

Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date:	September 17, 2015, 3:00 pm
Commissioners Present:	Rita Church, Allison Curran, Lainey Rappaport, Barry Trutor, Donna Waldron
Staff Present:	Anne D’Alton, Cemetery Office Assistant
Public Present:	Joan Shannon & Max Tracy (arrived at 3:15), City Councilors Sarah Dopp, past President of the Chittenden County Historical Society
Attachments:	Additions to Agenda from Jesse Bridges and Deryk Roach, Parks Dept. Photos of road repairs at Greenmount Cemetery Letters & emails concerning discontinuing the Cemetery Commission (5) Minutes of City Council Work Session, 09.02.2015

- I. Agenda reorganization
 - A. The meeting began at 3:00 by Commission Chair Donna Waldron introducing Agenda Item III A, bringing this issue to the beginning of the meeting in the interest of the public attending in order to speak to this issue.
- II. Approval of Minutes from May 14, 2015, July 9, 2015 and August 13, 2015 Meetings
 - A. (addressed later in the meeting): unanimously approved.
- III. Old Business
 - A. Consideration of City Council Resolution to discontinue Cemetery Commission as an entity separate from the Parks Commission.
 - ◆ Joan Shannon said that she loves cemeteries, and understands the difference between parks and cemeteries. However, commissions are to oversee departments, so there should be just one commission for the Parks Department. The separation of Parks and DPW is an example of fiefdoms defending their territory at the expense of the City. Parks should be responsible for looking after the interest of the cemeteries. Both entities could profit from hearing each other’s issues during the same meeting. The Parks Commission could have a Cemetery Committee with 3 members, like the Harbor Committee. Shannon just learned about State Statutes pertaining to cemetery commissions, but notes that City Charter is in effect, too. Any change would require public approval. She does not want to fight for her idea, but believes it is in the City’s best interest. Apologized for not informing the Cemetery Commission of the resolution that City Council Chair Jane Knodell asked her to sponsor, to merge the Cemetery Commission into the Parks Commission—she assumed that the Cemetery Commission had reviewed this resolution.
 - ◆ Waldron noted that having the Cemetery Office Assistant at the Cemetery Commission Meetings is very helpful, providing communication between the commissioners and the staff concerning history and procedures—this would be forfeited by merging with the Parks Commission. She believes the Parks Commission already has a lot of responsibility, and it wouldn’t be practical to add the responsibility of hearing, reviewing and deciding



about Cemetery issues. In addition, there may not be time for these issues to be adequately addressed. Waldron pointed to a poster she'd made, displaying history, articles and photos about Cemetery issues not getting addressed. She noted that she understands the fiefdom issue, and asked if the capital spending plan being devised by Martha Keenan is helping to ameliorate this problem. Shannon said yes, Department heads are now working together better.

- ◆ Lainey Rappaport said the Cemetery Commission does not understand what benefit would be gained by merging the Cemetery Commission into the Parks Commission. There are presently a lot of issues in the City's cemeteries that are not being addressed, such as littering (including needles, trash, poop, vomit), unsupervised Corrections Crews, dogs.
- ◆ Waldron expressed an interest in improving the situation for the City, but the Cemetery Commissioners are concerned that the Parks Commission wouldn't have the interest or time to notice or be concerned about these problems enough to try to find solutions.
- ◆ Shannon believes that the merge would give a stronger voice to Cemetery issues, because the Cemetery Committee would be present at the Parks Commission meetings when budget decisions were being discussed. She reiterated that she did not want to fight for this change, though.
- ◆ Max Tracy noted that he hasn't been involved in this conversation, but agrees with Waldron that it would be better to keep the Cemetery Commission separate from the Parks Commission, or the cemetery issues would be lost. The littering issues are getting worse. Also, if people want to be involved in City government, they should be allowed—their voice is needed.
- ◆ Sarah Dopp shared a letter from the Chittenden County Historical Society expressing strong opposition to changing the Cemetery Commission into a committee on the Parks Commission. She noted that the interest of people serving on boards is very individual, so if the merge occurred, different types of people with different objectives would need to meet together. This would cause 3 negative results: the Commissioners would have to go to twice as many meetings (Parks Commission meetings plus Cemetery Committee meetings), Cemetery Commissioners would have to listen to Parks issues that they wouldn't be interested in, and because the Cemetery Division is such a small part of the Parks Department, their issues would get lost at Parks Commission meetings.
- ◆ Shannon sees Dopp's point, but notes that there is value in broadening perspective.
- ◆ Waldron suggested that if the City Council wanted to get rid of a commission, why not the Fence Viewers? Shannon said they are looking into that.
- ◆ Rappaport noted that Jesse Bridges had said one reason to merge the Cemetery Commission into the Parks Commission is that he would have 4 less meetings to attend per year, but she didn't think this would be true if he would need to attend the Cemetery Committee meetings.
- ◆ Waldron thanked Shannon for her apology.
- ◆ Trutor stated clearly that he is not interested in Parks and feels strongly about maintaining the Cemetery Commission. He doesn't want Burlington to be the first Vermont town to abolish its Cemetery Commission. He suggested sending a Cemetery Commissioner to the Parks Commission meetings to demonstrate that the Cemetery Commission is not a fiefdom, and to show that the merge would not work.
- ◆ Rappaport said she'd contacted the Mayor and most of the City Councilors, and they didn't know about the proposed change.



