

CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

Members Present: Chair Rob Marggraf (arrived late), Vice-Chair Belinda Labourdette, Secretary Susan Kelsch, Cathy Beaudoin, Grover Tasker, City Councilor Robert Warach

Alternate Members Present: Katie Smith

Alternate Members Absent: Roderick Blake (unexcused)

Staff Present: Mark Colonna, Facilities, Grounds & Cemetery Superintendent, Jennifer Bretz, Facilities, Grounds & Cemetery Office Manager

1. Call to Order & Attendance

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes of April 9, 2024

Motion: Beaudoin made the motion to approve the minutes, Tasker seconded.

Vote: U/a

3. Cemetery Staff Updates

The Facilities, Grounds, and Cemeteries Division received 70 service calls, of which 56 were closed (completed), and 127 work orders, of which 99 were completed and closed.

There were 27 work orders pertaining to cemetery issues, 37 work orders pertaining to facility issues, 28 work orders pertaining to grounds issues, 19 work orders related to sign issues, 11 work orders related to traffic and street light issues, and five work orders pertaining to tree issues.

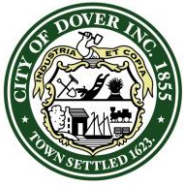
One niche, three full, and five ash internments were conducted in the Pine Hill Cemetery this month. Three graves were sold this month. Fourteen excavations were dug and poured for monument foundations. Fifteen foot-markers were installed.

Volunteer Deborah Clough has been instrumental in organizing the planting and maintenance of Spring Flower displays. The upper square flagpole and fountain islands, the whiskey barrels, and the Veteran's Circle flagpole island at Pine Hill Cemetery were all collaborated with the Dover Doers volunteer group. A crew member assisted a local Girl Scout Troop with the planting of a small tree at Henry Law Park.

A crew member completed a welding course at Advanced Trade School in Brentwood NH.

Ball parks continued to get their regular grooming and lining for baseball and soccer games. Multiple repairs were made to the irrigation system at Shaw's Lane. Playgrounds at Horne St School and Woodman Park School got new wood chips spread under equipment.

Facility, Grounds, and Cemetery crews worked tirelessly mowing and trimming the entire Pine Hill Cemetery in preparation for the Memorial Day holiday weekend during the most active part of the growing season. Many stayed until the sun started setting during the weekdays and a full crew came



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

in on the two Saturdays leading up to the holiday weekend. A volunteer group came in the Thursday before the holiday to place flags on the veteran's graves.

All the City-maintained flags were replaced with new ones. Crews lowered flags to half-staff in honor of National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Day on Sunday May 5th, Peace Officers Memorial Day on Wednesday May 15th, New Hampshire Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Day on Friday May 17th, and flags were lowered again in honor of the Memorial Day ceremony held in Pine Hill Cemetery on Monday May 27th.

Historical markers were put in place throughout the downtown area.

Crews were able to clean and refill the Jenny Thompson Pool ahead of the first swim meet.

We are working with the City's Graffiti Committee to cover up the repeated defacement of some of the trouble spots throughout the City.

Motion: Tasker made the motion to accept the staff updates, Beaudoin seconded.

Vote: U/a

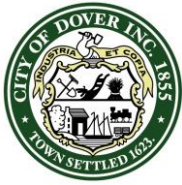
4. Citizens Forum

Dover residents Randy Willard and his daughter Liberty Willard came before the Board to ask the City to allow him to place a bench in the Pine Hill Cemetery as a way to honor their daughter and sister who passed away Oct 22, 2023. Both Mr. Willard and his daughter Liberty made an earnest plea, stating how important it will be to their family, how important it will be to them to visit Sydalia's grave on a regular basis, for years to come.

Mr. Willard has purchased six plots in the cemetery. Three of the plots are right next to each other, joined on the long side like pages in a book. Willard's daughter Sydalia is buried in one of these plots. The other three plots adjoin the first two at the foot of Sydalia's grave. Again, these three plots are joined on the long end. In total the family owns a long skinny rectangle of 6 plots. The family plans to place a headstone on Sydalia's plot. There is nothing controversial about this headstone. The writing on this headstone faces Court Street.

