

BOARD OF CEMETERY COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Cemetery Commissioners herewith files our annual report of activities for the calendar year 2003, our 143rd year of operation. We are a three member entirely volunteer board, consisting of Chairman Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Vice-Chairman Charles Johnson and Clerk Alexander Corbett, III.

Highland Meadow Cemetery Activities

This year has been another year of waiting and preparing. As we await the conveyance of the McLean land to the town for use as our new Highland Meadow Cemetery, we completed our plans for its development. Our activities included: completing detailed construction design documents, completing bid documents, working with Town Planner and Land Management Committee to assure State Secretary of Environmental Affairs acceptance of Conservation Restriction B2; working with the Town's Telecommunications Committee to relocate the public safety/commercial communications tower which is in the active cemetery zone; collaborating with the Water Department, McLean and its developers to route and install the water line. Continuing activities revolve around operations management, pricing and marketing. Lastly, our chairman has acted as our representative to the McLean Land Management Committee, which has benefited both the cemetery and open space interests.



The grounds of Belmont Cemetery blossom in springtime.

Belmont Cemetery Activities

Although new burial lots for traditional interments have not been available at Belmont Cemetery since 1988, 114 interments were made to existing plots in 2003 including 36 cremations. (This compares to 124 total in 2002 including 36 cremations). Of the 114 total, 57 (50%) of the interments were non-residents of the Town, up from 42% last year. Total resultant fee receipts for the calendar year 2003 were \$107,681 down from \$117,720 in calendar 2002.

Staff and Organization

We continue to benefit from the commitment, care and expertise of our terrific cemetery staff, led by Superintendent Robert P. Gardiner.

Bob, with our other full time employees John McDonough, Dan Tempesta and Jeff Currier and part time worker Nancy Fay succeed in making Belmont Cemetery one of the most beautiful cemeteries in Greater Boston, public or private. It is a consoling place, treasured by our many families and we are deeply grateful for our talented staff.

Change to Organizational Structure

During 2003, the Town Meeting voted for a home rule petition to place the staff and equipment of the cemetery department under the supervision and organizational structure of a newly created Department of Public Works (DPW). The Board of Cemetery Commissioners did not initially support this effort, feeling that the cemetery perpetual care requirements and services to grieving families would be compromised. After considerable negotiation and articulation of the Belmont Cemetery perpetual care requirements, Town Administrator Mel Kleckner wrote on March 21st on behalf of the town that he did "unequivocally commit that, to the extent the existing Cemetery Department is meeting them, the consolidated public works department shall meet the standards for maintenance incorporated in Mr. Gardiner's memo of March 10, 2003." The Board of Selectmen later unanimously voted the same.

The aforementioned standard elements that define perpetual care at Belmont Cemetery follow (March 10, 2003):

- Lawn is cut to approximately 2 ½ inches
- Trimming around each gravestone and marker
- Trees are mulched and pruned for appearance and safety

- Head stones are straightened and kept upright
- Settled grave areas are filled and re-seeded in a timely fashion
- No trash blowing or caught in perimeter fences
- Roads and paths are kept clear of debris and snow
- Catch basins are free of debris
- Visitors are assisted as required
- Lawn areas are generally weed free
- Fallen leaves and branches are removed on a regular basis
- Trees are replaced when necessary
- Re-seeding and over-seeding lawn areas
- Staff is responsive to requests and complaints
- Sites designated for the Annual Planting Program are planted yearly by Memorial Day
- Damage is repaired in a timely manner
- Decorations and floral displays are removed in a timely fashion
- Bushes around individual plots are removed when left unattended or become problematic
- Flags are properly placed and removed, disposed of in accordance with law
- Landscape is watered (when appropriate)
- Trash barrels and working water faucets are available for visitor use
- Fences are maintained and painted
- Buildings are kept in good repair and appearance

During the consolidation discussions, the Board of Cemetery Commissioners requested a cost forecast for performing cemetery services under a Department of Public Works format. Even as of this writing, we have not received them. However, we accept that Town Meeting, in an effort to realize any opportunity for cost savings, looked to consolidation as a necessary step, and so agreed to consolidate our operations. However, we accepted neither the proposal to eliminate the elected Board of Cemetery Commissioners, nor the proposal to convert it to an appointed Board. Ultimately the Board of Selectmen and the Town Meeting agreed with our position, leaving the Board an elected body. The Cemetery Commission has always been a volunteer board, never receiving any pay for our service but we must be responsive to the voters of the town in our endeavors. We suggested the language that permits the town to convert the Cemetery Commission from an elected to an appointed board. This could only happen after five years from the vote on the home rule petition, provided that two-thirds affirmative vote is achieved at Town Meeting.

As of this writing, the home rule petition has not yet been voted at the State Legislature. The cemetery operations remain separate from the consolidated DPW operation, though Superintendent Gardiner and his staff work cooperatively with the other divisions of the DPW.

We are pleased to report the following progress against our stated goals for Fiscal Year 2004:

- **Acquire and develop land for a new cemetery.** Await the transfer of land.
- **Continue to promote and improve the Annual Planting Program for individual lots that was established in 1997.** Program continues to thrive and receive positive reviews from participants and enroll new participants. Continue to expand awareness.
- **Continue tree planting program originally established in 1996 and enhance landscape areas to beautify Belmont Cemetery.** Recently reinvigorated and changed program, securing several new enrollments. Exploring other cooperative funding opportunities with community organizations and community service hours for students.
- **Continue to encourage Town officials to implement a performance-based review system for employees.** Completed our review on time.
- **Develop new ways to inspire and reward long-term employees and encourage newer employees to remain.** We are most pleased that we have had no staff turnover again this year. We continue to involve all our staff in design and operations planning efforts, solicit their ideas and rely upon their expertise. A major thrust of effort for FY2005 will be working through the effects of the consolidation on the employees of the cemetery, to assure parity, equality and availability of opportunity.
- **Develop new revenue opportunities and identify cost-savings opportunities.** We look forward to seeing a cost forecast and resultant cost –savings as touted by the Selectmen and Town Administrator on the DPW consolidation.

Calendar Year 2003 Operational Statistics:

Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund	\$ 489,327
Interest Income from Perpetual Care Fund	\$ 28,851
Annual Planting Fund (includes H. Smith Fund)	\$ 61,846
Fee Receipts	\$ 107,681
# Full Time Employees	4
# Part Time Employees	1
Total Budget Appropriation for FY2003	*\$ 305,344
*Reduced Budget for FY2003	\$ 295,407

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Chairman