

Mayor and Town Council members:

I am a resident of Washington Grove, and I am signing my name in support of the work of the Race & Social Equity Committee (RASEC) and ask that the Mayor and Town Council consider my perspective in advance of the July Town Council meeting.

I support both the Town-approved goals for RASEC and the Town-approved resolution (“Acknowledging Washington Grove’s Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future”).

In this letter you will see my commitment to the shared goals of RASEC, my support for the many accomplishments of RASEC in working towards those goals, and concerns about the current environment that has affected the ability of RASEC to work toward these goals.

I also ask the Mayor and Town Council to consider the recommendations respectfully made, below.

Sincerely,

Nan Aitel-Thompson, 416 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Carrie Banachowski, 407 Chestnut Avenue

Joel Bethepu, 413 Washington Grove Lane

Sarah Kobrin, 409 Chestnut Avenue

Oscar Ramos, 404 Brown Street

Lynn Mento, 102 Center Street

Rick Silton, 409 Chestnut Avenue

Tad Stahnke, 113 Chestnut Avenue

Terry Strother, 113 Chestnut Avenue

Alison Faupel, 510 Washington Grove Lane

Ryan Young, 404 Grove Avenue

Emily Brown, 404 Grove Avenue

Dick Cavicchi, 127 Grove Avenue

Gretchen Horlacher, 127 Grove Avenue

Paula Puglisi, 406 Grove Avenue

**By supporting RASEC and the resolution, I commit to the shared the goals, acknowledgments, and commitments such as to:**

- Learn and share knowledge about the history of racial injustice as it relates to Washington Grove and other communities

- Examine policies and practices (including those that are seemingly neutral) to determine whether they are contributing to racial inequity and promoting inclusivity
- Build relationships and make amends with neighboring communities
- Collaborate with other town commissions and committees to realize the goals
- Acknowledge, apologize for, repudiate, reject, and condemn all racially motivated, discriminatory, or exclusionary aspects of the Town's history, and deeply regret the pain, hurt, and suffering that has been caused
- Where they have authority and responsibility, will take steps that undo the effects of systemic racism, bias, discrimination, and inequities, which impact the quality of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for Town residents and our neighbors
- Commit to further engage in individual and collective work to understand bias
- Further address any policies or practices that may have the effect of being racially biased or harmful, and foster an unbiased and inclusive environment free of discrimination and harassment toward any person or group
- Treat all persons in a fair and equitable manner, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, ability, or disability.

**I also ask for recognition of the successes of RASEC, through activities, such as these, that further the goals of RASEC and the Town Resolution:**

- Contributed to the Comprehensive Plan to include anti-racist language, a more complete, accurate Town history, and exploration of a broader range of housing options.
- Organized a series of three educational/informational programs about accessory dwelling units (ADUs) featuring expert presenters who discussed the pros and cons of allowing ADUs.
- Submitted a document regarding RASEC's mission statement and accomplishments to the Sustainability Committee to support their application for the Maryland Sustainability Certification
- Advocated for WG to formally grant Indigenous Peoples' Day and Juneteenth as holidays to employee
- Co-sponsored three events with the Emory Grove community:
  - Pastor Warner's virtual talk about Emory Grove's history, plans to re-build, and ways in which our community can support those efforts
  - Washington Grove/Emory Grove Walk: Historic sites tour of both communities and lunch together
  - Ice Cream Social with discussion groups to build trust.

- Researched, advocated, and aided in the process of removing racially restrictive covenants from deeds for individual homeowners and advocated to pass legislation to remove covenants en masse.
- Initiated a three-session storytelling project created by Adventures with Wilson with the goal of trust building in which participants were invited from Emory Grove, Washington Grove, and East Gaithersburg United.
- Collaborated with the Lake Committee to address racial profiling incidents at the lake and to ensure that Lake Committee policies and procedures promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Facilitated two discussions following the viewing of a documentary that explored racial attitudes.
- Translated the Town Welcome Packet into Spanish.
- Designed and disseminated a town survey to measure residents' perceptions of diversity equity, inclusion, and volunteerism in Washington Grove. The data analysis was presented in a series of five sessions which included discussions.
- Created a Town anti-racist statement and Resolution, participated in the creation of the final document, and advocated for its passage. The Resolution was adopted on May 8, 2023.
- Created a RASEC position paper endorsing allowing ADU and providing suggestions for the ordinance.
- Co-organized and facilitated a discussion with the EG community to better understand their views about WG and the resolution and meaningful ways to move forward.
- Created a series of storytelling programs, Reckoning with Race, in which storytellers told stories about life experiences involving racial issues to prompt open, authentic discussion between the Emory Grove and Washington Grove communities.
- Submitted five recommendations to the Town Council based on the town survey responses, feedback from the survey discussions and the Emory Grove/ RASEC discussions, as well as observations and ongoing discussions during RASEC meetings and events. The recommendations to consider renaming McCathran Hall, developing a communication system between Emory Grove and Washington Grove, and designing a website protocol for posting letters were rejected, although some of the suggestions within the website recommendation were adopted. The recommendation to collaborate with surrounding neighborhoods regarding the future of the shared-use path was approved. The council has debated the recommendation to hire diversity, equity, and inclusion consultants for the voluntary education of community leaders and residents for three months.

**I have concerns about the environment in which RASEC has been working, making sincere efforts to achieve our shared goals, such as:**

- A motion to defund the largest budget item in RASEC's proposed 2024-2025 budget
- A council motion to reject four of RASEC's recommendations to the council without discussion
- Pressure to comply with demands to limit or repress what RASEC members can talk about personally in the Reckoning with Race series due to a concern about how Washington Grove's historical actions may be perceived.
- The prolonged council debate about bringing in a DEI consultant for interested WG residents and leaders to help our individual and community growth, per the resolution. The consultants are both under \$5,000.00 so an RFP is not required. Typically, when an RFP is required, there are three bids. RASEC originally investigated four consultants, chose two, and gave the rationale for their choice. At the council's behest, RASEC investigated four additional consultants and gave reasons why the original two were still the best choice, although RASEC is considering one for another task. Now the council is investigating yet different consultants. RASEC was given a series of questions to answer in writing following the last council meeting. Many of the questions had been answered during previous council meetings or the information is contained in the proposal. The cost of this initiative is questioned, yet carving a tree stump was approved without discussion for \$5,000.00 which is \$1,000.00 less than the combined cost of both consultants who provide individual assessments and group education and discussion.

**I am respectfully asking the Mayor and Town Council to:**

- Review the previously approved goals for RASEC and the Town's commitments on the next steps in resolution #2023-1 and either reaffirm agreement with each of them or request changes so there is clarity of goals as RASEC does its work.
- Support RASEC's process to look at "any policies and practices" per the approved resolution, despite premature concerns expressed to the mayor and council about what RASEC may or may not put forward for your consideration upon completion.
- Approve RASEC's recommendation as written to offer community leaders and residents who are interested in DEI, learning opportunities to "engage in individual and collective work to understand bias" per the approved resolution – despite misgivings and misunderstandings from some residents. Specifically, we ask that you approve the RASEC recommendation to bring in the two proposed DEIA consultants given alignment with the approved goals, the significant review of available options, the fit at \$6,000 within RASEC's budget, and to maintain the Town's equality of process with how similarly priced recommendations from other committees are handled.
- Lead the Town by principle and example, despite the naturally uncomfortable situations that typically arise when this kind of work is tackled.