

March 30, 2023

To: Mayor and Town Council, Town of Washington Grove

From: Joan Mahaffey, 102 Ridge Road, Washington Grove MD

Re: Resolution of the Town of Washington Grove Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

At the Monday, March 27, hearing on the Anti-Racist Resolution, I requested that the References document pdf, which is available on the Town website, be eliminated from the Resolution. I heartily support an Anti-Racist resolution. The 150th Celebration of the founding of the Camp Meetings is an appropriate time to apologize for sins of the past. A diverse community is a strong community.

The RASEC Committee could choose two directions for emphasis: **1.** Work to correct vestiges of institutional racism and discrimination today. **or 2.** Dig into the past to reveal institutional discrimination, which was nationwide, and document in detail how Washington Grove residents practiced and profited from this institutional discrimination. In support of the first focus, I have been proud to be a part of RASEC work such as removing restrictive covenants and supporting the work of Heritage Emory Grove. However, in reference to the second focus, this Resolution, particularly its supporting documentation, has a negative perception with biased condemnation of past events in Washington Grove which dishonor people who dedicated their lives to the foundation and preservation of the Town. I tried to resolve some of my issues with RASEC between November and February, but I was not successful.

You requested that I put in writing my objections to the References document which accompanies the Resolution itself. I object to including the References document pdf and have cited objections to specific pages included in the References document. Please bear with me. My responses are almost as verbose as the Resolution itself. The original References document is attached to this email above.

Slide 9 Supporting Reference 6 – Cheaper Labor

"J. H. Nugent was a very important person to Washington Grove before the days of the WSSC." states Rosalee Shantz on page 44 of [Grove Gatherings](#). This slide mentions Mr. Nugent by name along with his picture, inherently giving him respect. A sewage system was not available in Washington Grove before 1928. What were the alternatives before that? Also, one data point does not make a comparison. Where is information about higher priced Anglo workers? Where was alternative Anglo labor in rural Montgomery County? How many "people of color" collect our refuse today? Is this racism on our part today?

Slide 10 Supporting Reference 6 – Cheaper Labor

I do not know why this slide was included as part of Washington Grove's racist past. I have a completely different view of the relationship between Washington Grove and Emory Grove. They were two small communities surrounded by farmland. Without a doubt, they were not equal as far as wealth or opportunity, but they were two "sister communities" with a symbiotic relationship. Today many of the people who clean our houses, care for our elderly, and do our landscaping are "people of color." Is this racism on our part today?

Here are some of my more positive recollections:

- Rosalee Shantz enumerates the names of African American families who lived in Emory Grove. Families from Washington Grove personally knew families from Emory Grove and vice versa.
- My grandparents hired domestic and other help from Emory Grove because they knew them and knew they could use the livelihood. Emory Grove was a community of homeowners. They, too, had bills to pay. We were always respectful. I remember being very grateful when my grandmother sent Gertrude over to help with the laundry. Some of the jobs she did became mine when I was old enough.
- When it snowed, my grandfather, with his own money, hired Robert Taylor and his horse drawn sledge to plow a walkway between his house and our house next door. We would run to the window when we heard the horse's jingle bells and watch in awe as Mr. Taylor drove his horse and sledge down our sidewalk.
- One line in Rosalee Shantz's book also talks about interpersonal support. Page 55 of Rosalee's [Grove Gatherings](#) talks about Miss Dora Hendricks, a Grove resident. We called her "Aunt Dora." (For years Miss Dora drove a little old Ford named "John Henry." By 1953 it was worn out and rightfully so. She had purchased it in 1931 and it had covered over 400,000 miles without accident. This little car carried supplies to needy families that she somehow learned about. She and the Ford always managed to carry someone to a clinic or a bag of coal to a cold Negro family.)

