

Provincetown Cemetery Commission

Meeting Minutes

Meeting date: November 16, 2022

Location: Caucus Hall, Town Hall, 260 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657

Call to order: 3:07PM

In attendance:

Sharon Bunn (SB) (Chair), Lynne Martin (LM) (Vice Chair), Michael Harpie (MH), Timothy Famulare (TF) (Alternate), Robert Sweetman (Alternate)

Excused absence: N/A

Unexcused absence: Michael Chute

Also attending: Christopher Luciano and Lisa Wolfsen from the Nickerson Funeral Home, Wellfleet, MA

Supporting materials: 4th Revision for Green Burials FAQs submitted by TF

1. Public comments, if any: None

2. Review and approval of minutes of the October 11, 2022, meeting: TF requested a revision to add the 3rd Revision of Green Burial FAQs to the list of Supportive Materials.

Motion to approve with TF's revision by: LM Second by: MH Vote: 5-0-0

- Motion by TF to take the discussion with the representatives from the Nickerson Funeral Home out of order (Agenda item 5. Old Business) and discuss next. Second: SB Vote: 4-0-0

5. Unfinished business:

- Green Burials: An informative discussion was held with Christopher Luciano, Operations Manager, and Lisa Wolfsen, Funeral Director, from Nickerson Funeral Home (Nickerson), aka Dignity Memorial, in which they gave us an overview of the business along with a lengthy exchange to give us their input on green burials in Provincetown. Mr. Luciano is knowledgeable in the subject of green burials, and Nickerson funeral Home has so far taken part in a total of approximately nine (9) green burials in Brewster and Wellfleet. Provincetown has had three (3) green burials to date, with which Nickerson Funeral Home was not involved. Everything from Provincetown's soil conditions, the requirement of a bottomless vault, through the entire process and procedures were touched upon.

Mr. Luciano and Ms. Wolfsen made the following comments and recommendations:

- i. Unfortunately, on Cape Cod, completed death certificates are not stored online in the Commonwealth's EDRS system, as they are in other areas of MA. The template death certificate form available online, but it must be taken to the decedent's doctor for completion, and then forwarded to the funeral home (if one is involved).
- ii. Recommends use of a solid container to protect the body.
- iii. When possible, persons who want to have a green burial should have a pre-planning contract with a funeral home to ensure that all details and arrangements are confirmed in advance, given that the body cannot be embalmed, and must be kept cooled. He recommends burying the body within 24-28 hours. Nickerson has a cool climate room.
- iv. Nickerson has the capacity to do immediate green burials; there would be an additional fee involved.

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- v. Nickerson has a separate team that manages outreach to clients and community organizations, and a different team that conducts burials.
- vi. It coordinates with Captain Brad for full burials at sea.
- vii. Mr. Luciano stated the town of Brewster will be allowing green burials in its Mosswood Cemetery.
- viii. Inquired about whether Provincetown has a columbarium for cremations. LM replied that drawings were done for a columbarium at the Alden St Cemetery when Richard Olsen was chair of the Commission. A separate area for cremation burials was established instead. Mr. Luciano mentioned the alternative concept of establishing a scattering garden for ashes.
- ix. Mr. Luciano has talked with the Provincetown Cemetery Supervisor about purchasing vaults (standard and bottomless) to store on site at the cemetery. Nickerson is open to such an arrangement. It also likes to offer personalized vaults to clients.
- x. Ms. Wolfsen frequently visits people in their homes to answer questions and talk about pre-need planning. Outreach to churches will begin soon.

Both the Commission and Nickerson agreed that it is best to involve a funeral home to assist with legalities and some of the logistics of the death of someone for whom a green burial is requested. Nickerson Funeral Home is happy to be involved in any capacity of arrangements that the client wishes and will work with the Cemetery Superintendent to be sure all runs smoothly.

- Review/Revise 4th draft of the Green Burial FAQs: TF had to leave the Commission meeting early, and before the discussion with Nickerson was concluded. He will incorporate revisions of the Green Burial FAQs following the meeting for review at the December meeting.

