

LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Public Hearing Minutes

June 20th, 2017

7:00 P.M.

Chairman Glass called the Public Hearing to order at approximately 7:03 p.m.

Dan Gunter stated that the Burial Disturbance permit application was submitted by the City of Barnesville. The Application request that approximately 103 graves be relocated from an abandoned cemetery in the Industrial Area off Old Milner Road to Greenwood Cemetery in the City of Barnesville.

City Manager Roberts addressed the board regarding the application to move the graves. He stated that it is the desire of the City to relocate 103 graves from the Wadsworth Cemetery to the Greenwood Cemetery located on Adams Street in Barnesville, Georgia. The Wadsworth Cemetery is abandoned with no monuments or marked graves. The City purchased the property on January 10th, 1996 as an addition to the Industrial Park with a portion sold to Rayonier and has operated for the last 20 years. The property was zoned for Industrial use in 1996. The development of the property for investment purposes poses a threat to the abandoned Cemetery. The City's proposal to relocate the graves will bestow honor, dignity and respect that they deserve. Being located at Greenwood Cemetery will insure perpetual care, unlimited access for visitors, descendants, historians and genealogist. The graves will be memorialized with appropriate signage with the cultural history and importance of the graves for those in it. The entire process will be executed with care and dignity. The process consists of the following:

- 1) An Archeological Survey of the Property. Southern Research performed the archeological research on the gravesite. They followed traditional methods and technology. A careful surface survey was done with intensive deep metal detection, ground penetrating radar, and a shallow, non-intrusive ground excavation resulting in the detection of the southern grave shaft being detected.
- 2) Notification of the Descendants. Southern Research assisted with identifying the descendants. Advertisements have been placed in numerous newspapers in the region and posting have been made on Ancestry.com.
- 3) Relocation Plan. Georgia Statue provides clear direction and requirements for burial disturbance permits. Southern Research and their associates have had extension experience with grave archeology and genealogy. City Manager Roberts introduced Karen and Steve Wood who are the owners of the Southern Research. In closing City Manager Roberts referred the board to the application package submitted to the board that addresses each requirement.

Ted Clements of 818 Thomaston Street Barnesville, Georgia stated that he is ex-military and that his and other members of his family are ex-military. He stated that if any military is buried on the hill that something can be done and he hopes that the board comes to the right decision.

Paul Daly of 951 Hwy 18 West presented a photo of John Wadsworth and stated that a man lays in that grave on the hill. Mr. Daly said, "He is a civil war veteran born in 1802 and the son of Archibald." Mr. Daly read a letter from Archibald Wadworth that said, "In the name of God

Almighty, I, Archibald Wadworth of the county and the state being of advanced age knowing that I must shortly depart this life, deem it right and proper as to regards to myself and my family, and desire my body be buried in a decent and a Christian-like manner. My soul, I trust shall move to God, who gaveth as I go to salvation to the sacraments of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ.” Mr. Daly said, “He died in 1856. This to me is an argument about morality and ethics. Honestly I find it hypocritical to dig someone out of a grave and throw them in a mass grave and tell me that this is decent and proper. About five years ago a man came to my house named Charles Gauche and he stated that this is the slave name for his home: Gauche. I walked the fields with this man with tears in his eyes. A 6 foot 4 inch former football player, crying like a baby, saying I just wish I knew where my family was but I am so happy that I can walk this field today and know that they are somewhere. I found an old 19th century iron, doing some work around the yard that I gave to his wife. You would have thought that I had given her a pot of gold. Are you going to sit there and tell us that we are good Christian people and then dig people up? Most of you don’t know me or anything about me. I want to tell you a story about 9/11. Most of you people know that we were handed buckets up and down that line. You want to know what was in those buckets because I was there. I was a New York City Police Officer. In those buckets were pieces of bodies that we gave back in reference to every single body part. I’m proud that we did that. Proud of the police officers and the fireman that we worked with who gave that respect. All we ask here is in the community is that you do this the right way. This to me is insane. I find it completely of hypocrisy and Christian beliefs. I know Southern Research does a great job. I spoke to Mark McDonald today with the State of Georgia and he asked me to reach out to Mayor Banks, because I guess he knows him, and he asked me to relay a message to him saying that he can’t believe that you would go for this because there are other options. Mr. Daly’s suggestion is that we turn around and slow down. Take the foot off the pedal. This doesn’t need to be done tomorrow. I know that you don’t have anything that is concrete. Let’s talk about this as a community as a whole and let’s see what we can come up with. I think we are rushing to judgement and I think it is wrong. I believe that without a doubt that there are slaves buried there because I have seen it in writing. A man in 1913 talks about how many graves he saw up there and there is an article in the paper but he has no time to talk about it now. We can dig all of that stuff up later and we go through this later. The stuff I found was unbelievable. We can’t sit here as a community and decide we are just going to dig people up and throw them in the garbage. We still have over 30,000 body parts in New York City and it cost the City of New York millions and millions of dollars to keep them there because it is the right thing to do.” Mr. Daly requested that the board do the right thing.