- On page 63 Rosalee states that one summer Mary Liz Swan, Major Walker's cook from Emory Grove, "went to Major Walker and asked him to build her a little two story house....He built her that little house, the first two story house in Emory Grove." One cottage was even moved from Washington Grove to Emory Grove.
- In the 1950's Emory Grove residents would sell their farm produce from a truck driving up and down roads in Town. My mother would send my brothers and me out to purchase fresh corn, tomatoes and other vegetables.
- When we were young, my father would take us along with him to farms along Emory Grove Road when he had business with the families. I did not pay much attention to the adults' conversations, but we kids were fascinated with the farm animals.
- Emory Grove resident Betsy Davis assisted with my father's birth in the upper room at 111 Maple Avenue. Later, when Ms. Davis was older, my father took her to medical appointments. He also helped organize and attended her funeral. I have pictures taken during the same photo shoot of my infant father in the arms of his grandfather, his father, his mother, and Betsy Davis. Ms. Davis was always held in high regard by my family.
- I would sometimes ride my bike to Emory Grove on Sunday evening and sit outside the Methodist Church to hear the lovely choir.

This is the kind of interaction and compassion I think of when I remember Washington Grove. I left Washington Grove when I married in 1967. I lived for 35 years in southern Arizona. When I returned in 2002, to assist my aging parents, the Emory Grove community except for the Emory Grove United Methodist Church had been destroyed by urban renewal. Mid-County Highway divided the two areas. Looking at the two communities today, Washington Grove thriving and Emory Grove bearing the brunt of institutionalized racism, I understand why there is resentment in Emory Grove. Some of the comments I have heard about recollections from Emory Grove residents are very disturbing to me. We need to listen to their recollections and encourage conversation between members of the two communities to move forward.

Slides 11 to 15 Supporting Reference 7 – School Segregation

This reference and slides contain facts about the reprehensible segregated systems in Montgomery County.

Some issues, such as the segregation of schools, while unjust and despicable, were State issues. A person or administrator could be arrested for trying to desegregate schools in Maryland before 1954. Before 1954, my father had a conversation with the pastor at St. Martin's in Gaithersburg asking when our parish school would be integrated. The pastor replied that he would integrate the school as soon as it was legal. The Supreme Court decided *Brown vs. Board of Education* in late summer 1954. That September, St. Martin's opened as an integrated school.

Interestingly, there was never a public school in Washington Grove itself. The new school Longview Elementary School in Emory Grove was built in 1953 before the new Washington Grove Elementary School on Oakmont was opened in 1956 to replace the old two-room schoolhouse.

Slides 16 and 17 Supporting Reference 8 – Washington Grove Racial Covenants

There is no question that the restrictive covenants were designed to restrict people of color from buying property in certain areas. I do not question statistics on the enduring economic consequences for African Americans because of restrictive covenants and other discriminatory housing policies. However, according to Charlie Challstrom, not all properties in Washington Grove had these covenants. Charlie could not find deed covenants for Albert Osborn's property at 109 Maple nor for Roy McCathran's property at 111 Maple, my great grandfather and my grandfather. Many other properties in Washington Grove did not have deed covenants. What do the authors of the resolution mean by "The Town of Washington Grove **specified** that homes adopt racially restrictive covenants"? What was the legal process exactly? How did some people avoid having these deed covenants?

Slide 19 Supporting Reference 8 – Theater Segregation

The Town did not reject the request of the group who wanted to use the Auditorium for theater productions by an outside group as stated by the References document. The Town Council tied on the vote and the mayor refused to break the tie. Eventually the theater group withdrew their request.

I was too young to remember the 1949 issue, but to associate the 1961 vote with racism is a misconception in my opinion. I vividly remember that night because my mother was in labor, but my father left her to attend the meeting; the issue was that important to him. He voted against the theater project, not because of racist issues, but because a commercial theater venture, with a faulty financial history, in the center of town with its lights, noise, and traffic, would be an exploitative threat to the residential nature of the Town. The writers of the resolution wrote to me that they were not associating the two meetings. Then why include them in proximity on the same slide? The Auditorium was not

demolished because of racism. It was rapidly deteriorating because it was built in a low area. The Town could not afford to repair it and bring it up to code for public use.

