

February 29, 2024

To the Mayor and Town Council of Washington Grove:

The RASEC proposal to rename McCathran Hall will not undo any actual effects of racism. On the other hand, it is bound to cause very real pain, not only to members of the McCathran family (some of whom who still live here with us), but to other residents of Washington Grove as well. Removing Roy McCathran's name likely will infect Washington Grove with bitterness and division for a generation.

RASEC states in its slide presentation that the recommendation is not about "reading into Roy McCathran's intentions or beliefs," or "slighting the good he did as Mayor of Washington Grove." Nevertheless, the recommendation does exactly that. The recommendation diminishes (by ignoring) Roy McCathran's many years of service and scapegoats him for activities that implicated the whole community.

The recommendation notes the widespread racial attitudes of the Jim Crow era and claims that "We are not singling Mayor McCathran out as the sole participant in this racist activity." The recommendation does single out Roy McCathran, and saying otherwise does not make it so. The recommendation conflates Roy McCathran (the person) with Jim Crow (the era) and thus uses him as a symbol to "move beyond honoring those times."

Roy McCathran, whatever his faults and virtues, was not a time or an era. He was a person. His name on the hall honors him for the good he did. It does not reference his times.

No tangible benefit will result from shaming Roy McCathran's name (and by extension his descendants). The Council should reject the RASEC proposal for this cruel, ineffective gesture.

Sincerely,  
Bob Christin