

TOWN OF CHESTERFIELD, NH
CEMETERY COMMISSION

Monthly Meeting - 19 April 2021 - 6:30 P.M.
Selectboard Meeting Room
Chesterfield Town Offices
490 Route 63, Chesterfield, NH

MINUTES

Roll Call / Attendance

Present: Nancy Aichele, Ed Cheever, Neil Jenness, Jeff Titus and Margaret Winn (Commissioners), Chris Flagg (Sexton), Gary Winn (Selectboard Representative)

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order by Ed Cheever at 6:30 P.M.
Ed Cheever appointed Nancy Aichele as secretary pro tem for this meeting.

Election of Officers

Ed Cheever nominated Margaret Winn as commission chairperson. Jeff Titus seconded the nomination. Vote was unanimous in the affirmative to elect Margaret as chair.
Margaret Winn nominated Jeff Titus as secretary. Ed Cheever seconded the nomination. Vote was unanimous in the affirmative to elect Jeff as secretary.

Approval of Minutes

Margaret Winn made a motion to approve minutes of the last meeting, held on October 13, 2020 at the Stone House Museum. Neil Jenness seconded the motion. Vote was unanimous in the affirmative to approve the minutes.

Sexton's Report

Communications

1) Chris Flagg reported that he received an email from Kristen McKeon regarding updating a stone at the Timothy Robertson Burying-Ground. Kristen also asked who is responsible for the Methodist church sign which adjoins the burying ground...Chris indicated it's a state sign. Jeff Titus asked about the process when someone requests to be buried in an 'inactive' cemetery (other than Chesterfield West, Friedsam or Spofford). It was indicated that this is handled on a 'case-by-case' basis and decided by vote of the cemetery commission. It was noted that an applicant should typically be a direct descendent or a have direct genealogical connection to those buried (which can be verified) in order to gain approval. One recent example occurred when a cremation burial was approved for Draper-Crouch Burying-Ground. Neil Jenness noted such burials are to be cremations only, not full body burials. Also, Noyes-Robertson-Coolidge Cemetery has free lots for veterans (can be full body, spouses can't currently be buried there).

Monument Repairs / Placements

2) Chris reported on 3 damaged stones, located at Pattridge-Albee, Noyes-Robertson-Coolidge and Spofford (this one from frost, family offered to assist).

Personnel / Time Off

3) Chris reported that he has hired a new employee, Mike Fitzgerald, to be on the crew this season and that Tom Flavin has been an employee for 6 years now. Earlier in meeting Gary Winn noted that Chris reports to this board. He does a great job and is now in his 11th year as sexton. Chris noted that, when the time comes to step down, he plans to hire and train his replacement in order to maintain continuity for the cemetery staff.

4) Chris will be taking off May 3rd and 4th.

Gatekeepers

5) Chris noted that, with Pat Porter's departure, there currently are not any gatekeepers for the Chesterfield West Cemetery. Hours are 9:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M. (later in season closing time reverts to 6:00 P.M. due to earlier sunset). Cemetery crew opens gates on workday mornings (Monday - Wednesday), but other times will need coverage beginning May 1, 2021.

Suggestions for possible gatekeepers were nearby property owners Santino, Goldberg, Rahe. Margaret Winn will reach out to these neighbors to gauge interest. Gatekeeper is a part-time paid position (May 1st - November 1st). Margaret Winn and Neil Jenness expressed concerns over kids playing in the cemetery. Margaret suggested getting new locks. Nancy Aichele asked if there is any liability potential to the town if someone gets injured. Neil Jenness will look into this.

Cemetery Damage / Repairs / Upkeep

6) Chris reports finding lots of debris this year - including trees - in Chesterfield West, Friedsam (cleaned up) and Spofford. Ed Cheever expressed concerns about large pine trees at Friedsam falling. Removal of these trees would provide additional room for burials.

7) Chris reported that Steve Chickering is helping with repair of the waterline at Chesterfield West Cemetery. He has put in conduit that houses a portion of waterline running from the pond to the cemetery fountain.

8) Chris has ordered flowers from Sue Kelleher for Perpetual Care.

Budget

9) Chris reports line #10-190 Administration Expenses is over-spent already due to cost of advertising for open positions. Chris noted he is considering options for truck replacement at the end of this year. Margaret Winn asked what line #10-460 Dues are used for as it wasn't paid out last year. Chris stated it is for membership in the NH Cemetery Association.

