

Mayor John Compton
Washington Grove Town Councilors
McCathran Hall
Washington Grove, MD 20880

Dear Mr. Mayor Compton and Washington Grove Town Councilors:

I vividly remember my first chili supper a couple of years ago at our town hall. Dick and I were sitting with folks who have been here awhile, and I asked one of them why there were so few people of color in Washington Grove. That person said "I don't know - it must be economic."

Throughout its history, Washington Grove has remained a white community: the great majority of African Americans who passed through here were workers, often performing subservient tasks for low pay. Around us grew a vibrant community that is today among the most diverse in the country.

And yet, segregated neighborhoods persist. The reasons are complex, and more than I can understand, but many primarily white communities made it difficult or impossible for people of color to live within them. Imposing racial covenants on properties - as was done here - have not only self-segregated communities like our own. but have had well-documented and disastrous consequences for non-white people. As *Brown vs. Board of Education* reminds us, separate is never equal. We fail to grow when separated from others, and more importantly, we fail to understand their experiences.

Some of you have heard about a group Dick and I joined after the murder of George Floyd. It's called "Learning to be Antiracist Together - Itbart -" and its membership came from a bunch of local churches searching to find ways of talking about uncomfortable topics around race. Three years later the group is still in place: twice a month we (a small group of Black and white persons from various Protestant denominations) gather to read antiracist literature and to discuss current events from the perspective of race.

To say that I've learned a lot is such an understatement. It is among these friends that I learned about the relationship of Emory Grove and Washington Grove. None of what I learned was given in our town history website. Our discussions in the group turn repeatedly to how it's easier to keep people of color at arm's length. These stories, which our neighbors carry through generations, have not been told (or have been suppressed) in our still largely segregated space.

It doesn't have to be that way. I admire those people who refrained from putting racial covenants on property here in Montgomery County (see here for a helpful map provided by the county (<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/historic/research-and-designation/mapping-segregation-project/>)). Montgomery County is also undertaking a large project of renaming streets and schools whose names reify the racist, segregationist policies of the past. These are amazing steps.

Harder, though, is establishing and recovering relationships with people whose families were denied the opportunity of living in better neighborhoods and whose own neighborhoods were

destroyed (Emory Grove was destroyed by so-called urban renewal in the 1970s - in my own lifetime - and promises to rebuild it were not kept). One thing I've learned in our Itbart group is how Black folks may need to adopt a "double consciousness," interacting with white folks in more superficial ways as a matter of getting along. How can someone tell you how they really feel when their elder family member told them how he had to cross the street when passing by Washington Grove?

The point I am hoping to make is that longtime racial segregation makes it harder to understand the experiences of others. Do we want to continue in this path, or work to earn the trust of our neighbors? What kind of community do we envision for Washington Grove in the coming decades? Can we begin to understand how the actions that happened here have been seen and heard and felt differently? Do we really *want* a diverse community here? Ask yourself if we are ready to face our racial past.

Gretchen Horlacher (wife of Dick Cavicchi)