

CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, August 13, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

Members Present: Chair Rob Marggraf, Vice-Chair Belinda Labourdette, Secretary Susan Kelsch, Cathy Beaudoin

Members Absent: Grover Tasker (excused), City Councilor Robert Warach (excused)

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 5:36 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes of June 11, 2024

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

Vote: U/a

3. Unfinished Business

A. Green Burials - Review/Provide Recommendations to City Council

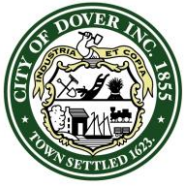
We have been directed by the City Council to make a recommendation concerning Green Burials by October 2024. The resolution asks the Cemetery Board to make a recommendation as to whether and on what terms to allow the practice of green burials in City cemeteries. If they are allowed, how the city's bylaws, policies, practices should be changed and resources made available to invest in green burials.

Kelsch reported on her efforts to invite someone from the staff of the City of Lebanon, NH concerning green burials, what they call "natural" burials. They have a lot of information on their Web site that we can learn and draw from, and Kelsch believes a conversation with one of their city employees would be very beneficial. After some initial brief discussion with their maintenance manager (Patrick McCarthy), he mysteriously did not return calls or emails, and therefore he is not available for tonight's discussion.

NH State Representative, Jessica LaMontagne, also spoke with an employee of the City of Lebanon, by the name of Doug Wilbert (? name uncertain). LaMontagne reports that the City of Lebanon has fielded many questions of interest about green burials. The City of Lebanon does green burials in 2 municipal cemeteries.

NH Funeral Home and Resources website lists those cemeteries that currently offer green burials, although most of them are private cemeteries.

Smith did research concerning green burials in the city of Montpelier, VT, and she provided us with this information. Their website is also a good resource for us, although it is in a different state.



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, August 13, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

Tasker provided a list of questions that he has concerning green burials, since he is not with us tonight.

First question from Tasker: Will the City be certified by the Green Burial Council (meeting its requirements) if it decides to go ahead with green burials?

Colonna noted that the Green Burial Council is an organization run by a husband and wife team, started about 10 years ago. They will certify cemeteries as green burial cemeteries for a fee, after sending their volunteers out to check on the cemetery's operation. This certification apparently needs to be renewed annually for a fee.

LaMontagne noted that the City of Lebanon is not certified by the Green Burial Council, although they took some of the GBC policies in developing their own policies.

Smith noted that discussion of the Green Burial Council certification gets at the issue of defining what green burial is, creating rules around green burials, and then being faced with citizens who want exceptions to these rules. Smith believes that rules would need to be nuanced and evolve over time, something we should note to the City Council in our recommendation.

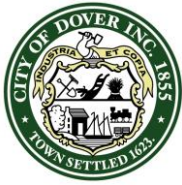
Bretz noted that any definitions and rules would need to be approved by the City Attorney.

Colonna noted that the City of Lebanon does require those who want a natural burial to hand-dig graves if the City cannot get to the chosen location using machinery. He is surprised that Lebanon is selling "pre-need" graves for green burials, as this creates a situation where some graves are not accessible thanks to others that have been pre-sold. He thinks a smarter system would be to sell graves one after another, in a line, not specific spots so there is no danger of running machinery over someone who is buried in a green manner, i.e. without a vault.

We discussed further the issue of digging graves by hand or by large machinery. Colonna believes it is not realistic to expect family/friends to hand-dig graves in any future scenario.

Colonna still believes that the definition of green burials is notably arbitrary. It does not make sense to him that digging graves by machinery is allowed in green burial systems, but a vault is not. He believes that offering a vault with the bottom taken out is a reasonable offer for green burials. Others in the meeting reject that as an acceptably green option.

We discussed further a problem of graves that do not have vaults, that the ground will settle unevenly as the body/casket decomposes. Also, the idea that the area for green burials would be maintained differently, i.e. not mowed as often. We discussed possible locations for green burials, in the existing Dover cemeteries.



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, August 13, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

We discussed the recommendation that we are being required to give. Stepping back, we feel that a big issue is unknown, that is, what prompted the City to start down the road of investigating green burials in the first place. This gets into the question of demand. Marggraf noted that in his 30 years' experience as a funeral director, he has never encountered a family that followed through on a request for green burial, although several have made inquiries.

We started to discuss the big issues of our recommendation, and where we are with those big issues.

1. Demand. How much demand is there?

Colonna noted the prices in Lebanon. They do charge more for the green burials. This indicates that they may be trying to discourage people from green burials. LaMontagne noted that this is a new phenomenon, and the industry is changing, so it's difficult to gauge interest. And it's possible no one is asking for green burials because it is known that they are not allowed in Dover.

Beaudoin suggested we do a quick survey through the Dover Download. We discussed how to word this, not to be too vague and not to be too leading. While not perfect, this would be a way to get some idea of interest. The survey may allow citizens to provide useful comments. We did not agree to the survey in the end.

2. Is this legal in the state of New Hampshire?

We can agree that yes, that is settled. No state-level legal barrier.

3. What guiding principles would we use? Or, put another way, how to define green burials?

4. What is the role of funeral homes?

This also includes the questions of body storage and embalming.

5. Where would we do green burials? Current cemeteries? New land?

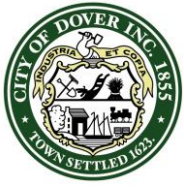
We would need to consider issues related to groundwater and effects on neighbors.

6. What do we expect or not expect from city employees?

We do not expect City employees to touch bodies at any time. We can agree never to expect City employees to dig graves by hand.

7. What happens if the citizen does not hold up his/her end? What is the City's "exit strategy" if something goes wrong?

Going back to the recommendation: we are all unsure about how to meet the October deadline. However, we believe that we can safely go back to the City Council with a statement that we are



CITY OF DOVER

CEMETERY BOARD - MINUTES

Meeting Type: Regular Meeting
Meeting Location: Pine Hill Cemetery - 145 Court Street, Dover, NH
Meeting Date: **Tuesday, August 13, 2024**
Meeting Time: **5:30 pm**

not ready to make a recommendation, this is a very complex issue, but that we need to get more information on X, Y, Z issues.

Colonna noted his frustration that his on-the-ground expertise, and that of Margraff and Tasker, after many years in the cemetery/funeral business, is not being heard and given proper weight in this discussion.

For our next meeting, LaMontagne will invite Lee Webster, a local who is knowledgeable about green burials in NH.

Kelsch will continue to work on someone from Lebanon to call in to the September meeting.

Beaudoin will contact the New Hampshire Municipal Association, to see what they know about this issue.

Bretz will email the New Hampshire Cemetery Association, to see what information they have.

Smith will look through the resources to identify another NH municipality, and see if one of their staff can speak with us.

4. Adjournment

Motion: Labourdette made the motion to adjourn at 6:40 p.m., Smith seconded.

Vote: U/a