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KATE HANSON  
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PHILLIP JOHNS

**MINUTES OF THE CEMETERY COMMISSION  
AUGUST 15, 2023**

A meeting of the Salem Cemetery Commission was held on August 15, 2023, at 6:30 p.m., via ZOOM, an online video conference call system. Present on call were Chairperson Jacob St. Louis, Members: Beth Gerard, Kate Hanson, Phillip Johns and Anthony O'Donnell; Raymond Jodoin, Director of Operations; Conor Morgan, General Foreperson, Cemetery/Tree Division, DPS and Commission Clerk Joanne Roomey.

**1. Approve Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes for June 20, 2023**

Ms. Gerard made a motion to approve the Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes for June 20, 2023. Seconded by Mr. O'Donnell. A roll call vote was taken and the motion was carried unanimously.

**2. Superintendent report from Conor Morgan about Cemetery operations**

- Interment Activities within the cemetery for the past month are: (7) cremation burials, (2) full burials and (4) lots sold.
- General maintenance in the cemetery has revolved around grass cutting and weed whacking as is normal during this time of year. With the onset of late summer and windier conditions, leaves and small diameter dead wood have fallen from the trees.
- There have been no security issues at the cemetery.
- Solitude Lake has repaired the fountain in Sargent's Pond, and it seems to be working well.
- New England Civil Engineering Corp. has been engaged to carry out a detailed survey into both the foul water drainage system and the overall hydrology of the site. The objective of this survey being to devise an overall plan to deal with drainage issues. The survey is not complete, however early reports indicate that fertilizer laden water is leaking onto the site from the adjacent golf course. Also salt and fertilizer laden water is entering the site in the form of urban runoff from all areas in the watershed. This is the main cause of the algae bloom and unpleasant smell. The lake has a major issue of sediment build up which must be addressed.

- The ongoing development and implementation of the “Greenlawn Cemetery master Plan” has focused on two important areas. The south slope of the Dixon Chapel and the Burke lot. Landscape architect Martha Stuart has been requested to study the impact of her proposed scheme for Dixons Chapel on the existing trees in the area. The development of the Burke Lot has progressed in several ways. Miscellaneous company surveyors have been engaged to survey the area and to locate the trees. Mr. Morgan has been in detailed engagement with our colleagues from Salem State University and Arbnet to discuss prioritizing trees for retention. Mr. Morgan has undertaken a study himself to examine the interaction of proposed excavation with root protection areas of trees to be retained.
- The restoration of stained-glass windows in the Dickson chapel continues apace under the stewardship of Ms. Patti Kelleher. A contractor, “Sash and Solder” has been selected and they plan to remove the window and repair it over the winter.
- The two-sweep star leaf rakers crucial to the cemetery have been repaired and returned ready for service in the Fall.
- Mr. Jodoin discussed the hydraulic study by the New England Civil Engineering Corp. for storm drains and sewers. They have not produced a lot of information. There are engineering problems, a lot of algae and geese poop everywhere. The main goal for the survey is to observe how the pond functions and works and how we can improve it. It is in the beginning phase, and we need to understand how the water goes into Greenlawn Cemetery before we can improve it. Funding source for restoration of the roads paid for by ARRP. They are using the budget trust funds money for the hydraulic.
- Conor said he does not want to plant trees before the burial plots, strip around the boundary for privacy. How much place can we leave for planting. Little holes throughout the canopy we could plant trees around the cemetery. Massive Oak tree near the lake that should come down. No rebuild on hydraulic study how it flows, maps, functions, works and make recommendations based on their findings. Cemetery Master Plan initially an operational plan not a tree planting plan to only make recommendations for the cite, 50 acres of trees. We want to fill up the spaces with trees. The process is picking the right species in the right place. What we are discussing today is how to keep the existing trees in the cemetery.
- In City of Salem secured \$22,000 for new tree plantings at Greenlawn Cemetery and will collaborate with the Friends of Greenlawn & SSU to implement this project.

**3. Discussion about Dickson Chapel slope expansion**

Presentation of 60% design plans for discussion by Martha Lyon. This will be continued until the next meeting.

Mr. Jodoin encouraged residents to write or email their recommendations, concerns, and any complaints they may have about Greenlawn's Master Plan that he could present to Martha Lyon who prepared the Master Plan. Mr. O'Donnell suggested allowing a section of the cemetery for green burials without an outbound container.

Margaret Fleming of Ward 6, who frequently walks Greenlawn Cemetery, wrote a letter to the commission with her comments. **(Please see attached letter below).**

**4. Burke lot discussion on double deep vs. side by side lots for sale**

Mr. Morgan spoke about the difference between double deep and side by side burials. He said the side by side are more of a demand than the double deep. The double deep graves are an enormous piece of concrete and are a major operation, more collateral damage for trees, and are much more expensive. Side by side is what most folks prefer. Ms. Gerard said double deep is not ideal for Greenlawn burials, but it would give us more space. There are going to be less internments available side by side.

