

Brattleboro Cemetery Committee
August 17, 2015
Town Clerk's Office

A meeting of the Brattleboro Cemetery Committee was convened at 5:17 PM by Chair Marshall Wheelock in the Town Clerk's office. Members present were: Edna Fletcher, Jane Fletcher, Judith Price, Jackie Stromberg, Marshall Wheelock, and Annette Cappy. Also present: Beth Perkins of Ker Westerlund Funeral Home. Absent with regrets: Debra Collins.

Edna Fletcher moved to approve the minutes of the July 21 meeting. The motion was seconded by Jane Fletcher. The minutes were approved as presented.

Beth Perkins, manager of Ker Westerlund Funeral Home was present to share information on natural or green burials. She explained that there are several potential levels to green burials that even extend to the use of non-motorized vehicles to transport a body.

Members of the committee felt that our primary objective in offering a green burial space was to allow the deceased the option to become one again with the earth by using natural, non-toxic burying practices.

Ms. Perkins primary discussion was centered on various aspects of green cemeteries. She stated that basically it is the responsibility of the cemetery to establish rules and regulations as to how they wish to function as a green cemetery. Topics discussed:

Caskets – traditional caskets are not acceptable as green. Allowable green caskets may be constructed of wood but do not contain metal hardware; wooden dowels are used to join pieces of wood. Also acceptable are wicker, grass wool or other natural bio-degradable materials. Another option would be to eliminate the use of a casket and use only a shroud.

Vaults – Use of vaults generally prohibited so as not to interfere with the earth's claim on the remains.

Grounds maintenance – Several options for levels of maintenance are available
Area maintained as other sections of the cemetery
Discontinue regular mowing and allow section to be reclaimed by nature
Minimal mowing, primarily to keep brush from becoming overgrown and unsightly
No mowing; instead, planting of wildflowers.

Long term maintenance - in time, the areas of burial will need to be filled with additional loam as the grave begins to sink.

Head stone – individual headstones are not customary. Without the use of a casket or vault, the ground is vulnerable to weight of the stone. Often the compromise is to allow one natural stone (unpolished or carved) for all names in the section. Each time a burial occurs, the name is added to the stone. Customarily only the names and dates of death are carved.

The committee also discussed the order of burials in the section with burials first being put nearest to the back of the designated area and working outward for subsequent burials so that

heavy equipment could be utilized without disturbing already filled graves. Lots would be used in order and remains buried in the next available space. There was no vote on this issue.

The committee then discussed its upcoming meeting with Town Manager Peter Elwell and ultimately a meeting with the selectboard for discussion of the following:

CEMETERY PROPOSALS FOR TOWN MANAGER/SELECTBOARD

Amend By-laws.

- Article 1: Reduce committee size from no more than 12 and no fewer than 5 members to no more than 10, and no fewer than 5 members which shall include no more than 2 staff members. All members shall have equal voting rights.
- Article 5: Reduce number of meetings required from two monthly, to *as needed*, with at least one meeting required annually, which shall be held in May.

Burial Sites

- Increase the number of cremains allowed to be buried in a plot containing an existing casket from two to four containers.

Interment

- The Town Clerk shall be informed prior to any digging; digging shall be done by a professional authorized by the clerk.
- The office of the town clerk shall be notified in writing and a permit shall be issued from the clerk prior to the removal or relocating of buried cremains.
- The Town shall require an opening fee of \$100 for each burial or removal, including cremains.

Markers

- Corner Markers - A second initial may be carved on a corner stone marker prior to installation at the expense of the requestor.
- Headstones - The placement of a headstone shall conform to the direction of those in place, in an existing row. When establishing a new row of plots, headstones shall be placed on the west end and face east.

Eternal Flame

- A single, solar powered light shall be permitted on a gravesite.
- The light shall be placed within the plot in the space allowed for plantings.
- The light shall be no more than 12 inches in height.
- Glass on any fixture is strictly prohibited.

