

Johnson County Cemetery District Minutes January 11th, 2022

The regular monthly meeting of the Johnson County Cemetery District was held at The Willow Grove Cemetery in Buffalo, Wyoming on December 14th, 2021. The meeting was called to order by President John Zorbas at 2:00 p.m. Present were: John Hanson, Carolyn Fox, Craig Wetterlund, Nancy Elm, John Ehlers (Zoom), John Zorbas, Chanda Rule, Megan Boggs, Van Frazier, Aaron Palmer, Dave Harness (Via Zoom), Jill Wright (Via Zoom), Linda Greenough (via Zoom), Seth Taylor from the Buffalo Bulletin (via Zoom), Kay (via Zoom), Tracy Chesterman (Via Zoom), Barbara Mueller (Via Zoom) and Carla Bishop (Via Zoom).

Note: Anticipated a large crowd from the public and set for this. Not many attendants was the reality. Had alternate meeting place lined up if need to accommodate a large crowd. John Z. asked for any new items that needed to be added to the agenda. John Zorbas added item 1A to the public comments section of the agenda.

I. PUBLIC COMMENT:

1A. John Zorba started the meeting with a statement to try and address rumors about the Cemetery District Board actions that have been going around the community. The first rumor is that the local funeral home has been told that they cannot collect cemetery fees or sell burial spaces. John Z. states that there is nothing in place that prevents any funeral home from collecting fees and submitting them to the cemetery district for services. He also states that the Cemetery District staff has to process the paperwork like the deeds and burial permits but this is the only restriction. John Z. states there are multiple ways for the public to pay cemetery fees. This can be done either through the funeral home, coming to the cemetery business office or through a JCCD board member. The next rumor that John Z. addresses is that the cemetery is requiring families to get permission for burials. John Z. states this is simply not true. What is being asked is that the funeral homes call the JCCD before a burial is scheduled so there is no conflict with multiple burials. Last month the cemetery staff asked to implement a burial request form and this was solely to plan and manage any conflicts between burials dates and times and to better serve the public. JCCD is not asking for permission but we are asking for cooperation to deconflict burials processes. John Z. states that "we don't deal with just one funeral home" and that "we deal with many that are in different towns." The third rumor that John Z. wants to address is that JCCD board fired the last sexton. The fact of the matter is that he resigned John Z. states. John Z. also states that there is a portion of the public that thinks the JCCD acted irrationally when implanting the Saturday burial fee. John Z. then goes to say that "the facts are that the board has been collecting data for two years before this decision was made". The Saturday burial fee was not a rash decision. This fee was never designed to punish anybody John Z. says. John Z. then states that he has fielded questions from people in the public about the cemetery district having money in reserves as well as the amount. John Z. admits that yes there is money in reserves and this is publicly reported annually. John Z. then explains why there is reserved money. John Z. states that \$500,000.00 is reserved specifically for operation of cemeteries for 2 years in the case that there was no tax money coming in from the county for whatever reason. The current board decided to do this several years ago. John Z. also states that the remaining \$490,000.00 is designated for capital improvements for the cemeteries in Johnson County. John Z. gives an example of the public rest rooms that have been recently built in the cemeteries that cost \$160,000.00. John Z. explains that when there are improvements to public properties it gets very expensive very quickly because of different codes that have to be followed in design and construction. Another example John Z. gave another example on how expensive improvements were to the irrigation system repair project that cost \$90,000.00. John H. also mentioned the \$30,000.00 spent on the drainage project on the south end of the cemetery. John Z. states that the JCCD board has been able to keep expenditures flat and under the rate of inflation. John Z also states that there is a portion of the public that just asks why doesn't the JCCD board just raise the mil levy? John Z. says that cemetery board could ask for another mil levy to cover overtime for Saturday burials but the impacts to certain tax payers might be significant and really strain fixed low-income public members of the public. This information was considered when the decision was made to implement the Saturday burial fee John Z. states. John Z. also states that the additional mil levies might be needed in the future to operate the cemetery if the county tax situation gets any worse and this is a reason not to use them at this time. John Z. also states that the cemetery district only has 2 full time employees which provide services on Saturdays. He was asked why the employees aren't swapped for weekend coverage. John Z says there needs to be two employees at the cemetery working at the same time for