- ◆ Shannon said there's no need to belabor the point: it's clear that the Cemetery Commissioners want the Cemetery Commission to remain as it is. Bridges has a lot of work to do pertaining to the Parks Department, and the Cemetery Commission should be mindful of this. He is spread thin, but does a great job.
 - ◆ Dopp agreed that having a Cemetery Commission representative on the Parks Commission could be beneficial to the City's Cemeteries, and this should be explored.
 - ◆ Rita Church stressed that even though the Parks Department is big, the Cemeteries are important, too, and this needs to be recognized. Volunteers have donated lots of time and money to improve the Cemeteries, demonstrating how valuable the City's cemeteries are to the public. This philanthropy spans generations: Lilian Carslisle (who helped restore the Chapel) and her daughter, Diana (who is a member of the Friends of Lakeview Cemetery, responsible for Chapel, Gazebo and Fountain restoration at Lakeview); Glenna Light (who initiated the Chapel restoration project) and her daughter Deborah (who has applied her extensive computer skills and attention to detail to help correct and transfer to electronic format the Cemetery's records, and recreate lost records-- a job much more extensive than that which can be handled by the one half-time office assistant assigned to the Cemetery Division); Jane Ewing (President of the Friends of Lakeview Cemetery) and her daughter Colleen Montgomery (who helps place flags on Veterans' graves).
 - ◆ Tracy urged Commissioners to reach out to the City Councilors, letting them know their concerns. The Councilors have a lot to do, too, so they cannot keep track of everything that is going on. They welcome and will make time for issues the public brings to them.
 - ◆ Church expressed the need for the Parks Department to consult with the Cemetery Commission about prioritizing the cemetery repairs Bridges promised would be done with the additional money being deposited to the Parks budget since the Commission agreed to his request to reduce the percentage of lot sales deposited to the Perpetual Care fund from 55% to 5% for 3 years.
 - ◆ Waldron asked if the item about expanding the Parks Commission to be addressed by the Charter Change Committee, chaired by City Councilor Kurt Wright, is connected with the resolution to merge the Cemetery Commission into the Parks Commission. Shannon responded no, that proposal has come up because so many people want to be on the Parks Commission, and they are making sub-committees.
 - ◆ Shannon assured the Cemetery Commission that the City Council does not want to make a change without the support of the Commission, and that she will tell the Charter Change Committee that she found no support for the proposed resolution. She recognized that this resolution must have felt to the Cemetery Commissioners like a lack of appreciation for the Commissioners and their work, but this is not the case. She and Tracy left at about 3:45.
 - ◆ Alison Curran reported that she attended the September 2, 2015 Work Session of the City Council during which the resolution to merge the Cemetery Commission into the Parks Commission was discussed, and the City Councilors in attendance said they did not feel this merge was necessary.
 - ◆ Rappaport expressed concern about the Greenmount entrance gate needing welding. Annie D'Alton responded that Jeff Shedd, Assistant Cemetery Supervisor, has had a temporary welding done, and is waiting for the Parks Department to schedule it.
- B. Items tabled from July 9, 2015 meeting
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.4, Election of Officers



