

December 14, 2022

Green Burial Council
2720 Cold Springs Road
Placerville, CA 95667

Dear Green Burial Council Board of Directors and Staff Members:

In August 2022, Matt Connell, Compliance Specialist for the Green Burial Council, purchased 20 acres in Blackhoof Township, Minnesota. The property is described as the Northeast ¼ of the Northeast ¼ except the Northern 1/3 in Section 20, Township 47 North, Range 17 West. The property address is 3133 Pioneer Road, Barnum, MN 55707. Mr. Connell subsequently deeded the property in September 2022, to Steelman Cemetery Company to which Ed Bixby, President of the Green Burial Council, is the owner and operator.

The purpose of this letter is to express concerns with the use of this property as a cemetery. The publication “Startup Tips for Green Burial Cemetery Operators” located on your website is contrary to how this site was selected and subsequently being developed. The contradictions are detailed as follows:

Acquiring the right property

- The publication indicates that the land should be relatively flat. The highest point on this property is 1,122 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The lowest point is 1,076 feet below MSL. This is a difference of 46 feet. Portions of this property could be defined as a steep slope, 12% grade, under Carlton County Zoning Ordinance #27.
- The publication indicates that the land should have little or no surface water. The low point of the property is a Type 5, open water wetland.
- The publication indicates that property should not have any deed covenants. While this is true, the properties immediately adjacent to the south located along Paradise Road and Eden Lane are part of a subdivision with a covenant placed on the subdivision only allowing a residential use.
- The publication indicates that the property should not be in an area with expensive homes. The average home in Carlton County is \$205,000 (homestead property). The average value of homesteaded properties immediately adjacent to this property is \$353,271. This is \$148,271 more than the average and should be considered “expensive homes.”

Written consent from abutters

- The publication indicates that “Good neighbors are priceless...write them, including links to the GBC and other green cemetery resources, and brochures and other written materials that lay out the issues. Follow up with a personal call and visit them if necessary. Present at a town-wide informational evening. Speak to the issue at selectmen’s meetings, town meetings, in churches, civic clubs, libraries — anywhere that you can build support for the concept.” To date, this has not been completed. Mr. Connell has backed out of two informational meetings, one at the township level and one at the county level. This has eroded the trust for this cemetery in the community.
- The Carlton County Board of Commissioners received a petition at the September 26, 2022, County Board meeting. The petition had 106 Blackhoof Township community signatures. The petition detailed several concerns with the cemetery and requested the county place a moratorium on burials.

Additionally, an average of twenty Blackhoof Township community members have regularly attended County Board meetings since September 2022, expressing concern. This appears to be in direct conflict with the publication referenced above.

- In addition, the county received correspondence between Mr. Bixby and the property owner to the north, Matt Arnold. Mr. Arnold was interested in purchasing the property in order to halt the cemetery and continue to hay the field. The property was sold to Mr. Connell for \$80,000 in August 2022. Mr. Arnold offered the sale price of \$80,000 to Mr. Connell. The estimated total value for the property by the county assessor is \$34,900. Mr. Bixby countered with \$350,000. This interaction received a lot of negative feedback from the local community.

Detail of social and cultural resources

- The county is not aware of any archaeological survey conducted on the above referenced property in the files of the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office. Considering the unique geomorphological setting of the landform (ancient beaches of Glacial Lake Duluth) in which the proposed cemetery is to be located and the report of previous discoveries of early Native American artifacts in the vicinity, the county recommends that an archaeological survey be conducted prior to any earth moving.

In closing, it is concerning that two prominent members of your council are not following the guidelines laid out in your publication "Startup Tips for Green Burial Cemetery Operators" located on your website. As detailed above, the cemetery being proposed in Blackhoof Township is in direct conflict with these guidelines. The county is asking for your support to assist in negotiating a satisfactory solution for all parties involved.

Sincerely,

Gary Peterson
Carlton County
Chair of the Board of Commissioners

C: Steelman Cemetery Company
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Crystal, MN 55429