

March 7, 2024

To the Mayor and Council of Washington Grove,

We would like to add our firm opposition to removing the McCathran name from our town hall for the many reasons already cited by other town residents. In our view, the current proposal by RASEC and the presumed actions by former mayor Roy McCathran, for whom the hall is named, fails to justify such a change.

Moreover, we are disturbed that the material prepared by RASEC members in support of a name change appears biased in assuming that Mr. McCathran had an active role in establishing or maintaining the covenants that excluded African Americans, as well as other ethnic and religious groups, from buying properties within the town. We have not seen any evidence that Mr. McCathran had any legal authority or control over the placing and/or removal of these abhorrent restrictions on properties owned by other individuals. It is also worth noting that Mr. McCathran himself did not choose to have any such covenants on his own property.

What we have seen is his many contributions during his years as mayor and beyond to creating the community we love today. In addition, the dedication to community service that he instilled in generations of his family, who have helped steer the Grove through often tumultuous years, lives on to this day, and we are most grateful for it.

We appreciate the work that RASEC has done in addressing the discriminatory practices of the past and their impact on the town in the present. But rather than assign responsibility for such practices, without credible evidence, to one person, we instead must take a clear-eyed look at how a society can learn from its past mistakes. Simply changing a name and pinning past improprieties on one person, whether warranted or unwarranted, makes it far too easy for all of us to detach from and feel innocent of past atrocities. Societies make mistakes, sometimes shockingly horrific mistakes, as was the enslavement of our fellow human beings and the era of Jim Crow.

And individuals make mistakes, such as wearing blackface in a minstrel production, even if this was considered acceptable at the time. But does a youthful action, however much in line with the attitudes of the time, justify a repudiation of all the beneficial contributions made in adulthood? And here we need to ask how many of us do NOT have an episode in their youth that, viewed through the lens of today's standards, would be morally questionable?

We also do not see a justification to move forward on the other proposals suggested by RASEC, again for reasons already expressed by other residents. And we are deeply concerned that individuals who do not reside in the town, however valuable their input

may be, would have a vote in crafting proposals for changes in the town. This does not preclude a lively and mutually beneficial exchange with our neighboring communities. However, we believe that proposals regarding present and future actions taken by the town should remain within the auspices of town residents and elected officials.

Respectfully,

Janet Lottero and Gary Hayward