

**GREENWOOD CEMETERY ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2018 AT 8:30 AM
MUNICIPAL BUILDING, ROOM 205, 151 MARTIN**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Gehringer called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Linda Buchanan, Vice Chairperson
Darlene Gehringer, Chairperson
Linda Peterson
Laura Schreiner
George Stern
Margaret Suter
Absent: Kevin Desmond

Administration: City Clerk Mynsberge

Others: Cheri Arcome, Elmwood Historic Cemeteries

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approval of meeting minutes of October 5, 2018

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Schreiner, seconded by Ms. Suter:
To approve the minutes of October 5, 2018 as submitted.

VOTE: Yeas, 6
 Nays, 0
 Absent, 1

IV. NEW BUSINESS

None

V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Items under Unfinished Business will be presented as a status update to the Board and may not require action at this time.

A. Payment Plan Policy

City Clerk Mynsberge presented her memo dated November 15, 2018

Mr. Stern endorsed City Clerk Mynsberge's recommendations to:

- Refund 50% of the payments made on installment if a purchaser is unable to complete the contract;
- Payment of 75% of the purchase price be made to the Perpetual Care Fund after the final payment is made, which causes less work for the City; and
- In the interest of compassion, if enough money is on account to pay for a needed grave the purchaser may be given time to replace the 20% deposit on the other plot(s).

Ms. Suter and Ms. Buchanan questioned what an appropriate procedure would be if all of the money on account was credited to the plot to be used and the 20% down payment amount for the remaining plot(s) was not left in the account.

Mr. Stern confirmed for Ms. Schreiner that he would be willing to give people time to replace the 20% down payment on the remaining plot(s) while the estate was settled.

Ms. Schreiner suggested the policy be made broader to allow flexibility.

City Clerk Mynsberge noted that as the purchaser continues to make payments when they can, in a short amount of time the 20% will be paid.

Ms. Peterson suggested a six-month grace period to reestablish the 20%.

Ms. Gehringer stated:

- The Board takes direction from, and reports to, the City Commission.
- When the City Commission first considered the GCAB's recommendation there were several comments, including from then-Mayor Harris who requested¹ ~~the request~~ for a cure period and other in-depth financial comments that were not clear to her.

Ms. Schreiner explained a cure period is a legal term for what is essentially a grace period.

Ms. Gehringer noted where she stands on the factors of the payment plan policy:

- Elmwood should submit 75% of the payments on payment plans quarterly.
- She reminded the Board the payment plan was initiated by Elmwood, so, with all due respect, quarterly accounting of the payments made is not that much more work.
- She does not agree, and she believes the City Commission also does not agree, that remittance of the City's 75% should be deferred until the purchasers make final payment.
- Refunding 50% of money paid on contracts which are not honored is consistent with the lot resale policy.
- In perspective, not everyone is buying a plot on a payment plan. Only a small number of people chose that option. If and when the payment plan policy is made official the number of payment plans is not going to increase discernably.
- When she wrote the initial draft of a policy, she took it from acceptable standards from other cemeteries offering payment plans, deleting a lot of the details and reporting requirements.
- She agrees a grace period should be offered.
- She does not agree that all the money on account goes to the particular plot needed for burial because these plot(s) are being held. Plots are being kept off the market that could otherwise be sold.
- She is not averse² ~~averse~~ to keeping 20% on each plot and using the funds above that amount to pay off a plot needed for burial.

In response to a question from Ms. Peterson, Cheri Arcome, representing Elmwood, explained how Elmwood administers payment plans:

- The 20% down payment is not applied to each plot equally.

¹ As amended on February 1, 2019.

² As corrected on February 1, 2019.

- If there is \$3,000 on account, one plot may be used for burial. As long as the family keeps making payments, the contract is paid off in 24 months so it is not considered an issue.
- Elmwood does not address the greater financial arrangements at the time of a death, when a family is grieving, as long as the needed plot is paid for in full and the burial fee is paid. Instead, the family is contacted 30 days after the burial to discuss any payments still owing.
- She explained that families are in a time of crisis when making burial arrangements. Often a widow has not handled the finances and may not know where the checkbook is or how to make payments. One of the biggest concerns for a family member at the time is that they might lose their space next to their spouse.

Ms. Arcome clarified for Ms. Peterson that families on a payment plan are given a payment book and are mailed a statement monthly. She confirmed that families are well informed by Elmwood as to when payments are due, how much has been paid and the balance owed. As of the end of the third calendar quarter, there are 15 statements being mailed each month.

Ms. Gehringer said she had a different perspective after Ms. Arcome's explanation of the current procedure and thanked her for her input.³ She noted Elmwood's method is more compassionate than what she⁴ † was suggesting. When families are in a time of crises it is harsh to say we are keeping 20%.

Ms. Suter and Ms. Schreiner explained how long probate can take and how long accounts can be frozen.

