



**TOWN of BROOKLINE**  
Massachusetts  
**Walnut Hills Cemetery**  
**Old Burying Ground**

**Trustees**

Robert Cook, Chairman  
Lisa Farber  
Gerry Hayes  
Peggy Maguire  
Randolph Meiklejohn  
Joslin Ham Murphy

**Director of Parks and Open Space**  
Alexandra Vecchio

**Walnut Hills Cemetery Trustees Meeting**  
**Wednesday, March 16, 2022**  
**8:30am - 9:15 am**  
**Zoom Webinar**

**Trustees Present:** Robert Cook, 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, Thomas Brady, Town Arborist

**Guests Present:**

**Welcome and Approval of the Minutes**

R. Cook moved for approval of the December 8, 2021, Walnut Hills Cemetery minutes. Seconded by L. Farber. All in favor. Joslin Ham Murphy abstained from voting.

**Cemetery Trustees Chair Selection Process and Possible Vote**

Alexandra Vecchio stated that she has notified Town Hall that we're looking for a new trustee. She has been told that recruitment is a critical part of her job. A. Vecchio stated that the Trustees do not need to vote today on a new chair for Walnut Hills Cemetery, but feels that a discussion can take place amongst the Trustees.

Robert Cook feels that neither the town alone nor trustees alone should appoint the Chair, but rather a collaboration between the two. Robert Cook stated that in the past he might have volunteered to be Chair, and feels that he should not be appointing his successor. J. Murphy wanted to personally acknowledge R. Cook's service and terrific leadership. Robert Cook stated he considers the most important qualification for the Chair, is a commitment to one-hour meetings. J. Murphy stated there is a reference to the election of a chair in the cemetery bylaws. She stated that in cleaning out her office, she discovered an old box on the top

of a bookshelf that has a plethora of cemetery materials. She will deliver that box to A. Vecchio soon.

Robert Cook asked J. Murphy if she thinks that there are legal requirements around the appointment of the Chair, which the Trustees need to be aware of before moving forward. J. Murphy stated the Bylaws were adopted by Town Meeting, and thus set legal requirements. She suggests the Trustees have a special meeting in two weeks after reviewing the bylaws. Robert Cook stated that he agrees with J. Murphy. He feels that there is some work to be done to look into the bylaw/legal matters, this will also allow time for individuals to express an interest in the position and see whether the Trustees are in a position to either vote or be ready to vote so that there is a chair in place for the June meeting. J. Murphy stated that she can pull the material together quickly and send the Trustees a memo, but without expressing an opinion on the Chair so as to not run afoul of the Open Meeting Law. She stated that she would be interested to hear if there is interest in this group for the Chair position because then the Trustees can also be thinking about that during the time between the next meeting.

Alexandra Vecchio stated it would be great to use the next 15 minutes to hear if anyone is interested in the Chair position or is ready to make a nomination. She doesn't think that there is prescribed language around the term limit for the Chair, she feels that it would be open to this body to discuss and decide the term limit.

Robert Cook stated that from his perspective, being a chair boils down to two responsibilities. The first is to run the meeting and the second is to work with Jessica on editing the minutes.

Gerry Hayes stated he was not really aware of anything preventing the Trustees from nominating and electing a chair today, but given the discussion of the rediscovered bylaws, and the possibility that there may be something that we should be aware of, he feels that we should wait.

Gerry Hayes thinks that there should be a vice-chair for those rare instances when the Chair is not available for a meeting. Randolph Meiklejohn asked whether the bylaws will address this. J. Murphy doesn't think so, but she will take another look. Gerry Hayes stated that in terms of limits, the boards he has been familiar with have had annual elections, this provides a chance to look at the situation and see if it is in the best interest of that particular board commission to keep the serving chair/ vice-chair.

Peggy Maguire thinks a vice-chair is a great idea. She isn't sure if an every-year term election is necessary. Robert Cook stated that perhaps a three-year term, with the possibility of renewal sounds right to him rather than an annual vote.

Robert Cook asked if A. Vecchio is she could pull together some information regarding the legal matters of electing a chair and then decide what the next steps would be

J. Murphy would suggest that people indicate their interest today and then each Trustee can individually send their proposed nominations to A. Vecchio and then she could produce those at the next meeting.

