

August 12, 2024

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

The Racial and Social Equity Committee (RASEC) Leadership Team including the non-resident members and the non-resident co-chair of the Lake and Field workgroup, have demonstrated their commitment to the Town-approved goals for RASEC exemplified through the Committee's accomplishments (attached below). Among its accomplishments, RASEC is especially proud to have sponsored the Town-approved Resolution 2023-01 ("Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future"). It is a statement of a vision that guides us forward.

We are grateful for the efforts of Mayor Compton and Councilor Gilmore and their willingness to consider RASEC recommendations without bias and to take a stand as leaders. We acknowledge and value the work of those RASEC members who are truly committed to furthering the goals of Resolution 2023-01. We are also grateful to the 17 Town residents who signed letters of support for the work of RASEC. We appreciate all of the residents who have offered encouragement and constructive suggestions.

The path has not always been easy, but we are heartened by the consistent high level of attendance of town residents at our events. It is never easy to come to grips with issues of race, which requires from time to time a hard look at one's own biases.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, we must acknowledge that sometimes we have faced obstructionist tactics from individual residents and some Town Councilors such as denial of facts (e.g. Washington Grove was not a Sundown Town), an attempt to defund most of our budget, an attempt to vote down RASEC recommendations to the Council without discussion, false allegations that the Leadership Team is not transparent, and relentlessly lobbying the Council to force a ban on a story due to a concern about how the Town's historical actions may be perceived.

The detailed research on the DEI training options done by the RASEC workgroup has been set aside by the council with no clear reasoning. The proposed replacement, without the option for a personalized component and clear pre-and post-assessment metrics, has risks of being "performative."

Recently we have been very disheartened by the passage of Resolution 2024-02, which excludes non-residents from voting and leadership roles on volunteer Town committees. The Mayor and the Council committed to "support ties with neighboring communities, and consider their welfare and the impact that our policies or decisions will have on them". Neighbors outside of the Town who volunteer their time, energy, expertise, lived experiences, and wisdom to help us better understand and make progress towards our goal of a diverse and inclusive town should be welcomed. Telling our neighbors, including and particularly those who are people of color, that we welcome their participation but they are not allowed to vote or to take on a leadership role has the opposite effect.

It has been difficult to move forward toward our goals when so much of our time has been spent in managing conflict. It seems we have fallen into a pattern of researching and piloting

educational events, workshops, and drafting recommendations, only to have them misrepresented. We are sorry to note that some town residents' issue public comments about our events based on hearsay rather than on attendance. It is disappointing that certain town residents, resort to rumor, innuendo, and scare tactics, particularly when RASEC offers venues to openly discuss issues. These actions have had adverse impacts on the town's image as a neighbor and serve to diminish the great efforts of other residents who have been working to move forward to implement the promises made in the resolution.

It has also been disappointing that some Councilors have made little effort to consider and respond to all points of view. This was evidenced by the lack of response to the residents who signed two letters in support of RASEC and in opposition to Resolution 2024-02. In contrast, much consideration was given to the most demanding voices. Matters of racial and social equity come down to a point of conscience. We believe that decisions from the Town government should not be made to appease the loudest voices, or the largest majority. Instead, the Town should recognize that its commitments under Resolution 2023-01 call for deep reflection on what will bring about justice, fairness and inclusiveness to even the smallest group of individuals.

In short, we do not feel that the relationship of RASEC and the Town is healthy. There is a disconnect between RASEC and the Town government as to how to move forward on the promises made in the Resolution. As a consequence, the Leadership Team of RASEC has decided to become an advocacy group of volunteers independent of the Town government. We believe this change will help us focus on our core goals of promoting social and racial equity while minimizing the time we spend defending our goals and the means by which we try to achieve them.

RASEC's mission will remain unchanged and we will continue to encourage dialogue, engagement, and participation in events and in the work.

We will be inviting others to join us, and we hope to maintain a respectful and transparent relationship with the Town, and to continue working towards a more informed, equitable, and inclusive Washington Grove, as stated in the Town Resolution 2023-01.

Sincerely,

Paula Puglisi
Dick Cavicchi
Tad Stahnke
Nick Patten
Paul Thorne-Keziah

Accomplishments of RASEC

- 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 employees
- Co-sponsored three events with the Emory Grove community:
 - Pastor Tim 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 Emory Grove community to better understand their views about Washington Grove 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.