

City of Burlington Parks, Cemetery Commission

Retreat Agenda

Thursday, January 21st, 5:00-8:00pm via ZOOM

5:00-5:05pm Call to Order and Public Comment (Jennifer, Chair)

5:05-5:35pm Opening & Introductions (Emma, Facilitator)

Share objectives for meeting

- Review basic responsibilities of commissioner role and limitations of authority based on the city charter
- Understand structure of Cemetery Commission as it relates to city staff, Friends of Burlington Cemetery/Parks Foundation, and the Parks & Rec Commission
- Identify ways to effectively work together as a commission and with residents, stakeholders and partners
- Explore ways to support department staff and the larger city in advancing goals related to cemeteries and open green spaces
- Consider ways commissioners can effectively engage the community in activities and issues related to cemeteries

5:35-5:45pm What is the role of a Commissioner? (Cindi)

5:45-6:00pm Organizational Chart Review (Cindi)

6:00pm STRETCH BREAK

6:05-6:30pm Being an Effective Commission

6:30-7:15pm Individual Goals and Visioning

Review projects Commissioners and staff are working on in the Cemeteries in 2020

7:15pm BREAK

7:20-7:45pm Community Engagement (Emma, Facilitator)

7:45pm Closing

8:00pm Adjourn



Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: 1/21/2021

Commissioners Present: Rita Church, Nancy Kirby, Mary Wesley, Alexandra Miller & Jennifer Diaz

Staff Present: Holli Bushnell - Office Assistant, Cindi White – BPRW Director, Meghan O’Daniel - Admin

Meeting was called to order at 5:13pm by Jennifer Diaz

I. Public Comment

No public comments were made at this time.

II. Opening & Introductions (Emma Mulvaney-Stanak)

Here to facilitate this retreat. Hoping to help this commission feel grounded and to build cohesiveness to help make the cemeteries in the City vibrant and appreciated.

Introduced herself - ONE resident, past city councilor for the City and familiar with the public process. Very familiar and dedicated to Burlington. Recently elected as a State representative for the ONE!

Outlined the objectives of the meeting:

- Review basic responsibilities of commissioner role and limitations of authority based on the city charter
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Touched on Zoom bombing and how to handle that if it happens.

Went over and explained Group Agreements for tonight’s meeting that help in having a successful meeting and decision making body, looking for unanimous agreement or discussion if there are questions, comments or edits members might have:

- Speak your truth
- Work towards curiosity
- Who speaks first?
- Make space, take space (mute, chat, raise hand)
- Oppression and Unconscious Bias exist (safe online space)
- Stay present & share responsibility for success
- Honor the work and people
- Move at the speed of trust
- What you pay attention to grows

Asked if everyone was comfortable agreeing to these group agreements or if there were questions, comments or edits. Unanimous approval by all Commissioners and staff.



Asked everyone to think about the following questions and share with the group:

- 1) What is your first or most noteworthy interaction with a cemetery?
- 2) What do these spaces mean to you and our community?

Jennifer's answers:

- 1) Deep lover of cemeteries throughout entire life. Incredibly impactful spaces. Spiritual person and can feel energy. Burlington cemeteries are similar to the ones she grew up visiting.
- 2) They are places people can go to learn about our past and now that we stand on the shoulders of the people of our past.

Mary's answers:

Has been drawn to cemeteries her whole life as interesting spaces for history and stories and atmosphere and green space. Was an archaeologist in her early career. Currently works with the Vermont Folk Life Center. Her mother passed away and had a very meaningful experience with the burial process. Powerful space to be in touch with big parts of the human condition. Interested in the present day meaning of cemeteries for people both to engage with those bigger concepts. Interested in how people make meaning and engage with death and dying. Also having cemeteries be shared greenspaces for the community and working with the community to cultivate them.

