

**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
COMMITTEE FOR CEMETERIES**



**PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2025
MEETING MINUTES**

Link to Zoom recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn32KmE5moc>

1. Call to Order and Roll Call:

Attending: Co-chair Dee Dee Forte, Celeste Brooks, Peter Splaine, Steve Buzzell, Sue Polidura.
Staff: Suzanne Woodland, Corin Hallowell, Stephanie Seacord (recording secretary). Excused:
Michael Griffin.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the June 5, 2025 Cemetery Committee Meeting

On a motion by Celeste, seconded by Corin, minutes were approved with the following amendment to #5: Headstone straightening continues.

3. Point of Graves wall update/Capital Improvement Plan – Corin and Suzanne

Suzanne explained that funds for projects such as rebuilding the Point of Graves Wall are approved by City Council as part of the CIP that is incorporated in the annual budget. Cemetery restoration and preservation funds are already included in the CIP and staff will be reviewing the needs in order to make a recommendation for the FY27 budget. Element sheet for Cemetery Fund (pg. 104 of the pdf): <https://www.portsmouthnh.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/CIP-FY26-FY31-full-doc-AfterBudget.pdf>

Corin suggested that the first step is design and engineering (structural as well as addressing the flooding and future sea level rise) for the project, using some of the accrued funds. Suzanne will provide an update on available funds and Corin will provide more information on the design aspects. He asked that the committee assist with any available information about what the wall looked like, assessment of the layers of brick, granite, concrete uncovered by the damage (ask the mason for the Treadwell Mansion wall?), and the committee's thoughts on what they'd want to see that would be appropriate/historically accurate. A public hearing on the CIP is scheduled for the City Council meeting on November 17, 2025 (7 pm).

4. Potential 2026 DPW coordinated projects

- Union Cemetery wrought iron repair and fence straightening -- \$10,000 was donated by the Mahoneys/Granite State Minerals for this project. Dee had a preliminary discussion with blacksmith Peter Hapney who would like more details on the scope of the project. Dee and Sue will create an inventory/map for that purpose.
- Wendell Tomb preservation – Another potential use of CIP funds. Mike Griffin has suggested a potential mason. Dee will contact him or investigate others eg Stepping Stones.

5. Headstone straightening update – Steve worked over the summer on more expoxying of broken stones (also the granite post at The Plains that was damaged. Will turn back to straightening when it's cooler.

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6. Headstone cleaning – Celeste suggested that midweek afternoon/evening cleaning in the fall might gather more volunteers than a weekend. Hall Cemetery needs immediate work this fall, starting on September 6 at 8 am. Corin can supply a skid with 50-100 gal of water. Committee will suggest a fall cleaning schedule that can be bcc'ed to members and publicized in the City Newsletter. Then in Spring 2026, additional cleaning at North and Union Cemeteries can be scheduled to align with the America 250 commemoration. Less intense work is required on stones previously cleaned – simply spraying with D2 and letting seasonal rain wash them works well.
7. Committee administrative items
 - Mission – historic vs. new burial space. Committee agreed that its role is preservation not new burial options (eg Green Burials) or cemetery locations. The City Manager's office continues to address those items.
 - Vacancies – Suzanne will check on Duncan MacCallum's intentions. Committee openings are currently posted on the City Clerk's page:
<https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/agendas/2025/City%20Council/Vacancies%20August%202025.pdf>
And two people have expressed interest. John Chagnon who is a trustee of the private Proprietors Cemetery attended the meeting via zoom and offered his interest and expertise, but does not meet the "Portsmouth resident" requirement. The committee agreed that they welcome his insights as a non-voting member and will send him meeting notices, agendas, packets in advance of future meetings.
 - Meeting schedule – Committee agreed to continue meeting monthly (with the possible exception of Dec and Jan) on the first Thursday of the month at 4 pm.
8. Other Business
 - Corin reported on an email to the City Manager from Emma Stratton, executive director of the Portsmouth Historical Society. The Society will conduct historical tours of Point of Graves and North Cemetery in October, at 4 pm on Thursday and Saturdays. They requested permission to put temporary markers or lanterns on specific gravesites for the tours and to offer cider/doughnut refreshments on the sites. Celeste noted that cemeteries were used for picnicking in the past, but did not want to see tables with refreshments. Committee agreed and said the markers would be ok for the duration of the tours – placed and removed within a few hours of the tours. Committee also expressed interest in attending a tour to raise awareness of its work and invite new members and donations.
 - Sue Polidura who also does cemetery tours (weather dependent) invited the committee to participate.
9. Public Comment – None.
10. Adjournment – On a motion by Peter, seconded by Sue the meeting adjourned at 5 pm.
11. Next meeting: Thursday, October 2 at 4 pm.