45 days from the day of purchase to pay the sales tax. If bought from a dealership a person is allowed 60 days. She also says it is not automatic that a person has to come up with the money immediately. Property taxes are paid 6 months in the arrears and it is not something that is not an automatic payment on any of them. Carla states that she was a victim of the \$400.00 Saturday Burial Fee. Her family had demands from the cemetery for payment of the Saturday Burial Fee before the grave would be open. She also states that as a person dealing with death, she prays that no one ever has to go through this experience because it was not pleasant. Carla also states that she feels that love ones are being held hostage by the cemetery with this fee. Carla states that she understands that the board wants to raise fees. Carla then says even when the State of Wyoming needed to increase fees they went by \$5.00 increments and didn't go from zero to \$400.00 instantly. Carla thinks the board went too excessive. John Z. asks Carla if she has a recommendation for the board. Carla states that she agrees with Craig W. and that the cemetery is a public entity. She also states that she can take her trash to the dump on Saturdays and they do not charge extra fees. John Z. asks Carla "as far as the fees, do you have a recommendation for the board?" Carla states that she would like to see them go back to zero. She also states that her family was not having a funeral because they wanted to but because that they had to. The family also had to hold the funeral in a timeline that would accommodate when other family members from other states could attend. John Z. ask Carla if she had any recommendation on how the board could recover overtime fees. Carla states that every other department in Johnson County does not get over time, they get comp time so why not this? Carla also asks if there is not day in the middle of the week that cemetery staff could take time off? John Z. states that this was looked at and explained how comp time is calculated at time and half and again stated that the cemetery only has a staff of two people. John Z. also brought up that the landfill has 4 or 5 people staffing it and that the landfill has the means to rotate schedules for weekend coverage because of the man power. Carla then stated that she has heard the cemetery district was comparing other surrounding counties cemeteries and their fees to Johnson County to justify the Saturday burial fees. Carla then gave the population numbers for Campbell, Sheridan and Johnson counties. Johnson County has a lot less population and she feels the JCCD is comparing apples to oranges with this issue. John Z. explains that the fact that JCCD looked at other cemeteries in surrounding areas as well as their fees was not the reason the fee was implemented. He continued with saying "the other cemeteries were looked at because the cemetery board wanted to make sure the fee amount was not excessive" and not to justify the JCCD burial fee. Barbara Mueller states through chat that the November board meeting minutes states that the fee was to discourage Saturday Burials and John Z. says that is a byproduct of this decision. John goes on to say that when Saturday funeral trends go down, the cemetery staff will have a higher quality of life in having time off on weekends. At this time Craig Wetterlund read a letter from former board member about Saturday burial fee issue. John Z. replies to this letter by stating that the cemetery has not changed the hours of operations and still gives services on Saturdays if needed. Carolyn Fox states that in one of the past meetings it was determine that this Saturday Burial Fee was not set in stone and if it isn't working there was the option for changing it. John H. and John Z. agreed and John Z. states this hold. true with anything the board does. John H. states that he would like to hear more form the public on this issue realizing there are public members upset about this. John H. also asks how much negativity is needed to reverse this decision and just how many residents are upset in the community? Nancy Elm states that with this fee there should be no comparison to anywhere else in Wyoming. John H. states that this decision was made collectively as the JCCD board. John H. also states that the public needs to know this fee was not implemented because Gillette did it. John H. goes on to say "just did some comparative shopping to see what the amount the fee needed to be set at". John H. states that he appreciates that the public is getting involved on this issue. The public involvement on this issue gives a snap shot on how well of a job the board is doing says John H. Nancy E. states that the \$400.00 fee is too much. John Z. says that the \$400.00 doesn't cover the cost of having two people here on Saturdays. The cost of overtime is not just a person salary but all the burden costs to include insurance and retirement and things like that says John Z. This is why the amount of the fee was determined John Z. says. John H. stated that the board did not come to the decision trivially and the board really looked hard at it and if it is going to be rescinded it need to be done in the same fashion. John H. states that he has heard many negative comments from the public on this issue but he needs more input from the public for a final decision. John H. suggests to the public that somebody might take the lead and start a petition against the Saturday Burial Fees. John H. thinks this would give the board a better feel for what the public in the large really thinks. John Z. feels that a petition really needs to be worded correctly. John Z. then states that the choice comes down to raising taxes for everybody to accommodate the few who partake in Saturday burials or implement a fee charged to the few people who partake in Saturday burials. This is along the lines of the results of the vote to raise taxes in Johnson County that was voted down last August.

