

**Statement of Robert Gilmore, Washington Grove Town Councilor,
in Support of Resolution 2023-01.**

I strongly support the proposed Resolution 2023-01, “Acknowledging Washington Grove’s Racially Exclusionary Past,” and as a Town Councilor, I intend to vote for its adoption.

America’s legacy of institutional racism, supported and tolerated by government, lives with us today. Our society has made great strides in acknowledging this legacy, apologizing for its pernicious past, and committing to remedying its ongoing effects. But there is work left to be done. Passing the Resolution is a modest, but meaningful, measure, for Washington Grove to participate in this process—to help bend, even if just a little, the moral arc of our country towards racial justice.

Today, Washington Grove is a town that embraces and espouses justice. But if we are honest, as this Resolution commits us to being, it was not always so. It is evident from the research of the RASEC Committee, and others before it, that for many decades after its founding—most of its history—the Town was racially exclusionary in many respects, ranging from formal legal policies (racial covenants in our property deeds) to hurtful practices (blackface minstrel shows, our status as being viewed as a “sundown” town).

It may be tempting to downplay this sort of racism as a product of the times, as no different or no worse than the rest of the county, state, or country. But that is not a helpful sentiment. For there *were* people and groups—white people, white groups—that opposed their society’s institutional racism. We dishonor those people and groups, and disrespect moral agency more generally, if we shrug our shoulders and simply say “that’s how things were in the old days.”

Putting that aside, I do not read the Resolution as singling out past leaders or members of the Town, or even the Town as a whole, for *exceptional* participation in racist policies and practices. It simply acknowledges that the Town’s government and residents were, in important respects, complicit in the mainstream, racially unjust, ways of our country for many, many years.

The Resolution also helps us recognize that the inheritance of our racially exclusionary past still is with us, even if not the result of current, intentional, racism. The Town is still overwhelmingly white, and relatively affluent, while

the surrounding community is one of the most diverse areas of the country, but also relatively disadvantaged economically. It is well known in the surrounding community that, disproportionately, children from the Town do not go to the neighborhood schools, but other schools instead. Even less obvious facets of our current life, such as making Maple Lake inaccessible to the (overwhelmingly, black and brown) people whose neighborhoods surround and overlook it, or taking measures in how we managed the Town soccer field that dissuaded Latino families from their soccer games and gatherings, reinforce racial separateness. As the RASEC Committee has helped document, and as we have heard from people such as Reverend Tim Warner of Emory Grove United Methodist church, these and other current features of Washington Grove, coupled with the town's overtly racially exclusionary past (remembered and spoken of by older Emory Grove residents, for instance), still engender skepticism and mistrust of the Town among our neighbors.

Passing this Resolution is a step to repairing that breach; to making amends for our predecessors' promotion or toleration of racial animus in the past; and to reinforcing our dedication to an inclusive and equitable present and future. To those who have suggested modifications to the Resolution that would result in cutting out content, or softening language, I fear that such modifications will be viewed by many people within and outside of the Town—rightly or wrongly—as white-washing the purpose and import of the document, and perhaps calling into question the Town's commitment to racial justice and healing. That would be terribly unfortunate and counterproductive. The Resolution may not be perfectly crafted—no document of its nature will be—but we must not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. The Resolution is a powerful and persuasive call for our Town's reckoning with the history and impact of racism. It deserves the support of all Town residents.

I want to thank the RASEC Committee for their efforts in preparing the proposed Resolution and more generally for promoting awareness and equity, and Councilor Barbara Raimondo for introducing and championing the Resolution.

I urge my fellow Councilors to vote for the Resolution's passage.