Maplewood Section of Morningside Cemetery

- An existing section of Morningside Cemetery known as Maplewood shall be designated for the burial of residents of the town who have been determined indigent.
- Burials of cremains only shall be allowed.
- In the event that the family of a resident lacks funds to purchase a plot, the Town shall waive the purchase fee and opening fee.
- The Town shall not be responsible for the cost of a marker.
- The Town's responsibility shall be consistent with Vermont State Statute.

New Section in Morningside Cemetery

- Create a new section in Morningside Cemetery for the burial of cremains only.
- The section shall be located in the heart-shaped grass area facing the front of the mausoleum.
- The new section shall be named Walsh Section.
- The Town may establish a flower garden in the area surrounding the flagpole.
- Plantings and decorations shall not be allowed on individual plots.
- Each cremains plot shall measure 40 inches in width x 5 feet in length.
- No more than two cremains containers shall be buried in each plot.
- Stone markers shall be flush to the ground and be no wider or longer than 30 inches.
- Plots will be numbered and sold in numerical order only.
- The cost of each plot shall be \$250.

Mausoleum Roof and Other Repairs

The condition of the mausoleum roof in Morningside Cemetery has been a concern of the committee since the committee was formed in 2007. The roof is constructed of slate and has many holes. Standing inside the structure, one can see the sky through the holes in the ceiling and roof. While the roof is the primary concern of the committee, there are several other repairs that could allow the building to be useful and could possibly income producing. It once was a lovely building built with a purpose.

Unauthorized Access and General Maintenance

- In addition to the main road leading into Morningside Cemetery there are three more areas of egress:

1.) The tree line that forms the dividing boundary between the cemetery and the Vermont Bread Company on Cotton Mill, has is a section that has been extensive cleared. There now is an opening among the trees that is large enough for unauthorized vehicles to enter the cemetery

without being observed. Piles of sand have been dumped in the space as a deterrent but the opening is still passable. Strategically placed boulders may be necessary to prohibit traffic.

2.) There are two gated roadways on the north section of the cemetery, both leading to Morningside Commons property. The fences and gates have been there for several years, and appear to have had a hard life, but they fulfill their purpose of keeping vehicles out. It is assumed that the necessary Town departments possess keys to these gates.

- The South Main Street access has a gate at the top of the hill, however, the gate is not closed and locked evenings. Committee members who live near the entrance report vehicular traffic entering and leaving the cemetery at all hours of the day or night. At one time the cemetery was locked at dusk each evening and unlocked in the morning. It has been many years since this practice has been observed.
- A few years ago the Cemetery Committee held a work day in Morningside, complete with a tractor with a brush hog on the back and a bucket on the front. Committee time and equipment was voluntary. Since then the unruly brush has again grown up around the cemetery. The area surrounding the mausoleum is covered with overgrowth. The roadway in some sections is nearly unpassable for a regular vehicle other than one with a high wheel base and the overgrowth of brush is such that it scrapes vehicles on two sides.

Natural or Green Burial Section

The committee is in the process of exploring the feasibility of natural burial section. A natural burial typically means, a cemetery managed using ecological land management practices and without the use of vaults for the burial of unembalmed human remains or human remains embalmed using nontoxic embalming fluids and that rest in either no burial container or in a nontoxic, nonhazardous, plant-derived burial container or shroud. A wooden casket held together with wooden dowels is acceptable, as are wicker, grass and wool caskets. A simple shroud is also acceptable.

The area generally is not mowed on a regular basis to maintain its natural setting. Wildflower seeds are sometimes scattered in the area to give it a pleasing appearance while maintaining it as a natural area. State statutes dictate proximity to water ways and depths of burials.

The committee is in agreement that the cemetery should offer a natural setting for the deceased to become one with the earth without toxic interference. Meetinghouse Cemetery offers a natural burial option and a local funeral home reports that requests for natural burials are increasing. The committee is committed to proceeding with this project and anticipates presenting our proposal to the selectboard at a later date.

At 6:25 PM, with no other business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned.