



Public Hearing
March 27, 2023
ZOOM Videoconference
Approved May 22, 2023

Public Hearing

Resolution 2023-01 “Acknowledging Washington Grove’s Racially Exclusionary Past”

Mayor Compton called the public hearing on Resolution 2023-01 to order at 7:35 p.m. He gave a brief history of the Resolution and reviewed appropriate conduct in a public hearing, which is not a debate but held for the purpose of taking public comments.

To begin the Hearing, Mayor Compton called upon drafters of the resolution from the Racial and Social Equity Committee (RASEC).

- *Paula Puglisi* thanked all who helped research and write the Resolution. She made a statement explaining how it all started, some background events and the intentions behind the Resolution.
- *Dick Cavicchi* read a statement urging adoption of the complete resolution. He noted apologies by politicians that have been made without reference to specific past events seem empty and mere words.

Mayor Compton called on the following individuals, who presented their testimony:

- *Tad Stahnke* thanked those who helped with this resolution and supported its passage. He noted the importance of acknowledging and not addressing the past with indifference, of removing offensive covenants from deeds, and ensuring that past offenses are acknowledged rather than erased from memory.
- *Joan Mahaffey* stated the 150 Year Anniversary Celebration was a good time for Resolution 2023-01 and addressing past racial offenses. She is concerned about misinformation in the document references and listed some references that she feels should be stricken. Some references are hurtful to her family.

Councilor Christine Dibble requested Joan submit a document to the Town Council detailing the specific misinformation.

- *Lisa Kokes* read a statement about inclusions and the use of “Whereas” so many times. She would like to see less “Whereas” paragraphs, fewer shame driven statements and more emphasis on moving forward.

- *Reverend Tim Warner* read his written statement in support of the resolution. He spoke to acknowledging the truth of the past by citing historical facts, including the existence of intentionally racist environments. He ended by saying people are ready for this acknowledgement and apology, which will be an important step to creating the best future for all races together.

Councilor Dave Cosson thanked Reverend Warner and hopes he will continue to be part of the movement.

- *Bob Booher* stated this is an important step in an important journey that we must do together. He stated our Town takes pride that we are different, a place apart, and it was valuable to acknowledge the original Town actions.
- *Paul Thorne-Keziah* stated he was a neighbor who lived on Bounding Bend Court. He appreciates all of the work being done on the resolution and believes it is a community decision and part of a larger process. He went on to say he did not buy a home in Washington Grove because he felt it was too white. He thanked everyone for their efforts.
- *Lynn Mento*, a brand new resident, said it is the right thing to do. She also suggested the Town Hall (currently named McCathran Hall) be renamed, perhaps after abolitionist and forward thinker Josiah Henson.

At this point, *Councilor Christine Dibble* asked about the process for making changes to the resolution and how the document could be edited. Mayor Compton noted the Town Council had agreed to review the Resolution at their April 10th meeting. He suggested that in the event of material revisions he would recommend the Council not vote on adoption, but that town residents should be given additional time to comment on the new language.

- *Sita Strother* thanked Dick Cavicchi, Paula Puglisi, other RASEC members, and Reverend Warner for their comments. She referred to Washington Grove as a Sundown Town which is defined as unsafe and unwelcome for African American people at night.
- *Oscar Ramos* explained his journey to the Grove and admitted he had reservations about moving to such a white community. He wondered what it meant in terms of our past and our future.
- *Larry French* stated it is inconceivable to him that this wouldn't pass. In the words of John Lewis, "this is good trouble" and we should move forward. He also brought up institutional racism. Larry asked why there has been no report about the results of the questionnaire distributed by RASEC to residents in the Fall of 2020 or 2021. The results would be germane to this topic.

Councilor Barbara Raimondo, Council liaison to RASEC, said the questionnaire is finished and the information has been evaluated. A document will be brought to the Council soon.

- *Peggy Koniz-Booher* thanked everyone for their hard work. She then asked a process question. She wants to be able to read other comments, specifically those from Joan

Mahaffey. She believes the question of intent needs further discussion. She would like to participate in another discussion, perhaps in the Town Hall.

Councilor Barbara Raimondo disagreed, noting discussion of such a resolution has been going on for a long time, and quoting James Baldwin; "How long do we have to wait?"

- *Mimi Bolotin* asked if the vote would be taken on the Resolution with the supporting documents included? Tension arises in the supporting documentation and she is not persuaded that these two documents should be approved together.
- *Paula Puglisi* commented that it would be difficult to determine the intentions of persons involved in past decisions and actions taken in Washington Grove. She wondered if there is really any point to trying to do so when the harm is already done.

Mayor Compton asked for additional comments. There were none. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Kathryn L. Lehman, Town Clerk