Nancy's answers:

5th generation Vermonter. Lives next to Greenmount Cemetery. Always been interested in cemeteries because of the history. Some of the names at Greenmount are people she knew growing up. Sees their stones as last words to the community. Sees cemeteries as spaces where we can have life as well as death. Feels a presence from the cemetery. Believes that there is something out there and is spiritual. Has relatives in most of the cemeteries in the City. Finds beauty in the peacefulness.

Alexandra's answers:

- 1) This week, saw a coyote outside of her window in the Lakeview cemetery. Grew up in NH and spent a lot of time in a Revolutionary war cemetery. Seeing the history and building on the storytelling. Tells so much about our culture, our history and the land and natural history. Uses Lakeview as a sanctuary for her family. A fun, amazing peaceful place to engage with the community. So special to hear how community stories interact in this one place.
- 2) Sees them as a dual space to hold grief and also this amazing connective place not only to our own families but to the community at large and with history. There's this peace being in this protective green space.

Rita's answers:

- 1) Affiliation with cemeteries at a very young age. Land was given by great great grandfather for the cemetery in a rural place. Came to Burlington, was contacted by cemetery Commissioners to please come and work with them. Husband's family all came from Burlington. Has learned a combination of things from both the country and City cemeteries. Both histories are in the cemetery. They are built from the people who are buried there. The people who visit enjoy learning what is in cemeteries because of this.

Holli's answers:



- 1) Has never lived more than a mile from a cemetery. Learned how to read, built fairy houses – played in them as a kid. Used them as a retreat as a teenager for alone time when she needed a refuge. Feels lucky to have had that growing up. Always found them incredibly beautiful and feels at peace in cemeteries. Working at Lakeview and getting the opportunity to work for the City of Burlington – feels like she was called to do that. Feels protective over the City's cemeteries. Feels lucky that she is able to help take care of these places.
- 2) They are complex. For some they will never be more than a place of sadness. For other people they can see them as a place where history and nature lives. They can be like chameleons – they can be what each individual needs. They are where we keep people's history and where as we move forward see as things change.

Cindi's answers:

- 1) When she was in college, had a rough freshman year. There was a cemetery nearby and she used it as a place to run to get away from campus for recreating and processing things.
- 2) They are so complex now. People use them as transportation corridors to run, ride bikes. They're historical. They are places for events! A great place for our animals as well. Cool to see all of the ways that cemeteries are used.

Emma thanked everyone for participating. It is important to remember why you are a part of a commission and what drew you to the role.

III. What is the role of a Commissioner? (Cindi)

Showed everyone the City's website to look at the Municipal Code of Ordinances. This is where you can find out anything you need/want to know about cemeteries including rules and regulations. One thing to note – the Commission cannot regulate staff – it is our staff's job to enforce things. 2 main pieces for the Commission: the setting of the prices to buy a cemetery plot and the investment of the money in the perpetual care fund. The Commission has the power to decide if the interest on the account is spent or invested. You can't technically tell BPRW how to spend it, but can be discussed. If there is interest in changing any of the rules/regulations the Commission can discuss it. They can also add rules if agreed upon. All Commissioners must be active participants. Opened the floor for questions.

Holli – just lot prices that need to be discussed and determined by the Commission?

Cindi – answered she believed yes, not for other pricing (burials, use of the chapel, events, use of the grounds, etc.). Holli and Cindi will be double checking that.

Cindi feels the Commission can be so much more than it has in the past. Excited about this current Commission and the potential for

Alexandra – Was wondering if the Commission plays a role in design and if not who makes those decisions?

Cindi – you can designate spaces where lots won't be sold, may grant permission to build vaults. Likes the idea of bringing things to the Commission for support even though approval is not needed for projects.



Jennifer brought up that there was more of a sense of autonomy and responsibility back when the Commission was separate from the department for context.

IV. **Organizational Chart (Cindi)**

Showed power point slide of the following:

- Director
- Parks Supernitendent
- Cemetery Staff
- Cemetery Commission
- Friends of Louisa Howard Chapel
- Parks Foundation

Showed the current cemetery Commissioners and their end of term dates on another slide.

