



**Ravenna City Council
Special Meeting Minutes
October 19th, 2020 at 6:00pm**

The public meeting was held via Zoom and live streamed via YouTube. A video recording of the meeting can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtGMKSvVe9s>

The Special Meeting of Ravenna City Council was called to order at 6:00 P.M. by Council President, Andrew Kluge.

Council present via Zoom: Council President Andrew Kluge, Amy Michael, Rob Kairis, Cheryl Wood, Tim Calfee, Christina West, Paul Moskun and Matt Harper.

Present in person from Ravenna Township: Trustee, Pat Artz, Trustee, Henry Gibson, Trustee, Vince Coia, Fiscal Officer, Gail Pittman and Attorney, Chad Murdock

Also attending the meeting via Zoom: Mayor Seman; Finance Director, Brian Huff; and Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor

Mr. Kluge called the meeting to order and gave the floor to the Mayor to explain things.

Mayor Seman stated that the City appreciates the Trustees and Council coming together to try and resolve and look at the situation. He said that everyone is there to discuss the requests that the Township has made as well as an interest in an institution for the Ravenna area which is the cemetery, adding that the previous meetings were useful to him because they were able to look at some of the things that were causing problems for the Township in terms of finances and cost. The Mayor stated that he served on the Cemetery Board for several years when he was a Councilman, which he pointed out, showed that the City and the Township could work together quite well. He said that the budget at the cemetery, for the most part, has remained the same over at least a 10-year period. At this point and time, due to growth in the Township, the percentages that were originally established have been increased to close to 50%.

The Mayor said that the City is looking for dialog so that it completely understands and said that he would feel bad if the Township was not a part of the cemetery. He then deferred to Mr. Cimino to give a brief synopsis of the cemetery union history.

Mr. Cimino explained that the Township controlled Maple Grove Cemetery for many years until about 1994-1995 when they brought a lawsuit to the City. The Township felt that since the City surrounded the cemetery that it should then be the responsibility of the City to maintain the cemetery. The lawsuit went before Judge Kainrad who render the decision that the Township was correct, that the City surrounded the cemetery and because of that the City was responsible for maintaining the cemetery. There was an appeal, but the judge affirmed the initial decision that the City was responsible, and the Township was excluded from any responsibility for the cemetery. A time later, the Township approached the City and asked to be a part of the cemetery. The only way they could be apart of it was to form a union cemetery with the City. He stated that the only way that the union could be disassembled would be if the City would consent to the withdrawal.

Mr. Kluge stated that he spoke to Council members and the basic premise that he came away with was that he understands that there are some financial issues going on both sides, with the question if the Township is open to investigating cost reductions within the cemetery.

Mr. Coia stated that from the letter that was sent to Council from their attorney, they first and foremost were interested in trying to get out of the contract over a sliding scale over a five-year period, adding that he understands that things right now aren't the best with Covid and the City's finances but maybe it won't be that tough of a pill to swallow after the 5 years.

The Mayor mentioned that the Township has had to take over the care of Grandview Cemetery and inquire about the cost.

Ms. Pittman explained that the Township took over Grandview Cemetery in 2018 and that there was a lot of disrepair which resulted in expenses costing over \$100,000.00 for 2018 and 2019 adding that they feel it is representative of what they will be expending each year.

Mr. Moskun inquired as to how the Township came up with a five-year plan versus something longer.

Mr. Coia stated that they thought it would be fairer to space it over 5 years versus two or three years.

Mr. Moskun asked what changes the Township would like since they want to make cuts.

Mr. Coia stated that he was not asking for any changes that night. He said he is asking the City to respectfully consider the Townships request of getting out of the contract over a five-year period, adding if that does not work then they are going to respectfully ask for a counter proposal.

Mr. Kairis stated that looking at union cemeteries in the Ohio Revise Code, the Maple Grove Cemetery contract was built around the concept of property taxes to help support the

running of the cemetery and that it's owed to the history and preservation of the cemetery to consider putting in place a property tax.

Mr. Gibson stated that in doing so it does the Township no favor because they still have another cemetery to take care of.

Mr. Kairis stated that the property tax would help pay for Maple Grove which would release the Township from having to use their funds to run the cemetery, adding that other approaches such as donations could be sought after to ease the financial burden.

Mr. Gibson stated that he vehemently opposes a property tax.

Mr. Kairis stated that if the City does not oblige their request then they need to look at other ways to raise money to salvage the agreement which means putting things on the table to not take an extreme approach.

Mr. Gibson suggested each party come up with ideas and then meet again.

Ms. West stated that she would like to see a conversation together.

Ms. Michael inquired about the employee health insurance costs and Mr. Gibson stated that the employees are not paying anything except for \$250 per year per employee.

Mr. Kluge stated that when looking at cost saving proposals, such as outsourcing lawn cutting, health care or part-time workers, they need the input of the Township in a back and forth conversation.

Mr. Moskun stated that there has not been an increased in the cemetery budget for 23 years. There was a miscommunication regarding the budget and percentages that the Township and City contribute.

Mr. Kairis stated that once a year the County Auditor provides the relative home values and then a pro-rated percentage is established, which has shown the Township percentage to have increased over the years which changes every year.

The Mayor asked if anyone knows what the motivation for the Township was to form the union cemetery, adding that they are the ones that initiated forming it.

Ms. Artz stated that the Trustees at the time, which included herself, felt that because a lot of Township people were buried in the cemetery that they should probably pay for part of it so that it was well maintained.

Ms. Michael inquired as to the cost of plots and if the price had decreased once the Township joined the union, but the information was unavailable.

Ms. Wood stated that she would assume that if the contract were to be dissolved then it would increase the price of plots for the Township residents, with Ms. Michael and Mr. Moskun agreeing. She also stated that she felt that they need to explore other options in cost reductions and other revenues, adding that it is very important for both the City and the Township to remain partners, not just in the cemetery, but for many other purposes. She said that they are one community, stating that nobody says Ravenna Township or Ravenna City, it is Ravenna and that they are one and would like to keep it that way.

Ms. West stated that there are costs to both cemeteries, and it is beneficial to work together.

Mr. Coia addressed the five-year graduate plan and Mr. Kluge stated that they would have to discuss it, but right now it would be to go back to the drawing board.

Mr. Calfee stated that his sense of the issue is that the City does not have an interest in releasing the Township from it's obligation in this cemetery, adding that the City does not have a counter proposal but that the Township maintains the status quo contract the way that it is drawn up.

Mr. Harper stated that he thinks it is in the best interest for the residents, both City and Township, that they work together and work things out to come up with a resolution that works for both sides which he thinks is possible.

Ms. Artz inquired if Council could vote that evening that they do not want to accept the Townships proposal.

Mr. Kluge stated that they would need to prepare legislation and take it through the committees therefore they could not.

Council and the Trustees discussed when a good date would be for their next meeting and Ms. Michael suggested a possible sub-committee to discuss cemetery ideas.

Ms. Artz suggested an equal membership from the Township and the City since the portion that the Township now pays is at 45%, adding that she felt they should have an equal say.

Mr. Kluge stated that he would discuss that option with Council.

The City Council and Township Trustees agree upon Monday, November 9th at 6:00pm for their next joint meeting.

There being no further business before Council, the meeting adjourned at 6:46 P.M.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council

Council President