



TOWN of BROOKLINE
Massachusetts
Walnut Hills Cemetery
Old Burying Ground

Trustees

Lisa Farber
Gerard Hayes
Peggy Maguire
Randolph Meiklejohn, Chair
Joslin Ham Murphy

Director of Parks and Open Space
Alexandra Vecchio

Walnut Hills Cemetery Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, January 24, 2023
6:00 PM – 7:30 PM
Zoom Webinar

Trustees Present: Gerard Hayes, Lisa Farber, Randolph Meiklejohn, Peggy Maguire, and Joslin Ham Murphy

Trustees Absent:

Staff Present: Alexandra Vecchio: Director of Parks and Open Space, Jessica White: Parks and Open Space Assistant

Welcome

Randolph Meiklejohn addressed the Trustees and public. He will chair tonight's meeting and before beginning, he wanted to confirm that all Trustees and other persons anticipated to participate on the agenda are present and can hear him. A roll call attendance of both staff and Trustees was taken. He stated that this public meeting of the Walnut Hills Cemetery Trustees is being held in open session, and is being conducted remotely in a manner that is consistent with the Legislature's extension of provisions initially made under the Governors' March 12, 2020 Executive Order, concerning the now-expired state of emergency in the Commonwealth, due to the outbreak of Covid-19. He stated that for this meeting the Trustees are convening via video conference, via Zoom as posted on the town's calendar, which identifies how the public may access the meeting. All supporting materials that have been provided to the members of this body are available on the town website and are attached to the invitation for the meeting. The meeting will follow the agenda unless the Chair notes otherwise. Randolph Meiklejohn covered ground rules that will permit orderly conduct of tonight's business and explained how the public comment will work. He stated that the Trustees also welcome public comment in writing. Randolph Meiklejohn detailed the agenda/timeline for tonight's meeting.

Review and Approval of September 21, 2022, June 8, 2022, and, November 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Joslin Murphy moved for approval of the December 14, 2022, Walnut Hills Cemetery Meeting Minutes, with edits as made by Joslin Murphy, Gerard Hayes, and Randolph Meiklejohn. Seconded by Gerard Hayes. All in favor. Those edits were made and reflected in the final minutes posted online.

Overview of the Walnut Hills Cemetery, Landscape Management Plan and Buildout Project Scope

Alexandra Vecchio provided background information and set the stage before moving into the presentation by the consultant team. She gave a brief overview of the Walnut Hills Cemetery Master Plan and Master Plan Recommendations, Walnut Hills Cemetery Rates and purchase data (FY19-FY22), Landscape Management Plan and Buildout: Project Scope and timeline. Please see the attached presentation here: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/3600>

Presentation of Design options of Buildout Project, by Halvorson

Vesna Maneva (of Halvorson Tighe & Bond Studio, the Town's landscape architecture consultant) presented a Walnut Hills Cemetery Schematic Design Options for Upright Markers presentation which can be found here. <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/3600> This presentation included site plans, diagrams, photographs, renderings and data for the two buildout options called "Library Edge" and "Allandale Edge".

Trustees Discussion of the Design Options

Lisa Farber and Vesna Maneva discussed the two processes for determining possible rock and ledge. One process is by drilling and the other is by using more specialized seismic mapping. Ballpark figures for the cost of these processes were discussed. Lisa Farber stated that with urban forestry tree mapping Vesna mentioned planting natives, which to her would be the right thing to put in as a buffer. She asked Vesna if she agrees. Vesna replied with a yes.

Peggy Maguire stated that she has walked the Library Edge buffer along the residential properties on Bellingham Road that abut the cemetery, and observed that currently there is no buffer at a couple of the homes, and they do have a direct view of the cemetery. It sounds to her that the Library Edge option will improve the character of that area by adding vegetation to that buffer area. She asked Vesna could confirm that is included in the option. Vesna replied with a yes and explained her plans for improving that edge.

