

April 21, 2024

Dear Mayor Compton and members of the Town Council,

I have heard for years that our volunteer committees are not part of the Town government. They do, however, receive taxpayer dollars to enter into contracts and to provide services to ensure the health, welfare and safety of Town residents and visitors. Often, committees' use of taxpayer monies occurs with little oversight from the Mayor and Council.

Thus far, committees generally spend their budgets wisely. And yet, it bothers me that the role of committees vis-à-vis the Town government and how they spend the budgets awarded to them are still so ill-defined. I believe that the Town's Charter requires more. Specifically, the Charter provides this language in Section 21(b)(8),

21. Powers of the Council:

(8) Boards, Commissions, and Committees

To appoint such boards, commissions and committees as may be necessary to the health, welfare and safety of the citizens. The authority and responsibility for each such group appointed must be prescribed in the ordinance or resolution which creates it.

I request that you consider the following measures to ensure the reasonable functioning of the relationship between committees and the Town government.

1. The Council and Mayor initiate a process to ensure that, as called for by the Charter, a Town resolution or ordinance exists that prescribes the committee's authority and responsibility. I recognize that this may take time due to the need for diligent research regarding our long-standing committees. As a taxpayer, I would like to see this linkage between the Town Council and the authority and responsibility of committees clearly delineated.
2. If no resolution or ordinance prescribing a committee's authority and responsibility exists, I request that the Mayor and Council work with the members of that committee to create such a resolution or ordinance.
3. I note that in April 2020, the Council and Mayor passed [Resolution 2019-13, "Guidelines to Provide for Proper Governance of Washington Grove Committees"](#). That resolution provides that:

C. Membership. Committees should adopt eligibility criteria for membership that are tailored to encourage volunteerism and the widest participation of town residents/property owners, while furthering the needs of the Committee. To this end, the Town Council recommends that membership on any Committee be as non-restrictive and as inclusive as possible.

This last sentence perhaps goes too far, since there is no current prohibition on non-residents making up the majority on a Town committee, or being the driving force behind how the committee operates and spends its budget. I therefore request that this resolution

be amended or supplemented to add that voting members of standing committees must be Town residents.

Decisions about committee expenditures as well as proposals to the Council may not represent the best interests of the Town if a minority of committee members are Town residents. In addition, as a taxpayer, I object to my tax dollars being spent by committees where decisions about the use of those dollars are made by non-residents.

4. It does not seem right that the standing committees can spend taxpayer dollars without Town government oversight if non-residents are leading Town committees and are able to vote on those committees. To this point I note that the language in [Resolution 2019-13, "Guidelines to Provide for Proper Governance of Washington Grove Committees"](#) implies that leadership in committees should be by Town residents (paragraph E below). I ask that the resolution be further amended or supplemented to make it clearer that leadership of Town committees is by officers who are Town residents:

E. Officers. Committees should encourage interested Town residents to participate in the leadership of Committee. Committees may choose one or more officers as needed for proper Committee function. It is strongly recommended that officers be elected by a majority vote of Committee members, and that elections occur at least every twelve (12) months. Committees may establish term limits for officers, or have no term limits depending on the needs of the Committee. To promote independence and the widest participation of residents in leadership roles in town, the Town Council strongly advocates that future elected officials not serve as Committee officers.

As an example, and to highlight the need to review our current situation, imagine a group of 5-10 people living outside of Town who want to pave a path in the East Woods. Under our existing status these non-residents could join the Woods Committee and potentially push to use Town funding to pave multiple paths in the woods.

Given that Town committees receive taxpayer dollars, it is reasonable and prudent that votes within committees are limited to Town residents and that leadership within committees is by Town residents. Such a framework would not restrict participation of non-residents in Town committee discussions and activities.

I believe that implementing the steps I am requesting will:

- Ensure that Section 21(b)(8) of the Charter is properly administered, and
- Provide assurance to Town residents that decisions and expenditures made by the Town's voluntary committees are truly in the best interest of all residents.

Thank you for your time, energy, and devotion to the Town.

Sincerely yours,
Tom Land