

Charlotte Cemetery Commission Meeting
June 21, 2016 11:30am – 1:00pm
Town Hall

APPROVED 7-14-16

MINUTES

Participants: Cemetery Commissioners Cheryl Walker, Linda Hamilton and Viki Zulkoski; former Commissioner Stephen Brooks; Town Administrator Dean Bloch; Selectboard Chair Lane Morrison, Mow! Mow! Mow! owners Dale and Vanessa Knowles; Town Clerk Mary Mead; observer Robert Mack.

Minutes of the June 2, 2016 meeting were approved and will be placed on the Town website.

Cemetery mowing

Dean Bloch helped arrange a meeting of Dale and Vanessa with the Cemetery Commissioners to clarify and hopefully resolve the issues explained in the Commission's June 17 letter to Dean and Dale (attached).

Not all of the damage to grave markers is confirmed to be from this year, but agreement was quickly reached that Mow! Mow! Mow! would try to provide greater protection to tombstones by modifying mowing techniques. It was agreed that Mow! Mow! Mow! will mow this week, using their current equipment but staying several inches away from upright stones, and with blade height raised to 4.5 inches or higher in order to avoid scratching horizontal stones. No weed whacking around stones will be done this week. Dale and Vanessa will investigate attachments to their weed whackers which provide more protection (for example softer strings or blades with guards), and if these are secured, they will mow and weed whack the following week as an experiment. When date/time of that trial run is set, they will notify Viki (cabbydog@me.com) so that Commissioners and Stephen can be present.

Vanessa prefers to be the contact person for Mow! Mow! Mow!, and by email. All parties will meet as soon as practical after the next mowing, to assess how successful the modifications are and how much, if any, additional time is needed by the mowers each month (since even though the Commission encourages less frequent rather than more frequent mowing, additional care/time may be needed to avoid/remove grass clippings blown onto stones.)

Clarification of fiscal record-keeping

Town Clerk Mary Mead joined the meeting briefly at Commission request, to clarify a few points related to keeping track of both Town allocated funds and private donations. Her assistance and patience is much appreciated. Specifically she confirmed that funds can be shifted from the Special Account (private donations) to the Maintenance Account

(Town allocation) if necessary, and that the Town allocation will continue to appear in the Town Report as a single line item.

Cemetery signs

Thanks to Stephen's initiative, identifying signs with historic information have now been installed in both East Burying Ground (Bradley) and West Burying Ground (Barber). These were created by Stephen in consultation with Charlotte Historical Society, and partially underwritten by him personally. This project is much appreciated.

To bring these to residents' attention, Viki will draft a brief article for *The Charlotte News* which will also introduce the new Commissioners.

Issues arising from tour of cemeteries under Commission stewardship

On June 4, Viki, Cheryl and Linda (as well as Judy Rowe from the Cemetery Support Team) toured the following cemeteries with Stephen to become familiar with current conditions and issues.

West Burying Ground (Barber Cemetery)

East Burying Ground (Bradley Cemetery)

Private burial grounds off Lime Kiln, Carpenter and Guinea Roads, and Spear Street.

General observations are summarized on the attached report. Follow-up at this time:

- Commitment to stop damage to stones from inappropriate mowing techniques.
- Agreement to accept presence of apparent woodchuck and den in Barber and do no repair of the area until after the denning season.
- Agreement to accept continued (minimal) use of herbicide in Bradley this year while we research alternative approaches to keeping the woodland understory open.
- Viki will file an official report of recent vandalism to stones with Shelburne Police Department, noting that this may assist in grant applications to VOCA and others for repair of damage.

Special advisor

At Commission invitation, Charlotte resident Dianne Leary has agreed to assist the Commission as special advisor and liaison with the respected Vermont Old Cemetery Association. She visited East and West Burying Grounds with Commissioners June 14 and shared observations and recommendations.

Mapping and Ground Penetrating Radar Analysis of West Burying Ground

Since the map created in the 1940s indicates that children were buried along the eastern edge of this cemetery, where no markers are present, the Commission is investigating the feasibility of having this area surveyed to determine if there are any remains there.

Stephen Brooks suggests researching this topic to determine best practices and most current technology before contracting for specific work.

Proposed hiring of a Cemetery Superintendent

Stephen recommends that the position of overseer/coordinator of on-the-ground operations in our cemeteries be formalized as a reimbursed position rather than continuing to rely on volunteers.

In order to consider this, a position description is needed which Stephen, Linda and Viki will draft. The Commission will then consider the proposal, including appropriate compensation, and comparison with practices of Cemetery Commissions in other towns.

