

DRAFT

Mason and Mount Vernon

Redistricting Advisory Committee Mason & Mount Vernon Workgroup

January 18, 2022: RAC decides to “consider” recommending a change to Mason or Mount Vernon

- Reminder: the RAC can only recommend to the Board of Supervisors that it rename a District or Precinct. *Very limited mandate.*
- Given the limited mandate, the RAC started *with as broad a list of potential criteria* as possible—“consideration” does not mean that the RAC “will” recommend a name change.
- Mason, named after Founding Father George Mason, who owned slaves, was to be “considered.”
- Mount Vernon, named after the plantation home of first president, was to be “considered.”
- Consideration was due to the association of both names with the institution of slavery.



- Mount Vernon was the home of our first President, George Washington.
- Mount Vernon was a working plantation. At the time of George Washington's death, 317 people were enslaved at Mount Vernon. In his will, George Washington decreed that the 123 slaves that he owned at Mount Vernon would be freed upon the death of his wife, Martha Washington.
- Mount Vernon, named after the house, is one of the original six townships of Fairfax County when the General Assembly divides the County in 1870. In 1874, Mount Vernon was converted into one of Six Districts in the County.
- Mount Vernon's proximity to Washington, DC, and association with George Washington played a role in deciding to place the Country's capital city where the District of Columbia now sits.

George Washington's contributions to this Country are almost too significant to list...

- Commander of the Continental Army, led Patriot forces to victory in the Revolutionary War.
- Early critic of the Articles of Confederation who pushed for a central government better designed to stand the test of time.
- Unanimously elected by his peers to preside as president over the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which resulted in the drafting of the United States Constitution.
- America's first president, elected in 1789.
- Perhaps most importantly, declined to run for president after serving two terms, believing that democracy required that the Country move on.
- The "Father of the Nation."



- In 1953, the Court-appointed redistricting committee of Fairfax County chooses to create a seventh district, the Mason District, named after George Mason, the author of the Bill of Rights.
- George Mason, another founding father, wrote the Virginia Declaration of rights in 1776, a precursor to the Bill of Rights.
- George Mason was one of three delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention who did not sign the Constitution.
- In his *Objections to this Constitution of Government*, Mason wrote: “There is no declaration of rights, and the laws of the general government being paramount, the declarations in the separate states are no security ... The president has no constitutional council. From this defect spring the improper powers of the Senate and the unnecessary office of the vice-president, who as president of the Senate dangerously blends executive and legislative powers ... There is no section preserving liberty of the press or trial by jury in civil cases, nor is there one concerning the danger of standing armies in time of peace.”
- Eventually fellow Virginian James Madison would introduce the Bill of Rights along the lines of Mason’s sentiments.
- Records suggest that Mason owned 90 slaves at his plantation estate, Gunston Hall.

RAC Subcommittee Considers Renaming

- On January 25, 2022, a subcommittee of the RAC considered the renaming of Mount Vernon and Mason with input from the public.
- There was *no appetite whatsoever* to rename the districts from either RAC members or members of the public.
- Public comments emphasized:
 - The importance of George Washington to the development of the nation.
 - The importance of Mount Vernon as a major attraction and key landmark in the Mount Vernon community.
 - The work that the operators of Mount Vernon, now a World Heritage Site, have done to contextualize Mount Vernon, the good and the bad.
 - The distinction between Founding Fathers and Confederate leaders.

RAC Subcommittee Members Quickly Dispensed With the Idea of Renaming Mount Vernon and Mason.

- Within minutes of the start of the Subcommittee meeting, the RAC Subcommittee decided that there was simply no reason at this time to rename Mount Vernon or Mason.
- RAC Subcommittee members drew a clear distinction between those who had help found our nation and those who tore it apart.
- RAC Subcommittee members did not ignore the flaws of our Founding Fathers, but pointed out that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights have, in the end, been central to the progress of the Nation.
- RAC Subcommittee members also pointed out a distinction between honoring Confederate leaders, a deliberate and concerted attempt to whitewash the causes of the Civil War, and honoring Founding Fathers like Washington and Mason, which occurs *in spite of* rather than *because of* their association with the evils of the institution of slavery.

The Mason and Mount Vernon Subcommittee of the RAC recommends that the full committee *neither* recommend renaming Mason *nor* Mount Vernon.