

Freetown Cemetery Commission
Minutes of the Monday, December 3, 2018 Meeting
Town Hall — Assonet, Mass.

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Present: Keven Desmarais, Adrienne Levesque, and Mike McCue.

Absent: None.

Call to order: Mike McCue called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

Receipt of Minutes / Superintendent's Report

Minutes of October 1, 2018, were received. The Superintendent's Reports for October and November, including bills paid since the previous meeting, were also received.

Update on Mowing Prices – Fiscal Year 2020

Mr. McCue reported that both Tom Copeland and Heath Chace agreed to maintain their FY19 prices for FY20.

Assonet Burying Ground

Mr. McCue reported that the new sections north of Section 8 are completed and lots are available for purchase, with some already being purchased. The sections have been numbered 8-A and 8-B.

It was agreed on consensus to require cement to be used to stabilize the upright marble headstones in the Veterans Section, as was done for Richard Donahue's headstone. It is hoped this will avoid the settling that has occurred with some of the stones placed earlier.

Discussion was held on whether to require each individual lot in the Veterans Section to have a headstone. Currently the VA will provide the veteran with a free stone, but not a spouse. Where one or both people are cremated, the lot and headstone can be shared; if neither is cremated, the lots are side-by-side and the VA-issued stone would be on one lot and not both. On the pro side, requiring each lot to have a stone would maintain a uniform appearance; and the cost of the stones was believed to be equal to or less than the cost of a single lot, which whereas lots are free in the Veterans Section, there was possibly still an overall savings to be had. On the con side, this would be an expense to the families, which the Cemetery Commission tries hard to avoid. The analogy of "a mouth missing teeth" was used to describe what the section could look like if a number of lots are left without headstones. All agreed to think about this more over the winter, not wanting to impose an expense in haste.

Mr. McCue raised the idea of creating an area for respectful flag retirements, noting that flags keep appearing in the old shed without any idea of who is putting them there. Mr. Desmarais reported that Richard Brown has asked about the growing number of flags in the old shed. On consensus, Mr. Desmarais will talk to John Remedis about having the VFW retire the flags that have accumulated, and Mr. McCue will follow up with the Boy Scouts about setting up an area to retire flags at the Assonet Burying Ground.

Mr. McCue also brought forward an idea for using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to determine the availability of space on the west end of Section 14 and in the southwest corner of the cemetery, south of Section 22 and west of the Bragg Graves. Mr. Desmarais discussed the pros and cons of GPR. Mr. McCue believed Lakeville had had some success with GPR. All agreed to look into it and to pursue the idea if it could be accomplished for \$1,000 or less.

Discussion on Gravediggers' Licenses

Mr. McCue reported that John Ashley intended to give up opening graves for traditional burials at the end of December, but was still interested in overseeing cremation burials. He also reported that others had expressed an interest in the possibility of overseeing cremation burials but not traditional burials. The concern

is that the licensing rules stipulate insurance requirements for heavy equipment. Mr. Desmarais felt that insurance could be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for those looking to perform only cremation burials. In the meantime, it was agreed unanimously that Mr. Ashley be able to continue overseeing cremation burials under his current license.

Discussion on Mapping

Mr. McCue stated that most of the outstanding mapping projects will be finished within the coming months. He also stated that over the years, a number of outside parties have recommended that the older cemeteries be mapped while the headstones are still legible. This would primarily be for the cemeteries with graves from the 1700s and 1800s, where fragile headstones are prone to being lost to weather. All agreed it was reasonable to pursue mapping the older cemeteries for future reference. The intent will be to have each grave located and numbered, with a legend created to establish who is where.

Updates on Old Business or New Business

The following items were taken up under this heading:

