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**Testimony of the Town of Washington Grove  
Before the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission  
Presented by Council Member and Mayor *pro tem* Barbara Raimondo, Esq.  
October 5, 2024**

Good afternoon, members of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, invited guests, and members of the public. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Barbara Raimondo, a Town Councilor and Mayor Pro Tem for the Town of Washington Grove.

In 1873, the Washington Grove Camp Meeting Association, a Methodist organization, was established and bought land between Rockville and Gaithersburg for their members to hold religious meetings during the summer. In the beginning they brought and lived in their tents. Over time they built tiny cottages, and over more time the Grove became a year 'round community. Later the decision was made to incorporate as municipality, and the Town of Washington Grove came into being in 1937. Today we have around 225 homes and a population of around 500. The Town is governed by a volunteer Mayor and six volunteer Town Councilors. Our paid staff consists of a full-time clerk and a part-time treasurer. We have established a number of volunteer committees to do the business of the Town, such as the Woods Committee, Recreation Committee, and Lighting Committee, and several appointed Boards and Commissions. Anything that is accomplished in our Town is most likely done by a volunteer. Our residents are deeply committed to ensuring that Washington Grove stays a beautiful, vibrant, and friendly place to live.

Several years ago, a group of residents brought up the issue of racial disparity at the national, state, and local level. The Town of Washington Grove, which is mostly White, had to face the fact that it had engaged in racist policies and practices. These actions were demeaning and exclusionary and were painful to neighboring Black communities.

In response, the Town Council, with the input and support of residents, passed a "Resolution Acknowledging Washington Grove's Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to an Equitable and Inclusive Future." That resolution recognized the Town's detrimental behaviors and vowed to do better.

In the document the Mayor and Town Council resolve to, among other things:

- Acknowledge and apologize for all racially motivated, discriminatory, or exclusionary aspects of the Town's history;
- Welcome all people; recognize the rights of individuals to live with dignity;
- Take steps that undo the effects of systemic racism, bias, discrimination, and inequities;
- 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;
- Treat all persons in a fair and equitable manner;
- Support ties with neighboring communities;
- Continue building a Town where all people are welcomed to live and prosper.

The Town has taken several steps to implement this resolution. For example, the Town has made great strides in removing restrictive deed covenants from properties within Town.

Here is an excerpt of the deed language:

“For the purposes of sanitation and health, the grantees, their heirs and assigns, shall and will not sell, rent, lease, or in any manner dispose of said land, or any improvements thereon, to anyone of a race whose death rate is of a higher percentage than that of the white or Caucasian race.”

More than 120 properties in Washington Grove have been identified as burdened by this restrictive deed covenant beginning in 1929 and continuing until 1953. And most of these original deeds stated the “...covenants and restrictions shall run with the land...”

As we know, the law does not support these covenants:

- In 1948, the Supreme Court declared that racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable by States;
- In 1968, the Fair Housing Act made it illegal to add these deed covenants; and
- In 2021, the Town Council amended the Washington Grove Zoning Ordinance to declare these restrictive covenants as terminated.

However, despite being declared unenforceable, illegal, and terminated, such deed covenants show up when searching County Land Records for properties in Washington Grove and in other communities.

Washington Grove has been working on an initiative to remove these covenants since 2022. At first the process was cumbersome and bureaucratic. Recently, Section 3-112 of the Maryland Real Property Article was amended to make it easier for municipalities to file restrictive covenant modifications. This was the result of municipalities, such as Washington Grove, proposing and supporting a way to streamline the removal of these covenants.

Thus far, a total 80 restrictive covenant modifications have been submitted to the Land Records Office, reviewed by the Office of the County Attorney, and then successfully filed in the Land

Records for Montgomery County hosted by the Maryland State Archives. And there are another 20 restrictive covenant modifications document packages in progress.

We are proud of this initiative, which though symbolic, is also meaningful.

In addition, our Town has contracted with Leadership Montgomery, a local nonprofit organization, to provide a workshop titled “Introduction to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB).” This is being arranged in response to our residents’ desire to become more aware and welcoming within our Town and towards our neighboring communities. After this meeting is complete, a series of three additional workshops will be provided to the Mayor and Town Councilors, and chairs of our commissions, boards, and committees. During those three sessions leaders will create DEIB goals and strategies for each entity, with measurable outcomes and clear timelines. We believe this effort will help us see areas where we can be better, and lead us on a path toward well-defined improvement.

We have also engaged in other work, such as partnering with our neighbors in Emory Grove, another camp meeting, one rooted in the Black community. With Emory Grove we co-sponsored a guided walk to learn about the histories of each other’s community, attended an ice cream social to get to know each other better, participated in a virtual talk about Emory Grove’s history and plans to rebuild their area, and held a small shared gathering at our lake with Emory Grove residents.

Also on our agenda is outreach to neighboring communities on the planning of shared use (bike/pedestrian) paths in the region, to facilitate the travel of members from one neighborhood to the next, and let others know that they are welcome in our Town.

There is of course more to be done, and our Mayor, Councilors, and residents are open to growing as individuals and as a Town. We are grateful for the opportunity to be here today and look forward to working within and outside our Town to make our society more just and equitable.

I will be happy to take any questions.