

Town of Springfield – Cemetery Commissioners

Minutes

Selectmen's Hall - 96 Main Street - Third Floor

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

Commissioners present: Cathryn Feickert, Jerry Patch, Hugh Putnam and Barbara A. Courchesne, Ex-Officio.

Meeting called to order: Called to order at 5:04 p.m. by Commissioner Patch. Beth Gray entered the meeting at 5:10 p.m.

Additions to the Agenda: Town Clerk, Barbara Courchesne, requested, and Commissioners agreed, to add at the end of the agenda Nicole Vecchi, VOCA board member who was present and wanting to address the commission.

Approve Minutes of June 7, 2023: Commissioner Putnam moved and Commissioner Feickert seconded to approve Minutes of June 7, 2023. All in favor.

Oakland Damage Update: Town Clerk, Courchesne, reported that the Chris Potter had repaired and repositioned the stones in Oakland that were damaged. Donny Turner, Public Works Foreman, had reported that the bill for that work would be \$500.00 and Chris Potter was still sourcing a replacement of the angel headstone that was broken. The pieces of the broken angel headstone in a labeled box in storage available for claim by a family member. Barbara will look into the paperwork regarding restitution.

Trustee of Public Funds: Trustee of Public Funds, Peter Andrews, was present to discuss the status of the Cemetery Trust Fund. Trustee Andrews explained that 25 years ago the individual trust funds were co-mingled into one investment fund. He learned from outgoing Trustee, Jane Waysville, that state regulations changed from the requirement of CD investment with no growth to current investment options with growth. Currently, part of the fund is invested for growth & income and part of the fund is distributes income/dividends to the cemetery budget of the town. The trustees' spreadsheet breaks down the fund by distribution. In accordance with state statute, the principal of the cemetery fund must stay in place and not be used. There has been some growth in that fund over the past 25 plus year period. The trustees are trying to figure out what was the original principal value of that separate cemetery fund was before being combined with the other trust funds. Although the principal cannot be touched, the growth can. Every time a cemetery lot is purchased, \$150.00 from that purchase is deposited into the trust account towards the principal. There is around \$787,000.00 with the last report in the cemetery fund. Jane Waysville (former trustee) informed Trustee Andrews that there was around \$400,000.00 that went into that trust fund initially around 25 years ago; she is trying to determine that exact date and amount. In approximate terms, if you take \$400,000, as a true principal, and add to that what the lot purchases have attributed over the last 25 years, approximately \$80,000, it would equal \$480,000. Because it's all invested in one fund, contingency is necessary of maybe 30%, so then there could be \$50,000 to \$100,000 potentially available. Trustees will meet and have a better number by the end of the month. Stock investments have been known to drop 30% so a responsible contingency is necessary. Part of the fund is invested in income such as CDs and bonds and the other part is invested in stocks, and those appreciate. Appreciation shows up as a number until you take some of it out. If you take \$50,000 out,

it could impact the income distributed to the town. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that the Historical Society has the same type of fund, which they periodically dip into. Jane Waysville told to Trustee Andrews that \$600,000 went into the combined fund; it's now \$2,000,000. The Trustee Report and the Audit are published in the Town Report. The 2022 Audit indicates a Cemetery Permanent Fund balance of \$545,930 and a Restricted Cemetery balance of \$221,623 and the Restricted account has been the one that fluctuates; need to check with the auditor. Town Clerk Courchesne explained that the income from the Cemetery Trust all goes into cemetery budget line item and what it costs to run the cemetery far exceeds the income/dividends that is paid by the Trust to the town. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that if you take it out of the restricted account and use it, it won't go to offset the cemetery overhead. If it all goes to offset the towns budget, we won't get anywhere with perpetual care. Commissioner Patch mentioned since budget money goes towards maintenance when it comes to the end of the year we don't have anything left. Town Clerk Courchesne suggested the Cemetery Commission settle on a specific project and advise the Selectboard of its intent and stick with repairing stones. Commissioner Feickert mentioned that there are grants with VOCA which would help a little. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that we're not gaining if we don't use the money to clean stones rather than just contribute to maintenance overhead. Trustee Andrews mentioned that the question being figured at the moment is the principal balance calculated every year. Fiduciary policy in the audit mentions 40/60 investment options, which is separate from the 30% cushion. Town Clerk Courchesne asked if the cushion is dictated by statute. Trustee Andrews mentioned that the trustees are meeting again by the end of the month. Trustees are going to be writing a new policy. Town Clerk Courchesne read a description of the definition of perpetual care provided by VLCT. Trustee Andrews mentioned it sounds like the income distribution supplements the town budget so it makes sense for the commissioners to develop a project for the trustees to fund. Town Clerk Courchesne confirmed that trustees will figure out if there is growth available and the Cemetery Commission will define a project. Town Manager, Jeff Mobus, mentioned that the request should follow the town's purchasing policy which involves bids for projects exceeding \$10,000. Town Manager Mobus, mentioned that there is currently an estimate of \$117,000 to remove 97 old pine trees on the back side of Oakland. Town Clerk Courchesne restated that the commissioners were looking to repair and clean stones. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that there are dozens of stones on the ground in addition to leaning and will be on the ground soon. Hugh mention that it appears that we are having trouble keeping up with mowing. Town Manager Mobus mentioned that this year we are all set for cemetery help but that the bigger problem has been the rain; time for mowing has gone down. Town Manager Mobus agreed that high school community service students could clean stones, pick up branches but not run power equipment; signature on a volunteer form is needed. Cleaning headstones just involves water and the cleaning solution and is good for under 18 year olds as well as taking inventory of the stones. Commissioner Feickert mentioned that she and Commissioner Gray had talked about cataloguing stones in the cemetery. Town Manager Mobus reminded commissioners that \$5,000 in growth had been withdrawn from the trust fund years ago. Trustee Andrews mentioned that Jane Waysville is looking to see what the value of that money was when it was put in, around \$400,000 to \$440,000 and then we will have to add up all the money that was put in for the past 22 to 24 years and in his mind that is the principal. When someone purchases a lot for \$300.00, 150.00 is deposited towards perpetual care. The Commissioners have been cognizant of our area and what the area will bear in its price per lot. Town Clerk Courchesne started going through trustees report in each town report and a guesstimate of \$4,000 is a good average for the past 33 years. Trustee Andrews mentioned that an auditor would accept an average. All agreed that the principal should be changing each year. Principal and growth appears on the Trustee's Report in Town Report and Trustee Andrews wants to adjust the spreadsheet so that true principal is set apart and show up every quarter. Once the principal is determined, there has to be a contingency over and above that of at least 30%. Only a portion of the funds are in the stock market. Trustee Andrews is guessing that even with a good contingency that there is something in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000 that could be available. Commissioner Patch asked if the Cemetery Commission can allocate a sum of that money for the repair of stones each year? Town Manager Mobus stated yes, however, if the expenditure is over \$10,000 then the Selectboard's purchasing policy would be in play. Trustee Andrews reminded that interest and

