

**OFFICE OF CEMETERY OVERSIGHT
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON CEMETERY OPERATIONS
MINUTES**

DATE: March 24, 2016

TIME: 10:45 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

PLACE: Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation, 500 N. Calvert Street,
3rd Floor Conference Room, Baltimore, Maryland 21202

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Porter called the meeting to order at 10:45 A. M.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Frank Porter, Acting Chair
Yvonne Fisher
Andrew Linthicum
Erich March
Walter Tegeler
David Zinner

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

STAFF PRESENT

Deborah Rappazzo - Investigator
Olusegun (Victor) Sokoya – Financial Compliance Administrator
Leila Whitley - Administrative Aide
Paulette Wirsching - Assistant Attorney General

STAFF ABSENT

Marilyn Harris-Davis – Director

VISTORS

Ruth Ann Arty – Board of Morticians
Kaija Dallessandro - Baltimore Crematory at Loudon Park
Craig Huff – Moreland Memorial Park Cemetery

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HOUSEKEEPING

Minutes

The minutes from February 25, 2016 were approved (with corrections).

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Director's Report is deferred until the next meeting.

FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr. Sokoya reported on his proposed balance sheet template. There has to be verification of the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to be in good standing to complete financials for cemeteries. There should be some consistency when cemeteries submit their balance sheets. Cemeteries have been submitting balance sheets in a variety of ways. The proper and useful classification of accounts, such as current assets and liabilities as well as long term assets and liabilities should be a part of the balance sheets. A lot of companies do not separate the current from long term. General accounting practices (GAP) should be followed.

INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

Ms. Rappazzo reported for the months of January and February, there have been 73 complaints, 26 which are formal complaints and 47 were inquiries which could potentially be a formal complaint. Some complaints are regarding some sales counselors at cemeteries trying to persuade consumers to purchase a memorial from the cemetery and not an outside monument dealer. Consumers stated that if their loved ones' memorials were not purchased at the cemetery, but from an outside vendor, their memorials would not be provided the same standard of perpetual care. Consumers also stated that they were told by cemetery sales counselors, that if their loved ones' monuments were ran over by the cemetery maintenance trucks, the cemetery would not replace it and would expect the outside monument dealer to do so.

Another common complaint has been maintenance. Ms. Rappazzo has been explaining to consumers that the ground at cemeteries is too wet from precipitation from the snow and the rain. A lot of maintenance will not be able to be done until spring is actually here (for example, the temperature).

The wall at Cedar Hill has been fixed and resolved. There was discussion in reference to how close can someone get buried next to a river/pond, without an issue arising such as the recent issue at Cedar Hill.

CEMETERIAN SEMINAR

Ms. Arty stated she spoke with Director Harris-Davis recently regarding the cemeterian seminar might be held in either May or September.

One item that was suggested to go on the agenda for the seminar was, if a consumer purchased a memorial from an outside monument dealer, who is responsible for the perpetual care? A suggestion was made to have a 'ten commandments' put together for the licensees regarding what counselors should or should not do. Another suggestion was to have Frequently Asked Questions developed for the seminar.

LEGISLATIVE

Ms. Wirsching reported on a few legislative bills. Senate Bill 536 in regards to increasing the submission time for perpetual care reports to OCO from 120 days to 150 days passed. Senate Bill 535 in regards to not requiring a CPA review to be submitted to OCO was unfavorable. Senate Bill 897 in regards to taking loans from perpetual care trust funds was unfavorable.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Mr. Zinner reported on bench right fees. There is a wide range of what cemeteries are charging for bench right fees. Cemeteries are still charging different fees, having a big difference from one cemetery to another and not being consistent. The Office of Cemetery Oversight (OCO) cannot regulate fees. A suggestion was made to include bench right fees on Ms. Rappazzo's inspection sheet.

NEW BUSINESS

The next Advisory Council meeting will be held on April 28, 2016.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 1:00 P.M.