3. Chair's report:

- Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds: Neither the Town Manager nor the Assistant Town Manager have responded to SB's Oct letter requesting administrative assistance to put together a new bid package for maintenance of the cemetery headstones and monuments. MH shared that he has CPA applications and corresponding paperwork for years 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019 which will need to be reviewed in a future meeting.
- 27 Winthrop St proposed residential project: Received email from an abutter concerning recent Historic District Commission (HDC) meetings on the project, and a request that the chair attend a future HDC meeting. Chair replied to the email; did not attend the HDC meeting.
- Resignation of CB as a regular commissioner, and review of appointment process: The Commission thanks CB for his contributions. If either TF or RS is interested in moving into the regular position opening, an online application for Town board appointment should be completed and submitted to the Clerk's Office. Clerk will forward application to the Select Board for a vote to approve the appointment.

4. Cemetery Supervisor updates and discussion: N/A (BC unable to attend meeting).

6. New cemetery business:

- Deed for Alden St Cemetery plot N172 sold to Pearl Witherstine / Donald & Elsie, on or about Jan. 1, 1970: Request for modification of the deed by a living relative to authorize burial rights of a deceased sibling.

Motion to approve modification of the deed as requested by: SB Second by: MH Vote: 4-0-0.

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- LM exited the meeting early after review of the above agenda item. A quorum of 3 commissioners remained, and the meeting continued.
- Determine revisions to the Cemetery Rules and Regulations definition of “Resident,” and any other suggested revisions: After a brief discussion of the background and intentions of the current definition of “Resident” regarding eligibility to purchase cemetery plots, further discussion about these items was postponed until the December 7, 2022, meeting.

Motion to approve by: SB Second by: MH Vote: 3-0-0.

7. Cemetery Plot Sales: None.

8. Cemetery buy-back requests, if any: None

9. Other business that may come before the Cemetery Commission that could not have been reasonably anticipated pursuant to MA Open Meeting Law: None.

10. Review of action items:

- MH to check with Clerk’s office to determine the requirements for someone to be eligible to vote in Provincetown, and on what date the recurring annual Town Census (Street Listing) is conducted.
- SB to inform the Assistant Clerk that the modification of the deed for N172 was approved.

11. Date and location of next regular meeting: December 7th. 2022, 3:00PM, Caucus Hall – Town Hall

12. Adjournment: 4:38PM

Motion to approve by: SB Second by: RS Vote: 3-0-0

Respectfully submitted by: Michael P. Harpie

I. What is a Green Burial?

- “Green Burial,” also known as “Natural Burial,” is a means of burial that allows the body to decompose naturally, returning all elements to the earth through environmentally sound practices. The interment occurs without embalming or a grave liner

II. Basic Requirements for Green Burials in Provincetown:

- Green Burials may only occur in the designated area in the Upper section of the Alden Street cemetery.
- The body must not be embalmed.
- The body may be
 - wrapped in a biodegradable shroud (cotton, wool, silk, hemp, etc.) and buried on a natural burial shrouding board (wooden tray with handles, also known as a trundle), or
 - placed in a casket made solely of biodegradable materials (cardboard, wood, willow, bamboo, seagrass, felt, etc.) *and* free of any varnishing, metals, or other toxic or non-biodegradable materials, or
 - placed directly onto the earth without a shrouding board or a casket.
 - **See more details below in Section IV about biodegradability requirements for shrouds and caskets.**
- Given the sandy nature of the cemetery grounds, all burials require the use of mechanical lowering devices, operated by cemetery staff, and the use of a vault with cover, which shall be placed only by cemetery staff. **Bottomless vaults must be used for Green Burials.**
- If a green burial cannot be prepared due to practical constraints and the body must be cremated, cremated remains within a biodegradable container may be placed in a grave that has been designated for a natural body burial.

III. Managing the Arrangements for Green Burials:

- **A funeral home may handle all arrangements.**
- **Alternatively, families and others may care for the deceased.** In Massachusetts, it is legal to care for the deceased without using a funeral home. The deceased may remain in the home. Family may handle the administrative tasks, may transport the deceased to the cemetery, and may conduct a service without a funeral director. **If not using the services of a funeral director, arrangements should be made to have a town representative present at the graveside service to oversee cemetery procedures.**
- **A hybrid, or combination, may be used** (where the funeral home provides some services and the family provides others). For example, a funeral home may be asked to take care of administrative tasks (the “paperwork”) and the family handles other

arrangements. Any funeral director in Massachusetts may be used. Funeral homes should be contacted to determine the services they provide and the costs.

