



City Manager

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MEMO

To: City Council
CC: Sue McClean (City Clerk), Nate Moore (Finance Director), Jen Sala (Historic Preservation Chair)
From: Charlie Pearce, City Manager
Date: September 16, 2024
Re: September 2024 Agenda – Proposal to form a cemetery commission

Suggested Motion: “Move to create a Cemetery Commission for the city of Ellsworth which will be temporarily chaired by Jen Sala, Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission. This commission will be responsible for overseeing the maintenance, finances, and long-term infrastructure/strategic planning of Ellsworth’s cemeteries under city purview. Initial priorities will include recruiting appropriate residents of Ellsworth to be nominated to the City Council to be on the standing commission, working with the Finance Department and City Clerk’s Office on policies regarding cemetery reserve funds, preparing an inventory of current cemeteries, and developing a comprehensive future cemetery plan focused on rehabilitating the Old Burial Ground, enhancing historical signage, and landscaping.”

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to request City Council's authorization for the formation of a Cemetery Commission that will be tasked with overseeing the maintenance, finances, and long-term infrastructure/strategic planning of Ellsworth’s growing cemetery needs. The commission will play a vital role in ensuring that our cemeteries are well-maintained, sustainable, and reflective of our community’s values and history.

Need for a Cemetery Commission

As our city's cemetery needs continue to grow, it is important that we establish a formal group to provide oversight and long-term planning. A dedicated Cemetery Commission will be responsible for addressing the following key areas:

- **Maintenance:** Regular upkeep of all city cemeteries, ensuring they remain safe, respectful, and attractive.
- **Finances:** Collaborating with the Finance Department to review and establish policies for the use of cemetery reserve funds.
- **Strategic Planning:** Developing a long-term plan for future cemetery development and rehabilitation, including an emphasis on historical sites.
- **Bylaws and Policies:** Ensuring all cemetery-related bylaws are updated, enforced, and aligned with city priorities.

Commission Responsibilities

If authorized, the Cemetery Commission will begin by focusing on the following early initiatives:

1. **Working with the Finance Department and City Clerk's Office:**
 - The commission will collaborate with these departments to review current policies and procedures related to the allocation of cemetery reserve funds.
 - An essential first task will be developing a clear framework for how funds are allocated to various cemeteries in Ellsworth and ensuring financial transparency.
2. **Annual Reports:**
 - The commission will prepare annual reports to update the City Council on maintenance efforts, financial standing, and any recommendations for future actions.
3. **Inventory of Cemeteries:**
 - The commission will create a comprehensive inventory of all city cemeteries currently being maintained and identify those that need attention, particularly older sites.
4. **Future Cemetery Planning:**
 - An initial focus of the commission will be on developing a future cemetery plan, starting with the rehabilitation of the historic Old Burial Ground.
 - This plan will prioritize increased historical signage and landscaping enhancements to highlight the cemetery's significance in Ellsworth's history.

Formation of the Commission

The Cemetery Commission will be formed following the standard city commission structure, which includes:

- **Commission Composition:**

The commission will be comprised of 5 members, potentially including representatives from city departments (Finance, Public Works, or the City Clerk's Office), as well as interested community members with relevant expertise.
- **Appointment Process:**

The City Council will appoint commission members, and the City Manager's Office will

provide administrative support in seeking and vetting qualified candidates from the community.

- **Meeting Structure:**

The commission will meet quarterly, with additional meetings scheduled as necessary, to ensure timely action on cemetery-related matters.

Request for Authorization

I respectfully request that the City Council authorize the formation of the Cemetery Commission to begin addressing Ellsworth's cemetery needs. By establishing this group, we can ensure that our cemeteries are maintained responsibly and that future infrastructure and strategic plans are developed thoughtfully and sustainably.

Please let me know if additional information or discussion is needed. I look forward to your consideration of this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Charlie Pearce
City Manager
Ellsworth, Maine

Additional Resources:

Ellsworth Cemetery Ordinance: https://www.ellsworthmaine.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ord16_cemetery.pdf

City Charter Section on Commission Formation

<https://www.ellsworthmaine.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/City-Charter-of-Ellsworth-full.pdf>

Sec. 10.02 - Council Appointees. The City Council will appoint Registered Voters of the City of Ellsworth to serve at-will on such Boards and Commissions as may be created by Ordinance, except that the Council may by Ordinance authorize the appointment of other qualified persons to serve on such Boards if permitted under state law. Council Appointees will serve without compensation and will not be subject to the City's Personnel Rules. Such Boards and Commissions may include, but are not limited to, a Harbor Commission, Board of Appeals, Recreation Commission, Planning Board, Historic Preservation Commission, Registration Board of Appeals, Board of Assessment Review, and Water Supply Commission.