

Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 9, 2023 at 9:00 AM

401 Middle Road, Chilmark

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Judie Flanders (Chair), Laurisa Rich

Absent: Matt Tobin

Other: Carolyn Stoeber (Administrator)

The meeting was called to order by Judie at 9:09am

- A. Approval of Minutes – October 26, 2023 minutes were discussed and after a correction to the name of the invasive pest - Southern Pine Beetle - was made, the minutes were approved unanimously.
- B. Administration Report
 - Plot leases - A return of a half plot lease and a check for an additional \$600 will secure a full plot lease for E. Williams for 337, freeing up the half plot previously assigned; Celli's full plot was approved for 338; Craig is a full plot and assigned 339; Ebby's full plot was assigned 340. The application received by a non-owner with life interest in the property was discussed. They will need to either become a resident of Chilmark or get permission from the estate to be buried in the plot associated with the property. Carolyn will send a pdf version of the updated Kings Way plot map before the next meeting.
 - It was discussed that inquiries for new plots should be encouraged to use existing plots as family burial places, rather than each generation obtaining a new plot.
 - Judie reported that Susan has not been able to reach Lenny Jason regarding the list of Veterans, but will keep trying. Susan will also reach out to Joanne Murphy to see if she has access to a list.
 - The cemetery commission will attempt to verify the list when the flags are pulled after Veteran's Day. Judie will look at the weather after Susan has obtained the list and set a date for pulling the flags.
 - Correspondence
 - The abutter's letter regarding the stockade fence was sent.
 - The contact information for an existing plot will be updated for the current lease-holders who inquired about creating a family plot vs. purchasing a new plot.
- C. Superintendent Report, delivered by Judie
 - Burials – There were no burials reported for the period since the last meeting
 - Susan will reach out to Don Sexton to do some trimming around the stones, ask for a bill, and work with him on a contract for the future that will specify how the commission would like the cemetery to be maintained.
 - Susan will have the fence post installed by Steve Jaffe when the fall clean up occurs.
 - Susan received a call from Moore who would like a bench-sized stone at the edge of the plot near the road. Susan will make sure it is set back at least 12 inches. The concern is that a plow might hit it if it were too close to the road. Susan will request to be on-site when it is installed.
 - M. Wurtheimer wants confirmation that an 11 x 22 plot can hold 8 burials. Susan told him it depended on how people were prepared for burial. Carolyn will confirm that it is in a section where a full plot would be 11 x 22. Susan is in communication with him.
 - Susan has not yet gotten snow stakes. She will use her personal snow stakes and get replacements when next off-island.
- D. New Business

- Tree replacement program: Judie invited discussion on if we should begin a tree planting program. There was agreement that it is a good idea, but there has been a suggestion in the past to not take trees down until old graves are in danger or the tree is compromised. Kings Way does not have many trees currently. In the Founder's section, Matt and Steve Jaffe might identify the trees of most concern. This item will be postponed until Matt can be consulted. A first step for creating the program may be having Matt take a look at the trees on a 6-month schedule. A consideration may include dealing with trees in the areas that Warren Gowell will be working so that disturbance is minimized and graves can be repaired and reseeded at one time. Judie will call Warren Gowell to remind him of the cemetery project. The January agenda will include a discussion of the tree replacement program.
- Digitizing the records: the newest map for Kings Way is now a searchable excel map. One approach could be to begin with Kings Way and, working backwards, create a searchable map for each area of AHC. Some of the old maps are not fully legible, but a scan or large copy could preserve what we have for information and might help with the digital conversion. For digitizing cemetery records, there is a possibility of enlisting help from the Historical Commission and money from the CPC. Once all the lists are in Excel, the commission can use Access to connect all the lists. The first priority will be to obtain the list of Veterans. Another piece of information that needs to be connected is who is buried in each plot. Tim Carroll told Carolyn the website can incorporate an Access database currently. Carolyn will confirm this is currently possible. Judie expressed concern that our only copy of some cemetery information is hard-copy. Judie wondered if there are budget considerations for this project. Laurisa talked to Tisbury who currently uses Access and wondered if this is sufficient or if there is a standard that we should consider. Judie emphasized that any program should be integrated with the town's planning. The museum may be the best resource for research considerations. Laurisa will ask the museum how research is done in cemeteries and what they find is most helpful and if there are standards to consider while we are trying to digitize our records.
- Laurisa will put away the rain barrel at the cemetery for the winter.
- Carolyn relayed information about the .8 acre abutting property that is not able to be developed. Perhaps the owners could be approached in the future for a creative solution that might serve both the abutters and the cemetery. For example, they could sell the property with restrictions that provide guarantees for the property to remain wooded and the cemetery could use it in a way that is in keeping with the restrictions, but allows for use - a green burial site or scatter garden? In the new year, Carolyn will ask Tim what the first step would be for a long-term project like this.
- Carolyn will reach out to Jennifer Christy from the Planning Board to represent the cemetery's interests in new space for expansion and show them the newest area that is half-filled. Carolyn will send the master plan sections on the cemetery and our planning board survey answers to the commission.

E. Old Business

- Judie spoke with the Historical Commission and they are interested in working on projects together. The miscommunication about marking graves in any way, other than flags for veterans, was resolved. The cemetery will not be available to meet tours at the cemetery. The Chilmark Library has collections of K. West's papers, but they do not have reference records on the Chilmark Deaf Community. Reference requests will be referred to the Martha's Vineyard Museum. While the cemetery does not have the capacity to meet tours, with adequate notice we can assist people in locating their plots or locating the graves of relatives or persons of interest.
- Reconfiguration of the Cemetery Commission: Laurisa would be interested in co-chairing going forward to become familiar with the duties of the chair before taking over. After the election, the commission will add an item to the agenda for a vote to reconfigure the commission and install the co-chairs.

- The December meeting will be designated to address the budget for fiscal year 2025 and drafting the year-end report.
- Carolyn's initial evaluation is due at the 6-month date of hire.
- Repairs to the shed and fencing and some of the other maintenance work might be included in the town's maintenance responsibilities in the future. Carolyn will ask Tim if the town can be more involved in helping at the cemetery.
- Laurisa announced that May 18, 2024 from 8 - 11am is the next hazardous waste disposal date. The shed will be cleaned up in anticipation of this date. The town can dispose of any trash as well. The facilities manager will assist in the spring. Laurisa would like to think of a creative way to use the metal plaques, rather than disposal.
- Matt still has the 3 pamphlets from Tim Boland.

Documents reviewed: Excel spreadsheet of the newest section (Kings) for assigning new plot numbers

Next meeting: December 14, 2023 9am in Conference Room #1 at the town hall. The December meeting is the budget meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 am.