

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

DATE: January 27, 2022

TIME: 10:05 a.m. – 11:55 a.m.

PLACE: **Meeting ID:** [https:// meet.google.com/ ean-zoxr-zgt](https://meet.google.com/ean-zoxr-zgt)

*Phone Numbers*

*(US)+1 415-737-9563*

*PIN: 991 991 730#*

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Frank Porter, Chair  
J. Michael Bennett  
Bruce Hultquist  
Yvonne Fisher  
Craig Huff  
Erich March  
Ronald Pearcey  
David Zinner

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Rebecca Edmiston  
Walter Tegeler

**STAFF PRESENT**

Gregory Morgan – Commissioner of Occupational & Professional Licensing  
Kausar Syed – Deputy Commissioner of Occupational & Professional Licensing  
Deborah Rappazzo - Director, Office of Cemetery Oversight  
John Hart - Assistant Attorney General, Office of Cemetery Oversight  
Leila Whitley - Administrative Aide, Office of Cemetery Oversight  
Dreana Anderson - Investigator, Office of Cemetery Oversight

## **STAFF ABSENT**

N/A

## **VISITORS**

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Acting Chair Porter called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

## **MINUTES**

The minutes from July 22, 2021 and October 21, 2021 were read and approved.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Occupational and Professional Licensing is now in the new building location. We have been servicing customers throughout the move.

The "Search Cemeteries" function on the Office of Cemetery Oversight's website was previously not supported by our IT Department, but in the future it will be. Currently, the Director is working to have all identified cemeteries in Maryland placed in our AS400 database. Once that step is completed, the current "Search Cemeteries" feature on our website will be updated with the new information.

Next week, the Director will begin working with our IT Department to start the process of placing individual registration applications online for payments and processing. Once the individual online applications and payment process is up and running, online applications and payments will be made available for businesses applying for permits.

On behalf of the Office of Cemetery Oversight and its Advisory Council, the Director extended a thank you to Ronald Pearcey, his staff at Mount Olivet Cemetery for hosting the October 2021 Advisory Council meeting at his cemetery.

The Director informed the Council that funding has been obtained for our cemetery restoration project called "Prince" (Preservation and Restoration Initiative for Neglected Cemeteries). The Department of Labor has partnered with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to create a training program for returning citizens (inmates) one to three years out from release back to society. This program will initially be offered in a facility located in Hagerstown, Maryland over a six-week period. It will include not only classroom training twice a week as well as providing offsite restoration training at a local cemetery.

The position of the Financial Compliance Administrator is now vacant. The Director is working with the human resources division to begin the hiring process. In the interim, since Deputy Commissioner, Syed, who is also a CPA (Certified Public Accountant), will assist the Director with questions surrounding financial stability documents such as trust reports and balance sheets.

Commissioner Gregory Morgan discussed the Legislative Session letter from Secretary Robinson regarding testifying, with the Advisory Council for more clarification. The Commissioner is excited for all the Advisory Council members to see our new office location at 1100 N Eutaw Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.

The Advisory Council briefly discussed the Federal Emergency management Agency's (FEMA) "Burial COVID-19 Funeral Assistance" program. This program can assist families with possible reimbursement of funeral costs for loved ones that have died due to COVID-19.

For additional information, please go to <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>.

There are two Consumer Member vacancies on the Advisory Council. There have been no applications submitted yet. The four reappointments have submitted their applications and are under review. Council Members that have expiring terms can continue to serve on the Council until you receive notification otherwise.

The OCO staff continues to work in person and remotely. However, each day a staff member will be in the office to process mail and perform other duties. Regardless, the office of OCO is open 5 days a week and all staff members can be reached by phone and email.

Consumers that are interested in coming into the building must go online to schedule an appointment. Consumers can go to: <https://www.dllr.state.md.us/license/cem/> and select the "Schedule An Appointment" button which is found in the middle of the home page. All visitors are required to have their ID and are required to enter the building through the front entrance at 1100 N. Eutaw Street.

