

Green Burial in Westford

- ▶ Lisa Groves
- ▶ Westford Cemetery
Commission

- ▶ MHOA Quarterly Meeting –
Green Burials
- ▶ May 16, 2024





2018



► **February - Cemetery Commission Meeting:**

- 3 Residents request green burial
- Commissioners open, want Board of Health input
- Cemetery Supervisor in favor

► **April - Board of Health Meeting:**

- Health Director: Green burial “less invasive” than conventional and poses no threat to drinking water or soil
- BOH approves green burial so long as standard precautions taken to protect ground water and public health and safety



2018

► **May:**

- With BOH approval, Cemetery Commission votes to allow green burial
- Next step: ***Town of Westford Regulations for Municipal Cemeteries*** require burial vaults – must be updated, and any revision needs Town Meeting approval

► **June – November:**

- Cemetery Commission membership and Cemetery Department staff changes

► **December:**

- Cemetery Commission appoints 8-member ***Green Burial Advisory Subcommittee*** to draft green burial regulations and provide opportunities for residents to learn about green burial



2019



➤ **January – June: Subcommittee Activities**

- Appointees: 2 commissioners, Cemetery Supervisor, Environmental Services Manager (Health Dept staff), 4 residents
- Meets approximately 30 hours
- Holds public info session at library attended by 26 people and recorded by Westford CAT



Subcommittee Main Topics

- **Green Burial Council** standards for cemeteries
- What's allowed, what's not?
- Body Preparation
- Burial Practices
- Memorialization
- Grave sales - specific lots conveyed or right to be buried only?
- Landscaping and maintenance
- Education & outreach (including funeral homes)



2019

► July – August:

- Subcommittee and Commission integrate green burial regulations into main regulations document and finish revision

► September:

- Town Counsel approves revision for Special Town Meeting Warrant

► October:

- STM unanimously approves revised ***Town of Westford Regulations for Municipal Cemeteries***, including green burial – it's official!



2020

► **January:**

- Pine Grove Cemetery expansion planning begins
- Will include designated green burial section

► **In the interim...**

April 2020


- 15 “provisional” green burial graves designated along edge of Pine Grove Cemetery until expansion project completed



