

The Montague Cemetery Commission wishes to provide the residents of Montague the opportunity to be buried in a town cemetery, however the current town cemeteries are all tiny, historic, and full. The Commission has been advocating to acquire land for a new cemetery since the 1970s, and this current incarnation of the Commission has been on the search for a suitable parcel for the last two years.

We have been serendipitously offered the chance to acquire Highland Cemetery on Turners Falls Road which fits all of our search criteria and more. Highland Cemetery is owned and operated by a private non-profit cemetery corporation. While the cemetery is well maintained and managed, the Board is no longer able to take care of it. The Highland Cemetery board would like to gift the cemetery to the town. It comes with a modest endowment.

We believe it is in the strategic interest of the town to assume ownership. The Cemetery is located on a 7.5 acre parcel, with ample open lawn space for new plots as well as 2.5 wooded acres that we would use as an area for green burial. The acquisition of Highland Cemetery would not only allow town residents to be buried in a town cemetery, but would also offer a green burial alternative which does not currently exist in any Montague cemetery.

Montague has 7 private cemeteries owned and operated by churches or cemetery associations, and 7 historic town cemeteries. Our town cemeteries are currently maintained by a local contractor and paid for with a modest annual maintenance budget of \$7,000.

Annual Expenses: \$5,000

Anticipated costs for annual maintenance and insurance for Highland Cemetery

Lawn Section Revenue: \$2,750

Anticipated yearly revenue from plot sales for existing lawn section
(5 x \$550 per plot) lawn section

Green Burial Revenue: \$3,750

Anticipated yearly revenue from plot sales for new green burial section
(5 x \$750 per plot) green burial section once established

Yearly Combined Revenue \$6,500

Anticipated annual revenue from lawn and wooded sections once green burial section is established

One-time expense \$2,000

Anticipated start-up costs associated with creating a wooded green burial area - Phase 1

Anticipated overall impact on Montague Cemetery Commission FY2022 budget:

Request \$4,250 for FY2022 to create the green burial section and to cover any shortfall for maintenance and insurance in the first year of town ownership before the green section is established. Going forward, the Commission anticipates requesting a slight increase in the annual cemetery budget to cover any rising maintenance costs for all of our town cemeteries. (Last increase was \$1,000 in FY2017.)

If we move forward with the process, Town Meeting will need to vote to accept ownership of the cemetery. We would then need to engage Town Counsel to support the transfer of the land and any required filings.