

Bellevue Board Meeting

March 25, 2026

Called to order: 6:18

Roll call. Present: Carmen Lopez, Elizabeth Charlton, Eric Machuca, Maria Taveras

Absent: Steve Murphy, Nicholas Kolofoles

Acceptance of minutes waived: not available for review.

E. Charlton requests motion to take letter regarding Memorial Day out of order.

Motion, M. Taveras, E. Machuca second. Passed.

(letter shared for review and discussion) **Motion, E. Machuca to send the letter to Martha Velez, Victor Ortega, Eileen Bernelle, Brian Depena, M. Taveras second. Passed. Roll Call: Maria Taveras, yea. Eric Machuca, yea. Elizabeth Charlton, yea.** C. L. will email tomorrow (3/26) and cc the board.

Superintendents Report. (written report available for review) C.L. There are 226 Christmas ornaments in stock. E.C. I have another, new in box at home making 227. (discussion) It's agreed that there are enough for the 2026 Tree Lighting. C.L. I need to inform you that I was approached by Acting Community Development Director Charlinett Pascual, saying that she had been approached by a Warwick Street neighbor, regarding the acquisition of some of the cemetery land abutting her yard. E.C. Tell her we sell by the inch. E.M. We can't afford the loss. E.C. Usually, it goes the other way: the cemetery takes land by eminent domain. E.M./C.L. agree. C.L. Other Neighbors on Crescent, May and Highgate Streets have actually fenced off land and built a shed and a deck. M.T. We have to nip this in the bud. C.L. The boundaries have been surveyed and the City Attorney said we must take down the structures and erect a new boundary fence.

E.C. Do we need to draft a letter of response? (discussion) C.L. To the Community Development Director, and/or the effected residents? I went to look at the areas mentioned. Maybe she (Warwick Street resident) thought she could get around the cemetery by going to Community Development. E.C. This sort of thing has happened in the past. Under the (Buckley) administration, they gave Saint Mary's land. It was a scandal. That sort of thing ends up on national news.

E.C. Request motion to draft a letter to the Acting C.D.D. **M. Taveras motion to draft a letter to Acting Director Charlinett Pascual stating that the Bellevue Cemetery respectfully declines to sell land to any abutters. E. Machuca second. Passed.**

E. Charlton motion to fence off Warwick Street boundary. Motion withdrawn.

E.C. wants account reform. Return to distribution into original trusts set up in the charter. M.T. How much revenue goes into each account? Discussion re. allocation of received revenues. 60% goes to Bellevue, 40% to the (city general fund) E.C. That's what Nicholas Kolofos said. C.L. That may be. (the matter remains unclear) C.L. 40% vanishes from our view. M.T. We should know where it goes. E.M. Who is in charge/accounting for deposits? Call Nick. E.C./C.L. it has been a 60/40 split since we have been involved. C.L. I'm told the 40% is used to operate the cemetery. M.T. suggests motion for clear accounting: where does the money go, month to month. Each burial generates how much? E.C. calls for motion to get more detailed financial report. C.L. Historically, the board has been given a (simplified extraction) of the data. E.M. Follow the money. 20% over all of these years adds up. We need to know where the money goes. M.T. It's been going on for years. We must get control. C.L. There is \$1,332,000. in the container fund. (explains printed statement) M.T. Why does the principal of the Perpetual Care Fund not grow? E.M. suggests motion to send a letter of inquiry to the (comptroller).

C.L. When the State (gets/grants) emergency funds for a disaster: storms, snow removal, DPW receives funds. The assumption is that that benefits the Bellevue also, but it doesn't. Nothing goes to cover our overtime. We're not fully recognized as a separate entity. E.C. Tom Ferris applied for and received FEMA funds, and the city took that. E.M. suggests communicating that to City Hall. C.L. I could ask Ramon to attend a meeting and explain the distribution. (discussion) It's resolved that, because the board is responsible for the funds, a forensic audit is the appropriate action to take. M. T. suggests a motion to initiate a detailed/forensic audit. (discussion) C.L. suggests back to the Lantigua administration. E.C. back to the Sullivan administration. No resolution.

E.C. We have had a request to bring the horse drawn hearse, May 30th, to Methuen as part of their 300th anniversary celebration. M.T. How much would we charge? C.L. It could be an in-kind donation. We display the hearse, and there is a tasteful sign with availability information. Suggests adding a horse. Maybe from the MSPCA. A better photo opp. E.C. Motion to offer as an in-kind donation? (discussion) No resolution.

Topic turns to Street Signage, listed on agenda.

