
Office of Cemetery Oversight
Advisory Council on Cemetery Operations

Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 26, 2023
10:00 AM

In-Person Information:

Meeting Location: Mount Olivet Cemetery-Chapel
515 S. Market Street, Frederick, MD 21701
(The Chapel is located behind the Francis Scott Key Memorial Statue)
Phone #: 301-662-1164

Virtual Sign-on Information:

Sign on information: Join with Google Meet- [meet.google.com/ ean-zoxr-zgt](https://meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt)
-Up to 250 participants

Meeting ID: [https:// meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt](https://meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt)

Phone Numbers/(US)+1 415-737-9563

To call in: **Dial PIN:** PIN: 991 991 730#

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

Council Members Present

Chris Palmer

David Zinner

Greg Huff

Ron Pearcey

Bruce Hultquist

Yvonne Fisher

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Absent Council Members

Frank Porter
Michael Bennett
Rebecca Bailey
Erich March

Staff Members Present

Matthew Venuti
Deborah Rappazzo
Dreama Anderson
Lucas Manes

Staff Members Absent

Leila Whitley

2. Meeting Called to Order by: Executive Director Deborah Rappazzo, 10:30 AM
3. Approval of Today's Agenda-Deferred to December meeting-No Quorum
4. Approval of August 1, 2023 – Minutes- Deferred to December meeting-No Quorum
5. Executive Director's Report
 1. Introduction-Executive Director, Rappazzo, welcomed everyone to the Advisory Council meeting and extended a thank you to the staff of Mount Olivet Cemetery for hosting the meeting.
 2. Mount Olivet Cemetery-History, Events and Restoration Presentation by Ronald Pearcey, Cemetery Superintendent and Chris Haugh, Community Relations & Historic-Preservation Manager:

Council Member-Pearcey and speaker Chris Haugh provided an overview of events occurring at Mount Olivet Cemetery. One of the events is known as the Friends Group which started years ago. This group is made up of volunteers that have been helping to clean stones, provide tours and do restoration work in the cemetery for several years. Their work throughout the cemetery will be highlighted during a cemetery tour. A few of the achievements done by the Friends Groups are as follows:

- Friends Group: Clean stones approximately 8-12 stones per month
- Friends Group: Preserve records, the chapel, and memorials, which are in the front 3rd of cemetery. Some of the preservation work involves many of the records pertaining to fallen civil war soldiers. Many of these burials are due to the cemetery's location to the war.
- Mount Olivet Staff: Created "Stories in Stone" which is a monthly article about someone buried at their cemetery. It can be found on the cemetery's website (Mountolivethistory.com-Stories in Stone). Tours and Lectures can also be reserved for individuals, small groups, and large parties.

3. Sudden Losses, Inc. by Sherri Tee, Executive Director, “Behind-the-scenes glimpse into the activities of the charity and more”

Sudden Losses, Inc. is a 501 c3 that accepts and donates cemetery rights (burial plots and burial goods and services) to families that have an unexpected death or are in need. Their website is “suddenlossesinc.com” which is currently under construction. They have no real budget; therefore, a lot of items are paid for by Ms. Tee. The nonprofit is looking for more volunteers. Information regarding the organization can be found on the IRS website. Information is not shared outside of the organization. George Washington/Mt. Lebanon has donated 24 rights. Their current Inventory is constantly changing. If you would like to submit an inquiry, you can send an email to Sherri Tee. Organizations only donate burial sites, advises of the additional costs, but does not cover them. It is possible to exchange space for another location for some of the corporations. Life does not come with a remote control. Sometimes you must get up and change the channel. Organization pays the transfer fees out of pocket. 5-6 families per week are serviced. The organization is near Washington DC.

OCO will place the organization’s information on the OCO website.

B. PRINCE Project-Update, by David Zinner

In the last month, working with Dept of Corrections. One of the large Catholic Cemeteries in West Baltimore. The biggest problem is that many cemeteries paying \$15/hour is a challenge is getting enough workers to come out.

6. Old Business*

7. New Business*

8. Investigator’s Report:

August -9 new complaints for which 7 have been closed. Most of the complaints were regarding memorial products.

September -16 new complaints, for "of which 7 have been closed and 4 were letters received from an unidentified individual.

9. Financial Compliance Administrator’s Report*

10. Licensing Specialist’s Report*

11. Legislative Update

Proposed Bills:

There are 3 bill proposals that will be submitted by the Maryland Department of Labor on behalf of the Office of Cemetery Oversight. These are as follows:

- Updating final dispositions of cremated human remains
- Registered Sellers selling preneed cremation certificates.
- Abandoned Cemetery Fund

Council Member Zinner asked a question regarding religious cemeteries being able to utilize the abandoned cemetery funds to care for their cemeteries, will this be allowed. Also stated that this bill appears to be a back door to regulating religious cemeteries.

The Abandoned Cemetery Fund would potentially be for all abandoned cemeteries with funding provided by an optional \$1 donation on state income tax forms. This donation request may appear on Maryland State 2025 Tax form. Therefore, the OCO will have time to put a plan together to manage the passing of this bill. Council Member Zinner asked that once the bill has been passed, will another advisory committee be formed? Executive Director Rappazzo responded that that would be very helpful and should be discussed in greater detail at a later meeting.

Regulation Amendments:

There are a few regulation updates that have been submitted for consideration. They are as follows:

- Increase contract fees to be increased from \$15 to \$30 to manage the rising operation cost of the Office of Cemetery Oversight and improve services for licensees and constituents.
- Updating current regulations to include pet cemeteries.
- Creation of a regulation requiring applicants, licensees, and all others subject to the jurisdiction of the Office of Cemetery Oversight, to respond to communications when requested within 30 days. The new regulation would also require a person to notify the Office of a change in address. Lastly, pursuant to the regulation the failure to respond within 30 days may be considered a violation of Business Regulation Article, Title 5, Annotated Code of Maryland. A regulation to change initial and renewal permit fees for nonprofit cemeteries not actively selling burial plots or burial goods.
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Process is to accept advisory council thoughts, then they are submitted to the Secretary, Secretary selects which regulations will move forward.

12. Public Comment-None

13. Adjournment 12:37 PM

*The starred items may be deferred until the December 7, 2023, meeting.