

Princeton Cemetery Commission Meeting – Monday September 21, 2020
Post Office Place – Council on Aging Meeting Room
Minutes

Present: Lynne Grettum, Paul Constantino, Greg Miranda, Lou Trostel

Absent: None

Attending: Bob Temple

The meeting was called to order by Chair Grettum at 7:05 P.M.

Review of Meeting Minutes from 8/17/2020

The minutes from 8/17/2020 were delivered late and not all members had time to review before meeting. The review was tabled until the next meeting.

Update on Superintendent Job Description and Search

The search for a new Cemetery Superintendent is proceeding slowly. Town Administrator Patch is continuing to look for applicants, and also did a nice job updating the job description to a more ‘user friendly’ form and language.

Update on Cemetery Commission Charge

As requested by the Board of Selectmen, information regarding the commission members has been collected, and a description of the cemetery commission “charge” was drafted by L. Grettum. The draft was approved by the members and will be submitted to the B.O.S.

Cemetery Status Report

Lacking a current Superintendent, Chair Grettum delivered an update on cemetery news. A new monument placement and two cremation burials have been performed since last meeting. A further cremation burial is scheduled for October 10. An inquiry was made regarding the purchase of two lots in North Cemetery.

With the continued assistance of Ben Metcalf and the Highway Department, the cremation burials have been going smoothly. We are hoping that a new Cemetery Superintendent will be hired and arrangements made for the equipment required for full burials, before the cemeteries re-open in the spring of 2021.

L. Grettum is now the primary contact for the cemetery maintenance company, Einstein’s Solutions, and has reviewed their billing submissions. The company has been performing well with minimal supervision, and has been staying within the budgeted costs as allocated in the contract. Lynne had inspected the main cemeteries recently, and G. Miranda made an inspection round of all the cemeteries the afternoon before the meeting. The maintenance condition of all the cemeteries was good. There were weather related problems with the drought resulting in patches of dead grass, though conditions have improved some since mid-summer. Some branch and bush trimming that would normally be performed by the Superintendent has lapsed for the time being.

New Applicant for Cemetery Commission Membership

One application has been received applying for membership on the Cemetery Commission, and was reviewed by the members. Members were in favor of continuing the process, but the candidate has also applied to other town committees and it was not currently known which one they were most interested in pursuing.

Burial Process Update

L. Grettum is finalizing the burial process documentation updates, but has not had much time to progress due to having assumed responsibilities for the upcoming elections as temporary Town Clerk.

As the Commission Chair, Lynne has been acting in place of the Superintendent with burial duties. She reports very good coordination with Ben Metcalf and the Highway Department, which has been invaluable the last several months. Ben has also been assisting with the search for mini-excavators/operators, which are required to open the graves for full burials. Some local leads in town have not worked out; he is pursuing others. One option that may be most practical would be to rent the equipment as needed. There are reported to be some appropriate rental companies in the area; more information needs to be obtained regarding costs and availability.

G. Miranda expressed favor regarding the idea of bringing the cemetery maintenance duties back as a town responsibility, such as within the Highway Department, instead of using outside contractors. Members were in general agreement with the concept, though everyone understands that this is a long-term goal which requires multiple discussions and approvals among multiple town government bodies. The first priority remains the search for a new superintendent.

Fee Schedule

A survey was performed by G. Miranda to gather information about cemetery-related fees in a number of neighboring towns, including those in the Wachusett district. The results were summarized in a chart that was shared with the other members at the meeting. Information regarding plot prices and burial fees was obtained for a total of 14 towns. The results showed that the current fee schedule for Princeton is very close to the average from all the towns:

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Single Lot Price | Princeton \$600 | Average \$636 |
| Full Burial (weekday) | Princeton \$700 | Average \$666 |
| Full Burial (weekend) | Princeton \$800 | Average \$785 |
| Cremation Burial | Princeton \$400 | Average \$321 |

There were a few outliers with towns that were significantly less or more expensive than the average, but the Princeton costs were very much in the mainstream of the surveyed towns. At the moment, there is not much imperative to re-consider lot pricing in Princeton. However, the costs to the town for burials, especially full burials, are currently in flux and almost certainly increasing. Since the previous maintenance company stopped performing grave preparations when their contract ended in July 2020, any full burials have cost more than the fees provided. The Commission has absorbed some extra costs in this short-term period, but cannot afford to subsidize burial expenses on an ongoing basis. Once the arrangements for obtaining grave preparation services has stabilized and the expected costs are better known,

the Commission may have to re-evaluate the fee schedule to be sure it is consistent with the current situation.

Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before meeting

L. Grettum informed the members that a conversation had been started by Susan Ollila, in which she expressed a desire to replace a row of dying trees in Woodlawn Cemetery. The current trees are dying because they are inappropriate species for the location. She would like to work with professional landscapers to replace them with something more appropriate and visually pleasing. Members were in favor of the concept, and wish to thank Ms. Ollila for her proposal. The gift to the town will need approval from other town bodies before specific plans can be started.

Bob Temple was attending the meeting in person, and had a number of questions or comments to present.

Bob had a question regarding the status of the ‘paupers’ grave’ area in South Cemetery. L. Grettum noted that the area was inspected with ground radar in 2014, the records were still in possession, and that a memorial had been proposed in 2017 that would set-off the area and include a marker.

Bob inquired about the results from a 2017 Eagle Scout project which had documented grave stones in Meetinghouse Cemetery. Lynne indicated that those records are in the hands of the Historical Commission.

Bob asked about the status of a grave stone which had been removed from the Meetinghouse Cemetery years ago and later recovered and returned to Princeton. Lynne said that the stone was in the possession of the Historical Commission, who were preserving it indoors rather than replacing in the ground.

Bob provided information to the members regarding a company that sells veterans’ markers at a discount, “Temple Aluminum Foundry Inc.”. It is believed that additional markers are needed for the Princeton cemeteries; that source will be considered at time of purchase.

Bob asked if the town had a complete listing of all the veteran’s graves in the town cemeteries, and was informed that there is an updated listing maintained.

Bob mentioned that Massachusetts state law allows for towns to be reimbursed by the state for 75% of the cost for veteran’s markers; the Commission was aware and thanks Bob for his offered assistance.

Schedule Next Meeting

Chair Grettum assigned the next meeting date to Monday October 19, 2020, to again be held in the Council on Aging Meeting Room in Post Office Place, at 7:00 PM.

L. Trostel motioned to adjourn, seconded by P. Constantino, passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:22 P.M.