

Princeton Cemetery Commission Meeting – Monday July 13, 2020
Remote-Meeting
Minutes

Present: Lynne Grettum, Paul Constantino, Greg Miranda, Cemetery Superintendent Bill Bergstrom, Town Administrator Sherry Patch

Absent: Lou Trostel

The meeting was called to order by L. Grettum at 7:19 P.M.

This meeting was held remotely using GoToMeeting.

Election of New Chair

A new commission chairman was required, following the retirement of former chair Charlie Steele when his term expired on 6/30/2020.

A motion was made by G. Miranda to nominate L. Grettum for chair, with the expectation that Lynne will act as chair for a several months while Greg prepares to take over that role. The arrangement was agreeable to both. The motion was seconded by P. Constantino, and passed by unanimous vote 3-0.

Review of June 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes

The minutes for June 24, 2020 were reviewed without comments.

P. Constantino motioned to accept the minutes as written, seconded by G. Miranda.

The motion passed. Vote: 3-0.

Cemetery Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Bergstrom reported that the new maintenance contractor, Einstein's Solutions, has taken over as of July 1, 2020 and is now actively performing work in the cemeteries. In terms of ability to rate their performance, it has been less than two weeks, but things have gone well at the beginning.

There were 5 burials performed this season so far, 2 in May and 3 in June, with another scheduled for the coming weekend.

Burial Process Review

A discussion took place regarding some problems that arose regarding burials on the weekend of June 27-28, 2020. Several of the parties involved were also in attendance for the remote meeting, including Sharon and Kim Ash, Tim Santry, and Rick Mansfield from Miles Funeral Home. Members of the Ash family expressed great frustration and emotional distress over the burial process, both with scheduling and gravesite preparations, especially a 2-day delay in the refilling of the grave after the funeral proceedings. Mr. Santry likewise expressed his unhappiness with the multiple day delay in the closing of his family's grave, the burial having taken place on Thursday, June 25, and questioned why we couldn't request help from the new contractor. That grave was eventually closed by members of the Princeton Highway Department.

Part of the problems were related to the change-over between maintenance contractors; one contract was ending on June 30 and the new one beginning on July 1. The leaving-contractor who was responsible for the grave openings and closings did not perform the closings on June 25 or 27, and then was late for the rescheduled time of 2:00 PM on June 29, resulting in another party performing the work before the contractor eventually showed up.

On top of the issues with the departing contractor, the Cemetery Superintendent was away on previously scheduled personal business that weekend of June 27, and so was not personally available while the problems were developing. His anticipated absence was the reason for initial scheduling problems, when the Ashes were told that their burial could not take place that Saturday. The former Cemetery Commission chair, Charlie Steele, volunteered to take the Superintendent's place after the conflict was raised, but was not expecting to deal with the site preparation issues, especially the failure of the contractor to return and close the graves. Eventually, Chairman Steele, Superintendent Bergstrom, Lynne Grettum and several other town officials became involved in resolving the situation, which didn't finally happen until Monday afternoon June 29. This confusion was another source of distress for the families involved.

Although the problems with the grave preparation and closing were partly due to a unique circumstance involving the contractual change-over, this event exposed some weaknesses in the chain of command and communications between the Cemetery Commission and the Cemetery Superintendent, and between those parties and other parts of town government. Princeton is a small town that uses many volunteers to staff Boards and Commissions in assistance to the town government officials. Procedures have historically evolved over time. Some aspects of operation start out being handled on a more informal basis, and become more formalized and regulated as laws change or the need presents itself. This is one of those occasions, where gaps in the process have been brought to light and improvements are required. The Cemetery Commission and Superintendent are sorry that it took this upsetting incident to initiate these changes, express our apologies to the affected families, and commit to updating our procedures in a timely manner to prevent a future recurrence.

It was decided that Chair Grettum, G. Miranda and Superintendent Bergstrom will meet as soon as possible to discuss and formulate the required process updates. The suggested changes will be available for review before final implementation. Areas to be addressed include:

- establishing a formal chain of command from the Superintendent through the Commission, so there is both a line of authority in case of emergencies and a back-up personnel plan for instances where the Superintendent's presence would normally be required and they are unable to attend;
- formalizing, where required, communication procedures between the Cemetery Commission/Superintendent and other parts of town government, relating to billing/accounting, lot sales and dispositions, burials, or wherever applicable;
- posting sufficient information on the town website to allow for easier communication by the public with the Superintendent and Commission;
- establishing back-up for the equipment and operator required for grave preparations, to prevent any future interruptions in burial procedures from occurring.

FY20 Financial Review

There was overspending in the FY20 budget for cemetery maintenance of approximately \$10,000. This had been recognized earlier and attributed largely to the number of grass mowing's which were higher than anticipated in the maintenance contract, primarily related to the weather which was favorable for growing. Costs are expected to be better controlled in FY21 by limiting mowing to the contracted allotments regardless of the weather. The Commission's yearly limit to the Cemetery revolving fund has been increased from \$4000 to \$8000 which should help to cover the excess. More information is needed regarding current balances before we can close the book.

On specific business, the Commission members voted unanimously to refund the burial fees to the two families affected by the mishandled burials discussed above. Members also voted unanimously to pay N.E. Acreage Group the full fee for their grave preparation services from that occasion. Among considerations were their previous 3-year history of good service, the fact they have given us very reasonable rates for that extra work all along, and a wish to exit the situation without more controversy and ill feelings.

There was discussion regarding other potential providers for gravesite preparation services in the future, in terms of obtaining both lower costs and back-up providers. This work is outside of the contract for routine maintenance. The new maintenance contractor, Einstein's Solutions, is willing to provide the service but at a significantly higher cost than in the past. The Commission does not have money to subsidize those external costs, which would ultimately require higher burial fees to cover the expenses. There are a couple of local companies in Princeton that have the required equipment (mini-excavator) and have expressed interest in helping to provide the service for the town. It would be of great benefit to have multiple providers because the special equipment is limited and not always available on a given date. Chair Grettum to discuss with Administrator Patch regarding a public bid for services.

Cemetery Management Software

There was insufficient time remaining in the meeting and little progress in research on CMS packages; the topic was tabled until a later meeting.

Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before meeting

None.

Next Meeting – August 17, 2020

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday August 17, 2020 at 7:00 PM. The meeting is anticipated to be held in-person at the Town Hall Annex if conditions allow.

G. Miranda motioned to adjourn, seconded by P. Constantino, passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 8:34 P.M.