

The Middletown Springs Old Cemetery Task Force – Official Meeting Minutes: July 19, 2017

The Meeting was convened at 7:05 p.m. by Chair John Arsenault
Attending: John Arsenault, Nora Rubinstein and David Wright

Minutes of meeting July 12, 2017 unanimously approved.

Discussion included the following:

- In the continuing effort to identify “best practices” for status evaluation, conservation, preservation and restoration of the old cemetery, the group discussed other area cemeteries that are models and might be willing to share expertise. Nora has had difficulty reaching Shelley Taylor of Danby, so John will try to attend the Danby Cemetery Commission meeting to determine what resources they are using. David will contact the Ira Historical Society to determine who is maintaining their cemetery. John will contact Janet Muff to determine which regional cemeteries are in good condition and who is doing the work to maintain and restore them. Nora will contact Joyce Barbieri to determine the status of the Wallingford cemetery.
 - Questions include: 1) who they are working with as experts \ professionals, 2) the nature of their work group and whether they are using volunteers and 3) what funding they are using to support the work.
- The potential use of ground penetrating radar to determine where missing\unmarked graves may be. If it is possible to identify these locations with respect to the existing surveys, such graves could be marked with a stainless steel post and a name where available or something that indicates that the deceased is unknown. This appears to be an expensive process so we may need to be quite specific about areas to be searched. As an expensive procedure it may be a lower priority as compared to other work.
- John has used the Herb Davison \ Lydia Powers Taylor survey to enter information on all graves in the old cemetery. He has included Find-a-Grave numbers for all these graves. This spreadsheet can be used as a template by a group of volunteers or a Cemetery Commission to add supplementary information on condition, material and type of marker and other needed categories.
- John has investigated the Gardner stone and the genealogy of that family. The only direct descendants currently alive and in the area would appear to be Laura Castle and her children, but there may be other collateral descendants and John will continue researching this. It would be important to inform them of the condition of their ancestor’s stone and determine whether they are willing to assist with supporting the town’s cost of stabilizing and restoring that stone.
- The group discussed further funding for activities in the cemetery, and David suggested that there may have been funds provided for perpetual care of at least three family plots including the Oatman plot across from Sissy’s and two other areas marked off as family plots to the south. John felt that if such funds exist they should be administered by the Trustees of Public Monies. We should discuss with the Selectboard whether such funds exist and may be made available for maintenance of the old cemetery.
- Nora downloaded two documents from the National Park Service which may be useful in guiding future work on identifying graves and describing condition information, and pursuing restoration. These documents will be part of the final bibliography of resources. Nora will continue compiling resource lists of reading material, resource people and materials options.

- David spoke with Barry Spear re. the status of the pine tree in the cemetery. Barry feels that the tree is healthy and does not need to be taken down, though it should be pruned and sections cabled for support. He cautioned that it would be extremely difficult to remove the sections of the trunk should we decide that the tree should come down, and that with some care, it can be maintained. He would be interested in doing the needed work to stabilize and prune that tree and will provide an estimate and potential work plan. He was not able to recommend others who would do this work, but the committee agreed that it would be useful to discuss other professional arborists with Terry Redfield, should the Selectboard want to pursue this.
- The group discussed further actions that could be taken on the Gardner monument. One possible monument company that could be contacted would be Bowker in West Rutland, but the task force felt that this should not be done until this was reviewed with the Selectboard and a determination made on what they see as future action. An alternative scenario was suggested which would involve the potential use of a house-moving company or someone experienced in lifting heavy objects with jacks to lift and stabilize the monument. Done carefully, dismantling the monument may not be necessary, negating the need for a crane. If a crane were needed, the gate on West Street might have to be temporarily disassembled.
- The committee reviewed a cleaning product recommended by Michael Fannin. D2 is a cleaner used on marble, stone and other surfaces and does not damage the stone while killing fungus and other growing materials that are degrading the surface of the markers. It is available through Granite Supply @ \$40 \ gallon of \$174.95 for 5 gallons. We could work with one of the other cemeteries to share costs if needed. Contact information is available on the resource page.
- The task force discussed whether it would make sense to post rules re. cleaning stones in the cemetery in an effort to ensure that only appropriate cleaning techniques are being used. Since it is presumed that people who are cleaning stones may be drawn into supporting the efforts to rehabilitate and restore the cemetery, we discussed how best to encourage them to use the appropriate techniques, how to encourage them to participate as volunteer labor, and how to encourage them to support the work being done with a financial contribution. We discussed setting up a Friends of the Cemetery group similar to the Friends of the Library group that will allow private contributions to support municipal functions.
- We discussed the possibility of renaming the existing but unused Cemetery Commission page on the Middletown web site an “Old Cemetery Task Force” page. If appropriate, that page can be renamed if a permanent commission is formed at the end of the study period, and someone is responsible for maintaining the old cemetery.
- David asked that the group note that the work that Bobby Parker is doing in the cemetery is excellent. The remarkable care he is taking to avoid damaging headstones by mowing carefully and angling the head of the trimmer is commended by all task force members.

The task force will next meet on July 27, 2017 at the Town Office with the Selectboard to discuss the status of current work. The next meeting of the task force is scheduled for August 9 at 7 p.m. at the Town Office. Interested members of the public are invited.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.