

**GREENWOOD CEMETERY ADVISORY BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2019 AT 8:30 AM  
MUNICIPAL BUILDING, ROOM 205, 151 MARTIN**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Gehringer called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Present: Linda Buchanan, Vice Chairwoman  
Darlene Gehringer, Chairwoman  
Linda Peterson  
Laura Schreiner (arrived 8:32)  
George Stern  
Margaret Suter

Absent: Kevin Desmond

Administration: City Clerk Mynsberge

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. Approval of meeting minutes of April 17, 2019

**MOTION:** Motion by Vice Chair Buchanan, seconded by Ms. Suter:

To approve the minutes of April 17, 2019 as corrected:

- Page 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> to Last Paragraph: "Ms. Buchanan" should be "Ms. Peterson".
- Page 3, 5<sup>th</sup> Paragraph: Replace "their" with "its".
- Page 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph: Replace "Ms. Suter" with "Ms. Schreiner".
- Page 4, 6<sup>th</sup> Paragraph: Replace "a maintenance consideration" with "an equality issue".
- Page 4, Last Paragraph: "Ms. Schreiner" should be "Chairwoman Gehringer".

VOTE: Yeas, 6  
Nays, 0

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Reconsideration of above ground monument rule in Section North F**

Ms. Gehringer presented the item.

Ms. Suter said that, after reviewing the packet, she would like to go back to the "flats only" model previously used by the cemetery. She went on to say that while it is hard to undo actions that have been done up to this point, returning to the flush markers in Section F is the prudent thing to do. There was an issue about another monument thought to be in Section F North, it was actually in Section F, and allowed in that particular section of the cemetery. Obviously, someone made a mistake or it was misidentified, as it is very hard to tell at the cemetery unless you have something stuck in the ground where the property lines are. Ms. Suter found some of the things illustrated in the packet to be too far in the past and can only surmise that there was once some information that is not available now, as to why the section restricted monuments in the beginning. Since there is no record, it is unfortunate at this point that we have a couple of

monuments that the Board does not know if it would be appropriate to request replacements with flush markers.

Clerk Mynsberge pointed out what Ms. Suter alluded to at the very end of her comments. There are clearly two monuments now in Section F North. Besides the monument that is on the border, the Callahan monument was installed in spring 2018 after the Commission made the decision in 2017 to allow monuments in a previously restricted area.

Ms. Schreiner felt, after reviewing the item and Ms. Arcome's attached email, that there were more approved monuments in the process of being installed.

Mr. Stern agreed that the Cemetery Advisory Board voted unanimously to keep a flush marker policy; the City Commission made a change to the policy and instructed the Greenwood Cemetery Advisory Board to reinforce. He expressed that rather than go back to the City Commission with the original motion that was previously submitted to retain the flat marker rule; he would like to propose a suspension as a compromise. Greenwood Cemetery, Section F North would still have all flush stones with no monuments erected until the suspension is lifted. At the same time, the Board is not forcing the Commission or going up against the Commission and saying that we think they were wrong. In fact, Commissioner DeWeese in the Commission hearing suggested that we might propose a suspension. Mr. Schnieder was at the meeting and suggested the same thing. Mr. Stern likes the word suspension, because it is not a criticism or demand, and puts the rule into effect as this Board would have liked it in the first place.

Chairman Gehring agreed with Mr. Stern on proposing a suspension to the City Commission.

Ms. Peterson led some discussion on the process to get markers installed at the cemetery.

City Clerk Mynsberge commented that because Elmwood installs the foundation, they make sure that proposed markers are within cemetery guidelines, rules and regulations.

Ms. Suter suggested that in the event of a private sale, a letter should go to the buyer outlining the rules and regulations.

Ms. Schreiner said that in any private transaction the purchaser has a duty to inquire about the guidelines prior to purchasing a marker.

Vice Chair Buchanan expressed that when you receive a deed for cemetery property, all restrictions are laid out in detail on the deed. Although Mr. Roberson, in this case, admitted to not noticing the restriction, it was on the deed.

Ms. Peterson suggested that Elmwood has a responsibility to verbally make sure that private purchasers look at the deed for restrictions.