C.L. We need to address the street signs. Unable to see the lettering. How much would it cost to have new ones made? E.C. It's expensive, yes. Suggest repainting. (discussion) All agree that the section signs should be made more visible as well.

These events are conducted on cemetery property and are directly related to the Cemetery Department's responsibility to maintain the grounds and provide appropriate commemorative observances for the community. Pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 114, the Cemetery Board is charged with the care, management, and control of cemetery property and activities conducted thereon.

Accordingly, the Board voted that the planning, administration, and oversight of Beautification Day and the Memorial Day ceremony will remain under the authority of the Cemetery Department and the Cemetery Board.

For clarity, no other municipal department or entity may represent, advertise, or present these events as being organized or administered by them without the express approval of the Cemetery Board.

A copy of the resolution has been entered into the official minutes of the Cemetery Board and is being transmitted for inclusion in the municipal record.

The Cemetery Department welcomes the continued participation of veterans organizations, community volunteers, and municipal partners in supporting these longstanding community events.

Respectfully submitted,


Elizabeth Charlton, Chairman


Carmen Lopez, Superintendant

Board of Directors,

Bellevue Cemetery

cc: Martha Velez, Health & Human Services

Victor Ortega, V.S.O.



BRIAN A. DE PEÑA
MAYOR

CARMEN LOPEZ
DIRECTOR

CITY OF LAWRENCE BELLEVUE CEMETERY

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Bellevue Cemetery Board of Directors

170 May street

Lawrence MA 01841

To: Ms Martha Velez
Health & Humana Services

Subject: Administration of Cemetery Community Events

Dear Ms Velez,

For the past twenty-two (22) years, the Cemetery Department has created, organized, funded, and administered two longstanding community events held at the cemetery: Beautification Day and the annual Memorial Day ceremony.

These events were established by the Cemetery Department and have been planned and conducted by cemetery staff in coordination with veterans organizations, community volunteers, and municipal partners. **Over the course of these twenty-two years, the events have continued successfully through five mayoral administrations and six Veterans Service Officers, reflecting their longstanding role as cemetery-sponsored community observances.**

Historically, certain municipal departments assisted when available by providing equipment such as tables, chairs, and podiums, which was appreciated. **However, that assistance was limited to logistical support.** The planning, organization, funding, and administration of these events have always remained the responsibility of the Cemetery Department.

To ensure the continued independence and reliability of these events, the Cemetery Department has purchased its own tables, chairs, and podium, and no longer requires equipment support from other departments.

It has recently come to our attention that there has been discussion regarding transferring or assuming responsibility for these events. **The Cemetery Board has reviewed this matter and determined that Beautification Day and the Memorial Day ceremony will remain Cemetery Department events and will not be transferred to another department.**

These events are conducted on cemetery property and are directly connected to the Cemetery Department's responsibility to maintain the grounds and provide appropriate commemorative observances for the community. **Pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 114, the Cemetery Board is charged with the care, management, and control of cemetery property and activities conducted thereon.** Accordingly, the planning, administration, and oversight of events held on cemetery property remain under the authority of the Cemetery Department and its governing board.

For clarity, Beautification Day and the Memorial Day ceremony will continue to be organized and administered by the Cemetery Department as they have been for the past twenty-two years.

For the avoidance of any misunderstanding, no other municipal department or entity may represent, advertise, or present these events as being organized or administered by them without the express approval of the Cemetery Board.

The Cemetery Department welcomes the continued participation of veterans organizations, community volunteers, and municipal partners in supporting these longstanding community events.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Charlton

Chairman, Bellevue Board of Directors



Carmen Lopez, Superintendant, Bellevue Cemetery



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Board of Directors
Bellevue Cemetery
City of Lawrence, Massachusetts

March 30, 2026

Acting Community Development Director Charlinett Pascual
City of Lawrence

Dear Ms. Pascual,

It has been brought to the Board's attention that a proposal was presented to your office by a Warwick Street abutter requesting the sale of cemetery land for the purpose of extending a private yard.

The Board affirms that land dedicated to cemetery purposes is not surplus municipal property and is not available for private conveyance under any circumstances. This is not a permissible use of cemetery land and is not subject to administrative discretion.

The disposition of cemetery land does not fall within the scope of administrative authority and may not be advanced, entertained, or informally considered. Any representation to the contrary is incorrect and should not be conveyed.

Accordingly, this request is declined.

The Board expects that any similar inquiries be addressed in a manner consistent with this determination.

Respectfully,


Elizabeth M. Charlton, Chair

Board of Directors


Carmen Lopez, Superintendent
Bellevue Cemetery