



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, April 26, 2023  
8:30 am -9:15 am  
Hybrid 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 Smith, Conservation Assistant; John Ronan, Cemetery Supervisor

**Welcome**

Randolph Meiklejohn opened the meeting. He stated that he has notes as well as a plan going forward for remote attendees for the hearing. He stated that this public meeting of the Trustees in open session is being conducted as a hybrid meeting. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that some attendees may be participating by video conference. All supporting materials that have been provided to members of this body are available on the town website attached to the invitation for this meeting. He added for those attending in person, drawings and other materials are pinned up on the wall as well as in folders distributed to the Trustees. Randolph Meiklejohn asked if there was a motion to approve the draft minutes from April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Joslin Ham Murphy made a motion to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Lisa Farber. A roll call vote was taken; all in favor.

Please click below to access all meeting documents:

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4085>

1. Walnut Hills Cemetery Map
2. Pages from the Master plan relevant to the buildout
3. Walnut Hills Cemetery meeting minutes
4. Walnut Hills Schematic Design Options for Upright markers Presentation 1/24/23

**Review Data on Recent Sales and Current Inventory of Upright-Marker Burial Lots**

Randolph Meiklejohn opened the discussion. He discussed the data that was presented of the lots sold in sections 21,18, and 19 of the Cemetery. He asked the Trustees if there were questions or

observations on the numbers. He stated that the Trustees started to look at this data back in November and September of 2022. Peggy Maguire stated that the data was helpful and there were questions regarding numbers several meetings ago. She added the issue is the demand of upright markers and discussed the amounts sold in 2008-2023. She asked about the uprights and how many were occupied. Randolph Meiklejohn and John Ronan responded that as a policy or regulation for a single casket burial lot one casket and two cremations or three cremations could be placed there meaning three total interments. Randolph Meiklejohn said that the subset of this data beyond sales that would show which plots have burials in them has not been presented here. He added that in section 21, 288 upright-marker lots had been sold 2008-2023, and there have been other plots sold in that time, in locations scattered around the cemetery, but not a significant amount. John Ronan and Randolph Meiklejohn discussed the layout of the plots within section 21. Joslin Ham Murphy stated that to her understanding there was 710 burial spaces available in Section 21 that are available for different modes of burial. She added that there are 105 casketed burial plots that remain in section 21, 35 upright, 46 flush, 24 walls, which adds up to 105 in total. She added that of the 35 lots in February and there were 24 were on hold and 11 were available and singles. She stated she wanted to discuss the hold policy. John Ronan responded that to date there are 9 available upright-marker lots. Alexandra Vecchio stated that they were discussing the data chart for section 21 is listed at 100 (including upright, flush and wall types). John Ronan stated that the numbers are constantly changing based on sales and/or buybacks. Randolph Meiklejohn discussed the graphs which displayed the sold and available plots. He stated that he had originally believed the mix of lot types in Section 21 had been intended to reflect the hope there would be a massive movement towards cremation, but in studying the Master Plan and the site, he now believes that the designation of lot types in section 21 was driven by the master plan. He discussed the Master Plan map and areas for burial. Joslin Ham Murphy stated that she worked on the Master Plan which did to her recollection anticipate a shift towards cremation which may have been a mistake. She added that it was based on the data at the time and that is why section 21 includes the three modes of burial. She added it was driven by the data and the landscape architect at the time. Randolph Meiklejohn asked if Joslin Ham Murphy could share about the design decisions for that section as they relate to the Master Plan. Joslin Ham Murphy discussed the landscape as it pertained to the Master Plan. Randolph Meiklejohn pointed out on the map the result of the areas and where upright markers could be found and discussed with the Trustees and John Ronan. Joslin Ham Murphy asked why the area of section 21 following along the back road couldn't be for upright-marker burials. John Ronan stated that area was for cremations and that there are more cremations taking place but many cremation lots remain in this section. He stated people are buying the upright lots but fewer have been buying the cremation lots. Alexandra asked John Ronan to explain cremation lots. John Ronan stated that cremation lots are 3x3ft with 2 burials and casketed lots are 3x10ft with 3 burials. Joslin Ham Murphy stated that the upright lots are the more economical option which is why they are being purchased in her opinion. She added that it should be revisited if cremation lots make sense and whether they should be reconfigured. Randolph Meiklejohn asked Joslin to clarify that she's asking about lots in the area discussed in lot 21; if they could be reprogrammed to casket burials. She stated if that could be looked at by the landscape architect, it would be helpful. Randolph Meiklejohn suggested that since the redesign be discussed later, the group should move forward with the agenda. The Trustees agreed.