Joslin Murphy stated that the trouble she is having with this proposal is that it presupposes that a decision has been made that the cemetery needs to provide more upright marker lots. Joslin Murphy stated that Alexandra said early on that staff was advised by the foreman that the cemetery was running out of upright marker spaces, and there was a conversation with the Trustees. However, Joslin said she believed there was no discussion about how the Trustees wanted to move forward with that. For example, she stated that many cemeteries permit only flush markers, and that was a question that she had for Vesna. Randolph stated that the framework for the meeting tonight and the options that we're presenting are within the presumption of considering expansion projects. He stated that what we're doing is considering potential options. Joslin Murphy stated that she believes Halvorson designed the new cemetery in Belmont Highland Meadows, and stated that it is a good example of a cemetery that only permits flat markers. A cemetery does not have to provide upright markers but is just something that's being considered. She thinks this is taking the cart before the horse, because it's costing a fair amount of money, and any further study is going to cost a fair amount of money. She feels that it is our obligation as fiduciaries to first consider the underlying question or whether we need an expansion within the cemetery. Joslin Murphy asked Vesna if there needs to be more geological study to determine what exists underneath these areas in both proposals. Vesna Maneva

stated that the study could take a few days. However, with every design new information does affect the design and cost. Joslin Murphy stated that in each case, although some of the trees appear to be in poor shape, these are woodland buffers and more than six to ten trees would be taken down with respect to each of these preliminary designs. Vesna Maneva replied with a yes. She stated that many of those saplings are invasive species. Alexandra Vecchio stated that Vesna is talking about Library Edge, where there are saplings that have sprouted up, not Allandale Edge which is an open lawn for the vast majority of the space. Joslin Murphy stated that there are very significant pine trees that line Allandale Road. Vesna Maneva stated that they are there, but they're not in the best condition anymore; sooner or later their successor needs to be planned for. She stated that the design option does not call for taking them down, but rather providing what can replace them in the future. A photograph of the Allandale Edge was shown. Joslin Murphy stated that it is a fairly significant woodland. She stated that she believes that one of the characteristics of a woodland, if she is not mistaken, is that there are trees that fall, and the woodland thus provides harborage for small creatures and is part of a natural environment. Alexandra Vecchio stated that it is why we enlisted the services of Bartlett Tree Services to help us develop the Cemetery Tree assessment and inventory, and to think about the succession planning to make sure that we're managing this in the best possible manner. Joslin Murphy stated that some of that is maintenance work. Alexandra Vecchio stated that we typically aim for a seven-year pruning cycle but haven't been able to maintain that in recent years for a variety of reasons.

Randolph Meiklejohn asked Vesna Maneva about the tree graphics on the Library Edge design, specifically the colors and symbols used on the drawings to represent each major tree's condition, and whether it is proposed to remain or to be removed. Randolph Meiklejohn asked Vesna if she had the data on the number of burial lots in the Library Edge option if it were laid out in continuous single lots without aisles between them. Vesna Maneva stated that with such a layout, you could probably get fifteen to twenty percent more than the 192 graves indicated in the presentation. Randolph Meiklejohn noted that part of the Library Edge buildout option includes the expansion of section twenty-four, which already has a pattern of lots in pairs, and he wondered if Vesna recommends continuing that pattern. Vesna Maneva stated that she would recommend it at least where you are immediately adjacent to the existing paired lots in Section twenty-four. The reason the design was shown this way is because that is what Halvorson was told that pairs of adjacent upright-market lots are in highest demand. Randolph stated that on the Allandale Edge option, it is interesting to note the difference in the buffer, he wondered if it is a combination of the topography itself and the trees that are causing Vesna to recommend a fifty-foot buffer here (where the Library Edge buffer is shown at twenty-five feet). Vesna Maneva replied with a yes. She stated that you could decrease the buffer width only a little bit, because the area is fairly steep.

