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## STATEMENT FROM THE LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ON RECENT EVENTS

On behalf of the Laurel Historical Society, let us as a community join the world to say that enough is enough. Over the past 150 years, Laurel has evolved into a vibrant and culturally diverse community, descending from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe that all call Laurel home. We take seriously the study of our history, as well as the recording of, and engagement in, current events. We recognize that the world unrest in response to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, has had a direct emotional impact on all of us in our community. We know the pain of this moment, as we have witnessed the blatant disregard for human life play out before our eyes and that the subsequent marches and protests around the world are glaring reminders of the fight for Civil Rights during the '60's. These events and images give rise to emotional discomfort in varying ways to all of our neighbors, as each of us lives a different reality.

As the City of Laurel celebrates 150 years, our community has grown and made tremendous strides and progress from its beginnings as a small mill town. However, the reality is, the pains of the past, for many, are ever present and the Laurel Historical Society is taking this moment to acknowledge that the history of Laurel is not exempt. Our community still carries the emotional injury of racial atrocities to the African American community and particularly the racially charged violence experienced by the residents of the Grove in the summer of 1967. This is the time that we speak to understanding that the emotional injury of those experiences carry throughout the generations, as does the institutional racism, benign neglect, systemic discrimination -- the combination of which results in a cycle of disenfranchisement of our neighbors.

Let not these recent deaths be in vain. We can only bridge our cultural gaps with compassion and communication. These are sensitive matters and it will require lots of patience, listening and consideration. It will not be without emotion and error, and as long as we stand in truth, we can become more unified and improve relations and civic engagement in our community. We have challenged ourselves, and invite you to join us, to be brave enough to engage in this conversation with someone who looks different than we do, to consider a different perspective. We can do this!

*The Laurel Historical Society will take the lead towards community healing with a public apology. We sent out an invitation for the Sesquicentennial Soirée Gala, in celebration of 150 years of Laurel that was not reflective of the diversity that makes up our community. We were held accountable by Alicia Fields, our Vice President. We are going to make mistakes along this journey, as we all come from different perspectives. Every day we are making new history and we will need your continued help to keep us accountable. We have assembled a team charged with making improvements within our organization as well as identifying more effective ways to engage. We look forward to the entire community being involved in this process.*

The Laurel Historical Society is committed to preserving and interpreting the entire history of Laurel in the most complete, respectful, and inclusive way possible. We call upon our family, friends, partners, and neighbors in the community to communicate with us and help guide us to a better future.

The past needs to be remembered. The present needs to be changed. The future needs to be better.

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