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**Cemetery Committee
Regular Meeting
Doc McIntosh's Room/Zoom
Thursday, August 19, 2021
6:00 PM**

1. Call to Order
2. Audience of Citizens
3. Read the Minutes of July 15, 2021 – Need to Approve
4. Old Business
 - A. Austin Val De Serra – Eagle Scout
 - B. Public Grounds Report
 - C. Fencing at Christian Lane
 - D. Masonry Work
5. New Business
 - A. Budget Review
6. Adjournment

**Cemetery Committee
Regular Meeting
Doc McIntosh's Room/Zoom
Thursday, July 15, 2021
6:00 PM**

Members Present: Charles Colaresi – Chairman, Dick Benson, Riza Brown, Edward Hornkohl, Jr., Stephen Pastuszak

Staff present: Town Clerk Kate Wall
Grounds Superintendent Steve Wood

1. Call to Order

Chairman Colaresi called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

2. Audience of Citizens

Paul Kendrick – Mr. Kendrick is a Boy Scout with Troop 44 and proposes to better Ledge Cemetery by cleaning dirty headstones, picking up fallen stones, stabilizing the lifted stones with topsoil and using epoxy to repair broken headstones. He plans to address 20-50 headstones over the course of the next few months and shared his proposed list of materials. Mr. Kendrick estimates the project to cost \$517 or less.

The Committee members thanked Mr. Kendrick for his initiative and thoughtful presentation and made some practical suggestions, including: 1) use gravel or crushed stone to settle the newly lifted gravestones instead of top soil; 2) try Simple Green as a cleaning agent for the dirty headstones; 3) patch test any other cleaning agent on a small portion of a headstone; 4) record the information on headstones prior to moving / attempting to repair; 5) check with a monument company for its opinion about any proposed epoxy on the appropriate headstone material. Chairman Colaresi will reach out to Mr. Kendrick after the group has discussed the proposed project.

3. Read the Minutes of June 17, 2021 – Need to Approve

Mr. Pastuszak moved to approve the June 17, 2021 meeting minutes.

Seconded by Ms. Brown.

Vote being: 4-0-1. MOTION CARRIED. Mr. Benson abstained from voting, as he was not present at the June 17, 2021 meeting.

4. Old Business

- A. **Public Grounds Report** – The mowing contractor has performed pretty consistently throughout the last year.
- B. **Fencing at Christian Lane** – The existing fence should be taken down on Monday, July 19, 2021 and the new fence is in stock. Superintendent Wood will have his crew trim weeds along the fence line and spray with weed inhibitor.
- C. **Masonry Work** – Ledge – Superintendent Wood met with a contractor who proposes to move the pillars 3-4 feet to the left and perform iron work as well. He will share the price quote once it is received.

Chairman Colaresi noted that the damaged / hanging tree at Dennison was knocked down in a recent rainstorm and has been cut up and removed. He also stated that the Worthington Fire District is due to open bids to clean up the neglected area beside Dennison at its next meeting. If Worthington Fire District does not reach out to communicate its plan to schedule clean up, the Cemetery Committee should be prepared to send a formal letter detailing the condition of the property and the many efforts by the Cemetery Committee to report the poor condition and request immediate action by the District.

5. New Business

- A. **Paul Kendrick – Eagle Scout Project** – The Committee applauded Mr. Kendrick's initiative but is concerned about the durability of the suggested epoxy. Ms. Brown and Mr. Benson will research the epoxy that Mr. Kendrick proposes to use on the gravestones. Mr. Kendrick should move forward with the Troop's approval process, raise funds to purchase materials, as well as research alternatives to repair the broken headstones. Once the Scout leadership approves the project, Mr. Kendrick should formally present his proposal to the Cemetery Committee.

The Committee discussed possible projects for Fiscal Year 2021-2022, including:

- Fencing at Beckley Cemetery;
- Tree trimming at the back of Ledge (to be performed once the pillars are knocked down;
- Removal of two hanging trees on the Mill Street side of the bank at Dennison.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Hornkohl moved to adjourn at 6:42 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Pastuszak.

Vote being: 5-0. MOTION CARRIED.

Submitted by,

Dana Borges



The Ancient Burying Ground in downtown Hartford is seen in 2019. Preservationists are calling for regional and statewide action to address deteriorating cemeteries.

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By Jesse Leavenworth Hartford Courant

In cemeteries across the state, tombstones that tell Connecticut's story are cracked, toppled and crusted with dirt and lichen while earth and grass swallow ground-level grave markers.

"Many of Connecticut's oldest and most historic cemeteries are suffering from severe neglect and are in critical, sometimes desperate, need of care and restoration," state Historian Walter W. Woodward said.

Woodward is among preservationists calling for regional and statewide action to address deteriorating cemeteries.