What is controversial is a bench that Mr. Willard has purchased. He would like to place this on the plot that connects to the foot of Sydalia's plot. In this plot, rather than a traditional headstone, he would like to place a bench, so that he and his daughter Liberty can visit Sydalia and spend time there. This bench would face Sydalia's headstone, i.e. when sitting on the stone they would be looking at her headstone. However, this is considered to be unacceptable from the City's point of view as it disrupts the orientation of the headstones in the row. All the other headstones that will stretch out in the row on either side of the bench will be facing Court Street. There are few of these headstones in the row at this time, but eventually it will be filled in.

Superintendent Colonna states that it is his responsibility to maintain the aesthetics of the Cemetery, and he believes that turning the orientation of this bench will be an unacceptable disruption. Any



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

engravings on the bench are not the point, but rather the fact that the bench will be “turned around” when compared to the headstones in that row. He has also proposed other orientations of headstones and bench on these 4 plots to Mr. Willard, but none of them were acceptable to Mr. Willard.

Mr. Willard states that he discussed the purchase of plots, the burial of his daughter, and the placement of headstone and bench within and on these 4 plots with the previous Supervisor, Sharon Sirois. Jen Bretz was also present at this discussion. Mr. Willard believed that the arrangement he wants now would be accepted. He is very adamant and emotional on this point. If he had known it would not be accepted, he would not have purchased the plots and the bench/headstone as he did. Another possibility would be the purchase of a bench with no back. Mr. Willard believes this is a far inferior option, the bench with no back is uncomfortable and unacceptable to the family. Again, he feels it is unfair that they should have to accept this, since they thought they had clearance for the bench with the back, facing his daughter’s headstone.

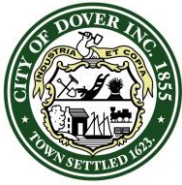
The monument company (Granite State Monuments) where he purchased Sydalia’s headstone and the bench with the back admits their fault in not checking with Pine Hill Cemetery before ordering any monuments for the customer. This is normally their procedure, but they did not do so in this case. Superintendent Colonna has been told by one of the owners of Granite State Monuments that they have promised to re-pay (or has already repaid) Mr Willard for the cost of the bench with the back if the City does not allow him to place it as he would like. There is disagreement between the Superintendent and Mr Willard on this point. Mr. Willard has purchased a bench with no back in case that will be needed and is trying to get some of the cost of the bench with the back refunded.

After hearing the initial description of the case, Vice-Chair Labourdette suggested we go see the plots, as they are not far from the Facilities building. The entire group agreed and walked out to the plots and discussed.

After seeing the plots, we promised to the Willards to discuss the matter, and noted that the discussion would be recorded in these minutes. Mr Willard and Ms. Willard left the meeting at this point.

After returning to the conference room, we discussed many aspects of this case. We all agreed that we extend our condolences to the Willard family. This is clearly a difficult case. Three members of the Cemetery Board initially stated they believe Mr Willard should be allowed to place the bench as he would like. Doing so in a currently loosely defined row would not be a major disruption and it would mean a lot to a grieving family.

The argument against doing so is a fear that once an exception is made, then others will want similar exceptions, the snowball effect. The Superintendent will have a hard time refusing further requests for exceptions.



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

The Superintendent stressed how much he and other City employees have tried to work with the family, have waived some relevant City fees, and have been communicating with the monument company on Mr Willard's behalf.

