

## Article #2 Sexton Position

### Background

The Montague Cemetery Commission proposes that the Selectboard establish and appoint a Cemetery Sexton to manage the process for burials at Highland and Old South Cemeteries. Creating a paid position to support this work will create a sustainable structure for the town and allow the cemeteries to function efficiently without sole reliance on volunteers. Establishing this position requires Town Meeting approval.

The volume of burials for which the Town holds some coordinating responsibility fluctuates by year. On average there have been just over 11 burials per year in the past 10 years. In 2022 there were 14 burials and in 2023, 8 burials-to-date. While cremation burials can be planned in advance, body burial is a time-sensitive event that requires someone to be on call to mark the grave and coordinate with vendors or with the family in the cases where they family is making arrangements without a funeral director.

The Sexton position would be paid \$100 on a ‘per burial’ basis and this would cover the performance of the specific burial for which compensation is received as well as other responsibilities attended to in collaboration with the Cemetery Commission, such as selling plots, monitoring cemetery conditions and fielding calls from families who have questions about their plot. The Commission proposes to add \$2,000 to the FY25 operating budget to cover the Sexton position, which would cover up to 20 burials. Given the limited cost and revenue associated with burials, the Town Accountant views this as more efficient than establishing a revolving account.

With respect to revenue, the Cemetery Commission collects a \$100 fee per burial, which is deposited in the Cemetery Lot Receipts Reserved for Appropriation account. This fund functions similarly to a reserve fund and is available to support capital and other Cemetery costs, subject to a vote of Town Meeting. For reference, the Highland Cemetery fee structure follows:

- \$550 for “conventional” burial in the lawn section;
- \$700 natural burial section – Montague residents;
- \$1,000 natural burial section – non-Montague residents,
- \$100 fee paid by the family of the deceased for burial services in the lawn and natural burial section.

## **Rationale**

The creation of the Cemetery Sexton position is one strategy within a larger framework to create sustainability for managing the town cemeteries. The Commission is interested in developing an infrastructure that is not reliant on volunteers alone to manage and maintain the active and the historic cemeteries of Montague.

The duties of the proposed Sexton position are outlined below:

### **Advance Burial Support Services**

- Receive calls from funeral director or family being notified of the death with a date for the burial. In the lawn section, use historic records to mark the plot for the contractor who digs the grave. This involves locating the plot using a metal detector, probe and measuring tape. If a natural burial, locate the grave directly next to the last one buried.
- If a body burial in the lawn or natural burial section, contact the contractor to inform them that the grave is marked and where to locate it for grave preparation (digging).
- If a cremation burial, dig the grave to specifications. Prep the gravesite.

Approximate time for burial prep: 1-2 hours

### **Day of Burial Services**

- If a body burial, meet the funeral director the day of the service, collect paperwork.
- If a cremation burial not using a funeral director, meet the family the day of the service, handle any arrangements discussed, collect paperwork, close the grave.
- Process paperwork with the town.

Approximate time for burial: 1-2 hours

### **Other responsibilities in collaboration with the Cemetery Commission**

- Sell burial plots including: meet individual at the cemetery to choose a plot (lawn section), or tour natural burial section, process payment and file paperwork (deed, record transaction with the town, etc.);
- Respond to calls related to placing the headstone, records research, green burial questions, etc.

Time for other responsibilities: Varies