

Missoula Cemetery Board Meeting
Thursday, February 6, 2020
12:00pm
Missoula City Cemetery Chapel

Minutes

1. **Call to Order**

Board members present: Kim Seeberger, Paul Filicetti, Mary Lou Cordis, Pat McHugh

Board members absent: Neil Carson

Staff: Ron Regan, Mary Ellen Stubb, Chris Behan (MRA), Dennis Bowman (PW), Jeremy Keene (PW), Susan Aaberg (Attorney)

Public: Lawrence and Will Sloane (L.F. Sloane Consulting); Bob and Michelle Jordan (Garden City Monument Services); Rick Evans and Tyson Moore (Missoula Funeral Homes), Susie Hilmes (Sunset Memorial Gardens)

2. **Roll Call**

3. **Approval of Minutes.** Unanimously approved as submitted with one word correction.

4. **Public Comment on items not listed on the agenda.**

5. **Staff Report.** None.

6. **Financials.** None

7. **New Business.** None

8. **Continuing Business – Cemetery Strategic Plan.** Will began by stating how much he enjoyed getting to know the cemetery. This is a beautiful site and it is true public service. He and Larry believe in this cemetery and feel that it has great potential. Today, they really want to talk to the board members who are the wards of the cemetery. Then, they will use their initial thoughts to garner some discussion.

Will explained that they started with an initial assessment. They got a chance to get to know the staff, the cemetery, and some of the lot owners and stakeholders. They consistently heard that the cemetery has come a long way and looks great. All of the people they talked with said the cemetery is very visually appealing and everyone loved the historic character. From the administrative perspective, cemetery records are very difficult to keep. The people charged with creating and overseeing these records take varying degrees of care for the information, which results in slowly changing records over time. They would like to say the staff here has done a tremendous job in keeping records and this cemetery is in a great position going forward.

Larry said the top topic is land use - what property is needed for the cemetery and what property can be deemed as excess. Using a cemetery map, Larry pointed to an area north of the bullpen. This area is already plotted, designed, and laid out for graves. When he calculates what has been plotted with the current rates for lot sales, then the result is 200 years of cemetery life.

Mary Lou said we only have 100 years and that came from Joe Pratt when he left. The guys shook hands on the gravel pit and other agreements and the cemetery lost out. You don't even know the

history. When she got on the board over 42 years ago, the mayor had taken money out of the cemetery permanent care fund and used it for downtown where Caras Park was and then it got flooded. We had to rebuild money to keep for the cemetery. We don't get equipment, so Joe would go out and do surplus to get it. You realize now that cemetery is the stepchild of city. It was then and always will be. In the Rattlesnake, bodies are still being found. You say we don't need this land, but this town is growing and cremation will continue. Once you forget your dead, then you forget society.

Will said he understands that Mary Lou feels passionately about the cemetery and he also believes in how important this site is to the community. This cemetery has to stay relevant and it will require city investment. Larry stated that seven thousand graves exist today and when we look at roughly 50 casket burials a year that gives 200 years of availability. Trending we can't predict, but this is the math.

Mary Lou said there was a time they planned soccer and baseball fields to use the land until time to use it for cemetery. The first plan was to work with St. Mary's Cemetery to build next to us. She doesn't know if the church still owns the baseball land but someday the cemetery will grab that and need it again. Paul asked that everyone hold questions to the end but he appreciates Mary Lou's comments.

Larry went back to the area map. With cremation rate being so high in Missoula, when they take a count in the plotted area of the cemetery, there are 7,000 graves for 200 years availability and when the new niche wall is installed, there is 25 years inventory there. Inventory is used once a site is sold, not when it is used for a burial. All the land not plotted is excess. It is their charge to state that fact, but not to tell you what to do with it. They think Cemetery Road should not be public and they will talk about those options.