City Clerk Mynsberge agreed that there is no reason why Elmwood could not verbally point out what is on the paperwork.

Ms. Schreiner agreed with Ms. Mynsberge and expressed that Ms. Arcome is very detailed oriented as a matter of standard operating procedures.

Chairwoman Gehringer noted that the as-built photos of the Robertson monument do not reflect the drawing presented to the Board and City Commission.

Mrs. Suter pointed out the drawing that Mr. Robertson submitted to the Board, in the attached letter, was the drawing that he in fact was submitting to Franklin.

Ms. Schreiner clarified that he wrote, "This is what I proposed to Franklin and will do something similar here". She went on to say that<sup>1</sup> the size may not be within the outside envelope of the parcel.

Chairman Gehringer<sup>2</sup> commented that the two proposed monuments are not even close in resemblance.

Chairman Gehringer pointed out that the base on the Robertson monument is not flush, and believes that a flush base is a requirement of all memorials – flats or monuments. A DPS employee, Mr. Huey, illegally installed a monument in the shape of a cross close to the border of Section F North. Chairperson Gehringer stated that, in her opinion, the monument does not set a precedent because it is there illegally and was approved so long ago that it cannot be undone.

**MOTION:** Motion by Mr. Stern, seconded by Ms. Suter:  
To recommend to the City Commission that it suspend the rule allowing above ground monuments in Section F North of Greenwood Cemetery.

Chairwoman Gehringer opened the meeting for public comment.

Mr. Michael Schneider, 251 Strathmoor Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI, explained:

- His parents are buried in Greenwood Cemetery.
- His parents bought their cemetery plots from the City in the 1970's.
- Mr. Schneider remembers being told at the time that their plots were in a section of the cemetery where all the memorials would be flush with the ground.
- Recently, while visiting his parents' graves, Mr. Schneider was shocked to find nearby a large above ground monument.
- He since was informed that the City rescinded that long-standing rule prohibiting above ground monuments in that section of the cemetery; and the change was driven by the request of one individual who did not want to follow the rules.
- When the City decided that Section F North of the cemetery would be reserved for flush markers that was not just a restriction on people purchasing grave sites there, it was also a promise to them that their graves would be in a section free from above ground monuments.
- He was very pleased that his parents were buried in a section that only had flat markers.
- Mr. Schneider feels that flush markers have an unassuming dignity and an openness and peacefulness without the distraction of large monuments nearby.
- He further feels that the large monuments are an intrusion and destroy the openness and tranquility that was there before.

---

<sup>1</sup> As corrected on August 16, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> As corrected on August 16, 2019.

- The City sold gravesites to his parents and to others telling them that this was an area free from above ground monuments, and changed the rule without notifying the family members of those already buried in that section of the cemetery and without regard to their wishes.
- Cheri Arcome, cemetery contact, told Mr. Schneider that two other families with sites in that section also complained about allowing above ground monuments.
- He wants to hold the City accountable for the changes made to a section initially restricted to flush memorials.
- He is requesting that the restriction go back into effect; and that those with above ground monuments be required to replace them with flush memorials.
- The persons who purchased sites in this section deserve to have the City's commitment upheld.

Vice Chair Buchanan feels that the motion should say that Section F North should remain flush, and asked what is the difference between using the term suspension and saying it stay flush.

Mr. Stern expressed that in keeping with Commissioner DeWeese's comments, he was simply putting forth wording that would appear as a compromise while putting into effect the non-future installing of monuments in Section F North.

Chairperson Gehringer opined that Commissioner DeWeese is only one commissioner out of seven. It is not a bad suggestion, but she personally would like to go back to exactly what we proposed and passed in the past.

Ms. Suter questioned if the Board follows Mr. Stern's suggestion would that give the Commissioners the ability to just go ahead and change the policy whenever they felt like it. She believes that a suspension would allow for policy changes later, by the Commission, when the next person feels like their loved one deserves a large monument.

Chairperson Gehringer suggested that replacement of the above ground monuments be a separate discussion.

Mr. Stern pointed out that Mr. Schneider raises an interesting point on the current management system. In keeping with Mr. Schneider's comment about letter writing, he asked Ms. Mynsberge if the City database has the capability to record next of kin.