November 2020

- First green burial in provisional section



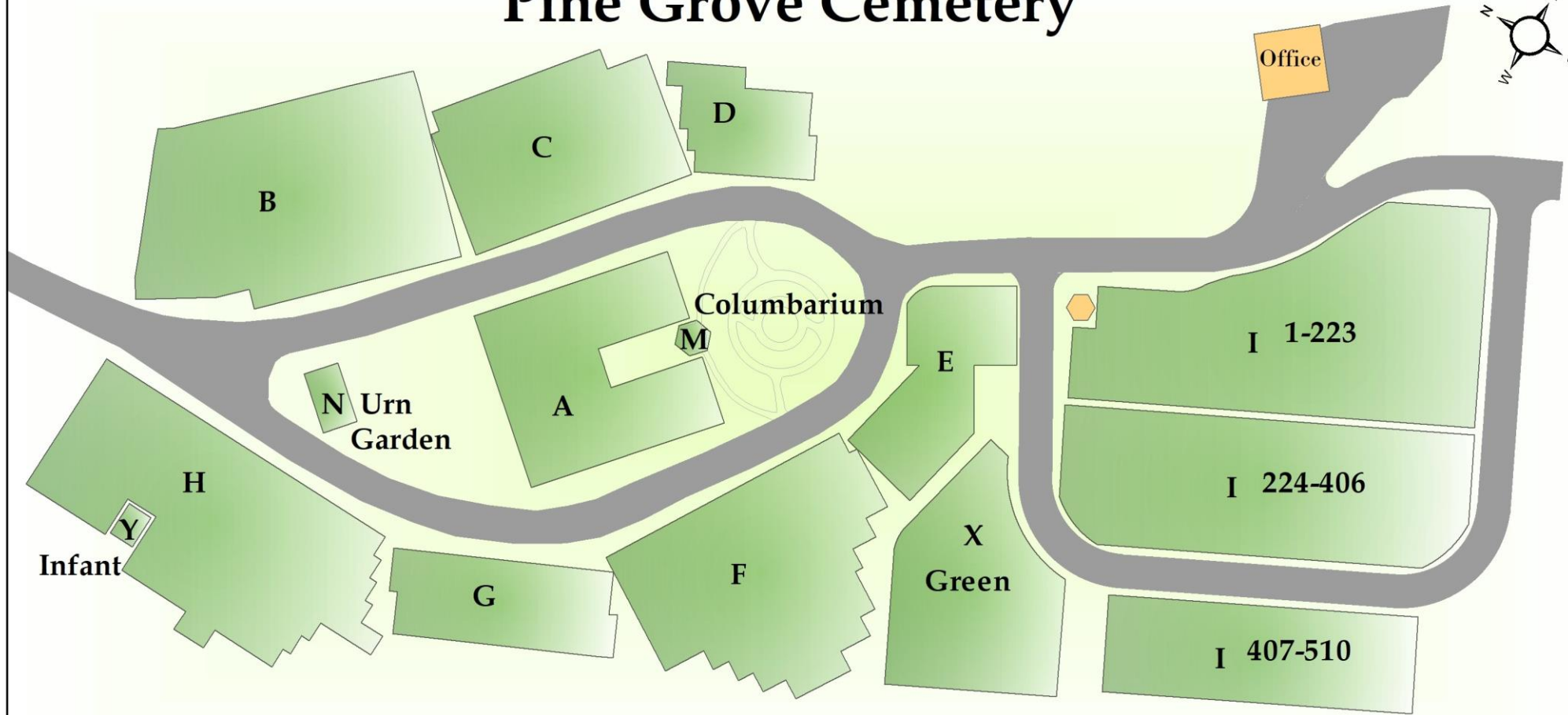


2022

► **April:**

- ***Green Burial in Westford: General Information and Guidelines*** booklet published (available on Cemetery Department webpage)
- Pine Grove Cemetery expansion completed: 987 graves including 148-grave green burial section

Pine Grove Cemetery



68 Forge Village Road, Westford, MA



1	16
2	17
3	18
19	33
34	48
35	49
36	50
51	64
52	65
53	66
67	78
68	79
80	88
81	89
90	95
91	96
92	97
98	104
99	105
106	106
107	107
108	108
111	111
112	112
113	113
113A	113A

009	008	007	18	17	16	25	24	33
010	19	20	27	26	25	24	33	34
011	21	22	28	27	26	25	24	35
21	20	19	28	27	26	25	24	36
22	21	20	29	28	27	26	25	37
31	30	29	38	37	36	35	34	38
32	31	30	39	38	37	36	35	39
40	39	38	40	39	38	37	36	40
41	40	39	41	40	39	38	37	41

148	147
146	146
145	145
144	144
143	143
142	142
141	141
140	140
139	139
138	138
137	137
136	136
135	135
134	134
133	133
132	132
131	131
130	130
129	129
128	128
127	127
126	126
125	125
124	124
123	123
122	122
121	121
120	120
119	119
118	118
117	117
116	116
115	115
114	114
113	113
112	112
111	111
110	110
109	109

089
088
087
086
085
084
083
082
081
080
079
078
077
076
075
074
073
072
071
070
069
068
067

040	
041	
042	
043	
044	
045	039
046	038
047	037
048	036
049	035
050	034
051	033
052	032
053	031
054	030
055	029
056	028
057	027
058	026
059	025
060	024
061	023
062	022
063	021
064	020
065	019
066	018

001
002
003
004
005
006
007
008
009
010
011
012
013
014
015
016
017

348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356
315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323
282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290
251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259
224	225	226	227	228	229			

432	431	430	429
458	457	456	455
484	483	482	481
510	509	508	507



To Date

- ▶ 38 green burial lots sold (25 to non-residents) – approximately 30% of sales
- ▶ 8 green burials performed (including 1 requested in older cemetery)



Community Memorial Stone

Natural Burial Pine Grove Cemetery

May 2022



Cemetery Supervisor prepares for first green burial in new section. The lowering device will be used. Shovels are available for friends and family to backfill the grave if desired.