Will said they walked the site. The historic section has a true feeling and is beloved and appreciated. They want to enhance and protect that. The first stop is the edge of the cemetery on all three sides. There needs to be some screening. Ron has done a good job to block the ties on the north end with a high canopy of trees and a chain-link fence. They recommend dense planting with low plants as a barrier. This creates more sense of place for the cemetery. They know this is more difficult on a maintenance level, but they think it is the best solution. The lumberyard side of the cemetery needs a six to eight foot privacy fence to block out that view. Every road is beautiful but from all of them, the public sees lumber. The front is the hardest. This is very narrow and they have heard some possible sidewalk talk here. Chain-link today is not nice. A car will occasionally hit the fence, salt adheres to it, or it simply needs to be replaced. Removing the fence reduces liability cost. They propose two options. One is to replace the existing fence with an ornamental fence. This will have some maintenance but it will keep as a long-term item and be about a \$60,000 expense. The second option is to remove the fence entirely. When they suggested this to the various lot owners, this option received strong opposition, however, this is their preference. People see the fence when driving by and it is a barrier telling them to keep out. There is a real need to open the cemetery up and make it more inviting. You're not keeping anyone out with a chain-link fence. Anyone can jump over it and come in if they want. Also, they propose a decorative or more engaging front entrance with ornamental fencing. The historic columns make it feel like people are coming into somewhere. The need is to balance that look with being next to barbed wire and septic tanks, both of which are not great backdrops. There is a need to look at how that functions and it is an important item to evaluate.

The biggest idea that has a lot of value and potential is the land sale. This building (the chapel) is not ideal and not well constructed. While it functions, it does not function well for families to use as a gathering place in inclement weather or for families to meet. The bathrooms are adequate but not nice. While they do a service, they are not perfect. The main office is in disrepair. The team here has done a great job keeping it clean, but it does not function and there is no meeting space. Will proposed combining all three elements into one building about 2,400 to 3,000 square feet. It would have offices,

meeting rooms, and a multi-purpose space for groups and families to meet or for Stories and Stones events. They propose to tie the funding of this building to the sale of the land. They hope the City looks at the land sale as an opportunity to help fund this building since the land was cemetery land. The maintenance garage can stay with a screen around it. It is well maintained and still a useful building.

Larry said there is an assumption that all or some of the excess land is targeted for other use such as residential. They do not feel it is appropriate for traffic to exit out of the cemetery. They propose a cul-de-sac with the new building placed on Evergreen. The new building should serve as a focal point and cornerstone of entrance for people coming into cemetery. The existing office should be maintained for the apartment; however, there some functions from the maintenance building could be incorporated here such as a breakroom or lockers. This proposal is a compounded one where the building gets painted grey so it blends, a new decorative entrance is added, and the fence is opened to make the cemetery inviting.

The last item is a bit controversial to discuss. They are going to recommend this, but suggest not to act on it right away. This is a densely streeted cemetery. The old section is more condensed and the new section is more wide open. There is liability with streets that need salted, plowed, and rebuilding. They suggest to remove some streets and over time, new burial space in the older sections will be gained, which is a very appealing selling point.

There is currently 75 feet across a section. You can stand on the street and see across to the next street. This has an impact on the character and the site. They have to look at this collectively. Larry said he has done many road closures in cemeteries. He suggests closing Blackthorn partially (but not around the columbarium) and closing Sycamore totally. This one thing creates 700 new graves and everyone wants in the old area. This increases product for the long-term. When you get rid of roads, it removes liability. The industry standard is 300 feet across for sections. Currently, staff has done this in the new areas where they adopted standards that are more modern. The case is made whenever you can find an alternative from hardscape and make grass; our cemetery clients are good at cutting grass. You could do more road closures but the absorption rates are so low.

Physically, Larry says they love the old part of the cemetery and it is the cornerstone of how to make this cemetery the stellar site in Missoula. There are hundreds of alternative ways to scatter ashes. This cemetery is not attracting clients, interest in flower sales is declining, interment numbers is declining, so there is a need to focus on how to turn this around.

The cemetery's number one asset is its trees. Larry proposes to seek out how to become a state-recognized arboretum. This would result in the installation of signs and become a place where students learn about trees. Eventually, expand that into the new part. Fruit bearing trees can enhance the habitat for the birding industry. Birding is the most popular growing activity in the country with the Audubon Society being very successful. People can come to the cemetery as a student to learn about birds and then, because the cemetery is relevant to them, they later come back to have loved ones placed here. This is an area where success cannot be easily measured, however, everyone is doing this in all urban historic cemeteries in an effort to make them a premier place to go.