- Chair: Rappaport nominated Waldron, Curran seconded. Trutor expressed a high regard for the leadership Waldron has provided, and urged her to continue as Chair. Church, Rappaport and Curran agreed. The motion passed unanimously.
- Vice-Chair: Church nominated Trutor, who said he'd be willing to continue in the position, but expressed his desire for others to have the opportunity to serve. But Curran and Rappaport said they were too busy at this time. All in favor of Trutor continuing as Vice-Chair.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.2 & 5
 - D'Alton referred to Deryk Roach's email report & photos of Greenmount road & fence repair. Because the fence was cut immediately after being mended twice, Roach moved on to the next proposed solution: to install a gate, so at least the integrity of the fence would be maintained.
 - Trutor asked if fence cutting had ever been reported to Police; D'Alton didn't know. He feels this should be done every time the fence is cut, to build a case. He doesn't like the idea of a gate, feels it will be left open. The State Law requires intact fence, he wants to keep people from bicycling over graves, and believes there must be a solution. He has tried using See-Click-Fix with no response.
 - Curran feels it would be best to accept that people are going to cut through the cemetery, and an open gate would be better than damaged fence.
 - Church worries that a bicyclist might get hurt or damage monuments.
 - Curran suggested talking with the Police about the problem, asking their advice.
 - Rappaport said she has reported issues at Greenmount to the police, and learned that there is a process to follow to get needles picked up.
 - Waldron will invite the Chief of Police to a Commission Meeting.
 - Trutor feels that Bridges has misunderstood the Commission's intent-- they know they are not in charge of day-to-day business. Also, he does not feel that the fiefdom problem brought up by Shannon relates to the City Cemeteries.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.9: Verizon Proposal
 - Waldron believes this is no longer under consideration, so the Commission does not need to see the proposal.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.7: Chapel Sign
 - The Friends of Lakeview Cemetery are working on this.
 - Rappaport would like to see a new sign on the Elmwood gate.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.1: Signage for no dogs in City Cemeteries
 - Rappaport feels this could be communicated to the public via Front Porch Forum, and a story in Seven Days. Waldron will follow up, including bikes & skateboards.
 - D'Alton noted that the public does care about preventing inappropriate activities in the Cemeteries: someone reported that Ridin' High had posted a skateboard event scheduled at Lakeview for a Sunday. D'Alton called and told them that this wasn't allowed and they said they would cancel it.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.8: Letters of Appreciation for Jim Woodman and Deborah Hardy for cleaning Civil War Veteran markers, and Don Jackson, coordinator of Civil War General gravesite tour.
 - Trutor will write first draft and Waldron will add to it.
 - Trutor feels Jane Ewing should get one, too, for all the work she has done on the Commission. Also Joan Shannon and Max Tracy.
- ◆ Agenda Item III.B.6: Request for CAO to discuss status of Perpetual Care account



- Trutor will write a letter to Bob Rustin, Burlington CAO, inviting him to a Commission meeting and asking him to get the Perpetual Care money invested responsibly so that the significant income that it would generate could be added to the Cemetery budget and used for resolving the many maintenance issues deferred by Parks due to lack of fund allocation. The Commission needs a clear statement of the status of the fund and plans to invest the money.

IV. Superintendent's Items

- A. Bridges emailed a report stating "the first part of the roads will be paved and the roof will be fixed as part of the capital plan this fall. This is funded by interest from the perpetual care fund."

V. Commissioner's Items

- A. Include on Agenda for next meeting (October 7, 2015):
 - ◆ Follow up on Martha Keenan reporting to the Commission concerning which category Chapel repair falls under. Deryk Roach is aware of Chapel repair needs, and is on the team working to prioritize maintenance & repair projects.

VI. Office Report – none.

VII. Adjournment

At 4:30 pm Waldron moved to adjourn, Trutor seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Next Commission Meeting: Wednesday, October 7, 2015, 4:30 pm at Cemetery Office.