

To the Mayor, Town Counselors, and fellow neighbors in The Town of Washington Grove,

Thank you for the opportunity to give some feedback on the proposed resolution "Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past".

I do appreciate the RASEC committee's work towards acknowledging the problems of the past and trying to work to be a stronger and better community going forward. There is a lot of important research that the RASEC committee is doing.

While I agree that it is important to recognize and acknowledge evils of the past, I nevertheless feel that this proposed resolution is too specific and negative. As written, I think the proposed resolution is counterproductive to what we should be aiming for.

I understand the pain of discrimination. Both Robert and I came from very humble families. His first home didn't even have running water. I grew up in the equivalent of Emory Grove, Maryland, in an unincorporated community that for years had no parks or playgrounds surrounded by great wealth. The complaints of discrimination listed in this resolution were not unique to Washington Grove and were very commonplace the community I grew up in, especially in the 1950's and 1960's.

I think this proposed resolution should focus less on the crimes of the past and more on strategies to be more equitable in the future. Even the most fervent Grover will admit that there is a lot of discrepancy on how rules and enforcement are enacted in this town. We need to work towards a more level playing field.

This is an important discussion and I hope it will promote change.

Personally, as someone who has experienced this kind of discrimination outlined in the RASEC Committee's research through much of my life, I don't think this document is healing and it will not help bring about the change and growth we want. Rather, I believe that a critical focus for Racial Equity going forward should be on Climate Change because it will affect minority communities most adversely.

I think a healthy community is like a garden. Yes, you do have to remove invasive plants before they spread but at the same time be careful of what else you are removing.

Years ago, I helped a group of Grover's organized by Betsy Klinger to remove a very invasive plant called garlic mustard along Ridge Road and thanks to our hard work, it is still largely gone!

Initially some of the neighbors who were helping pulling up the garlic mustard were taking huge chunks of the most beautiful topsoil at the same time and throwing both the garlic mustard and beautiful topsoil in a trash bag to be thrown away. I tried to encourage folks to shake out this amazing topsoil, this black gold that is so critical to rebirth. It does take some patience to remove topsoil from the roots.

To me, the topsoil represents the decay over the years of our history; it represents both the good and bad. This decayed matter is now useful for rebirth. Let us keep that fertile soil to grow together for the future.

Inequity like an invasive plant should be recognized and removed so it doesn't spread. We should remember our past, so we don't repeat mistakes. But we should not dwell on negativity and leave just barren ground so there is no room for re-growth. This resolution is so negative that I feel it is just throwing away the topsoil and leaving no positive energy for change. I don't think that this proposed resolution is an accurate description of what The Town of Washington Grove (TWG) deserves as a legacy.

TWG has evolved in many ways over the years in terms of trying to be more open and fairer. Do we have growth to do in that area? Yes, but let us acknowledge failings of TWG without leaving so much negativity and barren soil.

This discussion will help us grow more.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Virginia Quesada