"The solution begins by joining together to regionalize, professionalize and modernize Connecticut's approach to interring its dead and honorably memorializing them," Jeff Nolan, a volunteer trustee with the Central and Laurel Hill cemeteries in Brookfield, wrote recently in a letter to The Courant.

The former board member of the Connecticut Cemetery Association said in an interview that he realized the need for change when his mother was buried in Central Cemetery in 2002. Nolan said he and his father "were horrified at the dilapidated mess the place had become." The people running the cemetery were aged and ill and "happy to pass it off," he said.

It wasn't just the grounds that needed attention, Nolan said, but also the cemetery records. Connecticut has about 5,000 graveyards, and among the state's many private cemetery associations, untold millions of dollars are unaccounted for because of lax and nonexistent record keeping by volunteers with no oversight, he said. The need for collaboration to bring some uniformity and economy of scale is urgent, Nolan said.

Horror in Bridgeport

The most horrific example of cemetery neglect unfolded three years ago in Bridgeport. Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, executive director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network, cited the case while talking about the need for wider oversight.

Park Cemetery was established in 1878, and an association board oversaw its operation and maintenance for many years. In 2018, Bridgeport authorities found that about 130 graves, including Civil War veterans' plots, had been unceremoniously displaced.

Bones and pieces of old caskets were scattered around. Gravestones and remains had been dug up and shoved aside to make way for the newly dead, while some new graves were stacked atop old ones, according to an Associated Press story.

City police arrested caretaker Dale LaPrade on a charge of felony interference with a cemetery. LaPrade also was later arrested on charges that she embezzled more than \$60,000 from cemetery funds, according to published reports. She died earlier this year while the court cases were pending.

A retired lawyer whose relatives are buried at the cemetery broke the case. Cheryl Jansen had noticed a decline in maintenance and went to a probate judge to track the money families were paying for upkeep.

Jansen found that a cemetery board had not existed since the early 1980s and that oversight was eventually left to LaPrade and her husband. When police searched the property, they found financial records in disarray and mail left unopened for 20 years, the AP reported.

Restoration of the Bridgeport cemetery, including re-interring disturbed remains, was sad, frustrating and painstaking work. Similar cases, on a smaller scale, have emerged. At Fairfield Memorial Park in Stamford, state authorities in 1993 investigated allegations of misplaced burial vaults and plots that may have been used twice.

One crucial piece of record keeping that would protect against abuses and confusion is GIS mapping of individual gravesites, which could be added to all vital records, Nolan said. Connecticut universities teach modern GIS skills, but the technology is not used to its potential in public systems, he said.

Vital records link across hospitals, funeral homes, crematoria, cemeteries and town halls, but Nolan, a self-employed supply chain management consultant, says government officials lack a grasp of the bigger picture, which he said is more proof of the need for a state commission on cemeteries that could put the pieces together. A statewide panel also could establish educational programs for cemetery maintenance and record keeping, Nolan said.

'Neglected'

The term "neglected cemeteries" is relative, said Shapleigh-Brown, whose focus is on the state's older, pre-1800 burying grounds. In some graveyards, the grass is mowed, but the time-consuming and expensive work of righting, repairing and cleaning stones is left undone. Nature has overtaken some small cemeteries, gradually lost in the woods.

State law defines a "neglected cemetery" as a burial place with more than six graves that is not under the control or management of any currently functioning cemetery association; and which has been neglected "and allowed to grow up to weeds, briars and bushes, or about which the fences have become broken, decayed or dilapidated."

Shapleigh-Brown questioned the feasibility of broad state oversight, but she did agree that the state needs to clean up outdated, contradictory and unenforced laws governing cemeteries.

"In the past 20-plus years of being involved with burying ground history and preservation," she wrote in written testimony for a 2014 bill establishing a fund for neglected cemeteries, "I've constantly seen our state statutes concerning cemetery maintenance being ignored and abused with no accountability or concern expressed at any legal level."

For the past six years, municipalities have fully tapped the neglected cemeteries fund. Revenue comes from death certificate fees and is dependent each year on the number of certificates requested, OPM spokesman Chris McClure said. The money can be used to mow grass, clear weeds, briars and bushes, repair fences and walls and straighten gravestones. In 2015, the fund distributed awards of \$2,000 each to communities that included Bloomfield, Bristol, Weathersfield and Rocky Hill. Although 40 applications were received, the grant had enough funds for only 15 awards, according to OPM.

In 2016, 22 awards of \$2,000 each (from over 30 applications) were distributed to towns that included Farmington and Granby; in 2018, 44 awards of \$2,500 each were handed out to towns that included East Hartford, Berlin and Glastonbury; and last year, awards of \$3,332 each went to 37 communities.