The public spoke very loudly about no more taxes John Z. says. Craig W. states that special districts are sitting on a lot of money and the public would like to see used. John Z. agrees 100%. He also says that if the cemetery district is sitting on a lot of public funds that those funds need to be allocated and used or just give it back. John Z. then reads a poem to the board by Kipling. John Z's statement after reading the poem is that "as public servants you can't please everybody all the time". "All the board can ask is for public understanding and then move forward". John Z. states that the "board was not elected to be timid or be intimidated". These statements coincide with the message from the poem. Craig W. states that he had a problem with the \$400.00 being given to the first family which had to bury a baby. "This was the only money that family was charged", says Craig W. Craig W. explains how he relates to this situation because he is a dad that lost a child and he was "furious and insulted" that there was no hardship process for mitigate this fee in this instance. John Z. says that he will help Craig W. draft a policy with a process to grant hardship exemptions for a presentation to the board and then it can be voted on. John Z. states that at this time there is nothing in place for this to happen. John Z. also says that he is not saying that there shouldn't a hardship exemption process and that he is neutral on this topic. John Z. is willing to help any board member write a policy for presentation and offered this help directly to Craig W. again. Craig W. says he wants to see the fee rescinded totally because he voted against it. John H. states that implementing the fee was not a snap decision and rescinding it should not be either. John H. also states that exemptions will open up a can of worms on who decides to grant an exemption and what qualifies an exemption. John H. states that he feels the JCCD either has a fee or does not have a fee. Carolyn Fox then says she heard two comments from people in the public prior to the meeting. One comment opposed the fee and the other comment was "do what you have to do" with this person not liking the idea of paying more taxes. Carolyn Fox states that she doesn't like the fee but does not know what the answer is to cover the weekend time for burials. John Z. then says the cemetery district has had an ad in Wyoming Work Force since September trying to hire a part time person and there has been no interest or response. John Z. states that this might be the case in trying to hire another full-time employee. John Z. also says "If a full-time employee was hired, would there be enough work for this third person in the winter?" John Z. states that the JCCD board wants the public comments from Zoom messenger and the board will document these and put them in the meeting minutes. If there are questions from public submit them to cemetery staff and they will be brought up at the next meeting.

II. VOUCHER: John H. moves to accept vouchers and Nancy E. seconds. No discussion about vouchers There was a vote and motion carried.

III. MINUTES: Nancy Elm makes a motion to approve the minutes. John Hanson seconds the motion. No discussion. There is a vote motion carried.

IV. GUEST SPEAKERS:

V. TREASURER'S REPORT:

Chanda went over the financial report. Chanda stated that there was another significant check received from the county and this puts the JCCD at 66% of what is budgeted to collect from the county and 61% of total budgeted to be collected. Chanda also states that JCCD will probably not see another good-sized check until June. The next few months the check will be smaller because of how the tax collections take place. Nothing out of the ordinary as far as expenses other than a big payment to United Fire for the annual premium. Utility bills have gone up a little bit due cold weather. Chanda then goes over budget vs actual and states that JCCD is 50% through the fiscal year. There are 3-line items that are over run but they are not huge dollar amounts says Chanda. Chanda reports that JCCD has expended 44.67% of what has been budgeted. John Z gives direction to Van about working with John E to move money to over run line items. Chanda states that she is working on all the yearend tax forms and will be completed by the end of the month.

John Z asks if there is a motion to approve the financial report and submit to the board? Craig W. make a motion and Nancy E. seconds. No discussion. There is a vote, motion carried.

VI. ROLLING CALENDAR

John Z. states that this was put on the agenda to remind the board of the items that need reviewed monthly
Van F. presents no information on equipment review report
John E. states that surety bond review has been completed

VII. WILLOW GROVE SEXTON'S REPORT:

Van stated that the cemetery staff would like to request money to be moved from tree trimming line item in the budget and used to purchase 5 to 7 replacement trees for the cemetery. Craig W states there should be a line item to purchase trees already. John Z. states that in the past trees were purchased with capital improvement money as a match for a grant. John Z. states this instance is more of a maintenance function for purchasing trees because it is a small purchase. John E. states that line item includes miscellaneous functions in the description and small purchases are an operational cost. This line item would cover this purchase. John E also states that tree planting campaigns are a capital improvement function. The board approves the purchase of replacement trees. Van reports on Saturday burials for last year and they are at 31% of total burials for WG and 50% for Kaycee. Van reported that a Facebook page has been created for the cemetery district. This will be used to publish meeting agendas and as well as other things. John Z. asks if any of the board members wants to stop having this page. Carolyn F. states that she doesn't want it to stop but hopes it is positive. John Z. says that JCCD will try this for a while to see how it works. John H. says go for it. Van F. reports that the contractor for the office meeting room remodel will begin on January 31st and the carpet has been ordered. JCCD has spent \$13,677.50 (78%) on the cremation garden construction documents at this time Van reports.