Commissioners, staff & facilitator took a 5 minute break.

V. **Being an Effective Commission (Emma)**

Explained that everyone is going to explore 3 different questions about how to be an effective Commission and how and then break-up into small groups to discuss:

- 1) **Ally.** As a Commissioner, how can you best support the staff? For Commissioners with more than a year of service, please reflect on what you've done to-date to support the staff/the department and if it feels successful or not and why.
- 2) **Facilitators.** How can the Commission best handle, consider and encourage constructive dialogue by residents, stakeholders and staff as it relates to our department? What should we do/not do?
- 3) **Representatives.** How should we balance representing our local neighborhood (Ward) and as the city as a whole?

Groups broke out for 10 minutes of discussion.

VI. **Individual Goals and Visioning (Cindi)**

Cindi – The Department's design of Section 8 was the biggest. Looking ahead to the engineering of section 8 – taking the plans and making them a reality. That has been paused for now because of the Planning Team's capacity. This year was focused on survival in terms of maintenance. Seasonal staff will be re-introduced in FY22. Was excited by what the community did at Greenmount without BPRW's staff capacity to mow and trim like normal. The base of the War of 1812 mausoleum has been installed. The focus has been really on the care and maintenance of the spaces and trying to keep them looking nice.

Holli – The project that is most pressing is getting all of the back logged information into the database. Has been doing as much as she can, but has to focus on other things. Ultimate goal would be to find a way to make that accessible to the public. Has mostly been keeping the day



to day going. Selling lots and scheduling burials – both of which have been steady this year. Managing what we have right now and looking towards finishing the data entry project.

Cindi – believes that the Commission can really enhance the visioning for the cemeteries

Jennifer asked about roadblocks with data entry – is there a way to remotely tap into that system?

Holli is able to work on it from home. The problem is that there are physical cards that need to be scanned in the office – cannot be removed.

Emma wants to build upon the information about what is keeping things going at the cemeteries and what kind of programming has been going on recently. Keeping in mind about what cemeteries have meant to you in the past. Asked Commissioners to think about these questions:

- 1) What could the cemeteries be for our community more than they are today?
- 2) What projects are you interested in supporting or exploring?
- 3) What excites you about these ideas? Why?

Groups broke out for 10 minutes of discussion.

Group reconvened in the main room for discussion/reflections.

Nancy & Cindi – Nancy had talked about the historical tours with costumes. Would be interested in doing it at Greenmount and would be willing to be a contact for that. And the conservation angle for Greenmount – Nancy is open to meeting with City staff about what did and didn't work with the lower level of maintenance. And potentially having spring bulbs planted in the back!

Mary, Holli & Alexandra – Everyone has stories, more current stories too, about cemeteries. Interviewing and oral history around Burlington cemeteries is a really interesting idea. Possibly using it as an awareness tool for more people in Burlington to know and care about our cemeteries. Holli's big fantasy – the cemetery as it is is not super environmentally friendly. Burials and cremations puts a lot of chemicals into the ground and the air. Alkaline hydrolysis – green cremation. Puts less carbon into the air. Would love to find a way to partner with a local funeral home or another way to make this something Lakeview can offer. It is legal in Vermont currently, but not offered yet in the state. This would be a great step towards the City's goal of being carbon neutral!

Jennifer & Rita – Connecting to what Holli was talking about with green cremations. Rita has concerns about green burials. Knows someone who had a negative experience with them (in a different state) in the past. Jennifer thought there might have been innovation since then. Wants to make sure the community is happy with what is happening. Jennifer reflected on a past experience about someone who wanted to install an extensive garden on her loved one's plot. This would make maintenance difficult, and Jennifer felt that she needed to support the staff. That brought up the idea of potentially doing some community gardening within the cemetery for people to plant in.



Alexandra – Green burials come up a lot. Had an idea about introducing a type of green burial that's not just bodies in the ground, but instead taking some ashes in a biodegradable container and planting a tree over it. Feels like this is a fairly realistic first step. Working with a group to introduce native pollinator plants into the cemeteries. Creating no-mow spaces to help with maintenance needs.

