

February 24, 2024

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

The following are my thoughts and comments on the five proposed recommendations from the Racial and Social Equity Committee (RASEC). **I do not support any of the recommendations, and instead, have a few of my own.**

For ease of reference, I numbered RASEC's recommendations in the order they appear in their cover letter:

1. Recommendation to Create a Town Website Protocol
2. Recommendation to Collaborate with Neighboring Communities Regarding the Shared Use Path (includes two attachments)
3. Recommendation to Consider Restoring the Name of Our Town Hall to 'Town Hall' (includes two slide presentations)
4. Recommendation to Hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Specialist
5. Recommendation to Establish a Communication System between the Town of Washington Grove and Heritage Emory Grove

1. I do not support the recommendation to "create a Town website protocol" because there is not a problem that needs to be solved. Washington Grove benefits enormously from the efforts of many volunteers. Our mayor is a volunteer. Our Town Councilors are volunteers. Washington Grove is not a bureaucracy needing protocols, for the website or any of the other Town functions. The Town does not have a protocol for the Town Bulletin. The Mayor, the Town Councilors, and the relevant Town volunteers often solve problems as they arise, and the solutions are often crafted to address the specific details of the issue. The recommendation to find three additional Town volunteers for additional website oversight will stress our Town's already existing struggles finding people to take on volunteer tasks. Finally, if a resident writes a letter to the Mayor and Town Council -- as I am doing here -- it is considered an official communication and is then posted on the website to be available for other residents to see, and I believe it is subject to First Amendment free speech protections. I do not believe a new protocol is needed to support the aspirations in the Town's recently adopted resolution.
2. I do not support the recommendation to "collaborate with neighboring communities regarding the shared use path" because the Town is already involved in collaborative efforts with surrounding communities, such as the Town of Gaithersburg and the community association at Shady Grove Crossing. Our volunteer neighbors on the Town's Shared Path Committee are working very collaboratively with neighboring groups.
3. I do not support the recommendation to "consider restoring the name of our Town hall to 'Town Hall' for many reasons. First, I do not believe this proposal is respectful of our

current neighbors, individuals who grew up in Washington Grove and still live here. It is remarkable that the Town has 223 houses and over 20 residents grew up here, people who therefore have ancestral connections with the Town. Second, I note that the Town decided in 1957 to honor the Town's first Mayor, Roy McCathran, who served and guided the Town through the first 20 years of its evolution into a functioning municipality. The residents of the Town in 1957 held him in high regard and wanted to acknowledge his enormous contributions over his 20 dedicated years of devotion to the Town. I see it as a fitting acknowledgment and see no reason for a change. Twenty years is a long time.

Each individual, me, you, and all those people we have honored through the naming of our athletic fields, parks, walkways, and the hall have their foibles and have made mistakes that show poor judgment according to either the ethical standards of that time, or our current ethical standards. I have made mistakes. In the last 15 years I showed up at a Halloween party in black face (as a Rastafarian). I hope we can forgive each other for our mistakes and move on individually and collectively to take positive steps to rectify how others might view our individual and collective history. I hope we can take positive actions, now, rather than going backwards in history to find individuals to vilify for something that, when we apply today's standards, would be unacceptable. Rather than worrying about past offenses -- and presuming that these things might be viewed as offenses -- I would like to see residents take positive actions with their own time and energy.

I would like to see Town residents taking positive actions, instead of digging into history, because I believe building real connections with the enormous diversity of people in Montgomery County will be more effective at changing perceptions of Washington Grove than any of the RASEC proposals. Some of these positive actions might include attending Sunday services at the Emory Grove church -- which I acknowledge will take courage, serving food at local churches or food pantries, working with the MoCo Coalition for the Homeless, and finally inviting people from neighboring areas, such as Shady Grove Crossing, Emory Grove, Newport Estates, and Towne Crest to events such as our 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations. Please RASEC members, start taking positive actions to build connections -- to get to know, personally, people in our neighboring communities -- rather than spend time and energy discussing and creating slides and proposals that chastise current Town residents for things that happened in the past. Take positive actions -- go pray, eat, walk, talk and get to know the African-Americans, Latinx, South and East Asians, and all the other diverse people who live around us in Montgomery County. We are blessed to live in one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the country; four of the top 10 most diverse cities in the United States are in Montgomery County -- Silver Spring, Rockville, Germantown, and Gaithersburg.

4. I do not support the proposal to “hire a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specialist” because I believe my neighbors, who volunteer for Town positions, whether they be for the Town government or committees, are upstanding, well-intentioned individuals that do not need guidance from a hired DEI specialist. I am aware of a local group, that Paula Puglisi introduced to the Lake Committee, that offers FREE TRAININGS related to diversity, equity and inclusion. If free training is available, and it becomes apparent that some group needs guidance, then I recommend we wait for a specific situation to arise and avail ourselves of the training rather than paying for a DEI specialist to be on retainer. I do not think it would be a useful expenditure of Town resources.
  
5. I do not support the proposal that the Town Council needs to take an action to “establish a communication system between the Town of Washington Grove and Heritage Emory Grove”. I believe that RASEC could already be doing this. I am surprised that members of RASEC have not already created personal connections between them and members of Emory Grove that have fostered sharing between the two communities about events. I would be happy to get information about Emory Grove events that we are invited to attend. I’d go. Yes, RASEC members, please go forth and take this positive step to create personal connections between our Town and Emory Grove residents, invite them to our events, invite them to dinner parties, invite them to our movie series, etc.

And, while we’re at it, why limit the sharing of information about events to Emory Grove? I do not see any reason that individuals or groups in Town would be restrained from posting announcements about events, like the Polar Bear Plunge, with Shady Grove Crossing, Newport Estates, Towne Crest and Emory Grove. In fact, I was going to follow up with the Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) and see if we might coordinate to get more up-county people to support CCAN’s fund raising by participating in our Polar Bear plunge -- here in Maple Lake.

Many thanks, Mayor and Town Council, for all you do for the Town!!!

Sincerely,

Tom Land