



Photo by Mike Dougherty, courtesy of VTDigger

GREEN MOUNT CEMETERY NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Green Mount Cemetery, dedicated in 1855 as burial grounds for Montpelier and neighboring towns, was designed in the style of a “rural cemetery,” where the natural landscape is incorporated into the overall design. Since its dedication a board of cemetery commissioners has administered the cemetery in trust for the city of Montpelier, attempting to follow best practices in gravesite and grounds management, while embracing the natural beauty of the environment.

The last several years have brought new challenges to our traditional approach to land care and maintenance. The pandemic necessitated the loss of our grounds-crew workforce; climate change has spurred environmental complications, including a lack of pollinators; more and more people are opting for natural burials. All of these issues, and more, have caused us to dramatically adjust our green-space maintenance practices, beginning with a new approach to mowing the cemetery.

A new mowing philosophy

Our mowing practice is transitioning to reflect new values in land management and conservation. Less mowing encourages the growth of wildflowers, and provides habitat for butterflies, beneficial insects, and birds. Going forward, we will no longer mow the entire cemetery twice a month. Instead we will only cut the older sections (designed in 1852) in late

summer. We will mow our “new” sections (those opened in the 1940s) a minimum of three inches every two weeks. The Orchard, our natural burial section, will be mowed once in the fall (see our information flier, “Green Mount Cemetery Natural Burials,” for more information on natural burials). We will also mow all areas before winter sets in, to ensure that rodents do not find hibernal burrowing spaces. No pesticides will be used anywhere in the cemetery.

Exceptions to no-mow

The pathways and edges throughout the older sections will be mowed on a regular basis to permit walking through these historic areas. If you have a family lot in the older section that you visit regularly, please contact us and we will discuss how we can facilitate your visit.

Evaluating the success of our new practices

We anticipate that within three to five years (we have already been doing this practice for two), we will be able to properly evaluate our new approach based on the following criteria: public acceptance; lot-owner satisfaction; cost savings or reassignment of cemetery expenditures; overall plant, animal, and insect health; the impact on daily activities such as work and visitation; and other possible factors.

New assignments for the cemetery workforce

For over 35 years, the cemetery has been beautifully mowed by a workforce from the Vermont Department of Corrections who participate as part of a sentence-reduction program. If the pandemic permits the return of these crews, we will direct their attention to the many tasks that arise in our 35-acre hilly arcadia, including the restoration and cleaning of our 4,000-plus memorials; repairing sunken areas; adding low-maintenance, pollinator-friendly plants; and managing any new issues that arise.

Public input into the changes

We would love to hear your thoughts about our new practices, ideas for other approaches to natural resource management, and cemetery-related questions. We will keep track of all input and make it available to the public. We can be contacted in the following ways:

Email: cemetery@montpelier-vt.org

Office: 802-223-5352

Patrick Healy, Director, cell phone: 802-279-6957

Visit us!

Come see for yourself what a natural beauty is Green Mount. The cemetery is located at 250 State Street, overlooking the Winooski River. We are open everyday from dawn to dusk