Ms. Mynsberge was unsure, and noted the information has not been collected. A policy change would be needed, and her understanding is that the industry, in general, does not collect next of kin information.

Ms. Schreiner expressed her appreciation for Mr. Stern's thoughts about keeping next of kin contacts. However, she explained one generation might be an easy administrative task, but by the time you go down a couple of generations, and with the mobility of our society, she believes that tracking next of kin would become administratively burdensome.

Chairperson Gehringer expressed that her family is diligent about keeping next of kin information on record where her ~~mom~~ mother<sup>3</sup> is buried and wonders if people even know or understand that this is something that should be done.

Ms. Schreiner pointed out that contractually, the property does not necessarily pass down to the purchasers' heirs. It is nice to be able to have a next of kin record, and she would like to support this effort; but she sees it becoming a quagmire and, again, burdensome to administer.

VOTE:                   Yeas,     2 (Schreiner, Stern)  
                              Nays,     3

Motion failed.

**MOTION:**     Motion by Vice Chair Buchanan, seconded by Ms. Suter:

To recommend to the City Commission to return Section F North of Greenwood Cemetery to all flush markers.

Vice Chair Buchanan expressed the intent is that, for right now, it can only be the foreseeable future. The Board can only propose and make suggestions. With that in mind, the City Commission can change things again anytime an issue comes up. She also thought the suspension proposal gave the Commission too much wiggle room. The motion as made just says that the policy will go back to flush markers only, like the Board voted on eighteen (18) months ago.

Ms. Peterson reiterated that suspension is easier for the Commissioners because they would not have to decide anything; just vote on the proposal. She asked why the City Commission allowed the installation of the large monument - was it just to impress Mr. Robertson? She does not think that saying yes, no, or suspend will help. This issue will continue to be the Commission's call.

Ms. Suter agreed that it is always a possibility. She said, while reading Mr. Robertson's reasons for wanting to have the upright monument, she found that none of the reasons was valid for the cemetery. It is not up to this Board ultimately, but we must give the City Commissioners our best advice. Mr. Robertson wanted something, and when he did not get it from the Cemetery Board he took it to the City Commission. This Board will need to be firm in its response to the City Commission and let them know how we feel about this issue.

Vice Chair Buchanan wanted to let the Board know that while giving a cemetery tour a couple of weeks ago, one of the tourists was excited about Section F North being flush memorials, leaving the cemetery open. It gives the cemetery a different, flowing look.

Chairperson Gehringer asked Mr. Stern to recall when some of the members were on the original cemetery committee, and a DPS employee brought in a flood plain map that may have included part of the cemetery, if it lead to designating Section F North for flat markers only.

Mr. Stern said, at the time, the discussions around the flood plain were about building a large columbarium, and the committee declined to do that.

---

<sup>3</sup> As amended on August 16, 2019.

Ms. Peterson asked how many plots are available for sale in Section F North at the cemetery. Mr. Stern replied that there are 169 occupied graves in that section, and about 75 owned but not occupied.

VOTE:                   Yeas,    6  
                              Nays,    0

Chairperson Gehringer opened discussion on the Robertson monument, and asked if it fulfills the requirements for monuments at Greenwood.

Mr. Stern felt the Board may have been encroaching on legal matters and was hesitant to move forward. He said that he is not sure the Board has the ability to review a monument after it is erected. He suggested that legal counsel look at it.

Chairwoman Gehringer feels that Mr. Robertson's monument proposal was a blatant disregard for the rules in terms of using a flush base. She expressed that it is the Board's job to point it out to the City Commission. Ms. Suter agreed.

Mr. Stern asked what regulation the Robertson and Callaghan families violated.

Ms. Peterson interjected that a deal is a deal and deserves respect.

Chairperson Gehringer said that her point remains that Mr. Robertson proposed a flush base supporting the monument and it is not what was installed.

Ms. Suter suggested if the rules do not require monument bases to be flush, they should.

Mr. Schneider wants to verify that Mr. Robertson conformed to the rules that were in effect at the time that his monument was erected. He also thinks the Board is doing a good job of considering his request, due to the tight spot for both this Board and the Commission. He also asked if there is anything else he could do to convince the City Commission to rescind the rule and get rid of the monuments that are in place. He was advised by Vice Chair Buchanan to attend the City Commission meeting with additional supporters.