### **Continuation of Upright-Marker Burial Lots as an Internment Option at Walnut Hills Cemetery: Discussion and Possible Vote**

Randolph Meiklejohn asked if there were any comments about upright marker availability. Gerard Hayes asked why they would not continue with that option and expand availability for sites. Joslin

Ham Murphy answered his question by stating that going back to the Master Plan there is integrity in the decision to maintain the portion of the cemetery an open meadow concept. She added that there had been a miscalculation in the Master Plan, because at the time it was thought there would be more interest in cremation and maintaining integrity of the cemetery landscape. She added that many other cemeteries don't offer upright markers currently, and as an advisory board the Trustees could decide if there is interest in marketing cemetery lots or focus on maintaining integrity of the historic cemetery. She discussed the decision to offer uprights, what the obligation of the Trustees is, and revisiting the Master Plan. She added that the proposals to build out the Cemetery may be premature and discussed the costs associated with the endeavor. Joslin Ham Murphy suggested the possibility that the Trustees maintain flush markers as the only option for the cemetery, and whether people will choose the cemetery if they only offer flush marker should be a subject of evaluation. Randolph Meiklejohn discussed flush marker option with Joslin Ham Murphy. Gerard Hayes commented that things have changed and sooner or later the Trustees will have to discuss the cost for development with others and they should explore the option of reevaluating the current setup first before expansion. Randolph Meiklejohn discussed the Master Plan and how it set forth future expansions as well as wanting to continue to offer upright lots. He added that the Master Plan was what the current landscape architect (Halvorson) was referring to in proposing expansion areas. He discussed the recommendations of the landscape architect. Joslin Ham Murphy discussed the deliverables provided by the landscape architects as well as the need to look at the Cemetery comprehensively. Randolph Meiklejohn and Joslin Ham Murphy discussed offering upright markers in the existing footprint and having a comprehensive view of the Cemetery without expanding. Randolph Meiklejohn said the question for the Trustees is whether they want to continue to offer upright marker lots. Joslin Ham Murphy stated it depends, and discussed the options within the Cemetery. Randolph Meiklejohn asked if there was a motion to continue to offer upright markers. Gerard Hayes made a motion. Joslin Ham Murphy amended the motion to consider whether the cemetery should continue to offer upright marker burial options subject to a comprehensive review of what is currently available within the cemetery. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that that would be discussed in the next agenda item. Joslin Ham Murphy responded that that was her motion. Randolph Meiklejohn asked for clarification on the amendment. Joslin Ham Murphy and Randolph Meiklejohn discussed the amendment. Randolph Meiklejohn asked what Joslin Ham Murphy meant by comprehensive review and what the implications of the review are. Alexandra Vecchio responded that it was her understanding that Joslin Ham Murphy would like to consider continuing to offer upright grave markers with review of existing interment spaces in certain sections and if those can be turned into something other than how they are currently assigned. Joslin Ham Murphy agreed with what Alexandra Vecchio said. Randolph Meiklejohn asked if there was a second to amend the motion of Gerard Hayes. Lisa Farber seconded to amend the motion. Randolph Meiklejohn stated they have a motion as amended. A roll call vote was taken. Lisa Farber, Peggy Maguire, and Joslin Ham Murphy voted in favor. Randolph Meiklejohn and Gerard Hayes voted against. The motion passed. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that what was voted on means that the Trustees will not move to the next agenda item and asked Alexandra Vecchio for clarification. Alexandra Vecchio stated that the motion was amended, seconded, voted on as amended and passed and therefore the questions about the designs are no longer relevant.