Wyly Hill of 1068 Five Points Road addressed the board and said that he feels that if this permitted to go in here it will cause a dangerous situation. He stated that when someone is buried money is not our God and the City does not want to lose their money if they can’t relocate the bodies. They have no right to do this. Mr. Hill said that no one in the room would want an ancestor to be dug up and moved. Mr. Hill stated that a fence should be placed around the gravesite and that a grave should not be desecrated and he is fully against any such action.

Ashley Gilles of 425 Abbott Road addressed the board and stated that Georgia Law states that any graveyard or cemetery is supposed to have an easement where you have access for relatives to come visit and that proposes a legal issue. She said that it was not documented and maybe the zoning is incorrect. Ms. Gilles said that she doesn’t know what company would want to go

through such a horrendous line of red tape when there is supposed to be an easement. Ms. Gilles said, "You could draw up an easement for the cemetery and with that being said, you may be able to squash this whole thing and keep everyone's dignity. I am a Christian and I have never been in a board room where prayers are said. We are all Christian and that is the reason I moved to the South. I like that you pray in this county. We are all brothers and sisters. We should be respectful of our brothers and sisters who are buried up there."

Valerie Hill of 1068 Five Points Road addressed the board stating that she agreed with her husband. She said, I visited the gravesite last night and as I stood there and looked at the hill with the four trees naked it almost looked like where Christ was crucified. This should be treated as sacred land." Ms. Hill stated that Tim Turner wrote a historical book that says 20 confederate soldiers and slaves were both buried there and things are changing to suit the City's needs. Ms. Hill said that the City is desecrating the graves for their own gain and need. Ms. Hill asked why they just didn't buy the old Carter's Mill building and re-do it and preserve this land.

Penny Hutson of Milner, addressed the board and said that she has religious beliefs and believes that you should not disturb a person's family place. She said, "There are Christian families and Civil War soldiers buried there. This is not about who they are or what they did in life. We are speaking for people that have no voice. They were buried with love and dignity. What gives anyone the right to dig up anyone and put their remains or what's left of their remains in a box to be buried elsewhere? Why has the City not thought about the people that are buried there and their descendants?" Ms. Hutson said that she has done research and located descendants in Griffin, Georgia. Ms. Hutson went on to ask why the cemetery had not been maintained if the gravesite is owned by the City, why it was not taken care of and why there was not a memorial marker. Ms. Hutson stated that she and others have done extensive research and gathered newspaper articles and pics of the family. There are close to 140 graves there and there is so much more research that is needed. Ms. Hutson stated that she didn't know about this until Walter Geiger of the Barnesville Herald Gazette wrote about it in the paper. Ms. Hutson said that all fallen soldiers of all wars wouldn't think of doing this much less former slaves who are buried there. Ms. Hutson said that this is a disgrace and she is saddened for the people up there that she voted for are supporting this for the sake of what? Greed, money and she is glad that she doesn't have to make this decision.

Robert Neal Devane of 103 Lambdin Circle stated that in 1976 a soldier William Ossian Flipper was the first black graduate of the United States Military Academy in West Point. He said, "A horse was stolen with a white lady on the horse and he got on another horse and brought the horse back to town with the lady on the horse. The reason he was court martialed was because she gave him a hug and she was the daughter of General of the Brigade. He was buried in Atlanta and his body was exhumed and moved to hometown in Thomasville, Georgia. Turk McCall, an Anthropologist at Valdosta State University, had a fund raiser and got his body exhumed and moved and there were a lot of people there. He got a memorial funeral with full military honors. Mr. Devane said not everyone buried on that hill is William Ossian Flipper and what will he get?"