10) Chris reported that he is examining options for repair or replacement of the fence at Chesterfield West Cemetery, and shared with the commission some photos of area cemetery fencing as illustrations. One option would be to remove the current wooden sections between the granite stones and replace them with large-link chain (potentially costly and difficult to find). A second option would be to connect the granite stones with pressure treated cross bars and to repair the turnstiles. Gary Winn suggested possible plastic white fencing. It was noted that Chesterfield West Cemetery already has the granite posts in place. Frontage along Poor Road is 750' long. Discussion of options and related costs to be continued.

Upcoming Burials

Margaret Winn inquired about how many burials are anticipated this spring. Chris stated that there are 6 -7 that he is aware of at this time. There are two at Chesterfield West (one scheduled for May 21, 2021 and another coming)... two or three at Friedsam and one at Spofford... Chris expects there may be more.

Old Business

Records / Process Updates

General discussion ensued. Ed Cheever inquired about lot records as he has received a lot inheritance question from a resident. It was mentioned that the current process is that, when Neil sells a lot, Chris and Trish Lachenal get copies of paperwork. Approximately 8-15 lots are sold per year. The location of various records was discussed. Many of the current cemetery records are located at the highway department - those date back to the early 1990's. Other records, including minutes and older grave information, are housed at the historical society. Some discussion focused on the availability of existing electronic records, including access to same, whether or not other records should be digitized, as well as the best way to store all cemetery records. Chris Flagg indicated that he also has records and maps, which he plans to share with the commission. Commissioners discussed obtaining an electronic copy of current working records at the highway department, as well as how to best accomplish that. It was suggested that obtaining a flash drive to download a copy of these records would be the best route. It was also noted that the commission should establish a plan to provide adequate protection of cemetery records in the event of a catastrophic occurrence, such as a fire, etc. There seemed to be consensus among those present that the commission should work to develop a comprehensive process for storage and handling of all cemetery related records, and to examine updates to processes for lot sales, lot mapping and burials that would streamline the individual components into a single process.

New Business

Green Burials

General discussion ensued. Margaret Winn indicated that a green burial is typically 3.5 to 4 feet deep, as animals supposedly only dig 12 inches down. Body is in wicker basket or shroud made of cotton or wool. No vault. All cemeteries require vaults (Jewish Orthodox put vault over top of body-the vault is turned over so that body is protected and still be resting on the bare ground). Jeff Titus asked if there are currently any NH RSAs governing green burials. Chris Flagg stated he has no problem with having a section of cemetery dedicated for green burials. Neil Jenness mentioned she has concerns of potential health risk. Nancy Aichele stated we need to research to see if green burials actually do pose health risk or not. Gary Winn noted that if we pay the dues to join the state association, we would be able to ask for guidance on questions like these. Nancy Aichele asked if residents are allowed to bury on their own property. Margaret Winn replied that it depends on zoning.

Cemetery Visits

Jeff Titus inquired about visits to cemeteries. Chris Flagg stated that he will be conducting a visit to the Thomas Burying-Ground on Tuesday, April 27, 2021. Margaret and Jeff indicated interest in attending.

Posting of Minutes to town website

Jeff Titus spoke about creating an agenda for each monthly meeting and circulating it via email, thereby giving members an opportunity to review, add topics and be better prepared in advance of those meetings. Once approved, meeting minutes will be forwarded for public posting. Margaret Winn will contact town staff about updating cemetery commission information on the town website.

Updates to Cemetery Rules / Guidelines

General Discussion ensued. Margaret Winn asked if the commission has up-to-date by-laws. Chris Flagg replied that it has some. Margaret asked if we need to revisit/update cost of burials. Chris stated that funeral director pays backhoe operator directly, and that Chris has one of his staff on site for burials. Fee schedule is dated 2018, prices unchanged since 2015 (Chris provided Margaret with a copy). Neil Jenness indicated it has been policy not to sell a lot to someone who doesn't live in Chesterfield or is not a descendant. There seemed to be consensus among those present that the commission should work to collect and review all policies and guidelines currently in effect, and to consider publishing an updated document which contains a consolidated version of all.

Project Followup

Cemetery Book Update - Work is progressing. Margaret Winn is currently updating information relating to Spofford. Jeff Titus indicated that he is working on updating the Chesterfield cemetery listings on the website findagrave.com, so that that they can be compared with the latest cemetery book updates, with a goal of having both online and hardcopy records updating Chesterfield cemeteries. A further step would be to enhance this data with photos of grave stones, people, inscriptions, epitaphs, GPS locations, genealogical connections and pertinent historical information.

Next Meeting

It was noted that cemetery commission meetings are normally held on the second Tuesday of each month (April through October) at the Chesterfield Historical Society building next to the town hall in the center of town. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11, 2021 at 6:30 P.M. at the Historical Society.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Aichele,
Secretary Pro Tem

*****Document Status*****

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