



**WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, August 20, 2003, for the purpose of discussing possible expansion of the Greenbelt cemetery.**

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:02 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Rodney M. Roberts, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis. Councilmember Alan Turnbull arrived at 8:50 p.m.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: David E. Moran, Assistant to the City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Henry Haslinger, David Lange, Leonie Penney, and Rose Remenick.

Ms. Remenick said she had been led to believe that the topic of this meeting was cemetery maintenance, and she had come to convey a complaint. The Mayor asked her to do that first. Ms. Remenick said a friend of hers who lives in Pennsylvania had complained to her about the condition of the cemetery, which she described as "terrible." Ms. Remenick added that when she had last visited the cemetery, which was about six years ago, she thought it had been in bad condition too. Ms. Penney disagreed, saying that while at any specific point in time there might be a problem (e.g., just before the grass was cut or following heavy rains), she felt the cemetery was well cared for and in good condition. The Mayor asked Ms. Remenick to have her friend convey any specific complaints to the City Manager.

There was discussion of making an attempt to locate owners where there had been no contact or activity for a long time in order to see if there might be interest in selling lots back to the City or to other owners. There was discussion of subdividing lots into urn lots if any could be bought back by the City. This subject was continued later in the meeting.

#### Expansion

Mr. Roberts expressed interest in finding another site, particularly the lot on the other side of the street. Mayor Davis said she would prefer that to remain undeveloped as a buffer.

In response to Mayor Davis's question of whether expanding eastward toward Kenilworth was the only option, Mr. Moran said it was not, but it was flattest and farthest away from the Turner family cemetery, which the City does not know the exact boundaries of.

Mr. Roberts said his objection to expanding the cemetery at the present site was that it would be only a temporary fix. As long as there are people living in Greenbelt, there will be demand to increase the size of the cemetery. Mayor Davis asked staff to continue to consider the possibility of a new site, but she said she did not view the immediate question as necessarily leading to "never-ending expansion."

Mr. White also disagreed with Mr. Roberts, saying he thought some expansion was appropriate, though not necessarily as much as the 100 plots mentioned in the staff memo. He said he thought there should be expansion of the number of plots for burials but that there might also be smaller plots for urns or structures for urns. He suggested one possibility might be to have a low structure that would function both as a columbarium and also as a wall to define the boundaries of the cemetery.

Mayor Davis said Mr. Putens had conveyed to her that he would support some expansion, as would she, but not as extensive as the 100 plots proposed in the staff memo.

Mr. Turnbull said he thought whatever was done should pay for itself, and there should be no significant lateral expansion. He said he liked the idea of the wall to delineate the space of the cemetery and that it would be self-limiting. He added he thought a specialized architect should work on the overall design.

Mr. Roberts said he could support an urn wall that could be accomplished without cutting trees or encroaching on the woodland.

Mr. White clarified that in addition to the wall, he was in favor of some lateral expansion for increasing the number of burial plots.

Ms. Penney asked Council not to disturb the existing landscaping on the cemetery's north edge.

#### Reclaiming Plots

Mr. Lange suggested volunteers from the museum might assist with locating owners or their descendants. Mr. Moran raised the question of whether there would be any confidentiality issue with the records. Ms. Gallagher said she did not think that would be a problem if, as she assumed would be the case, any volunteers or other staff members would simply provide information to her as City Clerk and that any communication with owners or relatives would come from her. She added that there were other issues beyond simply locating people, however, including determining who held legal ownership and the fact that a major deterrent to selling lots back to the City is that the City is limited by the Code from paying more than the original sales price plus modest interest or the current sale price (\$500), whichever is less. In the case of the long-inactive plots, many of these were sold at about \$30 apiece. There was then discussion about the implications and processes of private sales and the City putting would-be buyers in touch with sellers. Mr. Lange also noted that the City could not subdivide plots sold privately.

Mr. Roberts asked if there was a way to encourage existing owners of multiple plots to use them for urns rather than burials or to bury double deep, and then possibly resell unused lots. There was discussion of whether efforts to conserve space in these ways should be confined to future sales rather than plots already sold.

#### Conclusion

Council directed staff to pursue the possibilities for creating a columbarium that would be a low wall, look into identifying owners who might wish to sell lots, see what change would need to be made to the Code to allow the City to sell subdivided lots, and clarify procedures for dealing with waiting list in the event of possibility private sales.

#### Other Business

Mr. White asked to put a hold on the request that had appeared on the CAR report for a listing of single-family rental houses in the City until the reasons for the request could be discussed. The Mayor and Mr. Turnbull agreed that staff should hold off on pursuing the request until the objection could be resolved.

Mayor Davis mentioned the following: dates she had confirmed with other Council members to add to the work session calendar for quarterly updates from the City Manager for the rest of the year; a September 18 Mayors' breakfast meeting in Laurel where Comcast and newspaper vending boxes would be on the agenda; a letter from County Executive Johnson regarding a meeting to be held on September 8; and a possible need for Council discussion on whether the City should weigh in on Beltsville's suggestion of including BARC in their incorporation process.

Mayor Davis also asked Mr. Moran if there was any information on the drastic drop of income tax revenue recently reported by the City Manager. Mr. Moran said nothing had been determined yet. It was suggested that staff check with Senator Pinsky's office or MML to determine if other municipalities were having the same experience.

Mr. Moran said the new phone system was being installed and might create temporary problems. He said although all public, external phone numbers would remain the same, staff extensions would all change.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher City Clerk