

Minutes of 10/25/22 Cemetery Commission

6:00 PM

**Remote Access Meeting with Zoom
(Under Emergency Order for Pandemic)
Approved at the Meeting of 11/16/22**

Members present: Walter Tibbetts (WT), Dina Stander (DS), Susan Millinger (SM). Meeting called to order at 6:03 p.m.

- 1) Minutes of the September meeting: Motion to accept the Minutes of September 22 was made and seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved by a roll call vote.
- 2) New burials and lot sales: One lot sale has been completed; a second is in early stage.
 - a. Valerie Phillips from North Carolina and her brother and his wife from Florida, all of whom grew up in Shutesbury, are purchasing a lot for their deceased mother, Linda Umholz, who lived in Shutesbury until she entered a nursing home. They met with WT and decided to buy Lot 166b, a quarter lot for two full graves and cremains. [Note: the other portion of Lot 166 was purchased by someone else; it is designated 166a.] Because of their Shutesbury connections, they paid the resident price of \$700. The brother gave WT a check for \$100; when Valerie sent a check for \$700, WT returned the check for \$100. The transaction with the \$100 check had never been sent to the Town Accountant, so once the \$700 check was in hand, the transaction with the returned \$100 check was not recorded.
 - b. WT will be getting back to Suzann Heron who is purchasing one or more lots in the green/natural section.
- 3) Board of Health Green Burial Meeting This meeting concerned green burials in the Jewish Community of Amherst (JCA) cemetery on Leverett Rd., west of West Pelham Rd. An abutter had written asking whether their well might be contaminated by green burials in that cemetery. The Cemetery Commission was involved because questions concerning this neighboring cemetery tend to come to it. Dina Stander is the Cemetery Commission's liaison to the JCA in cemetery matters.

The Shutesbury Board of Health (BOH) had written to the State DEP asking for guidance, but the process was moving so slowly that the abutter had contacted her State Senator who had called for this meeting. DS as liaison and WT as chair of the Commission attended the meeting. DS, the Commission's expert on all matters related to green burials, said that the science has not been clear about the issue of green burials and contamination of nearby water sources. It is generally said that 100 meters is a good distance between burial and water source, but this is a guideline, not a rule. DS has contacted Lee Webster, the leading expert in the field, asking for the most update science on this question. DS also asked the BOH for better communication between BOH and the Cemetery Commission on cemetery issues.

WT reported that he had discovered that since the death of Bill Clark, who had been excavation of graves for the JCA, no one is turning in to the Town Clerk (and thus to the State) the form for a Disposition, Removal, or Transportation permit. The JCA had not realized that it needed to submit paperwork to the Town. Sam Gladstone, the current chair of JCA's Burial Committee now understands this. Note: we need information about the needed permit on our website for family burials.

DS also pointed out that green burial educators need to be aware of the importance of communication between a cemetery and its municipality.

4) Cemetery documents

There was a brief discussion of the importance of inventorying the documents in Town Hall, and determining whether we need more storage space that we currently have there. There was also a question about whether there are any relevant documents in Old Town Hall. SM was instructed to ask Leslie Bracebridge about this. We agreed again that the Commission would like to meet in Town Hall this winter to conduct an inventory.

5) CPA Grant Application

a. The discussion began with a brief report on the Gravestone Repair Workshop.

Although there were no attendees (and Ta Mara Conde of Historic Gravestone Services provided some context on this: she has had to cancel other events recently for lack of attendees), the time was spent productively, talking with Conde about the grant application. Among her advice: for WT to take the red flags she gave us and add them to graves using the following criteria: first, safety, then historical stones in bad shape, then impressive or interesting monuments which will catch the attention of passers-by. Ta Mara also advised that we keep the request at \$10,000 (for a two-year project) so that we would not have to open for bids. She commented that she has been underbid, and therefore lost jobs, because of the low bids of companies that did inadequate work.

b. After Conde left, WT and SM walked around the oldest section of the cemetery, adjacent to Leverett Rd, inserting the flags by graves that met the criteria. There were so many flags needed in the oldest section that we never got beyond it. Conde will return and decide which of the flagged graves are the highest priority for repair, which is information we can use in our grant application.

c. In the meeting of 10.25, WT discussed the need for the removal of stumps left when trees were removed. A company which is sensitive to the needs of stump removal in a cemetery, when, for example, there may be gravestones in stumps, is not easy to find.

d. The grant application process. SM volunteered to draft the Determination of Eligibility form, due by December 1; WT will bring to her the files for the 2013 CPA grant application for grave repair and restoration. Our goal is to submit the form by Thanksgiving.

6.) Answers to the questions asked at the end of the meeting of 10.25.22

a Planting in the green burial section

1) Will we allow both native and nonnative species to be planted? Native plants will be encouraged, non-natives will be discouraged, invasive plants will not be permitted.

- 2) The soil there is very sandy: should we provide new top soil throughout the area? We would like to add top soil and intend to get a cost estimate for adding top soil to the whole green burial area. Maybe we will be able to begin adding it next year.
 - 3) To avoid the need to mow there, should we plant a perennial ground cover? We like the idea of planting a ground cover; creeping thyme, used in some cemeteries is an attractive possibility—but is it native?
- b. Delineation of access paths and lot boundaries
- 1) Considering putting gravel on access paths; stakes might be used to mark them.
 - 2) Small natural stones, flush with the ground, may be allowed to mark the corners of lots.
- c. What kind(s) of gravestones will be allowed? Only flat, flush with the ground? A limited height, like 2 inches? We need to know how big a stone can be before it needs a base which would require cementing. WT will consult with Negus and Taylor about this. Use of cement is to be avoided in the green burial section. The limit of stone size is a stone which does not need a foundation. [SM is to check with Sally Fairfield about the size of the stone she has ordered for Andy.]
- d) Already determined: vaults are allowed, but not necessary, in the traditional sections.
- e) Needed: WT's list of the steps to selling a lot, which can be used by any of the Commission members when necessary
- f) Needed: a good place for central storage of maps, etc. Can we get a file cabinet for storage in Town Hall? The answer will be connected to g
- g) At the November meeting we will schedule a (December?) meeting in Town Hall to examine the contents of the existing file drawer.
- 7) Items not anticipated: The question was asked of DS: what makes cremains so chemically toxic? DS did not know. Is all scattering of ashes a bad idea? Can scattering of a small amount (a couple of teaspoons) be alright? DS thought it was a question of the ok (very small amount) and the ideal (no scattering.) Emotions of family and friends have to be considered.
- 8) Date for next meeting: Wednesday, November 16, 2022, at 6 p.m.
- 9) Adjournment at 7:35: A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and unanimously carried by roll call vote.

Submitted by *Susan Millinger*
Cemetery Commission secretary