Larry said it is very difficult to market cemeteries. Cemeteries need a great product, a great website, and the best market tool of great prices. This cemetery is great because it already does all that. The cemetery presence in the city newsletter needs to keep happening but cemetery presence should also be in water bills and other widely dispersed city communications.

The cemetery has to build an active relationship with the funeral homes, monument companies, and other cemeteries. It needs to maximize its presence. The ability to put together a marketing budget is not effective. Community building like Stories and Stones is what makes people come here and the physical ideas make this place more inviting, which is even more reason to come.

Larry said they also have to evaluate staff and equipment with the same ability. These are hard issues. The relationship of expense to revenue is not a great picture. The ability to grow is very challenging. There is no magic bullet, but they are working on how to present that.

Will suggested the cemetery make incremental changes and do them slowly. Even though prices are under other area cemeteries, sites are still not moving. This cemetery is a great resource for the community, but we have to get them here to enjoy and use it. This cemetery needs to be more relevant.

Larry said a good example of becoming relevant is the universities and churches who are now installing columbariums. Once done, they become a relevant place. Scattering on a golf course is another way that shows how relevance is what is driving those options. People don't see cemeteries as a positive thing or understand that this is green space and an asset as a park. If this is not articulated and explained to the public then here you are.

Larry said the ordinance needs to go to Council as it relates to the proposed pet wall issue. It clearly says the cemetery is for human remains. Pets are not human so now the cemetery needs Council to adjust the ordinance. He feels there a couple things to do. On page 11 in item 7, is the prohibition against cremated remains placed in monuments. He wants this wording removed or modified to add "without approval of the cemetery." Niche benches are sold around the country. Right now, folks can buy a grave or niche here and all the prices are the same, meaning there are no options. However, if people like something nicer, then they could buy a newly designed lot for a bench or statue and use it for niches. These are wonderful products to include. People spend a thousand dollars and they feel good. As a company, there needs to be need low cost and high cost options.

Larry said they also recommend consolidating the Niche Fund into the Capital Reserve Fund. The Capital Reserve Fund has such a broad purpose, whereas the Niche Fund is 100% only used for niches. It is only logical to have one revolving fund to spend for products. You can still build niches from the reserve fund so there is no reason to keep it separate. There is 25 years of inventory as it is now.

Larry said they talked with city officials and were told that they are moving away from detailed ordinances. It is more customary to have an enabled ordinance, but then have rules and regulations for the cemetery. These rules can be modified by the Board as opposed to taking them to Council. Council does not need to hear or understand why you change rules in niches. The experts in the cemetery should be the ones making those decisions. Where Council is concerned, they have plenty of access to get that changed or remove excessive information in the ordinance without having to explain to the general public as a whole how to do everything. Some areas in the ordinance are awkward to explain to the public. He really feels this is a great idea.

The proposed plan is intended to be a blueprint for the cemetery. As for the road closures, you could close two blocks on Sycamore to see how that works, see the public response, try adding new graves, and see how that sells. All these concepts can be done in phases. The redevelopment of the site of undeveloped land is a huge plus for everyone. It means more connections of people living here and it helps the City tax base. He sees no down side to this. Will said the cemetery has to plan for this development by putting in buffers and screening which are more positive for the cemetery.

Larry said the cemetery needs to benefit from the sale of this land and he and Will plan to advocate to the City for continued support, not just for the cemetery, but for an arboretum, birding, outdoor classroom, historical society, and possible partnerships with the City and other important institutions.

At this point, Larry opened the floor for questions.

Pat asked if the plan was to open the south end along Cemetery Road and remove the fence there. Larry said yes, either put in a decorative fence (with a cost of about \$60,000), or preferably remove the fence all together. The fence says we don't want you and that is exactly opposite of what we do want. A fence is an expense that is not necessary. We need to open the cemetery up and make it more inviting. There are other issues as well like vision issues in order to turn out of the cemetery. It is big safety enhancement to get rid of the fence. There is nothing valuable about that fence.

Paul asked Jeremy what the future plans were within the City for that street in regards to trails or sidewalks. Jeremy said that for now, this street is only a connection from one side to the other. The city is currently working with a consultant to possibly squeeze a sidewalk in on one side of the road. They are just starting to figure out right of way issues and will look at where graves are.