Mr. Johns asked if there are different styles of vaults, less labor intensive. Mr. O'Donnell said there are natural-fiber shrouds that are placed directly into the earth rather than some concrete "outer burial container," but you need to find someone who sells them.

**5. Discussion on how many footstone markers are allowed per lot**

There was a discussion regarding clarifying the standing practice for how many footstone markers are allowed per single grave lot. There should be one headstone, one footstone marker and a veteran marker if required.

**6. New Business:** Ms. Gerard suggested contacting Elizabeth Peterson, who oversees the ticketing of the Charter Street Cemetery, to see if we could get a status report from her since she has been doing this for the past three years. Mr. Jodoin said he has monthly meetings with Ms. Peterson and will ask her for a report to present to the commission.

Christine Lutts was reaching out on behalf of the Friends of Greenlawn. They are hosting a Trails and Sails History and Nature Challenge in Greenlawn on September 24, 2023 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This event is free, but donations are greatly appreciated. Donations will be used towards the restoration of two stained glass windows. For more information, you can email: [friends@greenlawn.com](mailto:friends@greenlawn.com). Ms. Lutts is working with Mr. Jodoin regarding the requirement status to keep the certification for the Arboretum.

- 7. Adjournment:** Ms. Gerard made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Johns. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 30A §18-25 and  
City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033

August 14, 2023

To: Salem Cemetery Committee Board Members

Jacob St. Louis, Chair  
Anthony O'Donnell  
Beth Gerard  
Kate Hanson  
Phillip Johns

cc: Ray Jodoin, Director of Operations, DPS Salem  
Conor Morgan, General Foreperson, Cemetery/Tree Division, DPS Salem  
Megan Stott, Ward 6 Councillor, Salem  
Patti Kelleher, Preservation Planner, Salem

Re: Master Plan for Greenlawn Cemetery, 2022

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing as a concerned Salem resident and frequent walker in Greenlawn Cemetery ("Greenlawn") about the *Master Plan for Greenlawn 2022* ("the Plan") that was prepared by Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture LLC ("the Consultant").

I have read and re-read the Plan several times as I am sure you also have done. I've attended Cemetery Committee meetings on Zoom over the past 18+ months as my schedule would permit. I may have a schedule conflict for the next meeting on Aug. 15 and I offer my comments below to help the Cemetery Committee ("the Committee") in its discussion and decision-making about actions to take at Greenlawn.

### Comments

There are many good, solid recommendations in the Plan. However, with the "Dickson west side chapel slope" on the Committee's Agenda for August 15, 2023 I feel the comments below are most important. Page numbers in parentheses refer to the Plan.

#1. The Committee needs a *clear* Mission and Vision for Greenlawn to provide a strategic focus for decision-making. Without a strategic focus, there is no way to evaluate whether any particular action will help make Greenlawn what we want it to be.

- There is no Mission Statement referenced in the Plan.
- The Vision Statement ("Vision", p.5) is pretty mushy. Ask 10 people what it means...
- For example, what does the phrase "welcoming to all" mean? The Committee has debated who is eligible for burial at Greenlawn (i.e., residency requirements) without any reference to the Vision or Mission. This is a key question as Salem feels it is running out of burial space.
- For example, is the F. Carroll Sargent Arboretum at Greenlawn ("the Arboretum") satisfactorily reflected in the Vision ("A commemorative landscape that preserves the natural world;" – p.5)? What does this mean?

#2. The arboretum aspect of Greenlawn is not sufficiently considered in the Plan's recommendations. Indeed, the Plan describes Greenlawn's primary purpose "to provide interment space for Salem residents." (p. 58), a

potential conflict with the Vision. Certainly, a challenge given the ArbNet accreditation. How to balance cemetery/burial space with the Arboretum? An Arboretum involves not just public enjoyment of trees and shrubs, but also conservation, education, and botanical research<sup>1</sup>. Decisions involving burial space, plantings, open space, public use, programming, historical features, cooperation with other botanical organizations, etc. directly affect the Arboretum.

The Plan does not mention that Greenlawn is the *only* accredited Arboretum Cemetery north of Boston, and one of only three city-owned Arboretum Cemeteries in Massachusetts<sup>2</sup>. As such, the Arboretum is a special asset to Salem and to Massachusetts. Some of the tree/plant species in Greenlawn have been identified as rare and of potential interest to the global horticultural community. This distinguishes Greenlawn and *demand*s a duty of care for the Arboretum. Salem could find itself on the map for the wrong reasons if these special horticultural specimens are allowed to (further) deteriorate.