Ms. Gehringer commented that the Board has spent a year and a half on the policy, going around and around, changing their minds, then going back and changing their minds the other way. She suggested that payment plans be discontinued moving forward for simplicity's sake. She noted there are a small number of people choosing the payment plan option in comparison with the overall population and with the number of graves in the cemetery. Ms. Gehringer also expressed concern that when the policy is once again presented to the City Commission the Board will be going back and forth again.

Ms. Arcome reported that 85% of purchasers pay in full up front.

Ms. Arcome indicated Elmwood, as the City's contractor, is amenable to whatever direction Birmingham chooses in regards to payment plans.

Mr. Stern believed payment plans should continue to be offered because of the high cost of a plot in Greenwood. He noted many municipalities around the state are selling plots for around \$500, and at that price point he understands those communities not offering a payment plan. Mr. Stern commented that with the high price at Greenwood a payment plan is a compassionate thing to do, and it serves the citizens of Birmingham and the general area. He advocated finishing the policy and submitting it to the City Commission.

Ms. Suter commented that simplifying makes things better for everyone, and she said that people have other sources for money such as bank loans or personal loans from family. Ms. Suter was in favor of phasing out payment plans.

³ As amended February 1, 2019.

⁴ As corrected February 1, 2019.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Peterson, seconded by Ms. Suter:

To recommend to the City Commission that no new payment plans for the purchase of Greenwood Cemetery plots will be entered into effective January 1, 2019, and that current payment plans will be continued to their conclusion.

VOTE: Yeas, 4
 Nays, 2 (Schreiner, Stern)
 Absent, 1

Ms. Gehringer commented that if the City Commission does not accept the Board's recommendation she hopes they will give the Board better direction as to exactly what they are looking for.

B. Discussion of Master Plan Process

City Clerk Mynsberge:

- Introduced the discussion by suggesting the Board come to a consensus on their long-range goal and create the plan to achieve that goal.
- Noted that Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) has been a priority of the Board since its inception because there seems to be a lack of confidence from some quarters as to whether the current map and records of Greenwood Cemetery are accurate.
- Explained that field surveys have been done by both the Department of Public Works and by the City's contractor for cemetery management, Elmwood Historic Cemeteries. Both efforts included comparing findings in the field with the City's cemetery records. The current map of the cemetery is the result of the surveys and of Elmwood's having GPR performed on Sections B and C, and the western portion of Section A, and having rod-probed Sections K and L, and the western portion of Section A.⁵ ~~all of Sections K, L, B, C, and the western portion of Section A.~~
- Suggested that if the Board feels GPR is necessary to achieve their goal they should make a decision soon about requesting funding in the FY2018-2019 budget.

Discussion ensued regarding the long-term financial needs of the cemetery and how the perpetual care fund operates. The possibility of finding additional revenue streams was mentioned. City Clerk Mynsberge agreed to ask the City's Finance Director to attend the February meeting to explain the operation of the perpetual care fund, and how to read the quarterly revenue and expenditure report and the balance sheet.

Ms. Gehringer stated her opinion:

- GPR of the entire cemetery is the first priority to establish the baseline of plots that are sold and unsold, because there may be plots that have been sold for decades and graves that have not been identified.
- Determining the definitive location of potter's field would be the second priority.

Ms. Schreiner asserted that a really good baseline already exists, and she is reluctant to spend a lot of money recreating what is already available.

Ms. Gehringer agreed there is a good baseline, but implied it is not 100%. She stated GPR has never been done for the entire cemetery, and that she would be surprised if graves from the last century are found that are not on the map along with open spaces we do not know about. Mr. Stern, having done extensive research, discovered discrepancies.⁶

⁵ As corrected February 1, 2019.

⁶ As amended February 1, 2019.

Ms. Arcome confirmed:

- In 2014 or 2015, Elmwood did GPR on Sections B & C.
- Elmwood field surveyed all of Sections K, L, B, C, and the western portion of A.
- The maps and lot diagrams are correct. Elmwood spent three months at Greenwood verifying the records. If there were any corrections or updates that needed to be made, they were done at that time.
- Prior to Elmwood's work, around 2010, the City's Department of Public Services verified the lot diagrams and maps for all other sections, and those records are on file with the City.
- A field survey includes measuring lots, probing to determine existing contents, and, based on historical records, the sizes of plots for time periods are known and the points can be measured exactly.
- Sometimes excavation is required and the soil is used to determine what something is.
- Only single layer burials exist at Greenwood.

Ms. Gehringer noted that doing GPR on Sections B and C would be redundant but the Board would have access to the findings. She reiterated that GPR needs to be done on the entire cemetery.

City Clerk Mynsberge asked the Board to define, definitely, the receivables a GPR surveyor is to provide, so that in requesting quotes the Board's expectations can be communicated.

