

In Support of the Community Preservation Fund

In recent news articles, the group opposing the current surcharge for funding of Hingham's Community Preservation Act cited, among other things, grants to private cemeteries in town. The Directors of Hingham Cemetery would like to explain why we asked for help from the Community Preservation Fund, why we are extremely grateful for its support, and why we support continuation of the surcharge.

Some background information about us and the other cemeteries in town might be helpful. There are no municipal cemeteries in Hingham. The Hingham Cemetery is one of 5 non-sectarian, private, non-profit cemeteries, all run by unpaid volunteer boards of directors. The 6th cemetery in town, St Paul's Cemetery, is owned and managed by the Catholic Church. All these cemeteries are active today and are accepting the responsibility for the burial of the town's dead, a burden usually shouldered by municipalities and taxpayers.

The Hingham Cemetery dates from 1672 and is a major historical asset of the town of Hingham. It is the resting place of the town's earliest settlers and numerous noteworthy state and national figures, including Benjamin Lincoln, Massachusetts Gov. John Andrew, and Paul Revere's daughter Mary. The Cemetery contains the town's Veteran's burial ground, as well as two town-owned monuments (the Settler's Monument seen on the town seal, and the Civil War obelisk). It contains many colonial slate headstones, some credited to noted headstone carvers of the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as Victorian artwork by two major American sculptors of the 19th century. The Cemetery is also Hingham's only arboretum, and its 16 acres of open space provide a park-like setting open to the public one block from Hingham Square. School groups, researchers and visitors from around the globe visit year round.

An unpaid, working, volunteer Board of Directors runs the Cemetery on a tight budget. Our work includes selling lots, arranging for burials, developing new burial areas, maintaining the arboretum, restoring the headstones and monuments, managing the finances, fundraising, publicity, and historical tours. We have a paid superintendent who maintains the property and handles burials.

Today the cost of upkeep consumes virtually all of our income from lot sales and endowment, leaving very little for improvements or restoration projects. With each lot sale and resulting decrease in our inventory, the potential for future income diminishes. Therefore, our endowment alone must someday be adequate to maintain the grounds, monuments, and trees *in perpetuity*. We are working hard to ensure that this is the case, so that the Hingham Cemetery is a resource for the town and not a liability.

The Community Preservation Fund has played an important role in helping us preserve deteriorating historic and artistic elements in Hingham Cemetery. We received a grant to restore the 1848 cast-iron fencing surrounding the Rufus Lane lot, which is the town's only remaining example (and one of very few remaining in the country) of decorative fencing once typically found in Victorian cemeteries. It was in dire need of repair, and

the \$22,700 cost of restoration was far beyond our means. The Community Preservation Fund also granted us \$10,000 to repair stone surrounds on 6 other individual lots, work we could not have done within our annual budget. These surrounds are an important element in the Cemetery's design and repairing them was high on our priority list for esthetic as well as safety reasons. Without funding from the Community Preservation Fund Committee, these repairs would not have happened and some of the Cemetery's unique character would have been lost.

Hingham Cemetery is extremely grateful to the Community Preservation Fund and the town for recognizing our need, for valuing the historical elements of Hingham, and for helping to restore and preserve that which makes Hingham stand apart. There are few sources of funding available today for preservation of our town's historic treasures, and the Community Preservation Fund is an extremely important resource.

A huge Thank You, Community Preservation Fund!

Mary Reilly, President
Hingham Cemetery Board of Trustees