Paul wondered whether we might do a partial removal or install a lower fence so we have a visual barrier for families rather than a protective barrier. Larry suggested something like a guardrail would work, but make it more wooden with some kind of edge where you could place some plantings with landscape and color. This would reduce the cost of a decorative fence. The current fence is an issue when hit by a car, because it costs money to fix. We could plan areas along that edge that could be used as an exit and come into the cemetery at various parts. Jeremy liked the idea of a visual separation and Paul agreed that the edge of the cemetery could define the difference between the two areas of road and cemetery.

Larry used a Toledo example where bike trails were put through the cemetery in a very respected manner. There have been no issues there in the last couple of years because of all the people regularly going through the cemetery. He talked to Jeremy about detouring the sidewalk to pass through the cemetery so bike and wheelchairs can go through. More community equals a more enhanced cemetery.

Ron worries about removing the fence and sees people pulling over into the cemetery, which makes for a safety hazard. Without parking access into the cemetery or a place to pull over, then people will find a nice spot to drive through there. That is his biggest concern about removing the fence.

Paul asked which land is marked to sell. Larry said he would like to try to keep the pump house in the cemetery so it does not have to be rebuilt. The part by the bullpen where equipment is parked is another area he would try to retain. Once the office is moved onto Evergreen, then all else is excess. Ron asked where the equipment and piles were supposed to go.

Will explained that their number one job was to determine what was excess and that has been answered. The second thing was how to plan for that and that is where all other issues have to come into play. By siting a building south of the current office, the cemetery would maintain that road and the rectangle of land surrounding it. There is an opportunity to share this area with the Parks Dept. where the cemetery could share equipment, staff, and have a future maintenance area to develop. This land is excess but they recommend keeping it and doing interesting visual things so no house is right on top of visual cemetery space.

Paul suggested a land swap with Hunton to enhance the cemetery gate and entrance and add an additional buffer between the cemetery and a housing development. Larry had not looked at that yet. His job was to say what was excess. It is up to the City to figure out what to do with it. He does not know what the timeline for this land is but he thinks a land swap is a great idea. Jeremy said he was also thinking of a land swap and an open gateway to the cemetery.

Mary Lou said the land up front with the cemetery sign is railroad land and they don't give up their land. We already tried. Ron said the cemetery leases that land. Mary Lou said we offered to buy it but they won't let it go. Chris said the railroad land is part of the land grant and they can't sell it, but they can lease it for 100 years. Jeremy added that this land is Burlington Northern not Rail Link.

Paul said closing cemetery streets is not immediate but could be looked at as the cemetery reaches its boundaries. This concept gives known additional space that could be accounted for in the future. Larry said the reason to do it now is that everyone wants in the old part of the cemetery. If inventory isn't available when the public asks, then they may not buy in the new section. Being in the center, rather than on the edge of the cemetery, is where people want to be. Mary Lou said there is no money for that. Larry said to start with the area on Sycamore to see how it goes, then add more on Blackthorn. This then gives people options to be in a tree-lined area and sites will then sell. Will added that this area is so beautiful that it would be a really big draw.

Ron sees that idea, but he thinks it is a huge mistake to remove roads that the public uses to get around in the cemetery. Funeral homes know how tough it is getting around now for services or at Memorial time. Tyson Moore suggested the cemetery remove all the roads and then sell the spots at a premium. Will agreed with Tyson because the cemetery doesn't need excess land. The roads are in good condition so it's not wise to rip them up today. But, as needs arise where the streets need to be repaired, then you can decide not to do the repairs and use it as graves at that time. Look at this as a future perspective for additional inventory.

Kim asked that how we keep people out so the houses don't encroach on the cemetery when a portion of the land is sold for housing. Mary Lou said she lives by St. Mary's Cemetery and people used to go in there a night, there was a lot of vandalism, and that's why they had to fence and lock that cemetery. Larry said there is no reason for anyone to be in the cemetery at night. The cemetery should close at dusk. There needs to be some sort of barrier which needs to be some type of fencing and landscape to make a dense screen. Take advantage of that natural barrier. Rick Evans said his cemetery is good on inventory for another 150 years.

