

Eva's Comments on the 2024 Recommendations from RASEC

First of all, I continue to fully support the 2023 RASEC resolution, and I appreciate the time, effort, and thought that went into the RASEC survey, their presentations/discussions, and their recent recommendations.

There has been a lot of discussion about the recommendations, especially the potential re-naming McCathran Hall. This issue has brought out negativity and divisiveness that I find concerning. On the other hand, it has perhaps shown a real need for the town to consider examining – with open minds – difficult topics such as this one.

In listening to resident concerns at council meetings and reading through the submitted comments, one thing became clear: I was hearing from the same handful of residents. So **I reached out to some of the newer residents in town (mostly in the 20's to 40's age range), and was worried by their responses.** Some felt that discussions (of this issue and others) were often dominated by long-time residents. Some didn't feel comfortable speaking up at meetings or sharing their opinions through public comment.

This is a town run by volunteers. The younger residents are the future of Washington Grove, so it's important to make them feel welcome and included. **Without the investment of the younger generations, the town will literally fall apart, and all that Roy McCathran did to keep Washington Grove a unique and independent town will be for nothing.**

I fear the polarizing discussion over the RASEC recommendations will make newer and younger residents feel alienated or disengaged, and thus less likely to participate in the workings of the town. Listserv comments and public letters are being read by people who don't feel comfortable responding back, and **I hope everyone will think about what's more important: the name of a building, or the continuation of our town.**

I will get to my decision on the re-naming below, but I do hope this discussion can turn in a more positive direction. Let's put our energy into making Washington Grove a welcoming place, both for neighboring communities and newer Grove residents.

Eva's Comments and Decisions on the RASEC Recommendations

1. To Create a Town Website Protocol

I understand and appreciate that the RASEC-recommend protocol would demonstrate (in accordance with the 2023 resolution) that the town will not tolerate exclusionary, racist, discriminatory, insulting, accusatory, harassing, threatening, or anonymous posts on the Town website.

However, **such a protocol would add a level of bureaucracy that seems difficult to implement** in a town run by volunteers. Because of the gray-area nature of deciding if a comment might be "exclusionary, racist, discriminatory, insulting, accusatory, harassing, or threatening," it would at times be a challenging and time-consuming task, and it's important to

get comments onto the website in a timely manner. As a side note, I'm not clear on the legality of the proposed protocol.

Already the town website does not post anonymous letters, so the views posted are clearly the views of the person who submitted the letter and not the views of the town. Perhaps the website can state this in a clear way at the top, something to the effect of, "**views expressed in the following correspondences are solely that of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Town of Washington Grove, the Mayor, the town council, or any other associated parties.**"

Eva's Decision: No. Not necessary, especially with the addition of a "views expressed" disclaimer on the website.

2. To Collaborate with Neighboring Communities Regarding the Shared Use Path

I am *strongly* in favor of the shared use path, and after many frustrating setbacks I'm desperate to see it come to fruition. The path itself would be a huge step towards inclusion and social equity. I would like to defer to Jay Everhart, who (in addition to other residents) has been working diligently with Montgomery County for *years* to make the path happen. He says:

"...it is possible that by the beginning of the next decade the Connector will remain uncompleted. The more that parties press the County and DOT, the faster the Connector will be built."

Therefore, I don't think collaboration on a "vision" is appropriate at this point since any deviation from the current design could cause yet another set-back, but I do agree it would be helpful for neighboring communities to put pressure on the County and DOT to build the Connector.

This is not something the Council needs to do or approve. Yes, RASEC members should absolutely go ahead and work with the Washington Grove Connector Shared Use Pathway Project Liaison (SUPPL) Committee to inform neighboring communities about the Connector and advise them on how best to put pressure on the County to build it.

Eva's decision: Yes, RASEC (with the help of Path Liaison Committee) should absolutely encourage neighboring communities to work with us in advocating for the shared use path, but this is not something council needs to do or approve.

3. To Consider Restoring the Name of McCathran Hall to "Town Hall."

At this point the name change issue has *certainly* been considered by many, although maybe not in the way RASEC envisioned. The majority of residents submitting comments are against the name-change, but I know there are residents who are for the change, as well as those who support it but don't feel comfortable saying so publicly.

As per Georgette Cole's letter, Roy McCathran "successfully proposed and implemented the creation of an independent municipality" and "pushed for the element of our Charter which vests the authority of the Town in its voting residents at the annual Town Meeting." It seems Roy McCathran's legacy is the town itself, and perhaps we need not keep the hall named after him, especially if doing so could be perceived as insensitive or unwelcoming. A neutral, inclusive name like Washington Grove Town Hall could make sense.

On the other hand, many residents find the name-change insensitive, and this issue is causing such tension and division, I think at this point it would cause more harm than good. I'd rather spend our energy and efforts in a different way.

Eva's Decision: I side in favor of keeping the name McCathran Hall. We have *considered* the re-naming, as RASEC recommended, and town can certainly consider it again in future years.

4. To Hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Specialist

As an instructor at the Writer's Center, I recently took a 2-hour DEI training via Zoom that I found helpful and interesting. I would support RASEC coordinating a similar training for council members, committee chairs, and other interested residents. It could be offered once a year, around the time when new council members are elected. All council members are required to take an online training on the Maryland Open Meeting Act, so taking a DEI training as well makes sense to me.

Eva's Decision: It's not necessary to hire a DEI specialist, but I support RASEC finding an appropriate DEI training to be offered once a year. I would suggest it be required for council members, recommended for committee chairs, and offered to interested residents.

5. To Establish a Communication System between the Town of Washington Grove and Heritage Emory Grove

I fully support communicating with surrounding communities, including Emory Grove, however **I don't understand the need for this recommendation to be approved by council. The RASEC committee is already in communication with neighbors from Emory Grove.** Members of RASEC (or any resident) can reach out to surrounding communities to share upcoming Washington Grove events and news. I myself have done this by reaching out to Emory Grove Methodist Church and Washington Grove Elementary School to give them information about Summer in the Parks.

Of course we want clear and open communication among Washington Grove and our neighbors, both for the sharing of news/events and other conversations. **I think RASEC is will within their power to come up with a way to communicate with surrounding communities in whatever way they decide makes sense.** They can cc the RASEC Council Liaison on emails so that town council remains in the loop. They can forward announcements to Kathy for the bulletin and post them to the listserv.

Eva's Decision: Unless I am misunderstanding this recommendation, it seems like something RASEC can create on their own; it's not something that needs approval or action by the council.

I hope it's clear I've taken a long time to think through these recommendations. I've tried to keep an open mind and consider everyone's comments.

Sincerely,
Eva Patrone