Two slats placed on grave floor as spacers so straps can be easily removed



Funeral director and assistants transport casket from hearse to grave on rolling cart



Casket moved to lowering device



Lowering device activated



Casket has been lowered and straps now removed from under casket



Ready for service to begin

Natural Burial Pine Grove Cemetery

September 2023





Family & friends transport the casket



Lowering the casket







Challenges: Landscaping

- Initial seeding of native grasses disturbed by heavy rains
- Surrounding lawn and weeds creep in
- Longer growth looks odd to some and obscures flat markers
- **Solutions**
 - Mow pathways
 - Flat markers placed in pathways outside grave boundaries
 - Be flexible – landscape is ever evolving



Challenges: Grave Settling

► Factors Observed

- Burial container – caskets vs shrouds
- Heavy rainfall
- What goes into the grave

► Solutions

- Mound higher
- Add soil after settling
- Flat markers placed in path outside grave boundary



Challenges: Grave Settling

► **Factors Observed**

- Burial container – caskets vs shrouds
- Heavy rainfall
- What goes into the grave

► **Solutions**

- Mound higher
- Add soil after settling
- Flat markers placed in path outside grave boundary



Contact Information

► Westford Cemetery Department

- Email: cemetery@westfordma.gov
- Phone: [\(978\)692-5526](tel:(978)692-5526)
- Website: <https://www.westfordma.gov/1055/Cemetery-Department>

► Westford Cemetery Commission

- Lisa Groves, Chair
- Email: lgroves@westfordma.gov



Questions?



Green Burial Regulations

- The following 9 slides comprise the draft green burial regulations proposed by the Green Burial Advisory Subcommittee to the Cemetery Commission in July-August 2019, that were integrated into the ***Town of Westford Regulations for Municipal Cemeteries*** revision. Final wording may vary slightly. View the final, approved regulations [here](#).



Rules & Regulations Categories

- Definitions
- Body Preparation
- Burial Containers
- Memorialization
- Grave Site
- Sale of Graves
- Green Burial Process
- Care and Maintenance

Definitions

- **Green Burial** shall mean a burial that allows the body to decompose naturally, returning all elements to the earth through environmentally sound practices.

Body Preparation

- No embalming is permitted.
- Removable medical devices are to be removed prior to burial.
- Any clothing, jewelry, or mementos must be biodegradable.
- **The Cemetery Department reserves the right to refuse a body that is not properly prepared.**

Burial Containers

- Vaults and grave liners are not permitted.
- Burial containers must be made from materials that are biodegradable, nontoxic/nonhazardous, and natural/plant derived, with shrouds permissible.
- Shrouded bodies must be entirely wrapped, and must be supported on a solid softwood board, such as pine, which stays in the grave. Plywood and particle boards are not acceptable.
- **The Cemetery Department reserves the right to refuse a body that is not properly contained.**

Memorialization

- Markers are not required.
- If desired, markers must be flat, natural (unpolished), locally-sourced stones, no larger than 1' x 2'. The top will be set flush with the ground. Engraving is permitted prior to installation.
- We have since added a community memorial stone option.

Grave Site

- Graves will be mounded to accommodate settling.
- Graves will be 3-4 feet deep.
- No plantings are permitted.
- After a burial, the grave site will be allowed to return to its natural state.
- Cut flowers may be placed on top of a recent burial and will be removed by cemetery staff approximately one week later.
- No decorations, other than cut flowers as stated above, are permitted.

Sale of Graves

- *We use sequential burial, which means that one may pre-purchase the right to be buried, however the actual site isn't assigned until time of need. Burials take place one after the next, sequentially, working away from the most recent burial site to minimize disturbance to the land and vegetation.
- *This regulation is obsolete. In the new green section we allow pre-purchase of specific graves since backhoe can travel on established pathways.

*Green Burial Process

- Graves will be opened by Cemetery personnel.
- Families and friends may lower the body into grave.
- Family and friends may help fill the graves after body is lowered.
- *This was not included in the Town of Westford Regulations for Municipal Cemeteries, but

Care and Maintenance

- The green burial area will be maintained with minimal interference and maximum effort to preserve the natural environment.