Committee Cleaning up Cemeteries

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The town's Cemetery Committee is back in business, and new regulations are in the works, following a series of complaints regarding current conditions at the town's three cemeteries.

The regulations will address the overgrown shrubs and plethora of personal items that interfere with safety and maintenance at the three cemeteries – Marlboro Cemetery, Century Cemetery and Jones Hollow Cemetery.

The committee, which had slowly faded away out after members moved out of town or passed away, was revived this past summer when three new members were appointed by the Board of Selectmen. One former member, Carl Carlson, is still on the committee.

While the regulations apply to all three cemeteries, it's Marlboro Cemetery that has generated the largest number of complaints. In response, committee member Barbara Montstream said, the committee "walked the cemetery and noted areas of concern."

One issue the committee noted was the overgrown shrubs.

"Some interfered with neighboring [gravesites]," Montstream said. "They also have the potential of disturbing the monuments and interfere with maintenance."

The more sensitive topic the committee noticed was the amount of personal items at the gravesites, many of which had been left quite some time ago and never picked up. Some items sit on tombstones, while others simply sit on the ground.

Montstream explained that when the cemetery is mowed, the crews mow around the items, which include flower pots, garden ornaments and many other things. The items then get lost in the grass and weeds.

"It's a safety concern if [the items] get caught in the mower and become projectiles," Montstream said. "Things get broken and then there are broken pieces out in the grass."

In the current regulations, which were established in 1992, decorative stones, aboveground edging and benches are not permitted. Some of these items, however, are present at the cemetery.

Marlborough isn't the only town to have issues with its cemeteries. The committee reviewed rules and regulations from towns all over the state, many of which have rules about no personal items at all.

Montstream said the concern for safety and beautification prompted the committee to set up a major clean-up, something it hopes to do twice a year.

"Our intent is to do it in the fall and the spring again, so the wreaths from the holidays can be picked up," Montstream said. In the fall, the committee wants to clean the items up so the final mowing before the winter can be neat and orderly.

She said the committee has already removed some things it deemed inappropriate – such as broken glass, beer cans, wine bottles and corkscrews.

"The goal is for it to be clean, attractive, fresh-looking and safe for everyone," Montstream said.

The revised regulations were submitted by the Cemetery Committee to the Board of Selectmen. First Selectwoman Cathi Gaudinski said she expects to have a draft to the selectmen sometime this month.

"We create them and hope [the selectmen] accept them," Montstream said. "We're hoping it's soon."

The committee has a cleaning day planned for sometime before Nov. 15 with the exact date to be determined depending on the volunteers' schedules. Right now, the committee is asking all personal items to be picked up by Oct. 15 or they will be removed.

Montstream explained the Nov. 15 date is so that the cemetery can be cleaned, mowed and ready for people to drop off Christmas wreaths and decorations.

The committee has stated that, due to the volume of decorations, it is impossible to claim items after they have been removed. Therefore, if families wish to keep the items, they should remove them prior to clean-up day.