The Board defined the receivables as:

- A digitized map showing the location of each grave.
- Cross referencing of the findings with current records.
- A determination of which spaces are used and which are available to sell.

Ms. Schreiner confirmed for Board members that the current cemetery map is available to the public through the City's website (under the Clerk's Department pages and at www.greenwoodhistoriccemetery.org).

Ms. Arcome explained what GPR is likely to provide and provided suggestions for the Board to get useful information:

- GPR shows where ground has moved, which can mean that the ground shifted when a burial took place next to that spot.
- The Board should require, before committing to anything, a report which a vendor has provided to another cemetery. Does the report consist of analyzation of sediment layers and does that help the Board with its ultimate goal.
- GPR⁷ ~~GPS~~ cannot tell whether or not a body from 1859 is in the spot.

Mr. Stern agreed with Ms. Arcome's assessment.

Ms. Gehringer commented that the entire cemetery needs GPR because the City doesn't have access to Elmwood's data. Ms. Arcome clarified that the City has access to all the results of the GPR and field study⁸ done by Elmwood, and reiterated that all of the records have been confirmed or updated and are in the Clerk's office. She noted that GPR results will not be able to identify who is buried in a grave, for example that "Al Smith" is in Grave 24 in Section A.

⁷ As corrected February 1, 2019.

⁸ As corrected February 1, 2019.

Ms. Schreiner restated the end goal of the Board is to find out which spaces have been used, which spaces have not been used, and which spaces are available, and asked if GPR meets that goal.

Ms. Gehringer said she wants digitization of the entire cemetery.

Mr. Stern indicated he found over 100 spaces currently available for sale.

Ms. Schreiner again stated her opinion that the City already has a lot of the information being discussed as the goal through Elmwood's records. She made a comparison of not needing to see the sink trap if the plumber says he changed it. In the same way she does not need to see the unpleasant details to make an educated decision if she can rely on the company which is providing the information.

Ms. Gehringer noted that Elmwood did not do GPR on the entire cemetery. Mr. Stern added, "including one or two sections that had the most unsold graves. Never has come up in any of the contractor's discussions, so it's important".

Ms. Gehringer restated her opinion that the Board needs complete total knowledge on the entire cemetery.

Mr. Stern noted he would like to know more about our current data system from an IT person as to how it comports to cemetery programs in general. He indicated the Board has spent considerable time over the last four or five years talking about a comprehensive cemetery system, and it would concern him if the City Clerk is generating a lot of records if at some point a comprehensive cemetery system is instituted and is not compatible with the City's system. City Clerk Mynsberge noted that her office is deeply into the data input of cemetery records into the BS&A system. Mr. Stern said the Board may have to ask the City for an additional resource for the conversion process.

Ms. Gehringer asked each Board member to prioritize the master plan process list and to be prepared to discuss the master plan process in February.

Mr. Stern noted that the items on the list all deal with supply and suggested adding items related to demand.

Ms. Gehringer moved on to the Perpetual Care Fund financial report.

VI. FINANCIAL REPORT

A. Perpetual Care Fund – Period Ending September 30, 2018

- Income from the sale of cemetery plots was \$18,000.
- Investment income was \$3,509.57.
- Revenues⁹ ~~Assets~~ for the period were \$21,509.57

Board members discussed changing their fiscal year from a calendar year to the same year used by the City in order to avoid confusion with the first quarter for the Board meaning January-March, and the first quarter for the Finance Department meaning July-September.

⁹ As corrected February 1, 2019.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Schreiner, seconded by Ms. Peterson:
To make the Board's fiscal year coincide with the City's fiscal year beginning immediately.

VOTE: Yeas, 6
 Nays, 0
 Absent, 1

It was further suggested the Board's annual report to the City Commission be based on the fiscal year rather than the calendar year.

VII. OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR MATTERS NOT ON THE AGENDA

No members of the public were present.

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

None.

IX. ADJOURN

Chairperson Gehringer adjourned the meeting at 10:09 a.m.

NEXT MEETING: FEBRUARY 1, 2019

Greenwood Cemetery Advisory Board:

The powers and duties of the Greenwood Cemetery Advisory Board is to provide the following recommendations to the City Commission:

1. *Modifications: As to modifications of the rules and regulations governing Greenwood Cemetery.*
2. *Capital Improvements: As to what capital improvements should be made to the cemetery.*
3. *Future Demands: As to how to respond to future demands for cemetery services.*

Section 34-30 (g) of the Birmingham City Code

NOTICE: Individuals requiring accommodations, such as mobility, visual, hearing, interpreter or other assistance, for effective participation in this meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at (248) 530-1880 (voice), or (248) 644-5115 (TDD) at least one day in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

Las personas que requieren alojamiento, tales como servicios de interpretación, la participación efectiva en esta reunión deben ponerse en contacto con la Oficina del Secretario Municipal al (248) 530-1880 por lo menos el día antes de la reunión pública. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).