Larry said what they are suggesting is that any traffic that comes into the cemetery should go out onto cemetery road, not onto a public street. Technically, this front road isn't needed for cemetery purposes but that's the call of others here in the City, not theirs. That's where he really prefers the synergy with Parks and the idea to make a joint maintenance facility so the front section can be controlled better.

Kim asked if they were suggesting that we combine the chapel into the office location. This section is not plotted, but it still could leave us with the ability to do that. Will agreed but advised flexibility in thinking. Larry said for immediate visibility and parking, the site suggested is the best place for an office and maintenance facility and then it also becomes part of barrier.

Paul went back to the ordinance change suggestion. There was a mention of an issue with wording for the pet wall and green burials but he was not sure what that means. Is this allowed in the ordinance? If not, then does the wording change need to be in the sections area of the ordinance? Larry said green burials relate to a funeral director with regards to a casket, embalming, vault, etc. The problem is that a burial vault is not intended for burial, but for ground issues to keep the ground level. Green burials are more of a funeral home issue than a cemetery issue. Cemeteries want vaults for tripping hazards, etc. Paul asked about above ground options and referred to New Orleans, saying that is not a good idea. Will said a green resting place could be any number of things such as ashes inside a tree root ball, but long-term, green burials are not marketable in a transformative way. Tyson Moore said Sunset does two green burials a year. There are two green burial cemeteries within 50 miles of us, so that option is not what is asked for. Larry said the hot trend is a pet cemetery, however, he is not an advocate for this product and believes the impact on revenue is limited.

Mary Lou asked how a new entryway and removing the fence would change the cemetery to be more inviting. Larry said people don't connect to a concrete place like next door (Hunton). He suggests we pull the gate further inside by the stone archways and put in an electric gate to operate without security and cover when someone is not working here. Will said these gates can operate on a timer, or a car can pull up and the gates will open. They have done many of these and they are successful. Larry added that these gates are not cheap, but they are cheaper to do once than to continue to pay security. If we pull the gate even further in so it is right before the pillars, then it allows for more dense plantings along the sides that lead into it and right inside the gate will sit the new building. He suggests using mostly native plants, but to also include some organic plantings to create a bird habitat. Larry said we can't do anything about the neighbors that are really tough to address, like the cement plant and the barbed wire.

Mary Lou said this chapel was built by the cemetery guys for older people to have shelter in the winter. It's not fancy, there are no outside bathrooms, but it was all done by workers the same as the

first columbarium. Larry complimented the cemetery workers on their initiative. Mary Lou said she has a lot of relatives here and knows where all the bodies are buried. If the City takes the land and uses it for housing, then what about the dump on the hill? It has leaked twice. What happens when it does that again? When putting houses here, you don't put in basements because of all the lead paint that has gone into the ground. Jeremy said this was certainly something to be careful about.

Jeremy wondered what the board's reaction was should the City use one of the cemetery streets as a sidewalk or a walking connection, and whether that should be looked at. Kim liked the idea to use a street inside the cemetery. Larry said it would exit onto the street. Jeremy said the road is so constrained, that if a path follows one of the cemetery interior roads and then dumps onto the street, that would help in their planning. Kim asked if the same predicament would happen when leaving the cemetery. Jeremy agreed that it doesn't solve the problem, but edging the cemetery with a path is optional. Will said we may have to remove the fence if a sidewalk goes in. Larry said that could bring 46 people who walk there a day, so it would not be heavily used. Pat asked if the path would be lit. Mary Lou said it would have to be lit. Jeremy said the street is not lit. Larry said lighting would not be a bad change and would be in character of a cemetery. Ron added that it is bad here on the streets in the mornings. Drivers can't see people so he doesn't see anything bad about using the cemetery for in and out access and then dumping them back out onto the street. Jeremy said we have to find a way back out of the cemetery. Will said the barriers are too close without it. Chris felt that for a path, it was a lot easier to move their barriers than a cemetery. Kim wondered if the consultants were open to these things. Will said they had not discussed them yet.

Paul said that from all the things he has heard, the City wanted this Strategic Plan once the board started to look at the idea of a masterplan for the cemetery. The board recognized things that need to be changed, but what has been put out onto the table today, it is hard to swallow all of it. Mary Lou said some of this will work, but some won't. Paul said a lot of people in this room are decision makers in this process, and it will take a lot of people to make these decisions.

