6N Plateau Place
Greenbelt, MD 20770
301 441 9377

July 8, 2015

Greenbelt City Council
25 Crescent Road
Greenbelt, MD 20770

Dear City Council:

We request that the City of Greenbelt erect its peace pole at the recently dedicated memorial site behind the library. Its presence in Greenbelt testifies to the creative and hardworking energies of its citizens to open up communication between Greenbelt and a city in the U.S.S.R during a time in the mid-1980's of intense propaganda, isolationism and the serious threat of nuclear war. The effort was organized by members of the Greenbelt Peace Committee, some of whom are honored in the memorial site.

Greenbelt acquired this peace pole on May 13, 1987 from the Japanese Peace Pole Project because of Greenbelt's persistent though unsuccessful effort to establish a "sister city" relationship with Rezekne, a city of similar size in Latvia, U.S.S.R.

The Greenbelt Peace Committee began its "sister city" initiative in in February, 1984 by requesting a "sister city" similar to Greenbelt from The Ground Zero Pairing Project, a national anti-nuclear organization. Ground Zero had successfully created 60 other sister-city relationships between Soviet and U.S. cities. Greenbelt sent it first information packet to Rezekne and to the U.S.S.R.-USA Society, the official clearing house for sister cities, on March 21, 1984; it followed-up with a letter to the Soviet Embassy requesting support of this initiative.

The initial packet to Rezekne included greetings from the Greenbelt City Council inviting the people of Rezekne to become a "sister city." The packet also included letters from the City Recreation Department, Sierra Club, the Greenbelt Cultural Arts Center, Prince George's County Schools, Greenbelt Elementary School, St. Hugh's Catholic Church and Green Ridge House along with brochures, photographs and 150 personal messages from school children and Greenbelt residents.

The Greenbelt Peace Committee followed up with another packet on Thanksgiving, 1984, since it has not received an acknowledgement of its first mailing. Two years later, on March 27, 1986, a member of the Greenbelt Peace Committee, Gail Drake, met in Moscow with the Secretary for Relations between Soviet and Foreign Cities, inquiring what impeded Greenbelt's "sister city" initiative; she learned that Greenbelt was too small to be paired under the Soviet Union's sister cities program; further it considered Greenbelt a suburb, not a city.

Fiercer objections to this initiative were voiced locally by people who believed that the U.S.S.R. had to be condemned unconditionally because of its human rights violations. Others viewed a city in Latvia as unsuitable because of Soviet occupation of Latvia after World War II. Wide-spread media coverage of this initiative ensued when Arthur M. Eckstein, a resident of Greenbelt, stated in the *Washington Post* on June 15, 1986 that Rezekne was the site of a KGB prison. A political prison near Rezekne may well be the reason the U.S.S.R. vetoed the Greenbelt-Rezekne "sister-city" initiative. Greenbelt Mayor Gil Weidenfeld said: "It is not so easy to have a dialogue with communities that may have something to hide" (*Prince George's Journal*, June 17, 1986).

In the end, Greenbelt did not establish a sister-city relationship with any city in the Soviet Union. The peace pole, as an internationally recognized symbol, acts as a reminder of the importance of open communication between peoples of different ideologies and circumstances. We request that the City install the peace pole to remind us of the valiant effort by the City of Greenbelt and the Greenbelt Peace Committee to foster dialogue in an era of confrontation. We request that the pole be placed near the recently dedicated benches in honor of Bert Donn, Esther Webb, Bob Auerbach and Doug Love.

Cordially,

Donna Hoffmeister
for the Memorial Legacy Committee