dividends goes out anyway, and if you continue to take out the growth, then there is less to grow and eventually you get down. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that you want to be careful and take out enough to have a plan and hit a few key things we want to fix; it isn't all going to happen in a year. Roughly \$10,000 comes out each year, some years its lower. The cemetery costs us more to run than the interest and dividends and that falls on the taxpayers. The funds are under control of the Cemetery Commission, the Selectboard makes sure what is spent is done in a transparent manner. The Selectboard would like to know how funds are spent but cannot tell the commissioners how to spend the money. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that a plan is needed in phases prior to requesting funds and an inventory of the cemetery is a good place to start.

Nicole Vecchi of VOCA: Nicole Vecchi was present from VOCA and she recommended that not only an inventory of stones but that a complete site assessment be done as well. In Summer Hill there are tree branches that will come down and damage stones. Town Manager Mobus stated that trees are damaging with their roots tilting stones, branches and water/sewer lines. VOCA has a grant program that is not a lot of money which can be used towards trees and straightening stones. In the warm season through October every Saturday all over Vermont VOCA is conducting workshops. A community brings in volunteers and VOCA does a workshop and training such as straightening, monument repair work and cleaning; Nicole Vecchi manages cleaning. The thinking is to train volunteers who will in turn train others. D2 is recommended for cleaning stones and can get 40 to 50 headstones done with a low touch method; not harmful to the environment. They try to clean as many stones as possible in half a day prior to rain. D2 continues to brighten stones 6 to 9 months after cleaning. Commissioner Feickert mentioned her test and success with the product. Commissioner Putnam mentioned that fractured slate stones will last if you can keep out water. Power washing and bleach is not good for stones and takes the finish off. Only use a plastic scraper and rinse with water. The Veteran's Administration has come out with guidance on their stones. Military stones are government stones from start to finish and you can only use D2. Commissioner Feickert asked if the Oakland military stones are technically the property of the VA; Nicole Vecchi confirmed that is true. Permission is not needed from the VA to clean their stones in accordance with their guidance. If a military stone is destroyed due to improper care, the VA will not replace their stone and considers it vandalism. However, if it is truly destroyed due to natural deterioration, the VA will replace it. Nicole mentioned that they could come in next year and run a workshop on a Saturday morning. Cemetery Commission can advertise in advance, town would purchase D2 in advance from White Cap Construction (West Lebanon) which is the commercial construction arm of Walmart. \$230.00 for a 5 gallon tube. Also needed is sure pack, clamps, wood 2x4s and a specific epoxy. Core of 6 or 7 VOCA members that travel throughout the state. Tom Giffin does the scheduling via email and provide a standard list of materials. VOCA meets next September 30th 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in Manchester Community Library. Town Clerk Courchese mentioned that we could be prepared with products for a training in the spring and that we do have a Volunteer form which needs to be signed. Nichole Vecchi mentioned that in all her events there has only been once that she recalls a stone being damaged. Town Clerk Courchesne reached out to Stone Vault in Newport NH to see if they repair heavy stones, so that there is someone with insurance and skill doing the bigger stone work; no response yet. Commissioner Putnam mentioned pegs to which Nicole Vecchi stated they don't replace pins and they will generally do a bead or two of a two-part epoxy and it will be good for 15 years. Replacing pins is involved and requires drilling. There is also a rail method that goes on both sides and is effective for stones that have been broken into several pieces, the rail has to go into the ground below the frost level and follow the stone to work. VOCA has worked with as many as 70 people in a single Saturday. Summer Hill is one of Nicole's Vecchi's personal favorite cemeteries and the Commission granted her permission to use D2 to clean stones whenever she is in town. Commissioner Putnam provided a list of prominent people buried in Summer Hill.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m. Next meeting will be Wednesday, September 6, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara A. Courchesne

Barbara A. Courchesne
Cemetery Commissioner, Ex-Officio