

Cemetery money could be better spent

Article 28 of our May 4 Middlefield ATM (annual Town Meeting) warrant requested \$5,000 to map our cemeteries. The Fire Department was listed as the sponsor. It was tabled and will be voted on at our June 18 special Town Meeting.

A handout at the ATM presented a Capital Spending Plan prepared by the Finance Committee. The first item was for a \$25,000 plan spread over five years to locate and map all the graves by apparently using ground-penetrating radar, and then to develop a graves database. It was described as "Projects by Department," with "Cemeteries" listed as the cognizant town organization.

I was quite surprised by this article, as I had spent considerable time digitizing all the Cemetery Commission's paper records from our Pine Grove Cemetery and had prepared a computer database of 100 percent of the burials in that yard. It is the only open cemetery in town with available plots.

The all-volunteer Find-a-Grave website has inventoried and photographed almost 900 headstones and burials from all the Middlefield cemeteries.

Mr. Curt Robie, Finance Committee member, in response to a FOI inquiry, stated that he was responsible for this initiative and had not communicated with either the Cemetery or Historical commissions to gain

their approval or to even ascertain if this program was needed. I was not able to confirm if the Finance Committee had voted to include this article in the warrant.

The Finance Committee is the front end of the town's financial checks and balances. They review and recommend spending proposals, while the auditors review expenditures after they have been made. These checks and balances are put in jeopardy if the Finance Committee institutes and then approves their own programs.

The great majority of the unmarked graves contain infants and young children. Pioneer life took probably half the children before age 5. These early graves cannot be accidentally disturbed, as the old cemeteries are closed to new burials. Identifying the locations of these burials cannot tell us the identity of the occupants. There are no descendants searching for them. Let them rest in peace.

Please consider voting against this article on June 18. In my opinion, there are many more important uses for \$25,000 in Middlefield. For instance, consider conserving some of the most damaged headstones.

Never a dull moment up here walking the ancient Middlefield burying grounds.

Howard Knickerbocker
Middlefield

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