Slide 20 Supporting Reference 10– Railway Station

If the Washington Grove train station was so segregated, why does the photo show white people purchasing tickets at the outside window? The reference slide 20 insinuates that the window was for persons of color – “and one outside for blacks.” My father told me “The Washington Grove train station was segregated. It didn’t matter what color you were. There was one side for the men and one side for the women because the women didn’t want to walk on the floor the men were spitting on.” My understanding is that Washington Grove never enforced racial segregation at the train station.

Slide 22 Supporting Reference 11 – Closed Gates

The Grove archivist and a member of the Historic Preservation Commission meticulously examined Association minutes and produced the report *WG&SegregationGates&FencesNotes*. According to this report, the main intent of the fence and gates was to protect private property which was unoccupied ten months of the year and to prevent heavy farm wagons from hauling goods through the Camp Meeting property on the way to the railway depot. This report should be available on the Town website. There was never a fence or gates in my lifetime. Again, the authors have taken a complex issue and interpreted it as a purely racist issue citing the gate closing in 1897.

Slide 22 Supporting Reference 11 - Opposition to Sidewalk

This slide is very disturbing to me. My father’s name is included in the middle of the paragraph discussing opposition to the sidewalk. This would insinuate that he opposed the sidewalk. In fact, he was instrumental in having the sidewalk installed. The misconception this page provides is libel in my opinion. Furthermore, when residents along Washington Grove Lane opposed the sidewalk, residents to the north used Town roads and walkways, such as Hickory, Chestnut and Grove, to get to the train station and the commercial corner. People did not have to walk in traffic on Laytonsville Pike, as Washington Grove Lane was called then. At the time there were few sidewalks in upper Montgomery County. Most people in upper Montgomery County, regardless of color, were forced to walk along the roadways.

Slides 23 and 24 Supporting Reference 12 – Minstrel Shows in Washington Grove

I do not question the effect of minstrel shows on the African American population. I am not trying to justify minstrel shows. Even in Washington Grove, the minstrel shows “ignored the damaging history of slavery” as stated in the Resolution. There is reason to apologize.

The references on pages 23 and 24 are from firsthand sources, the Montgomery Sentinel and the Washington Star. In their response to my objection to the references, the authors of the Resolution said that names were not included. These newspaper clippings list the names of dozens of Washington Grove men. Some are ancestors of five or six current Washington Grove families. Why do all these names need to be included? Furthermore, one article states: “A parade of the troupe, headed by a real Negro band, through the streets of the Grove attracted much attention to the performance.” If minstrel shows in Washington Grove were such a mockery of African American, why did a “real Negro band” assist in the mockery? The authors of the Resolution assign the worst possible intent to these Grove men, to mock the African American community. My grandfather was very interested in many types of music. He was a very respectful man. I cannot accept that his intent was to mock. I knew my grandfather and the authors of this Resolution did not.

Slide 26 Supporting Reference 12 – My Personal Information

I am thankful that my address, phone number and email address are no longer accessible, although my name is still listed. The artifacts listed on page 26 were found in an old chest in the basement of my parents’ house after they passed. When I donated them to the Town archives, I resisted signing the donation form and only signed reluctantly. I would never have donated the artifacts if I knew they would be used to dishonor my family, other town residents, and the Town of Washington Grove itself.

These are my perceptions. I am astounded that the RASEC would go to such depths to disparage Washington Grove and its past residents. From my point of view, this document as written is divisive and replete with progressive piety and misinterpretations. It is unnecessarily vitriolic and self-flagellating. This document and specifically the inclusion of the References documentation pdf as written will do more harm than good. Therefore, I request that the Reference document pdf be eliminated from any Resolution.