But Nolan says much more could be done. Sharing costs through regionalization would bring updated methods and efficiency, so the best equipment would be available to even the smallest cemeteries, and the work of reversing years of neglect at many cemeteries could begin.

Nolan said he has been frustrated for years trying to connect the two Brookfield cemeteries he helps to oversee with larger organizations. The overriding problem, he says, is political resistance to regionalization in parochial Connecticut.

A bill was proposed for a state cemetery commission in 1994, but no action was taken. The proposed law called for a cemetery board within the Department of Consumer Protection to regulate cemetery associations. It also called for associations to establish and transfer all perpetual funds to a single endowment maintenance fund.

'Brother Jonathan's' resting place

Gravestones, some bent at severe angles, cover a knoll off a lonely road in Lebanon. Connecticut's Revolutionary War Gov. Jonathan Trumbull, the "brother Jonathan" who supplied Gen. George Washington's army, is buried here, along with Declaration of Independence signatory William Williams and many veterans of the struggle for liberty. The cemetery also includes 82 gravestones carved by Obadiah Wheeler, one of the most famous early carvers in the region, according to the town's website.

On a recent visit, the grass was mowed and American flags were planted by veterans' graves, but stones throughout the cemetery were leaning and cracked and some ground-level markers were sinking and obscured. A tree had fallen across several stones near the rear of the cemetery.

The cemetery is among about two dozen managed by the town and its cemetery commission. First Selectman Kevin Cwikla said he noticed a need to upgrade maintenance when he was elected about two years ago.

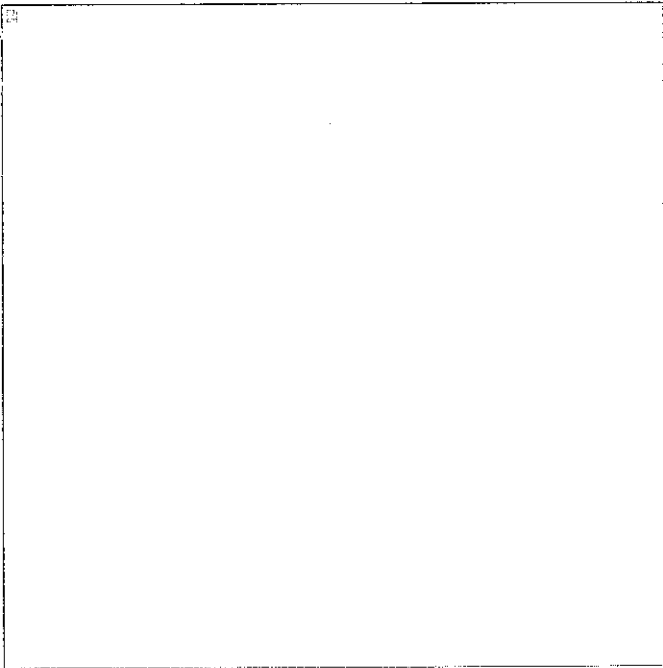
"We take our cemeteries very seriously," Cwikla said.

The cemetery maintenance budget recently was doubled, a new mowing service was contracted and a new sexton is being hired, he said. A program is in place to address individual headstones, Cwikla said.

Although cemeteries can and have been saved at the local level, Woodward said, citing work at Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground, "there are too many neglected cemeteries in too many places to leave their survival to chance.

"Creation of a state commission that could set policy, recommend remediation efforts, aid in the acquisition of funding and model successful cemetery protection and preservation efforts would be an important step in keeping Connecticut history alive, now and in the future," he said.

