

Special Properties Committee Meeting
Tuesday, August 26, 2025, 9:00 a.m. Village Hall

Officials Present: Chairman Berger, Council member Galicki

Visitors: Mayor Koons, Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Former Mayor Brett, Council member Cavanagh, Street Commissioner Young, Police Chief Rizzo, Administrative Assistant Galicki, former Cemetery Committee members Cindy Nairn, Patty Mills, and Ed Pyle; Former Street Commissioner Tim Alder, Kaley Richard, Chagrin Valley Times, Dan Mills

Chairman Berger called the meeting to order. The Mayor had those attending the meeting introduce themselves. Ed Pyle, Cindy Nairn, and Patty Mills were part of the Cemetery Committee for seven years. Patty Mills explained that her husband, Roger Mills, had been on Council for 27 years. He had indicated that he wanted to be buried in the South Russell Cemetery, but there was none so she went to work on changing this. Matt Brett, Former Council member and Mayor, served during the period of the discussion and decision to move forward with building the Cemetery. Cavanagh explained she is currently involved with the Property Committee, which is considering an expansion of the Cemetery. The Fiscal Officer stated that she worked with the Cemetery Committee assisting them with research and direction.

The Mayor presented slides of the Cemetery. History of the plantings were discussed, to include the row of arborvitae which had been planted at Nairn's recommendation to mitigate the road noise and provide privacy. The Mayor spoke about the placement of flags on the graves of veterans, the bioswale, and waterflow and land. He concluded that everything looks good and is not a problem.

Mayor Brett addressed the process of creating the Cemetery and said the topic of a cemetery was discussed for many years. There was another small cemetery in the Village that could no longer be used. When the topic was raised, the Village was in a position to have property that seemed to make sense. Nairn, Mills, and Pyle did a great service to the Village of understanding what is involved in developing a cemetery to include infrastructure items, pricing, management, software, etc. For years the committee made presentations to Council, and Council came around to the thinking that the Village had a responsibility to provide this kind of service. The Engineer and a consultant created the design and eventual plan. He gave credit to the committee for spearheading this endeavor and driving it forward.

Cavanagh, who grew up in South Russell, commented that she loved Rarick Cemetery and continuing efforts to keep it going. She hoped the Village could acquire a little more property to enable cars to go up and park. While planning the Village's 75th anniversary in 1998, she called Jeannette Grovner, who has published a book about the cemeteries of Geauga County. Grovner said there were no records for Rarick Cemetery. However, Linda Mattern ultimately acquired records through the courthouse and worked with Grovner to determine who is buried where in

the Cemetery. She noted that there are fewer headstones than burials. Over the years, Former Street Commissioner Alder repaired some broken stones. Cavanagh wanted to see this continue. Going forward, she was grateful that the Village was able to purchase the property on which the Village Cemetery is located despite legal issues and criticism. It has an area for expansion. Regarding the Cemetery, she said it needs color. She acknowledged the importance of making the graves of loved ones pretty and for it to be a nice place to visit and understood that this is what Nairn envisioned.

Dan Mills recalled sitting in on plenty of discussions amongst the residents and public meetings about the Cemetery. He was grateful his mother, Patty, was able to be part of the team that brought it to life.

Mayor Brett spoke about the public meetings that were held and emphasized the importance of allowing the residents to be engaged.

The Fiscal Officer distributed a report with Cemetery statistics. She advised that when planning the Cemetery, the consultant told the committee it would sell out in two years. Ten years later, there is still quite a bit available. Initially, the thought was to only sell the section by the street. The consultant had informed the committee that these tended to be most popular as they were by the road which was prestigious. This turned out to not be the case. The decision was ultimately made to install the arborvitae, which has made a row of lots unavailable due to tree roots. As it turned out, the inner portion of the Cemetery has been more popular. Currently, 25% of the full lots and 26% of the cremation lots have been sold. Additionally, there have been three scatterings. Galicki clarified that the percentages pertain to the developed Cemetery property and do not include the undeveloped property available for future burials. Nairn indicated that the total property available for the cemetery is 7.26 acres.

The Mayor asked Street Commissioner Young to give his thoughts on future plans for the Cemetery. The Street Commissioner thought it was currently just general maintenance, including cleaning up the bioswale and other vegetation areas. Former Street Commissioner Alder relayed that having the right equipment was the challenge in grave and foundation preparation.

Cavanagh addressed the potential for columbarium.

Berger commented on his experience in learning about the Cemetery as part of the Properties Committee. His observation is that the Village takes a lot of pride and respect for the residents and their families with regard to the Cemetery. In particular, he enjoyed being a part of maintaining the historical nature of Rarick Cemetery as well as creating a historical space with the South Russell Village Cemetery. He feels grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.

Nairn thanked Mayors Koons and Brett for supporting the difficult task of building the Cemetery. Nairn and Mills saw it as a service to the Village, but Pyle's approach was from a business perspective, which proved to be important. A cemetery consulting firm from New York assisted

in the process to some extent and were told that South Russell Village was the only community in the United States that was jumping in feet first to build a brand-new municipal cemetery. No one else in the country was ready to take on a project like that. Nairn reiterated that she wanted the Cemetery to be bucolic, not business like, and she thought they ended up with both and it is not a money pit as previously feared. The Village has done an outstanding job of having such a lovely municipal cemetery as a service to residents.

Pyle said he had never worked with two such dedicated ladies who pushed him and put books together and worked for hours and hours to see it through. Mayor Brett supported the committee after tough sessions with Council and encouraged them to keep running with it. None of the three of them had any experience with building a cemetery, and he reiterated that they were great ladies, and it was a great experience. Brett stated that without them, the building of the Cemetery would not have occurred. They came up with the plan, idea, concept, and got Council to support it over the years. He offered kudos.

Cavanagh asked what the hardest part of the process was and where they encountered push back. Nairn said it was just selling the idea because of the concern about the cost to the Village. Dan Mills added that there were also priorities that other people had in the Village like widening Bell Rd. Nairn agreed that there was a lot going on at the time. Pyle recalled an issue with a developer wanting the property to develop a strip mall and high-rise apartment and having to negotiate this with Council. The Mayor thought that the committee did not give in and that was the best thing.

Cavanagh stated that the Cemetery is there because it is born of heartache. People are heartsick when this is going on and it is always what they must bear in mind with the end of someone's life. People will never forget the day they buried someone there.

Berger adjourned the meeting at 9:34 a.m.