Randolph Meiklejohn expressed his interest in being the chair. J. Murphy will be putting together a short memo of facts regarding the appointment of the chair. The Trustees will reconvene in a few weeks special meeting in two to three weeks for this purpose.

### **Update on Bartlett Tree Experts Scope of Work**

Alexandra Vecchio stated that as we are thinking about the master landscape plan and build-out plan for the cemetery, we wanted to think about the trees that are currently there, where

additional plantings could go and what work services would be needed for the health care and long-term management of those trees. She stated that the Town hired Bartlett Tree Services to do an inventory of what we have on-site, to look at the health and status of those trees, and to make any recommendations for work that the town should be considering. A. Vecchio stated that the Town is currently down a Forestry Zone Manager position.

A. Vecchio stated that there were no big surprises from the inventory, and stated that there's more work that we would like to do in the cemetery and it's really a matter of staff time, resources, or the ability to bring in dollars to work with contractors to do that work.

Robert Cook stated that the Arnold Arboretum every summer brings in about 12 or so interns who are graduates who have often had experience in college and will have had bucket-truck experience after they finish their time at the Arboretum. He suggested reaching out to help fill open forestry positions within the Town. Thomas Brady and Alexandra Vecchio thanked R. Cook for the suggestion.

Thomas Brady stated that when he reviewed the report he was taken back by the number of removals, but the further into the report he got, the more pleased he was. He feels that the results have matched our intent and what the cemetery has always been. The Town's goal for the cemetery from his point of view is to make sure that the visitor spaces are maintained in a safe and appropriate manner. However, at the same time, the dead tree stock that's within the wooded buffer that surrounds those visitors' spaces are an important habitat for the birds and flora/fauna, which also are part of your experience at the cemetery. He stated that the cemetery is in very low single digits for trees of great concern in the visitor spaces. There is just one tree that Bartlett suggested needed immediate action in those visitor spaces.

Thomas Brady stated that in the buffers there's a significant number of removals but the vast majority of those are in the six to eight-inch range, which was consistent with what he anticipated, meaning those smaller dead trees are being left in the wooded areas to serve as habitat. Those trees are not a high risk to those who are visiting loved ones along the wooded edges of the buffers. Overall he is quite pleased. He stated that there have been good discussions with Bartlett around them recommending a lot of root collar excavation. He thinks a fair amount of fertilization is called for, which he always thinks is a great idea if done properly. He discussed his views on cabling and bracing of trees in the private vs. public sector. He stated that his takeaway from the Bartlett report was very positive and pleasing. He thought that Bartlett took a good, comprehensive, and thorough look throughout Walnut Hills.

He stated that one takeaway to the extent if possible is to up our game a little bit in terms of maintenance. The cemetery has a lot of older trees, and older trees require more care. He stated that we will want to do everything we can to maintain those older trees. He thinks the question of the standing smaller dead stock in the wooded buffers is as much as an arboricultural management question, and a policy discussion for this group to make some decision points on and figure out how to handle those wooded buffers moving forward.

Thomas Brady is thankful to the trustees for the funds that are designated each year for the tree work within the cemetery.

T. Brady stated that he anticipated more problems at the Old Burying Ground, there are a lot of old sugar maples over there and older stock. He thought he was going to get a litany [Lengthy?] list of high-risk trees. He stated that there are only two high-risk trees at the Old Burying Ground. T. Brady stated that we asked Bartlett to take particular note of the massive tulip tree right on the right as you through the gate, but they feel that's in good condition and doing well. Bartlett did not recommend significant risk mitigation measures over there, which is very pleasing to T. Brady. The report does call for a number of removals

recommended on the Chestnut Street side of the property. There is a high wall next to the sidewalk and a steep slope that goes up, and there are a number of smaller volunteer trees; that's a good example of where we have a wooded buffer area. However, their assessment is that there's a higher risk there because if one of those buffer area trees falls, it's going to come down possibly onto the sidewalk where we have a lot of traffic for the school. He stated that in that particular zone of the cemetery they did ask for a number of smaller removals in there to address some issues.

