

Ripton Cemetery Association and proposed Cemetery Commission

The Ripton Cemetery Association, chartered in 1939, oversaw Ripton's four public cemeteries for many years. During the 1970s, with dwindling participation and funds, members (plot owners) approached the selectboard about transferring cemetery care to the town. The selectboard was receptive and at a special town meeting in November 1977 voters approved funds for public burial grounds. The town attorney wrote to the Association advising that they meet and legally vote whether or not to disband. No record of such a meeting has been found. The cemetery association continued to meet sporadically after 1977 and filed a "Nonprofit Biennial Report Form" with the secretary of state through 2013.

In recent years, Bonnie Swan, cemetery sexton and president of the association, managed the cemeteries with maintenance assistance by Chris Smith, paid from a stock mutual fund owned by the association. The fund allows for basic maintenance but not for major projects. When Bonnie was contacted in May 2013 about re-setting tipped headstones, she spoke of lack of money for such work, few remaining plots to sell and the need for expansion, and about reorganizing as a cemetery commission to get more people involved and funds raised.

Since May 13th, the selectboard discussed Ripton's cemeteries at eleven different meetings in 2013. Perry Hanson led two informal meetings at the Community House for residents to discuss cemeteries. These discussions were followed on October 10th by a duly warned Ripton Cemetery Association meeting called by three association members to vote on the dissolution and transfer of its assets to the town. The association voted unanimously to approve both the dissolution and transfer of assets.

Following this vote, the selectboard proposed that the town establish a 5-member cemetery commission at the March 2014 town meeting, with Australian ballot vote of 5 commissioners to follow. In the interim, Bonnie Swan was asked to continue as cemetery sexton with authority to sell plots, and the town treasurer continued the practice, started in 1987, of overseeing the Cemetery Fund. At their October 28th meeting, the selectboard approved mailing a cemetery questionnaire composed by Charles Billings to all residents and landowners. The board also encouraged the exploration for additional land at Cook and Galvin cemeteries.

United Way Day of Caring volunteers, Megan Battey and David Lacey, spent an October day here cleaning stones with Bonnie Swan, Charles Billings and Perry Hanson. Megan and David offered to return in the spring with a group of college students, possibly to clean all of the stones at Cushman Cemetery.

Cemetery Questionnaire Summary. In November 2013 a questionnaire concerning Ripton's cemeteries was sent to all residents and landowners. It contained 18 yes or no questions, plus a 1 to 10 scale rating (1= not strongly to 10 = very strongly) of how strongly a respondent felt about each question. Sixty-eight questionnaires were returned. The results are summarized here and in the table on the next page. A significant majority: feel it is important to maintain our cemeteries and find more space; support expansion at the Cook Cemetery on Natural Turnpike and Galvin Cemetery on Rt. 125. A majority disagree that cemeteries should be funded solely from private donations or solely from taxes. While a majority agree to donate to support the cemeteries (58.5%), a larger majority (88.1%) want the cemeteries to be funded by a combination of taxes, donations and burial plot sales. Just over 1/3 of respondents have a relative/ancestor buried in a Ripton cemetery, and just over 1/4 either have a burial plot here or a family member who does. Almost 1/2 of those who answered whether they or a family member will eventually want to purchase a plot said yes, of those 24 chose Cook and 4 chose Galvin. Almost 3/4 would like rules for decorations. Two-thirds rejected the proposition that only residents be allowed a burial plot; 77.1% believed that someone with a relative buried in Ripton should also be able to have a plot. However, 51.5% of people want limitations on who may purchase a plot when additional land is available. Finally, just over 1/3 said they are willing to volunteer to help with cemetery needs.

Questionnaire Results:		Ave Yes	Ave "No"
		Score**	Score**
		% Yes	% No
1	Do you agree that it is important to maintain Ripton's cemeteries?	91.0%	9.0%
2	Given that there is little or no more burial space left in Ripton's cemeteries, do you agree that new cemetery space should be found?	85.1%	14.9%
3	Would you support expansion of the Cook cemetery (on Natural Turnpike near the junction with Robbins Crossroad)?	86.8%	13.2%
4	Would you support expansion of the Galvin cemetery (on Route 125 near Bread Loaf campus)?	71.2%	28.8%
5	Burial plot sales + perpetual care income do not cover all expenses. Should the deficit be funded solely from private donations?	36.1%	63.9%
6	Would you be willing to make a donation to help cover the costs of maintenance, restoration, administration and expansion of the cemeteries?	58.5%	41.5%
7	Would you prefer to have the cemeteries' needs funded solely by the town through property taxes?	26.1%	73.9%
8	Would you like to see the cemeteries funded by a combination of burial plot sales, private donations and allocations from the Town?	88.1%	11.9%
9	Are any of your ancestors or family buried in one of Ripton's cemeteries?	35.3%	64.7%
10	Do you or does a member of your family have a burial plot with room for future burials in one of Ripton's cemeteries?	26.9%	73.1%
11	In the future do you think that you or a member of your family would want a new burial plot in Ripton?	46.3%	53.7%
12	If the answer to number 11 above is YES, which cemetery would you choose (Cook /Nat.Tpike, Galvin /125, or other)?	24 for Cook & 4 for Galvin	
13	Should there be rules for things that one should not put in the cemetery—statues, lights, bushes/trees, talking monuments, etc.?	72.1%	27.9%
14	Should burials in Ripton cemeteries be limited to Ripton residents?	33.3%	66.7%
15	Should burial plots also be available to property owners who are not Ripton residents?	75.0%	25.0%
16	If someone is not a property owner and is not a resident of Ripton, but has a relative buried here, should they be allowed to buy a plot?	77.3%	22.7%
17	Should anyone, regardless of residency, property or relative, be able to purchase a burial plot in Ripton if cemetery land is made available?	48.5%	51.5%
18	Would you be willing to volunteer to help with current and future needs of the cemeteries? (See K. on the back for commissioner balloting.)	37.3%	62.7%