**Wallingford council considers cemetery project**

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By Andrew Ragali Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD — Town councilors want a more detailed plan from the Center Street Cemetery Association before appropriating funding to demolish a Prince Street home recently purchased by the town.

In June, the council approved purchasing two Prince Street homes that border the Center Street Cemetery. Initially, association officials proposed demolishing the home at 60 Prince St. and leaving the home at 58 Prince St. standing so it could be used as a garage to store a backhoe for the cemetery. But a feasibility study performed after the purchase showed the home at 58 Prince St. cannot be used as a garage because it is not large enough. The home also has a basement under the garage and could not bear the weight of a backhoe, said Peter Gouveia, the association’s president.

Therefore both homes must be demolished, Gouveia told the council Tuesday night. To demolish 58 Prince St., the council must appropriate funds to the association. The association hasn’t come up with a cost figure for demolition yet but Gouveia previously said costs are estimated at about $30,000.

“What I’d be more comfortable with is looking at everything over a master plan,” Republican Town Councilor Tom Laffin said Tuesday night. “I’m leery to just demolish and next year have another demolition crew out for something else. I’d prefer to have it all laid out.”

At the time of the purchase, Mayor William W. Dickinson Jr. said the property acquisitions were important because it’s not often land next to the cemetery becomes available. The cemetery is owned by the town, but through an agreement made in 1911, the association is responsible for its upkeep. The town provides the association with about $70,000 annually.

The council, in June, approved the transfer of $120,000 to purchase 60 Prince St., undergo environmental assessments and demolish the unoccupied home. The purchase price of 60 Prince St. was $90,000; leaving about $30,000 left for demolition, which has yet to occur. During the same June meeting, the council approved the purchase of 58 Prince St. for $148,000, but demolition fees were not included since the association hoped the building could be left standing. Further study showed that the garage was not large enough though, said Steve Lazarus, vice chair of the feasibility committee.

“You start to play construction games essentially,” he said. While expanding the ceiling is possible, “it’s more expensive than tearing down the house and starting from scratch.”

“Those two houses are really unsuitable as utility buildings,” Lazarus added.

The purchases were made to allow for a larger office for cemetery caretaker Bob Devaney, who currently has a small office located inside a maintenance garage, and to house a backhoe. The backhoe purchased by the town for the cemetery last year is stored outside under a tarp, leaving it vulnerable.

Water was poured into backhoe’s fuel tank recently, said Police Lt. Mack Mikulski. On Tuesday, Gouveia told the council that recent vandalism at the cemetery “has taken a different tone,” meaning it’s not just mischief.

Metal pieces have also been left on the cemetery grounds recently. Mikulski said police believe they were put there to cause damage to lawn mowers.

On Tuesday, Gouveia and Lazarus said they would like to build a new maintenance facility and office on the land at 58 Prince St. This would give Devaney a place to safely store the backhoe, though they did not have a cost estimate for the structure yet.

“Down the road I wouldn’t mind talking about building a new structure,” said Town Councilor John Sullivan, a Democrat. “But first I would like to know dollar value...I’m look forward to more information coming forward.”

Gouveia stressed Tuesday night that the objective to build a new structure is a multi-phase project. The association never guaranteed to the council that 58 Prince St. would be able to be used as a garage, he said, but suggested it as an option. Performing a feasibility study after the purchase was part of the plan and it “sounded logical to us,” Gouveia told the council. The association must come before the council during a future meeting to make a formal request for funding to demolish 58 Prince St. Lazarus said the project needs to proceed slowly to ensure it is done right the first time. Dickinson said he would prefer if both homes were demolished at once. The project would also consist of a new gateway built into the back of the cemetery to allow entrance from the Prince Street properties.

“The cemetery is going to be around for a long time,” Lazarus said. “We are not in a red hot rush. We’re looking to do the right thing.”

Town Councilor Nick Economopoulos, a Democrat, said he doesn’t see the demolition and construction of a new maintenance facility as a priority. He voted against the purchase of the two homes in June. On Tuesday, he brought up the January 2012 council meeting when Devaney requested funds to purchase the backhoe. During the meeting, Devaney said housing the new piece of equipment in existing facilities would not be a problem. Economopoulos also questioned the necessity of the backhoe, which Gouveia said Tuesday is also used to perform maintenance at the cemetery such as leaf pickup. Economopoulos said he recently saw Devaney using a different machine to pick up leaves.

The backhoe has paid for itself, Gouveia responded. The association recently saved $4,000 while using the backhoe to help fix grave site vandalism, he said. Economopoulos asked Gouveia how he could justify the purchase of the two Prince Street homes if the town refuses to purchase two homes off South Broad Street with contaminated wells.

“I’m not here to prioritize expenses for local government,” Gouveia told Economopoulos. “You are barking up the wrong tree.”

During his presentation to the council, Gouveia said since he became president in June much has been done to “change and improve the best practices of the association.”

Prior to Gouveia, Jerry Farrell Jr. served as the association’s president. In the last five months, Gouveia said the association adopted a new set of bylaws and regulations. This hasn’t been done in about 100 years, since the cemetery first came under the association’s responsibility, he said. In addition, the association adopted new expense authorization policies. Also, a monument restoration contract was reworked and will save money. The association has come to a new salary agreement with Devaney, he said, and has adopted an “easier to understand budget.”

New members have been added, and the association has begun meeting regularly, Gouveia said. Prior to his presidency, the association met once annually. A local business also volunteered to fund the costs of a new website. A new security system is in the near future, he said.

“If the council wishes, I’d be willing to come before you every three or four months to give an update report,” Gouveia said. “I would welcome having the town auditor conduct an audit of all our finances. I stand ready to answer any questions and listen to any input you would have for the association.”

Sullivan asked Gouveia when the association was last audited. Gouveia said he didn’t know and could only answer for the time he’s been president.

#### Originally found at [Wallingford council considers cemetery project](http://www.myrecordjournal.com/wallingford/wallingfordnews/2882149-129/wallingford-council-considers-cemetery-project.html)