

Current RASEC proposals are not appropriate

February 25, 2024

Dear Mayor Compton, and Councillors Dibble, Gilmore, Nagrod, Patrone, Raimondo and Warfield,

We are fortunate to have people on RASEC who not only care deeply about racial justice (as I think many of us do), but who also take the time to meet and focus on these issues. I believe they have already made important connections with a neighboring community and will continue to take forward-looking actions for addressing social equity.

I urge you to not support any of the current action recommendations made by the RASEC committee.

1. Website. I know of no existing problem. It is volunteer operated and professionally run. All changes are directed by our Town government.
2. Bike Path. The Town is already engaged in that process. There is no need for replication or more complexity. Anyone can attend the committee meetings related to that if they want to be engaged.
3. Retain the name "McCathran Hall" with pride.

I am writing as one who would not have been allowed to live in this Town under the old deed restrictions, and certainly not under the old framework that this Town was a Christian religious community. I am also writing as someone who understands that society changes over time -- things that everyone just **accepted as "the way it is" might have been thought fine in 1910 or 1960 and completely reprehensible now.**

I think many of us love this Town for its incredible physical character and layout, and that is precisely because it was laid out as a Methodist camp meeting. Its nonsecular origin benefits today's residents. The now unenforceable deed restriction was a product of our history. Roy McCathran's own home did not have that then common restriction -- that to me says everything -- he was a lawyer who was aware of what he was not including in his deed. If you listened to Phil Edwards' history talk, the transition from religious association to municipality was a complicated road with lots of disagreements and roadblocks, yet Roy McCathran helped make it happen. If the Town became part of the County without the municipal powers the Town has today, is there any chance we would still have the incredible, historic layout and treed landscape that we have today? Thank Roy McCathran for his role in that, as well as his role in having our own planning and zoning authority and other self-governing functions.

The letter submitted in response to this RASEC proposal by Phil Edwards, a historian of Washington Grove, is important. His research has never found "an iota of racism" in Roy McCathran. That speaks volumes. As to the black face -- this was a common (yes, abhorrent)

part of our society for a very long time. Most people did not understand its racist connotations. An action must be evaluated in the complicated and full historic context within which it exists. In summer camp talent shows in the 60's I remember there was always someone who wanted to be Al Jolsen and Swanee was sung in blackface -- no one understanding the serious issues involved. Have you watched a movie from the early 60's -- how many Chinese laundry roles existed, spoken in horrible broken English, with fake Chinese accents? No one questioned it and everyone laughed -- because people did not understand the inherent racism. Roy McCathran should not be the scapegoat for the nationwide racial failures of his times.

If we are going to focus on names used, George Washington was an actual slaveholder. Shouldn't the name of the Town, Washington Grove, be changed first? Interesting that many places, including our capital city, retain that name. Washington's bravery and leadership before and after the Revolution helped create this country, and he set the example of the first peaceful transfer of power. Those are enormous contributions to this country's existence. In his own way, the decades Roy McCathran spent working to create and then govern this Town allow us to enjoy this amazing place now. Isn't he the Mayor who said that he spent 10 years learning to do the job and the next 10 trying to get someone else to take it -- an indication of how much effort he devoted to all of the Town's functions and existence. Do we ignore his lifetime of positive contributions to the creation of this municipality and to its functioning for decades?

While most of us know that Emory Grove was also a Methodist camp, did you know that it was named after Methodist bishop John Emory? He was a slaveholder and opposed abolition. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Emory , and https://w1.mtsu.edu/borders/archives/1/Methodist_Bishops_and_Abolitionism.pdf

One of RASEC's own guidelines is to put relationships first, yet I am afraid this proposed name change does the opposite. In fact some of our dear neighbors who are Roy McCathran's progeny devote a huge number of hours and efforts to help our Town function, on committees and as volunteers, and have done so for decades. Another RASEC guideline is historical fidelity -- I believe to honor that concept any action in history must be reviewed with a broad, intensive understanding of the norms and society of its time.

4. I don't believe there is a need to hire a DEI trainer now. First, our council and committee members come and go -- any training now might have to be repeated every year or so. I second Tom Land's suggestions in his comments on this topic. We should address this if and when there is a specific need.

5. I don't believe there is a need to add more bureaucracy to an already volunteer town government by the formalized communication system proposed. I thought one aspect of RASEC is to continue communications with others outside of the Town, and there have been a number of events already. If something has happened which was a problem, the need would be to have that discussion directly -- come to a Council meeting and discuss, for example. Should every Town committee be setting up another layer of bureaucracy to be able to communicate with Town government? This mystifies me.

While I disagree with all of these particular proposals, I would certainly love to see forward-focused actions to increase our connections with our surrounding communities. I have learned a lot from some of the videos RASEC posted of conversations with Emory Grove neighbors of what life was like for them in more segregated times, and understand the need for creating more

opportunities for interaction. Even better, I would be thrilled if RASEC would find ways to encourage folks of different backgrounds to consider making their homes in the Grove.

Sincerely,

Shelley W.