on-line application for Tree City designation was submitted December 19<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to Joan Mahaffey, Kathy Lehman, and Marilyn Frey for completing the on-line application process.