

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING: MAY 14, 2024

PUBLIC COMMENT

First Name	Last Name	Street Address	Comments: Per Council rules and procedures, please limit comments to what can reasonably be read to the meeting record in three (3) minutes or less. Please be mindful that this form is for public comment only. Please direct questions/general inquiries to Council members directly.
John	Cavanna		<p>My apologies for not being able to attend in person Tuesday night. I want to make sure that my recollections of the process used to advise the council on the mural were entered into the record.</p> <p>#1. Membership to this advisory group fluctuated greatly. A large number of people were involved over the duration of this project, a smaller core group continually stayed involved and I believe that small group is responsible for the recommendation that was voted on last meeting.</p> <p>#2. Having stated that this small group made the decision on the mural placed before the council, I do not recall a formal vote ever being taken to place that one mural before the council and exclude other designs.</p> <p>#3. On the matter of the council being the final decision making authority on the mural, the advisory group was advised of this fact several times by both myself and counselor Wang.</p> <p>#4. On the matter of at least 3 presentations being presented before the council, this was clearly stated in the contract but I do not recall it ever being shared with advisory group.</p> <p>#5. It is unknown specifically who decided to reach out to surviving relatives of those recommended to appear on the mural, I believe it was counselor Wang and Gina LaRosa</p> <p>#6. On the matter of the degree of supervision RiseUp exercised over this advisory, it is my opinion that they exercised minimal supervision delegating this project to the advisory group and specifically the two individuals who appeared most interested and driven were Councilwoman Jenn Wang and Gina LaRosa. They worked hard to get us a good end result.</p> <p>For the record I did voice my concern on several occasions that the advisory group may not be complying with council expectations, but I do want to be clear that I believe in this project and a Glastonbury themed mural that speaks to Glastonbury's desire for diversity. I hope that the council will receive 3 proposals and that the council will schedule a public information session at its next meeting to permit the Glastonbury residents to share their opinions.</p>
Scott	Gac	298 Cedar Ridge Drive, Glastonbury, CT 06033	<p>Dear Town Council, I submit this statement in support of the Glastonbury MLK39 Mural design. As a professor of American History and trustee of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center (and, in this case, a member of the Glastonbury MLK39 Community Advocate Group), I often work on projects that commemorate important and meaningful histories. I hope that you will join me in applauding the design work of artist Micaela Levesque. In her proposed mural, Levesque has beautifully represented a variety of viewpoints as expressed by members of the Glastonbury MLK39 Community Advocate Group. This was no easy task. I want to thank Micaela as well as my fellow MLK39 Community Group members. Conversations and decisions about the commemoration of historical figures are important--and because they are important, they can raise contentious issues. However, members of our committee remained thoughtful and respectful throughout the trials and tribulations of the design-making process. I believe this mural design captures the very best spirit of the Glastonbury community. Thank you, Scott Gac</p>

Audrey	Yellen Quinlan	90 Candlelight Drive	<p>Good Afternoon,</p> <p>Several months ago, I submitted Zandra and Kirby's names to John as possible honorees for the RiseUp mural. Zandra and I were on the majorette squad together. She was very intelligent, reserved, and didn't seem to relish the spotlight. Knowing Zandra from high school as being reserved and then reading about her career path as a trailblazer was just so impressive. I was so proud of her tenacity, bravery, and perseverance. Although Kirby and I attended Hebron Avenue school together, I didn't really know him but his accomplishments, too, were noteworthy. Two Glastonbury people. Two remarkable achievements.</p> <p>When I first saw the mural, I wrote to Jen to tell her it is absolutely lovely and I continue to believe the artistry is, in fact, lovely; however, I think Zandra and Kirby dominating the mural minimizes the contributions of the other honorees. The honorees' presence in the mural is microscopic in comparison to Kirby and Zandra. One honoree is as important as the other honoree. Each mural honoree must receive equal visual weight, a balance. I urge Town Council members to revisit the mural with a focus on equal visual weight.</p> <p>I have two questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Other than providing biographies of the mural candidates, what input did the RiseUp committee have from the Historical Society of Glastonbury? Who represented the HSG on the committee?2. The RiseUp contract indicated three designs would be presented to the TC. One was presented. Where are the other two? RiseUp did not fulfill its contractual obligation. How is the Town Council addressing this breach? <p>Thank you</p>
--------	-------------------	----------------------	--

Marshall	Berdan	Mystic, CT	<p>Dear Town Council Member:</p> <p>Attached is my spirited critique (read: strong opposition) to the mural design as approved by town council at its April 23rd meeting. Unfortunately, it was rejected by "The Citizen" as being too long and as such, is way too long for the 2,000-character limit imposed by the public comment submission form. But I think it merits being read in its entirety in the hopes that a terrible travesty can still be averted. And I think that is only fair in the RISEUP reneged on its obligation to submit three designs for comment and consideration. not just one to be voted on then and there. Had they done what they were supposed to, I would have had an opportunity to present my fairly learned objections. And just so that you know, contrary to the misimpression that several of you voiced during the April 23rd meeting, the design was never submitted to the HSG board for comment, much less approval.</p> <p>Respectfully but passionately submitted,</p> <p>Marshall S. Berdan, formerly of Glastonbury, but now of Mystic HSG Board member 2013-2023 and ongoing Communications Committee chair</p>
----------	--------	------------	--

Mural, Mural on the Wall

It will be most appropriate that the proposed racial equity mural that Town Council, with the commendable exception of Kurt Cavanaugh, voted to approve at its April 23rd meeting will hang in Town Hall where it can serve as a reminder to both them and their constituents, of how they – all well-meaning and uncompensated public servants -- allowed themselves to be “white guilty” into approving what I, who have a pretty good grasp on Glastonbury history, can only see as an historical travesty.