Randolph Meiklejohn stated that the Trustees would have to discuss what comprehensive review means. Joslin Ham Murphy discussed what the comprehensive review should include and the opportunity to turn flush marker lots into full casket burial lots with upright markers and the vote that was taken was to commit to looking at it brought broadly and if it necessary to expand. Randolph Meiklejohn responded that that there has always been an opportunity and have committed to looking

broadly and not addressing. Joslin Ham Murphy discussed with Randolph Meiklejohn the vote further. Gerard Hayes proposed that we consider available information about the location of rock ledge as we proceed with any proposed buildout project. Alexandra Vecchio stated that the costs can change in the future depending on how long they wait and that the estimated cost would occur closer to the advancing of the buildout option. Lisa Farber asked if the cost was to include the potential ledge work. Randolph Meiklejohn, Gerard Hayes, and Alexandra Vecchio discussed construction costs and the need to wait to get an accurate estimate. Alexandra Vecchio discussed what Halvorson has said regarding the potential ledge. Joslin Ham Murphy asked about the Halvorson contract for consulting services and the original contract from May including tree removal and replacement. Alexandra Vecchio stated that it is still in process and Bartlett Tree did the initial assessment. She added they are now working on the Landscape Master Plan which takes into account the Bartlett assessment and the larger build out and discussed the contract addendum. Joslin Ham Murphy asked whether within the scope of that contract can they look at whether the cremations sites can be converted to casket sites. Alexandra Vecchio stated she would need to specify with what the Trustees are looking for as their contract is to look at buildout at large and need to articulate what Halvorson should review specifically. Randolph Meiklejohn asked if Alexandra Vecchio could relay the meeting discussion, and he asked whether the Trustees should articulate what sections to look at. Randolph Meiklejohn, Joslin Ham Murphy, and Alexandra Vecchio discussed the relaying of information to the landscape architects and why it is important. Randolph Meiklejohn discussed what was voted on during the meeting and in terms of directions in order to keep working on where they should be. Randolph Meiklejohn asked the Trustees which other sections the landscape architects should look at. Lisa Farber responded that section 21 along Beech and section 22 for non-expansory areas. Lisa Farber asked if there are any other sections designated for flush markers or sections that could be extended. John Ronan and Joslin Ham Murphy discussed lots sold and buybacks. Joslin Ham Murphy asked if predeath burial sites could be discussed and placed on the next agenda and prevent buybacks and hold practice. John Ronan discussed the hold practice to date. Gerard Hayes asked if Trustees could undertake to learn more about green burials and to discuss them as any proposed buildout project moves forward. Alexandra Vecchio responded that that is something Halvorson's assessments will offer baseline information about once they deliver their final product.

### **Staff Report and Signing of Deeds**

Alexandra discussed with the Trustees:

John Ronan is leaving his position and will stay on part time effective immediately for up to 6 months. Change in Business hours have been modified to fit limited staffing. The Administrative Assistant, Jessica White, and General Foreman, Greg Paulk, will fill in gaps.

The documentation on file regarding use of the Trust Fund is the same as what staff had on file and doesn't answer the question on use of funds. Town Counsel was asked for input and staff is waiting a reply.

Staff discussed plans to meet with Halvorson and review the Landscape Master Plan and additional interment options and potentially have a draft for the Trustees by the June meeting.

Alexandra gave an overview of PowerCorps Green Jobs Training Program and the pilot partnership with Brookline DPW.

### **Adjourn**

Gerard Hayes moved to adjourn. Seconded by Joslin Ham Murphy. A roll call vote was taken; all in favor.

