

Definitions and Policies for Stockbridge Cemetery in Massachusetts

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“The cemetery is more spiritual than a church, more emotionally arresting than the theater, more touching and inspiring than any museum. It is a green and granite archive. An extended family album.”
Hyatt, Gordon. “Grave Virtues.” *Berkshire*, Summer 1994, pp. 40-45.

These policies written for Stockbridge Cemetery may be amended as needed by the Cemetery Commission. They work in tandem with Article V Cemetery Regulations of the Town of Stockbridge Bylaws. Each policy comprises two parts: Definition and Policies. The topics include:

- MARKERS and MONUMENTS
- PLANTS, PLANTERS and DECORATIONS
- NATURAL and CONVENTIONAL BURIAL

In honoring the lives of people who have lived and died in Stockbridge, these policies have been written to encourage the natural processes of life, death, and renewal of the natural systems ever-present on our earth.

The death of a loved one leaves many of us lonely and sad. We hope you find solace at the cemetery in the physical touchstone of a marker or through the smell of naturally growing thyme in the older sections as you walk step by step through this healing landscape.

We encourage your thoughts about these policies that are written to enhance the beauty of the cemetery and support a cathartic experience for all of us still living and caring for our wonderful town of Stockbridge.

Sincerely,

Stockbridge Cemetery Commission

MARKERS and MONUMENTS

DEFINITIONS

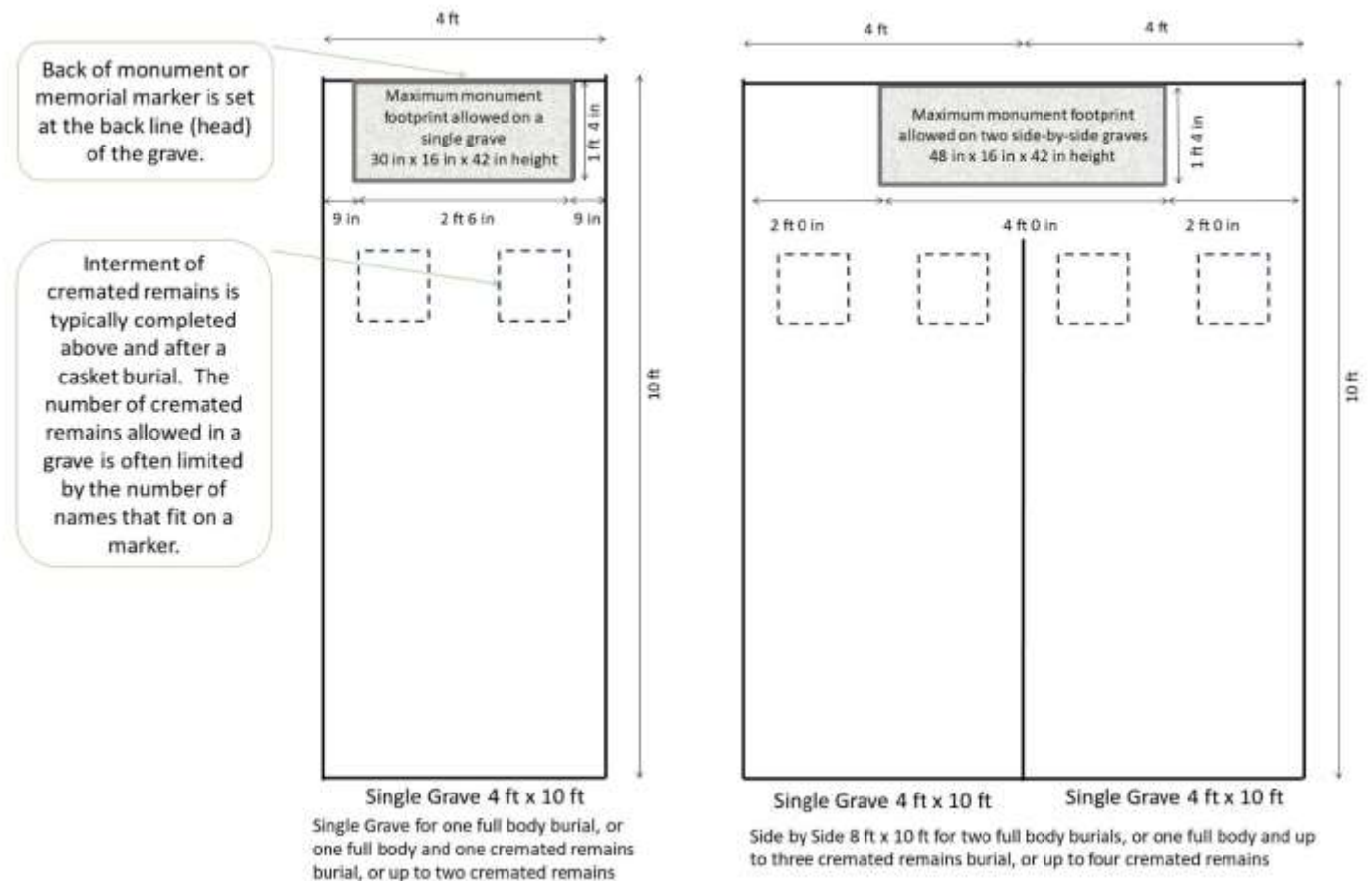
There are several styles of monuments. The important thing to consider when buying a monument is the number of names and dates that will be inscribed upon it. This description of styles is from the New England Monument Dealers Association:

- Flush markers- these markers are placed flat, flush with the ground.
- Bevel markers- these markers are not very high above the ground, with the back of the stone being a few inches higher than the front.
- Slant markers- these markers stand typically 16 or so inches above the ground with the back of the stone straight vertical, and the front sloping at 45 degrees.
- Traditional upright monument- these markers typically have either two pieces consisting of the monument and a base that attaches to it, or a one-piece monument (called a monolith), with a portion of the base buried into the ground.
- Ledgers - these markers are flat to the ground memorials that may cover the entire grave.
- Garden memorials - these markers can range from benches to urns to sundials and almost anything else you could imagine. Please see size regulations below.