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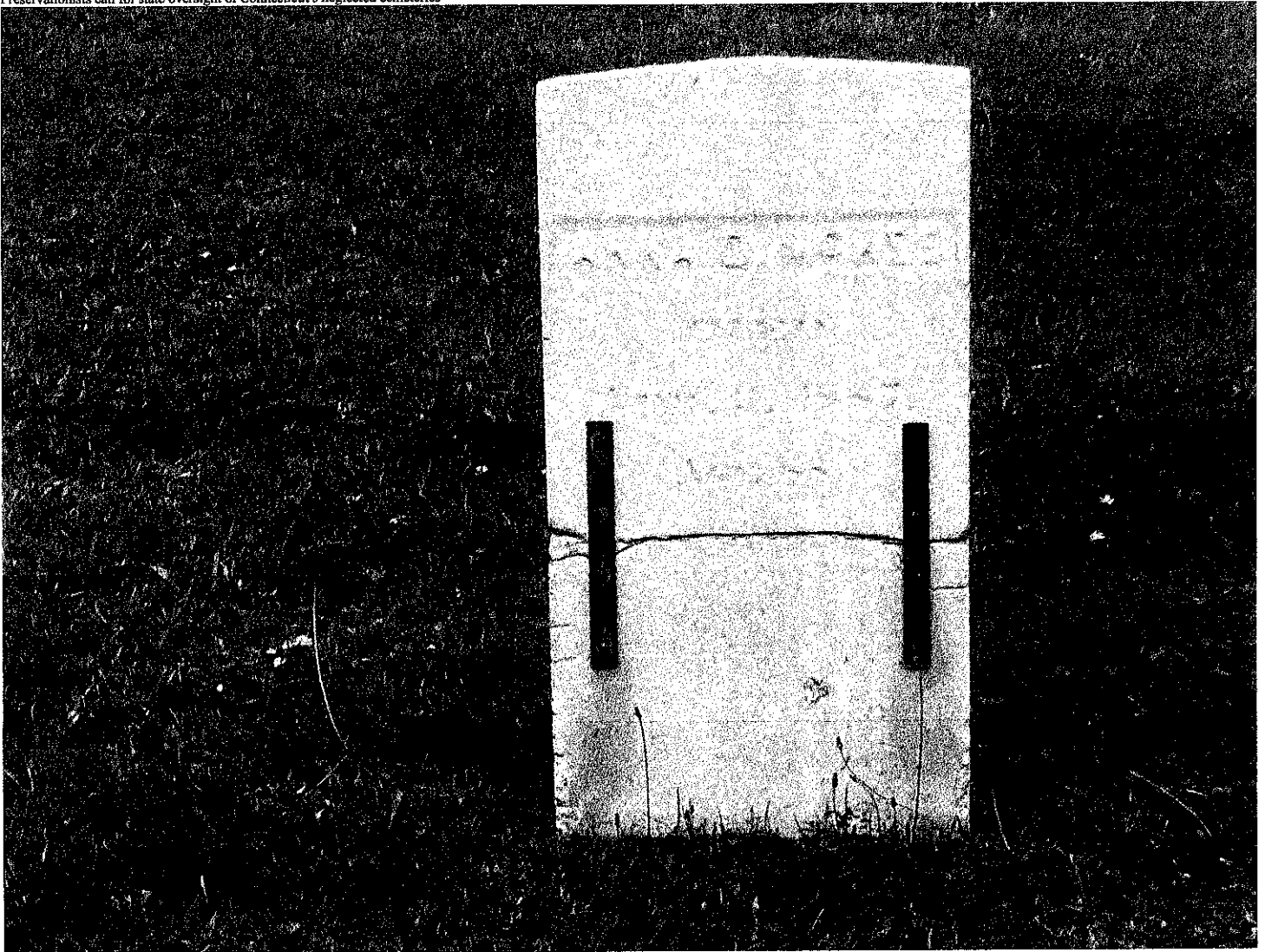




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Repairing history

Preservationists call for state oversight of Connecticut's neglected cemeteries



A repaired 19th century headstone stands in a Terryville cemetery. courant file photos

1013 - Cemetery Committee

DEPT/ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET		JUL	YTD	% ENCUM+E) BALANCE			REMAIN.
		ADOPTED	AMENDS	AMENDED MONTH	EXPENSE	ENCUM	ENCUM+E)	BALANCE	
51 Wages-Salaries									
001.10.1013.0.51305.00000	Commission Secretaries	1,050	0	1,050	100	0	100	950	90.5%
Wages-Salaries Total		1,050	0	1,050	100	0	100	950	90.5%
52 Fringe Benefits									
001.10.1013.0.52010.00000	Worker's Compensation	4	0	4	0	0	0	4	90.8%
001.10.1013.0.52100.00000	Social Security	81	0	81	8	0	8	73	90.6%
Fringe Benefits Total		85	0	85	8	0	8	77	90.6%
53 Professional/Technical									
001.10.1013.0.53201.00000	Supplies	100	0	100	0	0	0	100	100.0%
001.10.1013.0.53219.00000	Operating Materials	2,500	0	2,500	0	0	0	2,500	100.0%
001.10.1013.0.53221.00000	Fencing	5,000	0	5,000	0	0	0	5,000	100.0%
001.10.1013.0.53245.00000	Maintenance & Repair	5,000	0	5,000	0	0	0	5,000	100.0%
001.10.1013.0.53814.00000	Contractual Services	20,000	0	20,000	0	0	0	20,000	100.0%
Professional/Technical Total		32,600	0	32,600	0	0	0	32,600	100.0%
Cemetery Committee Total		33,735	0	33,735	108	0	108	33,627	99.7%

Dept	Fund	Account	Description	Budget	Budget Amended		YTD	Encum	Bal
					Adj's	Budget	Expense		
13	100	100.10.1013.0.53247.00000	Cemetery Account	0	3,707	3,707	0	0	3,707
13	100	100.10.1013.0.53247.00769	Dunham Cemetery	0	10,587	10,587	0	0	10,587