ArbNet accreditation includes contractual requirements for specific planning, development, maintenance, and governance activities for the Arboretum, as well as compliance reporting. Also, the Arboretum's diverse and rare plantings were important in the application for the National Register of Historic Places. These are also reasons why the Arboretum demands a duty of care, and simply adding burial spaces and columbaria walls at Greenlawn wherever they can be fit in is not the answer.

#3. The Plan ignores the historic 1894 Dickson Memorial Chapel ("the Chapel") as a potential *ongoing* source of revenue for Greenlawn, if restored. This, despite describing the Chapel as "one of Greenlawn's most prominent and beloved features", "a cemetery landmark" and "Greenlawn's crown jewel" [pgs. 12, 22 and 26, respectively].

- The Plan does not mention that multiple inquiries are received each month by the Cemetery Office and the Friends of Greenlawn about the availability of the Chapel for uses such as funerals, memorial services, weddings and other events.
- The Plan does not have any illustration of the financial contributions that a restored Chapel could make, nor any emphasis on its historical *contribution* to the town of Salem (i.e., putting Salem on the map for this reason).
- The Plan did not point out that Greenlawn's 2015 Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by Secretary of State William Galvin described the Chapel as "the most prominent architectural feature in the cemetery".

#4. Installation of *free-standing* columbaria walls, especially on the west slope of the Chapel is, simply, a bad idea. Such walls:

- will alter and destroy the historical landscape (a conflict with the City's goals as expressed in the Plan<sup>3</sup>);

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<sup>1</sup> ArbNet's widely recognized industry accreditation standards include planning, governance, number of species, staff or volunteer support, education & public programming, and tree science & conservation. Source: ArbNet website.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Greenlawn, the 2 other city-owned Arboretum Cemeteries in Massachusetts are Island Pond Cemetery in Harwich, and Milton Cemetery in Milton. The other 3 Arboretum Cemeteries in Massachusetts are privately or non-profit owned: Knollwood & Sharon Memorial Park in Canton; Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge; and Newton Cemetery in Newton. Source: ArbNet website.

<sup>3</sup> Plan, p.1: "In developing this [the Plan], the City aimed to restore the *character and quality of the historic landscape*, funding this effort, *in part*, through the development and sale of new, sensitively designed interment sites." [emphasis added by MF]

- will detract from the Chapel (Greenlawn’s “crown jewel”, and “most prominent feature” on its National Register of Historic Places listing – thus, requiring protection and support);
- are unproven as a popular burial method (no data is provided to support *free-standing* walls as a popular choice); and
- once installed, will be costly and difficult to remove if they prove unpopular; subjecting the Committee and the town of Salem to a lot of extra work (and expense) under fraught conditions given that some families may have chosen this interment already.

The Plan notes that Greenlawn and its neighboring spaces make up one of the largest undeveloped areas of Salem, providing *expansive habitat* for wildlife, certain flora, and both active & passive recreation (p.17-18, my emphasis). This is important, as bit-by-bit curbing of this expansive space (especially via free-standing columbaria) will erode it away.

The proposed columbaria wall on the west side of Sargent Pond (p.45, Site G) – where a retaining wall is needed – *should be considered before the Chapel west slope*. In the event that columbaria niches have limited take-up, the wall will still serve the purpose as a retaining wall.

For cremated remains, in-ground burial and scattering sites make sense, although it’s not clear in the Plan what exactly is meant by “scattering sites”. Unless I missed it, the Plan does not include a place for memorial plaques for those who choose to scatter cremated remains.

#5. I disagree with the idea to create a Visitor Parking area inside Greenlawn along Aspen Avenue (p.64) – it’s not necessary or practical and harms the Arboretum, requiring the removal of existing shrubs and, possibly, trees, as well as likely damaging tree root systems. It will also *crowd* the cemetery, destroying the character and quality of the historic landscape.

#6. Finally, the Plan fails to even bring up the subject of an additional cemetery for Salem. I appreciate this topic may seem outside the scope of the Plan, but it is not. Even if the recommended full burial sites are added, Greenlawn will run out of full burial space in about 10 years (at the current rate), and then where will we be? We’ll *still* need to find another cemetery spot, while the fate of the Arboretum is unclear – certainly Greenlawn’s historic character and landscape will be diminished, and possibly the Arboretum withered away. Thus, the need to at least *discuss* additional cemetery space cannot be avoided.

Salem has a detailed *Housing Road Map* (5-year plan) which states that Salem’s population is growing and has an increasing share of residents over age 65 compared to regional and statewide averages (*Salem Housing Road Map*, p.8). We may wonder how that affects planning for burial space. The *Housing Road Map* identifies potential additional land for affordable housing development. Why was potential additional cemetery land not even mentioned in the Plan? It certainly begs the question of whether there may be a location(s) that could be considered (not limited to the locations in the *Housing Road Map*). Due to the lead time involved for a new cemetery, and competing interests for the space, the time is *now* to discuss it.

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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Fleming  
Salem Resident, Ward 6