Pat expressed his appreciation for the Sloane effort on these plan ideas and asked if this was an interim step before a final draft. Larry said yes, there will be a final report to Council and he hopes to lock down how that process of Committee or Council works. Larry said he plans to present a draft to Ron to distribute to everyone and then he will be able to make some corrections before the final presentation to Council. Paul likes the idea to sit down with a draft to read and reflect a bit.

Kim asked if they would have examples of their recommendations such as the gate. Will said they may put ideas down for folks to study, but they do not specify recommendations or steps to achieve the projects. This is where you pick what you want to do and in what order. What they do is tell the board what they feel strongly about, but the board has to also feel it needs done or else the board shouldn't do it.

Larry asked if the extinguished funeral guests here today could speak to what they believe is a ten year window. If something doesn't get done or changed by then, then things will be very difficult. Larry said the City doesn't have time to do nothing. The number of caskets is in decline. If the cemetery is not in the market place to offer something for ethnicity and demographics, then there will be another sharp decline. Missoula is perfect for a cremation model.

Jeremy said he seconds that. What they are facing with the cemetery is increasing scrutiny in the General Fund. The cemetery finds itself under a spotlight. We should be proactive to make this cemetery relevant to the City. In a way that makes sense, like a path makes the cemetery relevant. We need to go beyond the things we've done in the past.

Paul asked whether they were suggesting an office move or a redevelopment idea. He said a 2,400 to 3,000 square foot building could be one million dollars to build. Larry said they used \$300 per square

foot as their basis after they had talked with Paul. The estimate for the building cost is between \$799,000 and \$900,000. Paul noted that utility cost would need added to that figure.

Paul asked if the consultants had considered a committal shelter or outdoor gathering spot for a ceremony. Larry said that tradition here is to be right at graveside. Shelters can work in some places, but he has a sense that families here want graveside. So, this would not be an option because this space would almost never be used. He likes interment shelters in vet cemeteries, especially for memorial or cremated remains. This idea was not considered here because of the strong sense that families in Missoula want graveside. Tyson agreed that historically, people want to be graveside. Will added that he agrees because this is such a beautiful space where people could sit under a tree for a service.

Ron stated that replacement of trees had not been talked about yet. Trees were a part of the RFP to determine the healthiness and replacement of them. The RFP also talked about a plan for if wells go down, but that hasn't been mentioned either. Now the recommendation is a new office but at first you did not want to do anything and now you do. Larry said that although the office functions every day, they are here to advocate for the cemetery. If land that the cemetery acquired is sold, then the cemetery should receive a part of the profit from the sale of that land. Consolidation of funds is part of that concept. He has not talked today about whether purchasing the new columbarium is best and what revenue that would generate. He doesn't know what is feasible or not. He recommends someone of authority assess trees for an arboretum and then an annual budget needs set aside for trees. This is part of the conditions of being a certified arboretum. He understands replacing trees is complex. You either place a new tree where the stump was removed or find a different location which is probably on a grave. People want the new part of the cemetery to have a similar canopy, but that can't be guaranteed. A tree replacement allotment needs to be in the annual budget.

Will said the State would do a tree survey to assess the conditions of the trees and make recommendations for replacements. Ron has done a great job trying to bring the same look to the new side of the cemetery. Larry said every year a new tree species has troubles and the cemetery needs to be responsive to that. He can't tell the cemetery what to plant, but he can give some ideas. He loves trees, but he is not experienced in that field so he won't tell the cemetery what to plant.

Pat asked if the city would assist in peeling asphalt when the time came to remove trees and fillin roads. Jeremy said yes and that it makes sense in a maintenance cycle. When roads need work, then decide if you want them or not. Larry said the concept used for the niche plaza could apply to the cemetery and would allow the cemetery to keep as much new burial options in the old section as possible. Pat agreed that would add to the cemetery's marketability.

Jeremy asked if there are currently premium sections in different areas. Ron said no that all graves are the same price except that vets get a small discount. Will said that concept is good public service and great for ease of sales, but he would encourage considering premium sites as an effective selling option.

9. Informational Items.

10. Communication

11. Adjournment at : 1:23pm

Respectfully submitted by Mary Ellen Stubb, Admin Asst III