
Office of Cemetery Oversight
Advisory Council On Cemetery Operations

Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 1, 2023
10:00 AM

Sign on information: Join with Google Meet- meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt

-Up to 250 participants

Meeting ID: <https://meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt>

Phone Numbers

To call in: **Dial** +1415-737-9563 **PIN:** 991991730#

HOUSEKEEPING:

COMAR 09.01.11.03, <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/09/09.01.11.03.htm> .03
Public Attendance.

- A. The public is invited to attend and observe any open session of the unit within the Department.
- B. Except in instances when the unit expressly invites public testimony, questions, comments, or other forms of public participation, or when public participation is otherwise authorized by law, a member of the public attending an open session may not actively participate in the session.

1. Roll Call/Quorum Announced: Staff

Present:

Deborah Rappazzo – Executive Director

Leila Whitley – Administrative Aide/Licensing Specialist

Lucas Manes – Financial Compliance Administrator

Kimberly Ward – Assistant Attorney General

Matthew Venuti – Assistant Attorney General

Staff Absent:

Dreama Anderson- Investigator

Council Members:

Frank Porter – Council Chair

J. Michael Bennett

Yvonne Fisher

Craig Huff

Erich March

Chris Palmer

John (Ron) Pearcey

Walter Tegeler

David Zinner

Council Members Absent:

Rebecca Bailey

Bruce Hultquist

Guests

n/a

2. **Meeting Called to Order:** By Frank Porter, Advisory Council, Chair at 10:06 am
3. **Approval of Today's Agenda:** Moved by Council Member Zinner and 2nd by Council Member Fisher, approved.
4. **Approval of April 2023:** Minutes moved by Council Member Palmer and 2nd by Council Member Bennett.

5. Executive Director's Report:

a. Discussion:

- Director Rappazzo introduced the new Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Cemetery Oversight (OCO), Matthew Venuti. Counsel Venuti gave a little background of himself.
- Council members were directed to submit their completed Advisory Council Reappointment paperwork for review and reappointment considerations.
- The new online payment process for initial and renewal applications is going along well. There are some licensees that are not submitting their completed renewal applications after they make their online payment to the OCO email address for processing.
- Director Rappazzo discussed the next step in technological innovation would be to allow our licensees the ability to print their own licenses in PDF format.
- The OCO is still not utilizing the ELMO System (new computer system that Occupational & Professional Licensing has introduced). Plans are to have the OCO utilizing the new system soon. Currently, other licensing boards/commissions/offices are already online. It will take a little time to work out the kinks for the process to work for OCO. Once the new online system works for one licensing board/commission/office works efficiently, then the others will come on board.
- Director Rappazzo has been and will continue assisting with the Athletic Commission until a new director is appointed.

6. Old Business:

- a. The PRINCE Project has come to an end regarding onsite training with incarcerated individuals. The offsite clean-up portion of the PRINCE Project has been suspended as well. There seems to be a lot of obstacles that have prevented the project from getting fully up-and-running. OCO along with our other Labor partners are determined to get this project back to its full operational capacity. This project helps incarcerated individuals return to society, providing them with job skills that could find them gainful employment opportunities.

7. New Business:

- a. Council Member Palmer inquired about the status of licensing for Reflection Park Inc. Director Rappazzo gave insight that the cemetery should be licensed later this year. They have a few more procedures to complete before they can obtain licensure.

b. Council Member Palmer further stated that Serenity Ridge Cemetery is functioning and is currently performing burials.

8. Investigator's Report (reported by the Director): Eight new complaints have been received since the last Advisory Council meeting. These complaints are pertaining to stolen memorial bases and preneed burial contracts. At this point OCO does not regulate pet cemeteries. However, effective October 1, 2023, the OCO will be providing licensure and handling consumer concerns for all pet cemeteries in Maryland.

9. Financial Compliance Administrator's Report:

- Staff Member Manes reported there are approximately 17 additional Perpetual and Preneed Burial reports that the OCO is waiting to receive.
- For 2022, 46 reports have been received and 11 more are expected to be submitted.
- For 2021, 40 reports have been received and 17 more are expected to be submitted.

10. Licensing Specialist's Report:

- Ms. Whitley - The new Online Payment process is going well. The only issue is, some of the licensees are not emailing their completed renewals to OCO when they make their payments. OCO sometimes must send them a reminder email to do so. OCO needs the completed renewal for the renewal licensing process to continue.
- Director Rappazzo – Everyone has their own unique renewal date (every 2 years) from the date of their initial license. For several years now, one year of revenue has been high, then the next year low, and so on and so forth.

11. Legislative Update:

- Counsel Venuti provided an overview of how Council Members appointments are processed:
 1. Recommendations from Council Members are submitted to the Director.
 2. The Director provides the recommendations to the Commissioner.
 3. The Commissioner provides the recommendations to the Secretary.
 4. The Secretary will agree or disagree with the recommendations. The entire process could take several weeks before final appointment considerations are finalized.

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- One legislative change was submitted for updating the “Final disposition of cremated human remains”. For a traditional burial (mausoleum or ground) the death certificate is created. From the Death Certificate a Burial Transit Document is created and must accompany the body until it is placed in its final resting place. Once the Burial Transit Document is received at the cemetery, the cemetery staff will go online and update the document stating what cemetery and when the individual was laid to rest. However, with a cremation, the final disposition is at the crematory.
 - Council Member March – The funeral home will get the family to sign, so if any family member wants to find out, at a later date, where the cremains are, typically, it is the funeral home that will give them that information. In rare occasions, family members take the body to the crematory and then everything is transacted with the family.
 - Director Rappazzo – If a cemetery was a licensee and they went out of business (with perpetual care), OCO would go to the court to request a receivership be appointed to take over the handing of all trusts and other finances as well as trying to locate someone to handle the day-to-day operation.
 - Another bill that the OCO is submitting is the creation of a fund for abandoned cemeteries. This fund would be managed by the OCO. The funds would come from donations made by Maryland Citizens when completing their State Income Taxes by way of checking a box at the bottom of their form. The OCO will create certain criteria where individuals could complete an application to have an abandoned cemetery cut, etc. The OCO will partner with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services(DPSCS) to unitize incarcerated individuals work teams to perform ground maintenance.
 - Director Rappazzo is requesting a fee increase be granted by regulation to ensure the OCO’s continued operation. The request is to increase the amount of the current contract fees expense of \$15. The OCO hasn’t requested a fee increase for over 10 years.
 - Council Member March – Burial costs are going up which is forcing a lot of consumers to go to cremation. With more cremations being done, an increase in fees will mainly be on 57 cemeteries to maintain the cost of the office (OCO) to be kept in place. It does not seem to be fair that 57 cemeteries are the bulk of the monies coming in to support OCO. All cemeteries in Maryland should have to pay their fair share since they are performing the same services as licensees.

12. Public Comment:

www.labor.maryland.gov

The next OCO Advisory Council meeting will be held on Thursday, September 28, 2023. This meeting will be held virtually. The October 26, 2023, meeting will be held at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Frederick, Maryland, in person.

- 13. Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 12:12 pm. A motion was made by Council Member Palmer and seconded by Council Member Zinner.

***A portion of this meeting may be closed pursuant to the General Provisions Article [Annotated Code of Maryland, §3-305\(b\)](#)