MARKERS and MONUMENTS

POLICIES

1. All monuments, markers, and boundary (corner) markers shall be subject to the approval of the Cemetery Commission or the Cemetery Consultant, and their placement shall be under the supervision of the Highway Superintendent or the Cemetery Consultant.
2. When two side-by-side 4ft x 10ft plots that total 8ft x 10ft are assigned, one upright monument is allowed with setbacks at a minimum of two feet from each side and flush with the back of the plot. Maximum height is 42 inches, including the base stone, if there is one. See diagram below for two single graves.
3. When one 4ft x 10ft plot is assigned, one marker with a lower profile is preferred to an upright monument. The side setbacks are nine (9) inches and the back of the monument is flush with the back of the plot. See diagram below for one single grave. See options under MARKERS and MONUMENTS DEFINITIONS.



4. The Cemetery Commission may designate areas in the Town Cemetery where monuments and markers of greater dimensions may be approved upon application.
5. A marker is not required however, all burials are allowed one head marker or one foot marker. Head and foot markers are flush with the ground.
6. All boundary or corner markers must be flush with the ground and marked out and installed by the Cemetery Consultant, Highway Superintendent, or designee.
7. Gravestone rubbings are prohibited.

PLANTS, PLANTERS, and DECORATIONS

POLICIES

1. All permanent plantings including hedges, trees, shrubs, and groundcovers shall be subject to the approval of the Cemetery Commission
2. Flags commemorating veterans are allowed during Memorial, Flag and Veterans Day holidays. They may be removed two weeks after the holiday or at the discretion of the Highway Superintendent.
3. Seasonal decorations (except flags) must be biodegradable. They will be removed at the discretion of the Highway Superintendent.
4. Plantings (annuals or perennials) are allowed up to 12 inches in front of a monument or marker. Recommended groundcover plantings include:
 - Thyme, creeping (*Thymus serpyllum*) (This plant grows naturally within the cemetery).
 - Barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*) – a sweet groundcover that is practically evergreen.
 - Other native or non-invasive species may be allowed with permission of the Cemetery Commission.
5. Metal, clay, or wooden planters that are up to 12 inches in diameter or from front to back and may be placed in front of a monument or marker. Generally, planters should not be wider than the monument or marker. Exceptions allowed depending upon the size and shape of a monument, however, in most cases, the planter should not be greater than two feet in width.
6. Pots, planters or flowers that are made of plastic are prohibited.
7. Glass, balloons, and candles are prohibited.

NATURAL and CONVENTIONAL BURIALS

DEFINITIONS

Conventional Burial – Conventional burial may include embalming a body, for temporary preservation and/or public viewing, and caskets often made with non-local materials or are non-fully biodegradable.

Cremation – According to Cremation Association of North America, “cremation is the mechanical, thermal, or other dissolution process that reduces human remains to bone fragments. Cremation also includes processing and pulverization of the bone fragments into pieces that are usually no more than one-eighth inch.”

Cremation Burial – Cremation burial in the Stockbridge Cemetery is the burial of the urn containing cremated remains. The urn may be placed over an existing body burial, if one already exists in the grave.

Natural Burial - Natural burial, also known as green burial, is the simplest form of a body burial whereby everything going into the grave is biodegradable. Natural burial is legal across the state of Massachusetts and the United States.

Stockbridge Cemetery is a ‘hybrid’ cemetery allowing for natural and conventional body burials, and the burial of cremated remains.

For more information on natural burials, see Green Burial Massachusetts (GBM) (www.GreenBurialMA.org), which is a statewide all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to educate the public about green burial. GBM maintains a crowd-sourced database of cemeteries in Massachusetts that allow natural burial. Additional information is available through the Green Burial Council, Inc., (www.GreenBurialCouncil.org) an international organization that provides standards and certifications for natural burial grounds, funeral providers, and products.

POLICIES

Natural burial is allowed at Stockbridge Cemetery. Most burials completed in the earliest sections of the Stockbridge Cemetery were natural ones. Stockbridge Cemetery is one of over 40 cemeteries (according to Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc) in Massachusetts offering natural burial as a viable choice to Stockbridge residents.

Natural Burial

Natural burial at Stockbridge Cemetery uses some of the old methods and some of the new.

A natural burial in Stockbridge Cemetery will:

- Use a lowering device to slowly and quietly lower a casketed or shrouded body into the grave. Please note a shrouding board must be purchased if a shrouded body is presented for burial. The board will also be placed into the grave.
- Use a backhoe or similar equipment to dig and close the grave
- Not use a grave liner or vault

Biodegradable containers may be:

- natural fiber shrouds (must include the use of the shrouding board for lowering into the grave. The board will stay at the bottom of the grave)
- unfinished wooden caskets built with non-exotic wood species, such as white pine
- wicker baskets
- cardboard caskets

Embalming is a choice; there is no state law requiring embalming. For natural burials a funeral director may use a non-toxic embalming fluid. Check with your preferred funeral director to ensure they are familiar with the product. Most funeral homes do not use a non-toxic embalming fluid.

Funeral Director Support

The Cemetery Commission prefers that you work with a licensed funeral director who can transfer the body to the cemetery and have all paperwork and fees in order upon arrival.

Conventional Burial

If you prefer to have a body embalmed by a licensed funeral director or per direction of the public health department, you may. You may purchase a concrete liner or metal vault for the grave. Those options are available to you.