Public Comment on the Design Options

Bobby Murphy addressed the Trustees. He lives at 66 Baker Circle. It seems to him that this whole discussion of destroying trees and open space started back in 2020, so he does not how we got here tonight from there without the abutters, Precinct 16 Town Meeting Members, and the neighborhood being notified of any of this. He is shocked by the mention of a third entrance to the cemetery. He stated that we have a gate system with two main entrances and a former police officer who watches over the cemetery. There are no problems at the cemetery because it is locked up at night and the cemetery caretaker patrols the area. A third entrance would welcome a whole host of problems. It's very unsettling that this board has gone out and hired a company to do this. He stated that we have our tree vendor Northern and an in-house tree crew. He doesn't understand why they could not have done all the tree work in-house. To him it feels like a lot of unnecessary money has

been spent. He thought that Brookline Boards and Commissions are about transparency and open meetings and to him, this has been nothing like that. He plans on submitting something in writing regarding the design options.

Richard Murphy addressed the Trustees. He is a Town Meeting Member, and an abutter at Baker Circle. He appreciates all the work to date. He wonders how the Trustees would consider an area before a rock survey was done beforehand. He stated that there is a reason why the forefathers of the cemetery did not build in certain areas. He thinks that the Library Edge is probably the best-case scenario, as far as consideration, but he knows from past conversations there is a lot of ledge. He thinks a rock survey would have been done before investing a lot of design work. He discussed the evergreen trees along the west buffer of Section 24. He feels that the buffers are a very important thing to consider when we are looking at these different areas. His biggest concern is the Library Edge. Richard Murphy stated that the ridgeline section, in the Allandale Edge option, is more of a concern for him, as far as the design work for those plots. It is in a historical section of the cemetery and it shouldn't be treated the same as the new section. His biggest concern is the historical value of that part of the cemetery and keeping the integrity of that section. He is hoping that with any of the ledge work the Town is not considering any pile driving as part of the plan. This was done for the Cremation Memorial, and the Memorial is not what it was when it was first built and designed. He stated that any pile driving would hurt the neighborhood. Richard Murphy described the noise impact of pile driving.

Betsy Fitzpatrick addressed the Trustees. She resides at 227 South St. She wanted to thank the Trustees for providing so much helpful information in the letter that was sent to abutters with links to the Master Plan and buildout options. Both she and her husband walk the cemetery frequently. She knows there will be obstacles and it is a tough site with some ledge, but she is very thankful that she tuned in to learn that the Trustees are thoughtfully looking at plans. She stated that it is a cemetery and it is there to serve the residents of the Town while still keeping its beautiful landscape features. She wanted to thank the Trustees for an informative meeting, and she will be keeping an eye on the buildouts and getting herself right over to the office to secure a plot if some become available.

Adrienne Bowman addressed the Trustees. She is a Town meeting member from Precinct 16 and lives at 416 VFW Parkway. She visits the cemetery very frequently. She does not understand even after looking at the graphics, how the number of plots presented tonight would all fit there. She stated that from a visual standpoint she thinks that it feels like there's more space on the Allandale side, so she is leaning toward that side. She stated that in an attempt to keep the woodland feel, she wondered if there could be an option to do a few in one section and a few in the other section, rather than building out one or both to their maximum capacity. It concerns her that it's only one path ahead, seemingly with the upright markers. One of the things she enjoys the most about the cemetery is that there's such diversity in memorials in the cemetery. Her personal preference is the ones that are on the rocks and the ledges, and she appreciated hearing that one thought was that there would be some ledge on the library side, where that could also be an option. She is having a very hard time visualizing what that would look like without it going over the edge toward the Library. She hopes that there would be further study from the Trustees and the consultant, to give a wider variety of options. She feels that just because there aren't upright markers, she can't imagine that people wouldn't want to still have their memorial in Walnut Hills Cemetery.

Chris Santos addressed the Trustees. He lives at 91 West Roxbury Parkway. He wanted to thank the Trustees for their service to the town. He has worked on committees before, and it's a lot of difficult work. He stated that there are no options until the ledge situation can be assessed. It seemed to him that both of the designs that were presented show that graves being very closely spaced, and feels that you wouldn't want sections where people are squeezed in together. He expects that the

Trustees would want to consider the spacing in those areas as they are developed. He does think that the Trustees should look very carefully at the motivations behind this demand, and whether or not people who are interested in having double plots wouldn't consider other options. It seems to him that it is a considerable amount of money to be investing without a more thorough analysis of the demand. He stated that the Master Plan is not oriented toward meeting demand, but is oriented toward maintaining the aesthetics of the cemetery.

