

Princeton Cemetery Commission Meeting – Thursday May 14, 2020
Remote-Meeting
Minutes

Present: Chair Charlie Steele, Greg Miranda, Lynne Grettum, Lou Trostel, Paul Constantino, Cemetery Superintendent Bill Bergstrom, Town Administrator Sherry Patch, Highway Superintendent Ben Metcalf, and Advisory Committee Chair Wayne Adams

Absent: None

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Steele at 2:35 P.M.

This meeting was held remotely using WebEx, and was scheduled specifically to discuss the issues involved with bringing back the cemetery maintenance work as an internal town function as opposed to outsourcing to an external contractor.

Outsourced Cemetery Maintenance Versus In-House Highway Department

The Committee would like to thank the other town officials who were able to attend our virtual meeting.

There was an initial discussion about the history of cemetery maintenance, and how the model changed from in-house to outsourced contractors. Some of the longer-term members mentioned previous issues with part-time seasonal workers, including finding and keeping them through an entire season.

Superintendent Metcalf was open to the idea of taking on responsibility for the cemetery maintenance, but raised a number of issues. The Highway Department still has the mowing equipment previously belonging to the Cemetery Department in storage; there would be some costs associated with getting the equipment back into working condition. The old pickup truck formerly used by the Cemetery Department would have to be rejuvenated at an estimated cost of \$12,000 since the Highway Department doesn't have a spare truck.

The Highway Department would also require additional manpower to handle the cemetery maintenance work. Related issues were discussed, including whether it would make more sense to have a part-time seasonal worker (approx. 6 months) or a part-time year-round position, with duties split between cemetery maintenance during the summer and other duties during the winter? Superintendent Metcalf put together a rough estimate of expenses for a seasonal employee, with about \$16,000 for annual labor costs (28 hr/wk x \$22/hr x 26 weeks) and approximately \$5,000 for supplies and equipment maintenance. It was noted that employees working over a set minimum number of hours (20 hr/wk?) would also require benefits such as health insurance.

During the discussion, a point was raised that provisions must be made for performing pre-burial gravesite preparations. This is not an issue for cremation-burials, where the site can be prepared manually by shovel, but full-burials require a mini-excavator which the town does not own. Due to tight spacings, a regular backhoe cannot be utilized. For the past several years, the maintenance contractor has been providing this service to the town for a fee. Arrangements will still be required with an outside source whoever winds up responsible for grounds maintenance.

The sense of the Committee was that it would probably be cheaper in the long run to bring back the maintenance work as a Highway Department function. When the work was first contracted out 3 years ago, there was a positive cost-saving for the town. However, the scope of the work in terms of number of mowings required was underestimated in the initial contract, and the base cost of the contractors has increased, such that using an external contractor will probably be costing the town extra rather than saving money in the future.

The Committee does not want to impose undue burden on the Highway Department. Assuming that the relevant equipment and truck can be put into action, the main question revolves around personnel, and what would be the best arrangement for both the Highway Department and the town in providing additional manpower. It was acknowledged that it is more complicated to consider hiring a new town employee and bringing additional work to a town department than accepting the external contract, but the various parties agreed that it was worth exploring given the potential benefits.

Time is becoming short before new maintenance arrangements must be in place. Chair Steele asked what the deadline might be for approving a contract with the low-bidder, Einstein's Solution, given that the current contract expires on July 1, 2020. Administrator Patch agreed to look into that detail. Given the complications involved in considering a change in model for cemetery maintenance and potential hiring of a town employee for the Highway Department, the Committee desired to consult with the Board of Selectmen and Advisory Committee before making further decisions. Administrator Patch will arrange for the introduction of agenda items in their upcoming meetings.

The Committee thanks the Highway Department for work they have already performed, doing spring clean-up in the town cemetery grounds in preparation for Memorial Day.

Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before meeting

None.

Next Meeting – TBD

The next meeting will be scheduled when appropriate by Chair Steele.

P. Constantino motioned to adjourn, seconded by L. Grettum, passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 3:28 P.M.

Submitted by Greg Miranda, Secretary
PCCminutes 5.26.2020