



## **Somersworth Historic District Commission**

One Government Way  
Somersworth, NH 03878

Minutes of Workshop Meeting on 22 February 2017: Adopted as submitted

### **Present:**

Laura Barry, Chair  
Martin Dumont, City Councilor and Representative to the HDC  
Tim Metivier, Building Inspector  
Richard Brooks, Commissioner  
Jenna Dunham, Alternate Commissioner  
George Poulin, Commissioner  
Pius Charles Murray, Commissioner and Secretary

### **In absentia:**

Arthur Hendrickson, Vice-Chair  
Beth Poulin, Commissioner

### **Cemetery Trustees Present:**

Woodland Openo, Chair  
Maggie Roberge, Board Member

### **Workshop Agenda & Minutes**

**I. Call to Order:** At 6:06 pm by the HDC Chair.

### **II. Workshop with the Cemetery Trustees.**

The HDC Chair congratulated the Cemetery Trustees on having Forest Glade Cemetery named to the National Historic Register; a letter from Peter Michaud informing the city of the honor was received by the HDC.

The HDC Chair opened the discussion by describing the HDC's interest in the continued upkeep of city-owned cemeteries. The HDC Chair stated that Mr. Poulin has been a prime driver on the HDC, urging the HDC and the city to do a much better job maintaining Lord's Court Cemetery in particular. Among the issues in which the HDC is interested concerning Lord's Court are overturned headstones, unmowed and overgrown grass, and the possibility of its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ms. Roberge thanked the HDC for its interest and for holding this workshop with the Cemetery Trustees. Ms. Roberge informed the HDC that the Cemetery Trustees had received bids on repairing the headstones; however, because the graves are private property (though the land is city-owned), an heir would have to be found to fix the headstones. The Cemetery Trustees were informed by the State that if after due diligence searching an heir could not be found then the city could pay for the repairs. The unexpected discovery of an heir to John Straw, the first person buried at Lord's Court, had offered hope to the city that more heirs would be identified thus reducing its costs in repairing broken headstones. The Cemetery Chair said that the NH Attorney General's office had a division that deals with cemeteries and which may be able to assist Lord's Court in skirting the requirement to find a relative. To the HDC Chair's question of what did due diligence consist in searching for relatives, Ms. Roberge responded that searching locally through town or city records appeared to satisfy the legal requirement; note however they Mr. Straw's relative was found in New Jersey. No national newspaper query searching for a relative was required either stated Ms. Roberge. The Cemetery Chair said that the cost for fixing the headstone on Mr. Straw's grave was \$25,000 and was paid by insurance. In order to be able to budget for the city's cemeteries and to put an end date on restoration/repair costs, the Cemetery Trustees have submitted a plan in which they wish to repair two headstones per year.

There was then an extended discussion between the HDC and the Cemetery Trustees concerning ongoing upkeep and ordinary maintenance of the city-owned cemeteries. Included in the discussion were possibilities of volunteers from community groups (e.g. Eagle Scouts, Liberty Mutual, Timberland, UNH students who need to do internships, prisoners from Strafford County jail, etc.) to undertake special narrow and time-limited maintenance projects or to ask DPW to mow the grass, trim trees, and otherwise make the grounds presentable. Mr. Poulin was adamant that since the land was city-owned the city had some responsibility for the cemeteries' upkeep. Mr. Metivier explained that to save money the city had outsourced maintenance of its parks and traffic circles.

Ms. Roberge explained that historically the Women's Club had undertaken to pay for the upkeep because one of its members was an heiress. Over time and after the heiress had left, the Women's Club stopped funding repairs and no one else in town stepped up. One option being investigated by the Cemetery Trustees is a Moose Plate Grant worth \$10,000 with no strings attached. Considerable discussion followed on the possibility of applying for multiple Moose Plate Grants, or multiple community groups applying for Moose Plate Grants for the city's cemeteries. In order to receive a Moose Plate Grant application, only a one page Letter of Intent briefly describing the project was required by grant's deadline.

There was some discussion on seeking listing of the Lord's Court Cemetery on the National Historic Register. The Cemetery Trustees were doubtful that it would qualify (e.g. a small

cemetery, no one famous buried there, etc.). But the HDC Chair said that it was Somersworth's first cemetery and that a later cemetery, Forest Glade, had made it onto the National Historic Register. Furthermore, the HDC chair stated that Lord's Court was an excellent example of the pre-walk through cemetery that became fashionable.

The Cemetery Trustees were very thankful for this full discussion with the HDC as well as for the HDC's interest in the city's cemeteries, one of which Forest Glade is now historic. The Cemetery Trustees expressed an interest in continuing the discussion and inquired if both boards would like to form subcommittees to continue discussion on ways to raise money, visibility, as well as to maintain and upkeep the cemeteries' appearances. The HDC Chair stated that the HDC would discuss the possibility of forming a subcommittee at its regular meeting. The HDC Chair thanked the Cemetery Trustees for this fruitful workshop.

### III. Adjournment:

The HDC Chair adjourned the Workshop at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Pius Charles Murray*  
(Mr.) Pius Charles Murray, MLS, MPA  
Secretary

