

Citizens for a Diverse Southborough

October 10, 2022, Heritage Day

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Select Board,

I have been asked to be the spokesman for a large and growing group of Southborough citizens who have become increasingly concerned about the views expressed by several members of your board, after ignoring repeated citizen requests to remove flags placed by certain private individuals in the Old Burial Ground. These individuals have chosen images that many of us find offensive, justifying their selection by arguing that these flags are somehow historically appropriate to Southborough—an assertion refuted through extensive research by members of both the Southborough Historical Commission and the Southborough Historical Society.

Whatever the original purpose or meaning these flags might have once held, they have now become widely associated with the January 6th insurrection, white supremacist groups, and others who believe that [government should be controlled solely by white Christians](#).



As such, these flags, shown above, are highly inappropriate historically, aesthetically and culturally, and do discredit to the reputation of our town as welcoming to all races, genders, and faiths.

We have read our town counsel's tortured explanation as to why the OBG is not a "public forum" and we are in complete disagreement. But even if we accept for the moment his views on the matter, counsel goes on to state unequivocally that these flags are actually a "form of government speech" and "express the views of the municipal government that controls them."

If that is true, it must logically follow then that you jointly and severally support the forces of racism, intolerance and injustice, whose message these flags have patently come to represent.

We trust that is not the case, and Town Counsel is mistaken.



Given our firm opinion that that you have, in fact, allowed the Old Burial Ground to become a public forum monopolized by private individuals with viewpoints vastly different from the majority of our residents, we therefore request the legal right to fly the flags shown above—recently guaranteed by the State Supreme Court—which, in our view, better represent the history and diversity of Southborough today:

- The Union Jack, to commemorate those loyal citizens of Britain who fought and died for England and who are buried there.
- The gay pride flag, emboldened with the motto, “Don’t tread on me!”, to commemorate the lives of all the LGBTQ citizens of Southborough throughout the ages.
- The flag of peace, the Coexist flag, bearing symbols of all the world’s religions, to remind us that we are all Americans, and we are stronger when working together than when tearing others down with petty partisanship.
- The flag of the Women’s Suffrage movement, to commemorate those brave pioneering women of Southborough who fought to enfranchise more than half of the American population.
- The black lives matter flag, to recognize the continuing burden people of color endure in our community to this day.
- The flag of the United Nations, whose map is centered on neither East nor West, but rather the whole globe, as a constant reminder that we are one small part of a very large planet, and everything we do, and others do, to destroy our own world only rebounds on us.

We would like to begin flying these flags next Monday the 17th in place of those currently there. Please consider this our formal, written request.

Of course, there is still the option, as urged by Ms. DeMuria's excellent citizen petition, to create a policy that prohibits the flying of any flag except one approved by the Historical Commission, as appropriate for a non-veteran, historic cemetery. We would support this alternative, though we would have expected the Select Board to have undertaken this initiative voluntarily last spring when first requested to act **by a petition with over 300 signatures**, rather than forcing us to yet again utilize our right of petition at Town Meeting in lieu of responsive and responsible leadership by your board.



Finally, we note too that the manner in which the flags are currently displayed on Southborough's All Wars Memorial violates federal guidelines. There should be only one American flag, not multiple, and all other banners should be subordinate to it.

We await your written reply.

Sincerely

Michael Weishan
Spokesman for Citizens for a Diverse Southborough