#### **INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT**

Investigator Anderson provided to the Council a breakdown of the different types of complaints received for the reporting period of July 23, 2021 to January 26, 2022. There was a total of 91 new complaints. They are as follows:

Memorial Inscriptions- 5  
Uninstalled Memorials -12  
Damaged Memorials -3  
Disinterments-5  
Maintenance-5  
Customer Service-5  
Record Keeping Errors-10  
Fees Charged-1  
Unlicensed Memorial Vendor-1  
Burial Rights Ownership-4  
Misburials-2  
Mausoleum Damage-1  
Refund denial-1  
Out of Business Vendor-40

When it comes to ordering and receiving memorials, Council Member March previously informed his consumers it would take 6-8 weeks. He now informs them it may take 9-15 weeks to receive them. Some memorials have been sitting in a container in China for approximately one year. Another Council Member agreed with that timeline.

### **FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE**

Deferred until the next Advisory Council meeting.

### **LICENSING SPECIALIST**

Throughout the relocation, renewals were being emailed to licensees and being processed from our licensing renewal list. There are only a few renewals and licenses that are mailed.

As licenses are processed and days go by, the number of current licensees can change anywhere from hourly (licenses being processed) to daily (licenses expiring). OCO has only 4 crematories licensed. Most of the crematories in Maryland that are licensed, are licensed with the Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

John Hart, AAG shared with the Council that before the Legislature this session is “SB219 – Office of Cemetery Oversight – Sunset Extension” which will extend the Office for another ten years until October 1, 2033. On January 13, 2021, the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing on the bill and issued a favorable report on January 24, 2022. The bill has made it through its Second Reading and is awaiting the Third Reading and passage over to the House.

Also discussed was “HB169 – Elections – Voter Registry -Notification and Removal of Deceased Individuals” which would require the State Administrator of Elections to make arrangements with Crematories, Morticians, and funeral directors in Maryland to provide information on recently deceased Maryland citizens. A hearing was to be held on the bill by the House Ways and Means Committee on January 25, 2022, but has been cancelled.

John Hart, AAG asked all Advisory Council members to attend the council meeting for next month, February 24, 2022, to take part in the vote to take proposed action on a new regulation: 09.34.01.13 Communication from Director -Failure to Respond. This is a regulation that other boards and commissions in the Occupational and Professional Licensing Department (O & P) already have in place. The proposed regulation requires licensees to respond to requests from OCO within 30-days of the request and provides the OCO with the ability to discipline the licensee if they fail to respond.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

A discussion surrounding an increase in the number of deaths because of COVID-19 was discussed among the Council Members. Some cemeteries have been busy, during this pandemic. Some cemeteries in some

counties (depending upon their location in the state) were not as busy as other cemeteries. It depended upon how the different parts of the state were impacted.

Council Member March stated his cemetery had an additional 12,000 burials, even though the state has said the virus is plateauing, it is not in black communities. Council Member March stated that Hospitals have been overwhelmed with the Omicron COVID variant and this virus can kill people, even if you have been vaccinated, especially if you have any underlying health conditions. One death from this virus, is one too many.

Council members basically agree on the average total burial cost (cemetery costs and funeral costs) could be anywhere from \$10,000 - \$15,000, maybe possibly up to \$22,000. All agree that there was an uptick in deaths since COVID started. Some deaths may have been accelerated with COVID and underlying health conditions.

Consequently, pertaining to contract fees reported during renewals for cemeteries and burial goods business, there could be a tremendous drop in the number of contracts over \$250.00 reported during the renewal process as the number of deaths decrease from pandemic to endemic. Therefore, to accurately determine when and if a contract fee increase for cemeteries and burial goods business will be necessary, this trend will have to be taken into consideration to accurately assess the need for such an increase.

Council Member Zinner requested a breakdown of the licenses by type. Such as crematories, nonprofits, burial goods businesses, and cemeteries. The Director will provide the requested information at our next meeting along with a copy of the submitted 2021 General Assembly reports.

### **COUNCIL CONCERNS**

Chair Porter stressed for all council members to be present at the next council meeting.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The next meeting is scheduled for February 24, 2022, and it will be a virtual meeting.

There was a motion to adjourn.