To be clear, I have only one problem with artist Micaele Levesque’s compelling and appealing work, and that is how she depicts the Smith Sisters in such a curiously amateurish way that suggests that her intent is to both minimize them compared to the other personages, and make them as non-White as possible. My overall problem, however, is not with the mural’s execution, but its composition. And that seems to be the logical consequence of a work whose goal of advancing racial equity is fatally undermined by the simple fact that racial inequity has never much of an issue throughout Glastonbury history.

Yes, there were enslaved people here and even after slavery was fully abolished in the state in 1840, black people here were no doubt looked down upon by some and often treated as second-class citizens. But neither were they systemically mistreated as they were in larger urban areas in the North, not out of the inherent magnanimity of Glastonburians, but primarily because their numbers were so few. And, of course, there was nothing here that even came close to the segregation and intimidation they faced down South.

By the time that civil rights (a.k.a., racial equity) first became a movement in the 1940s, there were only 45 blacks, referred to as “Negroes,” in a town of 6,632 according to the 1940 census. The Glastonbury MLK39 Mural Project is therefore essential a contemporary remedy in search of a nonexistent systemic disease. And because the pool of legitimate grievances here in Glastonbury is so shallow, it is hardly surprising that the individuals the Mural Project Community Advocate Group has chosen to depict are such poor standard bearers.

Let me be specific:

1. Sarah Onepenny (which should actually be given as Wumpene, her legitimate Wongunk name) played only the slightest of cameo roles in the history of Glastonbury when she witnessed the 1673 East Farms purchase deed -- not the original 1636 purchase from Wongunk sachem Sowheag. And she was only one of four secondary witnesses, not one of the seven primary signatories, all of whom were male and included either her husband or father. So why was she alone chosen to represent all of the town’s original Wongunk inhabitants? Apparently because all the other candidates were male, which gives you a pretty clear idea of the Mural Project’s “agenda.”
2. A review of the online roster of the 29th Regiment Connecticut (Colored) Volunteers reveals that of the roughly 1,700 men who served in that truly statewide unit, only 14 (.008%) claimed Glastonbury as their residence at the time of enlistment. (Many didn’t cite a town, so the number could well have been higher.) And of those 14, only one, Robert Stewart, had actually been born here. As worthy of note and praise as this noble and heroic regiment is, it has exceedingly little to do with Glastonbury, both absolutely and relatively.
3. Though Kirby Edmonds, the main character in the mural, did indeed graduate from GHS Class of 1969, he was born in Texas and appears to have actually lived here for only his high school years. More to the point, after he left Glastonbury to attend Cornell, he never came back. His entire career as a racial equity activist, honorable and commendable as it is, was spent in Ithaca, NY, where he died in 2020.

4. Zandra Flemister, also GHS Class of 1969 and the second most prominent person in the mural, was likewise one whose racial equity bona fides as the first Black female Secret Service agent have nothing to do with the town in which she spent her adolescence, but was not born. Her subsequent work as a whistleblower and agitator against the racial prejudice that she herself encountered, first in the Secret Service and then in the Foreign Service, was, as only to be expected, carried out in Washington, DC, where she died in February of last year, just in time to qualify her under the Mural Project Community Advocate Group's "no living person" rule. Like Edwards, she never returned to Glastonbury, and I understand that there is evidence that she actually disliked Glastonbury.

That leaves us with the Smith Sisters, Glastonbury's pre-eminent and unassailable advocates for gender rather than racial equity, though they certainly were among the town's first and most fervent Abolitionists, and Prince Simbo, another unassailable example of Glastonbury's early racial diversity. Both of them, however, are reduced to "also ran" status in this mural, and as many have pointed out, worthy lifetime Glastonburians Syphax Moseley and his wife, Mary, weren't even considered, even though they were among the Historical Society's original (2022) three most obvious candidates for inclusion.

Bottom line: In my humble, but relatively educated opinion, the mural design that was approved by Town Council on April 23rd is nothing more than a reversed-engineered "blackwash" of Glastonbury history, and exactly what should have been expected when history is co-opted to make a political statement. But since it was approved in apparent violation of RiseUp's contractual obligation with the town to provide three separate designs for Town Council to consider rather than just one to vote on, I stand in complete support of Chairman Gullotta's attempts to have that vote rescinded. If not, obsequiously flattering, but flawed history will soon be staring us all in the face from the walls of Town Hall.

Marshall S. Berdan

Trina Williams 32 Plank Ln

The mural serves as a vital symbol of inclusion for current Glastonbury Town members, emphasizing the celebration of local civil rights advocates and promoting a sense of belonging and pride among the diverse community. By honoring individuals from various backgrounds who have made significant contributions to the town's history, the mural transcends political divides and resonates with individuals of all backgrounds. For many, seeing representation of diverse and upstanding figures in the community's narrative is a powerful affirmation of identity and belonging. It underscores the historical reality that individuals from diverse backgrounds have long been integral to the fabric of Glastonbury, fostering a deeper appreciation for the town's rich heritage and the contributions of non-white community members across generations.