**B. Consideration to release additional gravesites for sale.**

Mr. Stern mentioned he attended a session with Bob Gibbs and his associates at one of the citywide master-planning meetings. Mr. Gibbs said it was important to look at supply and demand. Mr. Stern agreed with Ms. Suter that Mr. Gibbs did not suggest slowing down sales.

Chairperson Gehringer agreed that it is a good idea to reserve a certain number of spots for the future.

Ms. Suter recommended releasing 50 additional plots for sale.

Mr. Stern left the meeting at 10:01 a.m., and said he will not be able to attend the August meeting if it is rescheduled to August 16.

Vice Chair Buchanan noted that it would be simple to come back and meet to consider releasing more plots.

**MOTION:** Motion by Ms. Schreiner, seconded by Ms. Suter:

To recommend the release of 60 additional plots in Sections B & C bringing total allowable sales to 300, and when sales reach 270 the GCAB will review and make a recommendation to the City Commission on releasing additional plots.

VOTE:                      Yeas,     5  
                                     Nays,     0

**C. Consideration to reschedule August 2, 2019 regular meeting to August 16, 2019.**

Chairperson Gehringer stated, as Chairperson, she can change a meeting date without a vote of the Board. Chairperson Gehringer changed the August meeting date to August 16. She stated if there is no quorum, the Board will not meet.

**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. Finalization of Master Plan/Historical Collaboration Priority List**

City Clerk Mynsberge presented the item, explaining that the City Commission wants the Cemetery Advisory Board to develop a priority list of Master Plan/Collaborative Preservation Projects.

Vice Chair Buchanan said that Potter's Field (Item 3) could be eliminated fast. After some research, she found that Gilbert Lake Cemetery held many pioneers and underwent some changes in 1918. Their remains were moved to three different cemeteries: Greenwood, Franklin, and Roselawn. Right at that time the Cemetery Association (the City did not own the cemetery) decided that it wanted to sell more spots. In order to do that they wanted to move some of the remains that were at Potters Field. These people were poor, indigent, and without markers. Circa 1900, these remains were moved under the main road north of Section C)<sup>4</sup>. Military remains are on the South edge of Western part of Section C. and documented. Land developers eventually bought Gilbert Lake.

City Clerk Mynsberge led a discussion on the work plan and the Board decided to table until the August 16, 2019 meeting. She will label items A, B, C, etc. for that meeting.

*Ms. Peterson left at 10:24 a.m.*

**B. Ground Penetrating Radar**

**MOTION:** Moved by Ms. Suter, seconded by Vice Chair Buchanan:

To issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Ground Penetrating Radar services for the entire cemetery.

---

<sup>4</sup> As corrected on August 16, 2019.

Advisor Ms.<sup>5</sup> Schreiner thought the presenter of the GPR project raised red flags of the impact to the cemetery and alluded to the fact that the City may not get any benefit out of the system because it would not provide more information than our current records. She also sees it as labor intensive for the Clerk's office to support the effort; and is opposed to the temporary painting of the cemetery.

Chairperson Gehringer is in support of this motion so that the cemetery will receive digitizing and mapping.

Chairman Gehringer and Vice Chair Buchanan suggested that an RFP would provide the Board with more information.

VOTE:                      Yeas,     3  
                                 Nays,     1 (Schreiner)

**VI. FINANCIAL REPORT**

- A. 1Q 2019 Financial Report for Greenwood Cemetery
  - City Clerk Mynsberge reported the City Commission approved moving the GCAB's Annual Report to the fiscal year.
  
- B. 1Q Perpetual Care Fund Reports

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

None.

**VIII. BOARD COMMENTS**

Announcements:

- Three trees were planted at the East entrance to Greenwood Cemetery.
  - Vice Chair Buchanan reported very good reviews from the people visiting the Cemetery.

**IX. ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING: AUGUST 16, 2019**

---

Cheryl Arft, Deputy City Clerk/vc

*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*

---

<sup>5</sup> As amended on August 16, 2019.