Randolph Meiklejohn stated that it seems pretty clear that the focus of their fieldwork was safety, but he wonders if when the data comes back if it will include specific information. Thomas Brady stated that it's a very dense report. It will have the breakdown of size and age distribution, specific health care recommendations, root collar excavations, and corrective actions such as cabling and bracing. They have a map associated with each set of recommendations that identifies the specific stems in question. Randolph Meiklejohn stated that the specific data is going to be useful in long-term master planning. A. Vecchio stated that Bartlett did provide a GIS File with the location and data for each of these trees and because they actually did the tree inventory for public trees in the Urban Forest Climate Resiliency Master Plan, the Town is excited to be able to integrate this and the data from the Old Burial Ground all into one master file. Thomas Brady stated that the contractors and Town staff have work tablets, which means as work is done or actionable items are taken on the individual trees, it is tracked in real-time on a daily basis.

P. Maguire stated that weather is a variable, and wondered how the storms over the last few years affected Town plants. Thomas Brady stated that the storm events are ramping up much quicker than they used to. He stated that the storms are getting shorter in duration, but they're more intense. He feels that we were hit hard the last two years, there have been a lot of instructional failures and storms. The past four events brought 60 plus mile an hour wind events. It's been his judgment, based on discussions with Peter Jutras, Forestry supervisor to go to an on-call system. He stated that the percentage for what they call standing dead stock was 1% in our streets and in the single digits for the cemetery, which is the one tree. P. Maguire thinks the environmental changes that are impacting all of us should definitely be a consideration and she is assuming it's part of the planning process in the budget. It is not something you plan for but you react to and depending on the size of the tree, it could be very costly to remove.

R. Cook and T. Brady discussed the Town being self-insured when it comes to storms/hurricanes.

J. Murphy thanked T. Brady for a great report and, and wanted to acknowledge the work that T. Brady did on behalf of the tree on Hammond Street.

T. Brady discussed how the Trustees will soon be able to access this report. It will be available electronically.

### **Staff Updates**

Alexandra Vecchio stated that she wants to thank R. Cook for his service to the Walnut Hills Cemetery Trustees. Alexandra Vecchio stated that R. Cook did a great job of helping her get to know the trustees, the work, and the cemetery itself. She really appreciate his leadership as a collected and organized chair.

The Trustees presented R. Cook with a farewell card.

Alexandra Vecchio stated at the last Walnut Hills Cemetery Meeting there was discussion around the issue of a handful of bounced checks. There was discussion about paying for their plot at the time of death and some back and forth around the Trustees possibly establishing some sort of policy around that. She did check in with the town finance office/ treasurer and asked about their policy around this. They stated that unless you have a credit card machine that the cemetery does not then check or cash are the options. She stated that when the Town receives a bounced check they let the coordinating department contact that person and get payment. The Trustees can continue to watch this problem. Alexandra Vecchio stated if this ends up being problematic and continues to occur, we can also ask people to pay at the clerk's office, where they do have a credit card machine already, and then provide them with some sort of receipt. J. Murphy wonders why you couldn't pay online like several- other departments do, or even tap into one of those departments that's in place already. She does not have a problem asking people to produce a bank check. A. Vecchio stated that a bank check is the easiest solution but it is a possibility of tapping into one of those other systems that already exist. She would just have to with one of those departments and work out the logistics and clerical management of that to make sure that the funds were coming in and then being transferred over appropriately. L. Farber stated that it was a small number of bounced checks. She suggests we wait and see how many other cases we get like that before the trustees decide to move forward. L. Farber suggested accessing a late fee. A. Vecchio stated that there isn't a policy in place, but it could be established.

### **Other Business**

J. Murphy stated that she inherited a stone bench that she is hoping to install at her parent's burial sites. She forgets the process and thinks she needs to petition the trustees and then either abstain or participate in the vote. It is a lovely stone bench that was at her parents' home for a number of years. J. Murphy will work with Alexandra Vecchio to figure out the process.

Alexandra Vecchio stated that as of July 15, we will need to move to hybrid meetings.

Robert Cook wanted to make a remark on the comment that G. Hayes made two meetings or so ago, which is the fact that we're all aware that the cemetery will be running out of space in the next 10 to 15 years. R. Cook wants to know if the town wishes to be in the cemetery business, once this cemetery has been completely filled. He stated that it's a long-range question. He thinks if it involves the purchase of additional land, he feels that it's not too soon to start thinking about that because there's a lot of lead time required when a land purchase is involved. He encourages the trustees in future meetings to wrestle with this one, and decide how they wish to think about this going forward. It seems to him that it will become an important issue as time passes.

### **Adjourn**

R. Cook moved to adjourn. Seconded by G. Hayes. All in favor.