We discussed who has the final say in matters such as this. We agreed that as far as we know, the Superintendent does have the final say in maintaining the aesthetics of the Cemetery, although this is not in the Cemetery by-laws. The Superintendent feels that he has the feelings of the thousands of families whose loved ones are buried in Pine Hill Cemetery now and will be buried there in the future to consider. They expect him to maintain an orderly, attractive aesthetic in the cemetery. The cemetery has some rules already about size and shape of headstones, as well as what can be inscribed on the fronts of the columbarium. We discussed the possibility of drafting further rules to codify what is an orderly, attractive aesthetic. But most agreed that this would be too unwieldy and difficult. We fear that as soon as we drafted the rules, a case would come up that is not addressed by the rules and we would again turn to the Superintendent's judgement as the final authority. We are open to the idea of some suggested templates about what shapes of headstones will be acceptable, but did not make a specific plan to do this at this time.

We also noted that cases like this are a good time for the Cemetery Board to be consulted, as we are meant to be the voice of the public. The Superintendent noted that he has been discussing this issue with Cemetery Board president Rob Margraff since April.

We discussed the possibility of codifying the Superintendent's authority in this matter in all cases. But we did not agree on this.

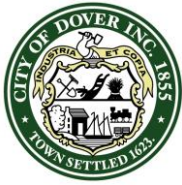
Motion: Beaudoin made a motion to defer to the judgment of the Superintendent for the aesthetic considerations of this case only, Tasker seconded. After discussion, a vote was taken.

Vote: Labourdette, Smith, Tasker, Beaudoin voted in favor. Kelsch opposed. Motion passed 4 to 1.

5. Unfinished Business

A. Status of Sign for Roberts Cemetery (a.k.a. First Settlers)

Robert Warach reports that the Committee for Racial Equity and Inclusion never responded to the information we gave them related to this matter. Both Warach and Beaudoin have sent them information and research. Kelsch made a motion that we recommend to the City Council to change the name of the cemetery currently known as the First Settler's Burying Ground to the Thomas Roberts Cemetery. Beaudoin seconded the motion. Vote was unanimous in favor. Background material will be sent to the City Manager, who will put this on the City Council agenda. We will let him know that we tried to reach out to the Racial Equity and Inclusion Committee. We believe that there is little financial impact as a result of this change. We know a new sign will be needed.



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

6. New Business

A. Green Burials

Councilor Warach left us at this point in the meeting, however he reviewed his information with Jen Bretz, and she shared them with us.

In the City Council meeting on April 10, 2024, the Council passed a motion directing the Cemetery Board to research and make recommendations about whether the City can offer green burials in the City cemeteries. Outside of that meeting, John Storer set a deadline of September 2024 for our recommendations.

We discussed many aspects of green burials, in many cases reviewing what we discussed in the April 2024 meeting.

We question the scope/expectations for this recommendation to the City Council. Just off the top of our heads we can see the need for changes to the cemetery bylaws, cemetery operations, a definition of green burials, and/or financial impacts.

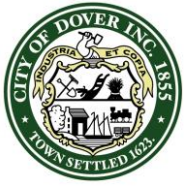
We agreed that one of our approaches will be to try to research/discuss with other cemeteries that have been offering green burials. Jessica LaMontagne suggested Lebanon, NH and Montpelier, VT. We discussed visiting one of these cemeteries or at least speaking with the superintendent of one of these cemeteries.

Tasker shared with us some information about a practice known as human composting and whether this is legal and/or handled in the state of New Hampshire. Jessica LaMontagne believes that green burials are already legal in New Hampshire, however the definition of green burial is still somewhat unclear.

Jessica LaMontagne noted that we could use the standards recommended by the National Green Burial Council as our basis for the definition of green burials.

We agreed to have a special meeting on August 13, 2024 to discuss our progress. That meeting will be devoted to green burials only. We believe a high-level recommendation on the direction we think the City should go, and defining some ideas of next steps will be an acceptable deliverable for the Sept deadline.

Kelsch agreed to research what Lebanon, NH is doing in its cemetery in advance of this meeting. Tasker suggested checking the New Hampshire Cemetery Association for its recommendations about green burials. Superintendent asks that we focus our efforts on municipal cemeteries, rather than private cemeteries.



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

7. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on August 13, 2024.

8. Adjournment

Motion: Tasker made the motion to adjourn at 7:10, Kelsch seconded.

Vote: U/a