- ◆ Mr. Desmarais will follow up with Churchill & Banks regarding the Robinson and Capt. Job Terry cemeteries and Mr. Copeland's ability to burn brush on the property.
- ◆ Mr. McCue reported the Assonet Boy Scouts began cleaning one of the cemeteries at Stop & Shop over the weekend, and intend to return later in December to continue work. They also started working at Payne's Cove in November.
- ◆ Mr. Copeland is scheduled to finish the clean-up of the Nichols Cemetery over the winter.
- ◆ Mr. McCue will ask Albanese Monuments to evaluate whether any of the remaining down stones at the Plummer Burial Ground can be stood up safely. Mr. Desmarais asked that money be requested in FY20 to work on more of these types of projects. Mrs. Levesque agreed.
- ◆ Discussion was held on the potential for seasonal labor in future fiscal years. Mr. McCue reported that the Highway Department crew has expressed concerns about the amount of work Mr. Brown takes on by himself – not that they are opposed to his doing the work, but that they feel he needs help to lighten his load. Commissioners were in unanimous agreement that Mr. Brown deserves help. Mr. Desmarais noted that the Conservation Commission would be needing help with some of their properties in the coming year, as well. Further discussion centered on whether any other department, such as the Board of Health (which oversees the Town Beach and Boat Ramp), might need assistance. It was agreed on consensus to reach out to the Conservation Commission, Highway Department, and Board of Health to see if it would be feasible to pursue sharing two or three seasonal laborers in FY20.
- ◆ Discussion resumed from the previous meeting as to the prices of lots and the split between perpetual care and "sale of lots". Mr. McCue reviewed the current prices and how they had come to be. He recounted that prices were raised in 2007 to match surrounding cemeteries and also to slow the rate of sales, which was outpacing available space. He also noted that in 2015, the prices were increased \$200 for nonresidents and decreased \$50 for residents. After that adjustment in 2015, the amount of perpetual care for each grave was \$500, with the balance going to sale of lots (\$250 for residents, \$500 for nonresidents). Those on payment plans in 2015 were credited if their price decreased, or "frozen" if their price increased, so the result was beneficial for residents and neutral for nonresidents.

Mr. Desmarais stated he has advocated for the amount paid into perpetual care to be reduced and the amount paid into "sale of lots" to be increased, as the "sale of lots" money is readily available while the perpetual care funds are added to a permanent trust fund. Mr. McCue stated he is more of the view that lots will eventually no longer be sold, but the perpetual care fund will remain indefinitely.

Discussion then turned to the amount of lots being sold. Mr. McCue stated that the number is lower than it was years ago, and felt this was partly due to the graves being more expensive than they were in the past and partly due to the increase in cremations, with the ability to use older family lots for cremations rather than purchasing new lots.

Mr. Desmarais asked how the current rates compared with surrounding towns. Mr. McCue stated the rates were comparable for municipal cemeteries and low compared to Catholic cemeteries. He attributed this to many of the Catholic cemeteries having more of space-crunch.

Mr. Desmarais asked if the amount credited to perpetual care and sale-of-lots could be split 50/50. Mr. McCue stated this would amend the resident rate to \$375/\$375 and the nonresident rate would remain unchanged at \$500/\$500. For reason of the veterans discount outside the Veterans Section, he felt the perpetual care rate should stay the same across all prices; although the discount would favor nonresidents, the amount paid would be the same for all veterans.

After further discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Desmarais, seconded by Mrs. Levesque, to reduce the price for residents for traditional graves to \$700.00, and to set the perpetual care charge for traditional graves at \$350.00. Mr. McCue noted he would abstain from the vote since he is currently on a payment plan and would benefit from the reduction in price. The motion carried 2-0-1, with Mr. McCue abstaining.

As of December 3, 2018, the prices for lots stand at:

Freetown Residents

♦ Traditional Grave:	\$ 700.00	(\$350.00 for lot, \$350.00 for perpetual care)
♦ Cremation Grave:	\$ 300.00	(\$150.00 for lot, \$150.00 for perpetual care)
♦ Veterans in general sections:	\$ 350.00	(\$350.00 for perpetual care only)
♦ Veterans in gen. sec., cremation:	\$ 150.00	(\$150.00 for perpetual care only)
♦ Veterans Section:	-- Free --	(Free for veterans and spouses)

Nonresidents

♦ Traditional Grave:	\$1,000.00	(\$650.00 for lot, \$350.00 for perpetual care)
♦ Cremation Grave:	\$ 500.00	(\$250.00 for lot, \$250.00 for perpetual care)
♦ Veterans in general sections:	\$ 350.00	(\$350.00 for perpetual care only)
♦ Veterans in gen. sec., cremation:	\$ 250.00	(\$250.00 for perpetual care only)
♦ Veterans Section:	-- Free --	(Free for veterans and spouses)

Any Other Business Properly Before the Board

None.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Mrs. Levesque, seconded by Mr. Desmarais, to adjourn at 4:46 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: _____
Michael T. McCue, Chairman