

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This study examines what is called the Elm Street Cemetery in Braintree, Massachusetts as part of a larger preservation project under the direction of Ms. Barbara Donohue.

Although the cemetery has great potential, much must be done.

Many of the problems seen at the Elm Street Cemetery are the result of deferred maintenance – doing too little over too long a period of time. The problem with this approach is that eventually the historic fabric can no longer sustain further maintenance cuts without a significant and noticeable degradation of the historic fabric. The Braintree cemetery is at, or perhaps even past, that point. Exacerbating the problem are changes in the funding level and staffing devoted to the cemetery by the Town of Braintree.

It is critical that the cemetery have a solid, permanent funding base. The requirements of cemetery maintenance do not change based on political vagaries or economic forecasts. In fact, their funding requirements only increase with age.

Massachusetts's lawmakers were progressive and in 2000 saw this need, enacting the Community Preservation Act that allows cities and towns to preserve open space and fund historic preservation. In 2002 Braintree accepted this invitation and allocated 1% of its property tax to this initiative. The town's Planning and Community Development Office oversees these funds. We strongly recommend that the cemetery begin receiving substantial funding from these funds for preservation activities recommended by this study. This is critical step in the long-term preservation of the Elm Street Cemetery.

Another critical problem is that the town has made detrimental changes to the cemetery landscape. Original, planned landscape features dating to the early 19th century have been removed. Original plantings have been cut down and tombs have been demolished. These actions have dramatically affected the cultural landscape and jeopardized the property's eligibility for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The town must become familiar with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation and ensure that they are uniformly applied to all actions in the burial grounds.

Even routine maintenance, such as mowing, is damaging stones. Other aspects of routine maintenance, such as trash collection, have fallen by the wayside, resulting in the cemetery having a dilapidated and uncared for appearance.

It is essential that the Town regain control of its cemetery and ensure that henceforth maintenance very carefully follows the recommendations offered in this study. A high priority must be the replanting of the cemetery, using historically appropriate trees and shrubs.

Maintenance such as mowing and collection of trash must be significantly improved. This will involve additional staffing and time. Large deck mowers are inappropriate and must be replaced by small walk-behind mowers. The heavy line used in trimmers must be replaced with much lighter line to prevent damage to the stones. Trash, leaves and other debris must be collected, not mowed over. The grounds must be periodically aerated. The turf requires periodic fertilization. Trees must be professionally pruned.

These are the expenses associated with appropriate cemetery maintenance.

The town must establish rules for the cemetery, post them, and ensure they are enforced. For example, we observed many stones disfigured by dogs urinating on them. This is disrespectful. The cemetery is not a dog run and animals must be prohibited from the cemetery grounds.

We also recommend a new, comprehensive program to reduce the vandalism we observed in the cemetery. This program combines increased police patrols, neighborhood participation, a friends group, more vigilant staff, and more careful record keeping.

A feature often associated with the cemetery is its heavy decorative cast iron fence along Elm Street. Lacking appropriate maintenance, this fence evidences a broad range of significant problems including corrosion, broken welds, and even missing sections.

The granite boundary wall, while receiving at least one maintenance effort at some time in the past, is also rapidly deteriorating. Hard Portland cement mortars smeared on the wall must be removed and the wall appropriately repointed. Two sections evidence displaced stones and must be rebuilt. The iron fence topping the wall is in deplorable condition with much corrosion and many missing sections.

Fences around different plots are in equally unstable condition and require immediate attention.

The three surviving tombs in the cemetery each exhibit problems including inappropriate repointing, corrosion of doors, build-up of soil, and damage to the stonework.

There is significant damage to a broad range of the stones in the cemetery. Some have been moved over time to facilitate mowing – changing the appearance and integrity of the burial grounds. These stones must be placed back in their original, and correct, position. Slate stones exhibit spalling and splitting characteristic of clay-

rich slates and these stones require conservation treatments to ensure that they do not further deteriorate. Many more stones are broken, through either vandalism or abusive lawn maintenance practices. These stones require repair.

This report evaluates all of the identified needs, classifying them into three broad categories:

- Those issues that are so critical – typically reflecting broad administrative issues, health and safety issues, and issues that if delayed will result in significantly greater costs – that require immediate attention during this fiscal or calendar year.
- Those issues that, while significant and reflecting on-going deterioration and concerns, can be spread over the next 2 to 3 years. This allows some budgeting flexibility, but this flexibility should not be misconstrued as a reason to ignore the seriousness of the issues.
- Finally, those issues that represent on-going maintenance and preservation issues. These costs can be spread over the following three to five years. Like the Second Priority issues, this budgetary flexibility should not be interpreted as allowing these issues to slide since further delay will only increase the cost of necessary actions.

Conservation activities at the cemetery will cost in excess of \$250,000. While this is a substantial sum, it reflects correction of deterioration which has been on-going for several decades.