Next meeting will be Thursday July 14 at Town Hall, 11:30-1:00.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda S. Hamilton and Viki Zulkoski

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**Town of Charlotte**  
**P. O. Box 119**  
**Charlotte, Vermont 05445**

**Cemetery Commission**

*Viki Zulkoski, Chair*  
*Cheryl Walker, Treasurer*  
*Linda Hamilton, Secretary*

June 17, 2016

TO: Dean Bloch, Town Administrator  
Dale Knowles, Mow! Mow! Mow!

CC: Lane Morrison, Selectboard Chair

FROM: Charlotte Cemetery Commission

RE: Cemetery mowing

The Town's request for bids for mowing includes a section for cemeteries, and indicates

that this is to be done under the "authority and administration" of the Cemetery Commission. As part of this, Dale was contacted by Linda after being awarded the contract, with the specific request to discuss the special sensitivities of old cemeteries with former Commissioner Stephen Brooks prior to any mowing. He verbally agreed but did not follow through. Stephen made several unsuccessful attempts to talk with Dale in person, including a meeting for which Dale failed to show up. Meanwhile, Dale went ahead and mowed the cemeteries. Viki called him and reiterated that he was not to mow again until Stephen could give him the guidelines for preventing damage to tombstones. He agreed, but mowed again anyway.

Cemetery Commission alerted Lane and Dean to our concern and inability to develop a working relationship with Dale. Unable to gain Dale's cooperation, we asked Stephen to monitor the mowing and report any damage to Dale and to us.

Mow! Mow! Mow! has worked in Barber and Bradley Cemeteries 3 times now, still without consulting with Stephen. Damage to tombstones and turf in Barber has been documented with photos (scratches on ground level stones from mower blades, scratches and chips in stones from plastic weedwhacker string, turf laid bare from big mower blades too low, for example). At our request Dianne Leary, Board member of the respected Vermont Old Cemetery Association, visited the cemeteries this week and confirmed that there is significant damage caused by inappropriate mowing techniques, --and it needs to stop.

On Dean's recommendation, we submit below the guidelines which we have tried to give Dale verbally. We are willing to let Dale mow one more time, to demonstrate willingness and ability to comply, or he can choose to stop entirely now. We will not continue with the contract if his crew continues to cause damage or otherwise not meet the specs (for example not cleaning up woody material).

In addition to the specifications in the request for bids, guidelines (accepted best practices) for mowing in old cemeteries include:

- Use walk-behind mowers only (for more control around stones). No riding mowers.
- Use weedwhackers around the fence, but NOT around stones (since the string bites into old tombstones).
- Cut grass ONLY as often as necessary to keep below 6 inches height, and to NO LESS THAN 2 inches (preferably no less than 3 inches).
- Remove any cut grass which is blown onto or up against tombstones (since it traps moisture and promotes breakdown of old stone). Use of mulching lawnmower preferred since it reduces the problem.

We await your response. Thank you.

## **Charlotte Cemetery Commission**

*Viki Zulkoski, Cheryl Walker, Linda Hamilton*

### **June 4, 2016 Orientation Tour of Cemeteries under Commission Stewardship**

West Burying Ground (Barber Cemetery)

East Burying Ground (Bradley Cemetery)

private burial grounds off Lime Kiln, Carpenter, and Guinea Roads, and Spear Street

Orientation by Former Commissioner Stephen Brooks.

Participants: Viki Zulkoski, Cheryl Walker, Linda Hamilton, Judy Rowe

(other members of the Cemetery Support Team not able to attend: Sue Smith, Susan Ohanian, Happy Patrick)

### **General Observations**

- These cemeteries, especially Barber, are significant historic and cultural treasures currently suffering seriously from lack of proper attention and maintenance, despite the best efforts of past Cemetery Commissions.
- Both Barber and Bradley are located in beautiful natural settings befitting a cemetery.
- Barber's main issues are:
  - Many stones in need of straightening and/or repair
  - Subsidence and uneven ground
  - Improper grass mowing which is damaging both flat and upright stones
  - Lack of parking for visitor access
  - Chain-link fencing which is an unnecessary eyesore
  - Lack of accurate documentation of grave locations
  - Vandalism (stones pushed over, marred, possibly moved)
- Barber's secondary issues:
  - Trash (beer cans, plastic weedwhacker strings etc.)
  - A large (presumably woodchuck) hole
- Bradley's main issues are:
  - Loss of gravesite integrity due to missing stones and markers
  - Rough rocky terrain which cannot be mowed
  - Current use of herbicides in lieu of mowing to keep woodland understory from growing back
- Bradley's secondary issues:
  - Current access drive and parking is on adjacent property by informal Permission

- Private burial grounds need to be revisited with more time to access their needs.