Commissioners, staff & facilitator took a 5 minute break.

VII. Community Engagement (Emma)

Community engagement is so important to what you all do. We can learn about what should be replicated because it went well and when it hasn't gone well how to move forward and try again. 2 questions to explore this and reflect on:

- 1) Think of good examples of community engagement since COVID began. What does/did it feel like? What does it look like? Who was there?
- 2) Think of a less stellar example of community engagement since COVID began. What was missing? What made it less successful? What should not be repeated and/or avoided?

Mary – Governor's share the light campaign. It was simple, safe and visible. Call to put lights up so that people can enjoy individually while also connecting community members.

Nancy – Agreed with Mary about the lights. Feels that all of this technical stuff is frustrating and that it's gone on too far. Thinks it creates more stress for those who have trouble participating.

Holli – Fondest memory of the summer was going to see Lyric and the Flynn perform outside in a park. That opportunity to go to a park in a safe and wonderful way was so great. Handles the public forums for the City Council meetings and felt that it could have been less chaotic. Everyone was overwhelmed and there could have been a better way to organize it all.

Rita – Face masks have been one of the very good things that have come from the pandemic. The other side of things are the people who won't wear them and don't believe in them. Food delivery (and other items) by the food shelf has been very helpful to many people.

Alexandra – Mutual aid networks that have popped up has been very positive. Event oriented community experience has been blown up and has become a microcosm of relationships. Acknowledging and elevating diverse voices and experiences. Recognizing and actively asking questions about how oppression and bias come up in our policies and how we hold space to come together. This is something worth celebrating in our community right now.

Jennifer – COVID has been difficult and it's been hard to find the positives. Technology and innovation has been one positive though. It's less important to be working in a work place for some people. Working from home is great, but can have its drawbacks. Like anything. Higher Ground doing drive-in music was a huge positive and a good example of something that worked.



Cindi – Thought the Governor and the Mayor giving us information via their press releases was a great example of community engagement. The way we communicated locally and throughout the state. Less stellar when you felt like you had no voice in meetings with lots of people. Early on trying to figure out how to communicate in this virtual world.

Emma pointed out that being home has allowed her to be in her community more! There are opportunities in that. To do the most with this moment, people can make a deeper relationship with Burlington. Themes she heard – good things were simple and safe and not on a screen. People had a chance to build community on a common cause. Figure out why community does matter. Technology has provided connectivity and is a necessity but there are still limitations with it. Different accessibility. What can you draw out of these moments?

VIII. Closing

Emma asked the group to reflect and answer what was something that you learned tonight?

Alexandra – Loves connecting with others on a personal level and the capacity to support each other in the Commission. Going forward she would love to find continued ways to create that personal interaction and creating extra capacity for relationships to grow.

Cindi – Excited about the ideas. Looking forward to the next agendas to see what comes of everything. Also excited about the conservation angle that was discussed.

Rita – Learned quite a bit. Is interested in the idea of green burials and communities expanding. Wants to hear more about what Holli knows because she feels they will be a necessity in the future.

Holli – Enjoyed hearing everyone's cemetery origin stories. Wonderful to hear that everyone has a connection to cemeteries from childhood. Feels like she is a part of a little community because of this.

Nancy – Tonight was special because she got to "see" everyone. And knows that her passion is felt by everyone else.

Jennifer – Feels the discussion was meaningful and important. Felt disjointed before and is glad to be involved and back at it. Found it interesting that everyone had a lot of connecting themes in their individual discussions. Encouraging and exciting to know that everyone is on the same page! Is also excited about the fact that the meeting was made up of all women.

Mary – Feels happy to be part of this community. This was so hugely valuable in all ways. Loved the origin stories and they helped her get to know everyone a little better.

Emma thanked everyone for participating!

IX. Adjournment



The meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm.

DRAFT