

Otisco Township Cemetery Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2021

Present: Lynda Sower, Maryann Reeves, Joe Borek, David Hodges, Greg Terry, Desmond Pike, Laura Staats

Absent: Shane McDonald,

Also Present: Bruce Feuerstein

Old Business:

Supervisor Desmond Pike, led the discussion regarding needs for the Otisco Township cemeteries, and the immediate possible need for a columbaria or memorial ash garden to be added at the Smyrna Cemetery location.

Approximate costs of the different styles of columbaria niches were discussed, the rectangular 64 niche unit retails for approximately \$23,000. The hexagon style niche with 72 spaces retails for approximately \$37,000. It was also noted that at Easton Cemetery an individual niche sells for \$250, currently only three burials have been completed at Easton using the Columbarium. It is believed that additional spaces have been pre-purchased for future need by residents in that area.

Current costs for a resident purchasing a burial space within Otisco Township is \$150, and \$450 for a non-Township resident. Burial cost is \$75 for residents and \$250 for non-residents. It is noted that the general discussion for the evening is centered on the number of cremation and burials currently taking place within Otisco Township. Bruce Feuerstein said that the current cremation rate in our area is about 60%. One reason given for the increase in cremations is that they are less expensive. When a full body burial, where the person has been embalmed, viewed and is buried in a casket the costs are significantly higher.

Mr. Feuerstein included the information that of all cremations done at his funeral home about one half make arrangements for burial within a cemetery. The other half take the cremains and will take care of either dispersing them or burying the cremains themselves. There was some discussion on the legality of where these disbursements were taking place. Laura Staats gave an example that her father was placed in Lake Michigan, following the US government regulation that any cremains dispersed in any U.S. waterway must be more than 3 miles from any shoreline. She also noted that a grave marker has been placed in a cemetery in Muskegon should anyone doing family genealogy in the future go looking for his grave.

Mr. Feuerstein stated that he knew some families spread their loved ones cremains on their family properties, which is allowed by state law, but other locations of dispersal are unknown. For some people the cost of purchasing a burial space, or niche in a columbaria was considered too expensive therefore they made the choice to handle the disbursement or interment themselves. It was also noted that anyone taking it upon themselves to dump cremains in a city cemetery or one of the Township cemeteries that those ashes typically are removed and thrown away.

It is the duty of the Township Clerk to maintain records of anyone that resides in a Township Cemetery, her records will show in which township cemetery, the burial location, date of interment, and method of burial, i.e. full body burial versus cremation. In the Otisco Township cemeteries up to eight sets of cremains may be interred within one burial space, a large monument may be erected to display the names of those interred there. There is an additional option that flat on ground markers, capable of being mowed over, may also be used on the single burial space to identify those cremains are buried there.

Mr. Feuerstein volunteered to help write an article for the Otisco Township Newsletter giving an overview of the plans of the Otisco Township Cemetery Committee for the future. This will include information on the columbaria and Memorial Ash Garden. Lynda Sower will work with the Township deputies to put a newsletter together to go out in the next few months. It is hoped that the article will illicit conversation between Township residents and the Township Hall for their wishes in the future regarding burials in the Township.

At the conclusion of these discussions it was determined that for the time being there are burial spaces between the Otisco Cemetery and the Smyrna Cemetery to meet the Township's immediate needs for resident and nonresident burials. More discussions will be taken up in the future as the need arises, including the

possible purchase of lands to the north or south of the Otisco Township Cemetery. As an example, one acre of land added to the Otisco Township Cemetery site would yield approximately 345 gravesites.

Additional Discussion:

There was a brief discussion regarding trees and their maintenance in both cemeteries. It was noted that in the Otisco Cemetery location that some of the very old trees located in the old section in the center of the cemetery and toward the front have only a few years life left in them. At some point these trees should be removed before a storm takes them down, causing damage to grave markers in that area. Joe Borek suggested the trees be removed and replacement trees be planted. It was also noted that the stumps from the trees removed from the road right-of-way at the Otisco Cemetery location have not been removed making it more difficult to mow that area.

In the Smyrna Cemetery where trees had been trim the previous year due to storm damage, one tree in particular, often referred to as “the hand” was discussed for removal. It should be noted that when this tree was trimmed due to the storm damage that some of the limbs were still alive and the trimming was to leave those living portions intact. However they were not. It has been suggested that perhaps a person who does chainsaw carving could be found and asked to sculpt each of the fingers of “the hand” into an outward looking angel to enhance the cemetery. The tree is unique and has character.

As discussed in a previous meeting in October 2020, a family in neighboring Orleans Township had purchased two gravesites with the intent of constructing a small personal family columbaria allowing for the burial of 16 people. Orleans Township appears to have made the decision to not stop the construction of the family columbaria. After a brief discussion, the general implication for Otisco Township cemeteries is that if a family wanted to do the same in one of our cemeteries that it would be allowed.

Next Scheduled Meeting: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 @ 7:00 PM at the Township Hall.

Next Proposed Agenda: Fall walk through and clean up.

Smyrna Marker Repair – Update – Doty

Myrtle for front hill at Smyrna – possible assistance

Re-instatement of Cemetery CD

Foundation Repairs