

Rockwood Cemetery issues investigated

By Rebecca Ring

Guelph/Eramosa council answered questions about the Rockwood Cemetery at a special meeting on May 11 when Marie Milne and William Wingate spoke on behalf of a group of citizens who submitted a list of questions to council about problems that have been growing between the group and Woodlawn Memorial Park (Guelph Cemetery Commission), managed by Paul Taylor, who was contracted by the township to operate the cemetery in October 2000.

Accountant Nathan Godfrey presented financial reports and explained that most of the approximately \$24,000 in arrears will be recovered in deferred revenue. It is owed to Woodlawn's general fund for work done. However, he confirmed that the cemetery is losing money every year as operating costs are higher than revenue. Mayor White asked for a detailed breakdown of these costs to investigate why it is losing

money and how costs could be cut.

Godfrey confirmed the Gladys Hannah Chapel fund is intact and totaled \$72,536 as of December 31, 2005. Wingate asked if the perpetual care fund and the chapel fund could have separate statements. Milne wants the township to take control of the chapel fund, "Isn't that the way Gladys wanted it?" he said, noting the fund was intended for construction and maintenance of the Gladys Hannah Chapel.

Prior to Woodlawn's contract, a volunteer board operated the cemetery with help from Taylor. After the agreement, a group of volunteers offered to help update the board, which lists burials, maintain and repair benches, plant flowers, etc. Their offers were rejected and their complaints grew. Milne says the board is 13 years out of date, and a bench that a volunteer offered to clean up was found destroyed at the back of the cemetery. "Paul

said we need to have little benches so hobos won't sleep on them. That's what he said." A woman in the gallery said she was fixing her parents grave and Taylor asked what she was doing there and told her to leave. White said to call him at home with any further complaints.

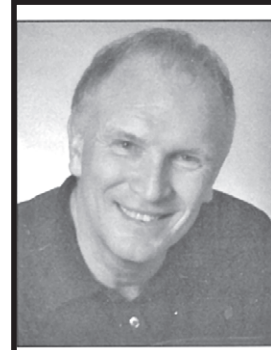
Woodlawn resigned in November following these and other complaints and the township is in the process of restructuring operation and maintenance. In the interim, Woodlawn is continuing.

White said council and staff will get a detailed breakdown of expenditures, form a business plan, look into roof issues, have separate stand alone accounts for the chapel and perpetual care funds, and look into forming a cemetery board or committee.

"I think it is an absolute shame that it has come to this," said White, "A cemetery is a central part of the community and should be a source of pride. We are committed to solving this and have set aside \$10,000 in the

budget to raise monuments and repair foundations. We will explore all options and piece this together. Perhaps

the township will have certain tasks, others done by professionals and some by volunteers."



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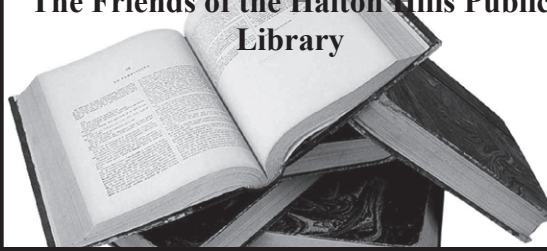
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