VIII. KAYCEE SEXTON'S REPORT:

Van states there was a GFI that tripped at the Kaycee rest room that took the heater tape off line. Dennette found and reset it. Nothing froze up in the rest room. The heater tape has been operational since the GFI was reset. Dennette will keep a close eye on this. Nancy Elm asked forwarded a question from a Kaycee public member that was wanting to set a headstone on a burial space that the family owns but there will be no burial. Megan Boggs tells Nancy this person needs to get a hold of Dennette and she will flag out the burial spot for a headstone and as long as it is set to meet JCCD standard this will not be a problem.

IX. CIMS REPORT:

X. PRESENTATIONS:

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

XII. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Vendor policy. This was handed out last month and is basically a code of conduct for contractor/vendors on cemetery property John Z. states. John Z. also says this policy allows contractors/vendor to be ban from cemetery property if they are not following this code of conduct. This will be tabled until next month.
2. Permanent, part time and seasonal staff compensation for Saturday burials. Van stated that he talked with Chanda about having a choice of either compensation time or overtime pay for Saturday burial and how it would affect her and her job duties. Chanda told Van that it wasn't a big deal if the choice option was put into place. Van stated that he talked with John Ehlers on this issue as well. Van shared the pay plan that him and John Ehlers had come up with from their discussion. This pay plan included just getting over time pay for working on Saturdays to cover burials so the fee that is being charged is being used efficiently. Van states that he would like to propose a plan that consisted of paying a flat rate \$200.00 to each full-time staff member for each burial performed on Saturdays. This proposal would also include paying flat rate of \$150.00 to part time and seasonal employees for each burial they cover on Saturdays. The board requested that this proposal be put into writing for the next meeting to accommodate the board members pondering on it. Megan Boggs stated that she does not agree with this pay plan for Saturday burials and she would like to have a choice between compensation time and overtime pay. John Ehlers stated that he firmly believes that JCCD should have one process for compensation for Saturday burials. He also thinks this payment should be taken care of through payroll to simplify things.
3. Cremations Garden update. Van states that JCCD was sent another plan set that are at 95% complete. This plan set is still not ready for the construction phase. Megan states that there have been some landscaping and plant species included in this set of plans. John Z. states that JCCD will hold the final payment for the construction documents until a completed plan set is delivered. John Z. asks if we will have a completed plan set before the Strategic planning work session? Van states, he will find out from CPRA. John Z. asks Van if the plan set that have been presented from CPRA been shared with local landscaping companies for feedback? Van says this has not been done at this time.

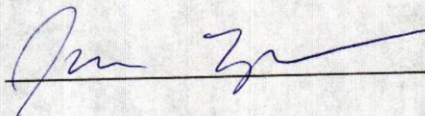
XII. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Amendment #20 to policy and procedures manual article 5. John E. suggests that JCCD add item 6b to article 5 which communicates that a requestor for a burial, be it a funeral home or private individual, would have to be responsible for and remit all cemetery fees. This would have to be done prior to a burial permit being issued and a grave being opened up. John E. then states that this would remove all possibility for confusion. John Z. states this falls in line with the burial request form that was approved at last month's board meeting. Craig W. states that he votes no! John Z. states there has not been a motion made as of yet. Carolyn Fox asks if every funeral home gets the burial request form? Van states that this form was sent to all funeral homes in the region. There was discussion among board members on how the burial request form is distributed and used. John E. makes a motion to adopt this amendment. There is more discussion about this amendment and the form and how it's used. John H. seconds the motion. There more discussion on this amendment. There is discussion from the public at this time. Votes takes place. Nancy Elm abstained, Craig Wetterlund votes no, John Hanson votes yes, John Ehlers votes yes, Carolyn Fox votes yes and John Zorbas votes yes. Motion is carried.
2. Board Member statements was tabled.
3. Amendment 21 to article 3 Policy and Procedures Manual. John Z states that in the JCCD employee handbook communicates all cemetery observed holidays. John Z. states that what is not in place is this communication to the public. This Amendment would communicate to vendors or contractors the cemetery observed holidays and put this into the Policy and Procedure Manual. John Z. says there has been a couple days added to original list from the employee handbook and they are Christmas Eve, New Year Eve and the Saturday before Memorial Day. Megan Boggs explains why there should be no burials on the Saturday before Memorial Day. This is because of the amount of people that come to the cemetery for this weekend to visit graves. John H. makes a motion to approve this amendment and Carolyn Fox seconds. No other discussion. There is a vote. Motions carried.

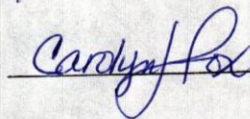
There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:18 P.M., following a motion by Nancy Elm, seconded by Craig Wetterlund.

The next meeting will be February 8th at 2:00 PM at the Willow Grove Cemetery Business Office.

Respectfully submitted by Van Frazier



Board President



Board Secretary