

Memo

August 23, 2017

From: Councilmember Kenneth Thomas

To: Mayor Becky Erickson
Public Works Committee of Poulsbo City Council

Subj: **REPORT ON CEMETERY IMPROVEMENT FOCUS EFFORT (2016-2017)**

Encl: (1) Current Chapter 2.76 [City Cemetery] of Poulsbo Municipal Code
(2) Poulsbo Cemetery Improvement Items (accomplished items highlighted)
(3) List of City of Poulsbo staff and citizens involved with recent cemetery improvements
(4) Guiding Questions and Proposed Vision of the Poulsbo Cemetery
(5) Observations and Recommendations
(6) Proposed City Cemetery Ordinance Changes
(7) Friends of Poulsbo Cemetery Information

1. **INTRODUCTION.** As you know, for many months Councilmember David Musgrove and I have been working with a group of citizens and city staff to provide a dedicated focus on improvements to the city-owned Poulsbo Cemetery. This memo and packet provides observations, information about our efforts, identified items for improvement, accomplishments, items not accomplished, and recommendations for future action.
2. **BACKGROUND.** The Poulsbo Cemetery was established by the Poulsbo municipal government in 1911, when 10 acres owned by Thomas Sondenaar were purchased by Mayor Peter Iverson, acting for the Town of Poulsbo. First interments took place in 1912. In keeping with customary cemetery practice at that time, the expectation then was that families would purchase blocks of plots and maintain the graves of their family members, although individual plots were also sold. Over the years, there have been several efforts by city council members and mayors to improve the cemetery's appearance and functions, with the most recent comprehensive exploration of alternatives taking place in 2003-2006. Yet issues remain and the effort to find solutions must continue. We decided to spend 12 months on a focused effort for further improvements, from July 2016 through June 2017.
3. **CONSTRAINTS.** Before embarking on the 2016-2017 project, there were several constraints on cemetery operations and improvement that were recognized:

- a. Unlike many other cemeteries, there was no perpetual care fund in existence to provide for the routine cost of cemetery operations, maintenance, or improvements.
- b. The Cemetery Reserve Fund, which receives money from the occasional sale of burial plots, accumulates funds very slowly and can be depleted very quickly. For this reason, the City Council has historically avoided large expenditures from this fund for improvements unless absolutely necessary.
- c. Several individual graves or family lots (composed of six adjacent graves) have tilted or damaged monuments, or concrete borders that are cracked due to apparent earth movement. The existing city ordinance (Chapter 2.76 of the Poulsbo Municipal Code, Section 2.76.190, Item D [Enclosure 1]) requires cemetery lot owners to keep all grave markers or monuments in good repair. The ordinance specifically states that “the city does not maintain, repair, or replace any grave marker or monumental structure erected upon the gravesite.”
- d. Maintenance, landscaping, and routine care of the overall cemetery are provided from the Public Works Department budget of the General Fund, which is supported by taxpayers. With the many needs of the city competing for limited tax monies available, the cemetery is normally considered a low priority when compared to more urgent and compelling needs that are central to residents’ lives. The likelihood of a substantially increased cemetery operating budget or use of tax-generated funds for cemetery capital improvements would be low.

For these reasons, it was clear that contributed funds, **donated site upgrades and volunteer involvement would be the keys** to improvements.

4. **MINIMUM END STATE DESIRED.** The improvement team determined the following were minimum items we sought to be in place for future successful cemetery operations:
 - a. An inventory of problems and immediate efforts to resolve as many as possible.
 - b. An update to the current ordinance.
 - c. An illustrated comprehensive cemetery plan (with vision).
 - d. An annual focused City Council review of cemetery operations/plans/budgets.
 - e. Maintain a list of proposed improvements/projects for future accomplishments.
 - f. Creation of a method/procedure/entity for accomplishing those projects.
 - g. A defined method of collecting & expending donations for cemetery improvements (the city would not conduct fund-raising but could accept donations specified for cemetery projects).
 - h. An annual community cemetery event (a public activity held there, along with an annual cleanup day that precedes it) to keep the cemetery in the public mind as a local historical landmark and place for civic involvement.

5. POLICY REVIEW. One goal was to explore concepts for the mission and vision of the Poulso Cemetery, then conduct a thorough review of city policy, ordinances, and desk manuals. Enclosure 4 provides guiding questions which the city council must answer to ensure that policies are appropriate. Enclosures 5 and 7 are recommendations for the city council's consideration.
6. MAIN OBJECTIVE. While immediate physical improvements were sought and accomplished (Enclosure 2), the ultimate objective of this project was to build public support so that a volunteer group of citizens might be formed to carry forward the momentum for cemetery improvements, supervise volunteer adoption of cemetery sections for routine upkeep (mowing/raking), assist with upkeep on neglected graves where family members cannot be identified or located, raise funds for future improvements, and cooperate with the City of Poulso to determine ways to accomplish more improvements.
7. FRIENDS OF THE POULSO CEMETERY. One result of the most recent community focus on the cemetery has been the formation of the Friends of Poulso Cemetery Steering Committee, with the goal of organizing a Friends of Poulso Cemetery Association in late 2017. A great deal of preparation and research has gone into this effort to create a non-profit organization representing cemetery deed holders and family members along with interested citizens to carry forward the desire to improve and maintain the cemetery.

The proposed mission of the Friends of Poulso Cemetery Association is to:

- a. Assist cemetery deed holders as they prepare and maintain burial lots within the cemetery.
 - b. Provide volunteer and financial resources to the City of Poulso as it works to maintain, restore, and beautify the Poulso Cemetery.
 - c. Provide volunteer and financial resources to the Poulso Historical Society to increase awareness that the Poulso Cemetery has the potential to be an open-air historical museum that tells the story of the community and its heritage.
8. CONCLUSION. Enclosed you will find information concerning the year-long focus on cemetery improvements, along with observations and recommendations. Remaining questions are also posed, to assist in determining the way forward. Information about the proposed Friends of the Poulso Cemetery is also enclosed, with the recommendation that that this group be allowed to present their concepts and ideas for consideration.