

## Town Hall Renaming - Diversity in WG

To: The Mayor and Washington Grove Town Council  
From: Ken McCathran, Joli McCathran, Joan Mahaffey  
Re: McCathran Hall  
Date: March 1, 2024

Dear Mayor and Town Council:

We support the passage of the Resolution Acknowledging Washington Grove's Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future on May 8, 2023, by the Washington Grove Town Council. Unjust Racist policies have plagued our country for centuries. We do not want to erase or discount the effects of institutionalized racism. However, we have an issue with some people on RASEC who have searched via "Google" racial issues nationwide and then focused the worst-case scenario down to our quarter mile square town of Washington Grove. We would like to correct misconceptions about deed covenants and educate residents about the greater effects of institutional racism, including government redlining and National Association of Realtors ethics policy.

RASEC has exaggerated the effects of racial covenants attached to deeds to the point of blatant lies. The intent of these covenants was evident, unjust, and discriminatory. But to blame these covenants as the sole cause of the lack of diversity in Washington Grove is a gross oversimplification. It can be documented that half the properties in Washington Grove had racial covenants in 1937, when the Town was incorporated. Almost half of the deeds **did not** have racial covenants. Of those that did, many of the properties were owned by one individual, a DC real estate investor. Mayor McCathran's job was to transfer Association shares and deeds of Association members to the new town. Some property owners who had racial covenants on their DC properties included those covenants in deeds to their properties in Washington Grove. At the time, racial covenants were legal. The new mayor had no authority to censor or rewrite the deeds of property owners. His responsibility was to transfer private deeds from the Association to the Town of Washington Grove. The legal struggle to incorporate the town took eight years from 1929 to 1937. One of the authors of the RASEC documents admits that he did not even know about the racial covenants until the death of George Floyd. Many residents today are just learning of those covenants, which have been illegal since the 1948 decision of the Supreme Court.

Much more powerful influences in housing practices nationally, as well as in Washington Grove, were the official redlining policy of the federal government <https://www.ncrc.org/redlining> and the racial policy of the National Association of Realtors (NAR). "A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to the property values in that neighborhood," <https://redressmovement.org/realtor-storymap>. Whereas the federal redlining policy was being questioned in the 1950's the NAR policy persisted into the 1970's. We have suggested to RASEC that they notify all real estate companies which do business in Washington Grove that the TC unanimously passed the above Resolution so there is no question about the Grove's valuing diversity and welcoming all people. RASEC seems more interested in pursuing hateful, divisive rhetoric about the past, rather than moving forward to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

When racial diversity statistics in Washington Grove are compared with those of Gaithersburg, the most diverse

city in the nation, there is cause to question the Town's policies and practices. However, statistics can help explain the discrepancy. In 1950 both Gaithersburg and Washington Grove were small communities surrounded by farmland. In the 1950 census the population of Washington Grove was just over 500, consistent with the Washington Grove population today. In 1950, the population of Gaithersburg was 1,749. By 2020 Gaithersburg's population had increased to 69,657. The area of Washinton Grove in 1950 was approximately ¼ mile square, almost the same as it is today. In the same period the area of Gaithersburg has increased from approximately one square mile to 10.34 square miles. The arrival of NIST (Bureau of Standards), and IBM in Gaithersburg, and the Department of Defense facility in Germantown (Atomic Energy Commission), as well as Gaithersburg's role today as a national center for biotechnology, have drawn people from across the nation and around the world to Gaithersburg. Washington Grove has no area to expand. However, these new employment opportunities have attracted to Washington Grove people with a more global, less isolationist, vision. In our opinion, comparing the two communities today is an invalid comparison.

On the national level, seven percent of households move every year. Our first mayor, Roy McCathran, ensured a healthy infrastructure to attract families to Washington Grove. In Washington Grove, many families stay 30, 40 years, or more. In a year of heavy turnover, five of the 225 households might move. There are currently no homes for sale in Town. This residential stability has undoubtedly had an effect on the lack of diversity in Town. Some families, such as ours, have contributed to diversity through marriage.

In summary, laying the blame for lack of diversity in Washington Grove on the outdated racial covenants inside private deeds to Washington Grove properties is invalid. Other factors, such as federal redlining policies, National Association of Realtor racial policies, and stability of property owners within Washington Grove had a much more far-reaching effect. Over the last several decades, Washington Grove has made slow, but steady progress welcoming people of diverse races and cultures. Today, let us continue to move forward with a more equitable, more inclusive, more open mindset. Let us be even more welcoming to people of all races and cultures.

### **Keep McCathran in McCathran Hall**

/S/

/S/

/S/

Ken McCathran, Joli McCathran, Joan Mahaffey