IV. Green Burial Procedures when a loved one dies (to be handled by a funeral home or family):

- **Death certificate:** A family designee or funeral director will need to obtain a disposition permit (“burial permit”) prior to moving a deceased person. Obtaining a death certificate entails working with the medical certifier and the Town Clerk (burial agent) to facilitate the entry of the death record into the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS). Death certificates should be filed as soon as possible so that the deceased's remains may be properly interred.
- **Disposition/Removal permit:** Once the Death Certificate is initiated in EDRS, a Disposition/Removal Permit (a permit to transport a body and dispose of it by burial, cremation, or donation to a medical school), is issued by the Burial Agent in the town where death occurred. In Provincetown, the Burial Agent is the Town Clerk.
- **Provincetown DPW arrangements:** The Cemetery Superintendent (insert contact info) at least 24 hours before the interment. Opening and closing of the grave must be done by Town Cemetery staff; family or friends of the deceased may not open and close the grave.
- **Preparing the deceased for burial:**
 - If home funeral care is chosen, certain funeral homes may be willing to offer education or guidance, as do home funeral guides. Care of the deceased may include natural, non-invasive procedures, and keeping the deceased cool with dry ice, Techni-ice, cooling blankets, open windows, or other methods. Families and friends may choose to bathe and dress the deceased at home and provide care for one to three days, depending on what the family wants and the burial schedule permits.
 - A funeral home may prepare and shelter the deceased until burial. Some funeral homes have refrigeration facilities and allow visitation of unembalmed bodies. Contact funeral homes for options and fees.
- **Shrouds or Caskets:** Containers or shrouds for burial in Alden Street Cemetery must be biodegradable. They can be homemade, made by a carpenter or cabinetmaker, or purchased from funeral homes, retail stores or online. The container holding or wrapping the deceased must be free of visible bodily fluids for burial.
 - **Shrouds and Shrouding Boards:** A shroud is a cloth used to wrap and cover a body after a person has died. Green burial shrouds must be made of natural, biodegradable materials such as wool, cotton, linen, bamboo, or hemp. A shrouded body may be placed inside a biodegradable casket, but a casket is not required. A shrouded body without a casket must be entirely wrapped and placed on an untreated softwood (such as white pine) or wicker shrouding board, which meets the same biodegradability requirements as requirements for caskets (see below). The board will help stabilize the body while being transported and lowered into the grave and will remain inside the grave. Plywood and particle board are not acceptable. A board with carrying handles that is at least as wide and as long as the body is

recommended; please notify the Cemetery Superintendent **if a board will exceed 28-inches in width and 84-inches in length**. Some shrouds have carrying handles sewn into the cloth and sleeves sewn into the bottom in which a narrower board can be inserted; the narrower board is acceptable since the body and board are held snugly together with ties, providing stability.

- **Biodegradable Caskets:** Caskets may be constructed from untreated softwood, wicker, cardboard, or other natural, biodegradable materials, and must not be painted with toxic paint or varnish. They should be of sufficient strength to support the weight of the body. Wooden caskets should be held together with wooden dowels and non-toxic glues rather than metal fasteners. To minimize environmental impact, we recommend obtaining locally-made caskets. Some people prefer to make their own, using locally-sourced or repurposed materials. Handmade caskets should conform to standard casket size; please notify the Cemetery Superintendent if an oversized casket will be required.
- **The obituary or death notice:** Print or online publications should be contacted to determine their requirements and costs.
- **Transportation of the deceased:** The deceased may need to be transported from a health care facility, to and from a home or funeral home, and to the cemetery. If crossing city or town lines, you must obtain a Disposition/Removal Permit prior to transporting the deceased.

Additional information

- **Scheduling:** Some nursing homes and hospitals have schedules for removing the deceased that might make it challenging for families to manage the necessary paperwork themselves, especially on weekends or holidays. In these instances, it can be helpful to hire a funeral director to handle the administrative requirements and transportation.
- **Home funeral guides:** Home funeral guides can assist a family with certain arrangements but are not licensed funeral directors and do not do the work of preparing the deceased for burial or providing transportation.

Information resources

Mass.gov: *Issues to consider in preparing for disposition of decedents* www.mass.gov/guides/issues-to-consider-in-preparing-for-disposition-of-decedents

Mass.gov: *Funeral Directors Consumer Fact Sheet* <https://tinyurl.com/ConsumerFactSheet>

Green Burial Massachusetts: greenburialma.org/

Green Burial Council: www.greenburialcouncil.org/

National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA): *How Funeral Directors Can Support Home Funeral Families* www.homefuneralalliance.org/what-funeral-directors-can-do.html

Funeral Consumers Alliance: funerals.org/

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