Randolph Meiklejohn thanked the members of the public for joining this meeting, speaking on the record, and submitting written comments. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that we heard from a member of the public who was having trouble visualizing, the number of graves, and suggested that any member of the public could go take a site walk of the cemetery much like the Trustees did while trying to develop an understanding of these design options.

Next Steps

Alexandra Vecchio stated that the Trustees' next meeting will be on March 22, 2023. She stated that these design options are intended to help the Trustees decide whether to continue to offer upright markers as a burial option within Walnut Hills Cemetery. She stated that at the Walnut Hill Cemetery Trustees September 2022 meeting, it was discussed that upright markers continue to be the most popular but those grave options have limited availability at this point. These design options were pursued to help the Trustees understand, if there was additional development to occur specifically around upright markers, what some of the potential sites would look like. She stated that the larger landscape and Master Plan and build-out plan which has been reflected since that conversation in 2020 was to look comprehensively at the next phase of build-out and interment options at the cemetery, and specifically how to make sure that we were caring for the existing landscape and planning for that next generation. Alexandra Vecchio discussed the next steps for the Trustees at their March meeting. Alexandra Vecchio stated that the consultant will not be pursuing any further analysis on these design options that were shown here this evening, and up until the March 22nd meeting, Halvorson will continue to work and align with their contract on those options, and the Trustees can revisit the upright marker question at that meeting. That meeting will be hybrid, held both in-person and via Zoom.

Joslin Murphy stated that she wanted to reassure Betsy Fitzpatrick that currently, it's her understanding from speaking to the Cemetery Supervisor that there are over six hundred lots available in the cemetery for interment and that raises a question for her. She wonders if that number is accurate and assuming that's accurate, or that it is a number close to that, she would be very interested in hearing from the landscape architect if there are any of those areas that would lend themselves (with a view toward the Master Plan, toward Department of the Interior standards, and toward the National Park Service regulations) to being converted to upright markers if it is the decision of the Trustees that we should respond to the demand. She wonders why we would even be considering spending somewhere between three hundred and eight hundred thousand dollars for a build-out with over 600 open lots available within the cemetery. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that in fact, that very question is what is on the agenda of our next meeting. Joslin Murphy feels that it is a question for the landscape architect, not the Trustees. She stated that one of the issues we have never looked at is whether there is any existing space within the cemetery that is currently designated for flat marker spaces that could easily be converted to upright marker spaces. If, again, the decision is made to meet that demand. She is looking for an answer for the next meeting so that the Trustees can properly deliberate the question. She stated that if she had been involved in the conversation that led to where we are today then she would have asked. She stated that for the last couple of meetings, we've been asked to respond to proposals for a buildout and her question from the beginning is do we

need to take this step and feels that one of the ways to resolve the question is to determine if any of the six hundred available interment spaces that are currently available in the cemetery and are designated for flat markers can be converted to upright markers. Her sense is if we decide we need to meet that demand, we can easily do so by converting existing interment spaces to operate marker spaces and avoid buildout. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that if you go back to the presentation that Halvorson prepared for the November 14th meeting, that presentation includes a slide in which the landscape architect stated her recommendation against converting the open lawn areas to upright markers. Joslin Murphy thinks that was for the foremost section when the cemetery is entered. She doesn't think it pertained to all of the sections that are currently flat markers. She used Section 21 as an example. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that there are only two sections, Sections 17 and 22, which are the ones that are seen in that image that Vesna prepared, that do not already have some kind of burials. Joslin Murphy stated that for example Section 18 does not have to be all flush markers, she stated that lot 20 is both flat and upright markers. Joslin Murphy stated that as a member of this board, she feels that we are being asked to decide without adequate information. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that he understands that, and is ready to have the necessary discussion at the March meeting.

Adjourn

Gerry Hayes moved to adjourn. Seconded by Lisa Farber. A roll call vote was taken. All in favor.