

Historic Cemetery Commission Minutes
Town Hall, Conference Room B
March 4, 2014
6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Deron Murphy (Chair), Mary Louise Formisano (Vice-Chair), Jason Beaumier, Gene Dumas, and Chris Feisthamel (arrived at 6:25 pm).

Others Present: Alan Clarke

Staff present: Lea Anthony Hitchen, Assistant Town Planner

Approval of Minutes – February 4, 2014

Motion by Mr. Beaumier to approve the February 4, 2014 minutes as written. Seconded by Mr. Dumas. Approved 4 – 0.

Review/Discuss Cemetery Rankings for Initial Cleanup

Mr. Clarke advised the group that in his opinion the cemeteries that are of top priority to be cleaned include Cemetery #13, the Joseph Fry Lot; Cemetery #18, the Tillinghast Lot located on the Briarbrook Farm land owned by Jerry Thompson; and Cemetery #47, the Henry Spencer Lot.

Mr. Clarke handed out an excel document to the Commission members listing the condition of each cemetery; “a” being “fine as is”, “b” for “check on work done” and “c” meaning “needs cleaning.”

Funding for Commission/Assistance from Town

Ms. Hitchen explained the Planning Department would be able to provide about \$250 from their budget to get the Commission started – that money could go towards the purchase of leaf bags, pizza/coffee for volunteers, equipment, etc. She advised the members that if they are looking for more funds to formally request it at the Town Council level as it is budget season

but there is an unlikely chance of the Commission getting a yearly budgetary line item. She suggested the Commission should research grant opportunities and other fundraising sources.

Commission members noted that at this point there is no base resource to start out with which may lead to failure of the Commission if support is not given at the Town level. They brainstormed ideas as to how the Town could assist including: purchasing the Commission a gas powered trimmer with blade; providing DPW employee assistance ½ day per week; starting a “rough clean” in the thicker vegetated cemeteries with the Commission finishing the clean-up; and DPW/Parks & Rec staff picking up bags and debris after a clean-up.

Staff informed the Commission that she has contacted the Town Manager, DPW Director as well as the Director of Parks & Recreation asking what kind of equipment they had and if it could be available for the Commission to use during clean-up events. Ms. Hitchen asserted she will be meeting to discuss the issue in the near future but once the question was posed the immediate response was that DPW and Parks & Recreation are extremely short on manpower; and the liability of using borrowed Town-owned tools on private property is concerning. Members reminded Staff that it is the Town that has the machinery, not the Commission.

Mr. Clarke advised the Commission that he now publishes his “Grave Concerns” in the North East Independent – he could always insert an announcement asking for lawn machine/equipment donations for the Commission.

Members suggested the Commission “put everything on the table” in terms of possible resources, collaborate with the Town Council and have a clear message as to the goals the Commission is trying to accomplish and gauge their value of this Commission – if they do not show support then the HCC will not have success.

Other topics the Commission discussed were creating a resource/tool list and where to store the equipment. Mr. Clarke offered to store the tools at his farm property in North Kingstown. Staff noted she would ask the Town Manager for a few places to store the equipment.

Mr. Feisthamel offered to contact Professor Arnold Robinson of Roger Williams University, who may have leads regarding grants and funding for the Commission.

Public Relations

Mr. Beaumier informed the members he had contacted the Providence Journal and a writer was able to put together a small article about the Commission and volunteer groups are currently being sought.

Mr. Beaumier also prepared a draft "Adopt a Cemetery" registration form. The Commission and Staff suggested it be reviewed by the Town Solicitor and certain points be added to include the proper way of protecting the gravestones when using power tools and specific language when cleaning cemeteries on private property.

Mr. Feisthamel recommended preparing a standard acknowledgement form for individuals/groups that do participate in the program.

Ms. Hitchen asserted she will be working with the Town's IT Coordinator in order to get the HCC visible on the town webpage and will include the Adopt a Cemetery form, the Do's & Don'ts of Cemetery Cleaning, volunteer permission slip, etc.

List of Target Groups for Cleanups

Ms. Hitchen had prepared a list of possible town organizations including political, church groups, local businesses, schools, youth groups, garden groups, town unions, etc. to contact for cleanups. Mr. Beaumier had already made contact with several groups who were willing to help or would get back to him. In addition to Ms. Hitchen's list, members discussed contacting the Youth to Youth group, RI 4-H and larger corporate businesses in Town. In addition to NEIT suggesting they could possibly erect a stone wall around Cemetery # 7 located on their property, the group recommended contacting a building and/or construction professor.

Schedule for Cleanups

The Commission has a target date of mid to late April for the start of cleanups.

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The next meeting will take place on **April 1, 2014 at 6:00 pm.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.