Angela Ledford 350 Bottoms Road Barnesville addressed the board and stated that anyone who is friends of her on Facebook for the last two year has watched her as she has visited graves. Her

husband has watched too and knows that one life can make a difference. Ms. Ledford said, "There are no headstones out there to place rocks. I didn't know that there was a cemetery there and I live 10 miles away. If I would have known I would have gone multiple times to try to find out anything about this. My mother thinks that I am morbid for going to look for graves at cemeteries but I just want to pay tribute and honor for the people that shaped our lives. These people had a lot of land to donate. There was a patient at Central State that I would have liked to have known about him but they threw them all in a mass grave and the only record is a list on the bottom of an angel statue. There were 25,000 people who died and the only thing left was a list of names on the bottom of an angel statute. This not how we do things in the south and this country is tearing down monuments of dead people every day and Lamar County is one of them and this is just not right. Twenty years ago they could have put in an easement so that people like me that want to go visit and say thank you could have access. They don't want to use Carter's because of traffic and they want to throw it out there on Hwy 18 where people are already dying at a mass rate because of traffic from the saw mill. I ask the board to not dig these people up because they are already not known and they are not where they wanted to be."

Kristie Sims of 118 Landin Circle addressed the board and stated that she is a business owner and has lived in Barnesville about 30 year and that she doesn't like to stir the pot but she wanted them to know that this is wrong. Ms. Sims said that you shouldn't dig people up and re-locate them. She just wanted the board to know that.

Melissa Cline of 420 Country Kitchen Road wanted to know when the last person that was buried there because, like many other people, she has been looking stuff up online and she found a Wadsworth descendant. In her obituary, it stated that she was buried at the Wadsworth Family Cemetery in 2015. Ms. Cline said, Maybe there are other Wadsworth Cemetery's but if it was last year, they think that this is their final resting place and for the City to dig these people up and move them, and I understand that they are in an unmarked grave now, but this is wrong and at least the descendants knew that was where they were located. To move graves for monetary gain is wrong and if you can live with that then so be it but I am not going to stand in front of my maker and say, "You know I voted for that." If you think that this is ok and can live with that, then vote the way you want. For now you are talking about 140 graves but if someone comes in with a bunch of money and wants to move everyone out of Greenwood Cemetery where does the board draw the line. The board has to decide but I hope that you can make the right decision and one you can live with."

Tim Dix of 204 Poplar Street Barnesville addressed the board and wanted to know if there is a time line for the permit. Chairman Glass responded that it is 30 days from the date of the Public Hearing and that a decision of yes or no has to be made. Mr. Dix said, "Is this because this is an opportunity to bring industrial development into that area and what happens if the deal falls through and the City of Barnesville backs out? Is there a bargaining period? Is the City of Barnesville actually committed to making this move once it is approved? Does the City have their feet to the fire? Is there a time table?" Attorney Mayfield stated that there is a time table for the Public Hearing.

Donnie Raiford of 510 Cannafax Road stated that he has lived here for 11 years and he cares about the City and the Community and what is right and what is wrong. Mr. Raiford stated that

he lived in Atlanta and traveled South on I-75 and on Cleveland Avenue there is a cemetery that has a fence around it. These graves were not disturbed and they are on a major interstate. Mr. Raiford asked if this site falls under the Historical Register and if the City is selling out only they knew the real intent.

City Manager Roberts answered the question from Ms. Cline regarding when the last person was buried at the Wadsworth Cemetery and responded that it was somewhere just after the year 1900. Mr. Daly in the audience said that it was early 20th century.

Felicia Daly of 951 Hwy 18 West stated that they had completed construction on I-75 in Atlanta and 2 cemeteries were not disturbed. Ms. Daly said, "There has to be land available in this rural community where there is land everywhere and rail road tracks are everywhere. What about Carter's Mill where there is a dilapidated building and I'm sure that if they went in there it is loaded with rodents and bats and all kinds of things. Why can't it be restored or leveled and rebuilt? There is a rail road, access to I-75 and it's in walking distance from downtown and it could re-vitalize downtown. This is just food for thought."

Paul Daly stated that he has been in contact with the heirs and descendants and spoke to a lady in the Midwest who was appalled by this news. He has also sent out emails to descendants and would like for the Board to just take their foot off the gas pedal. Mr. Daly said that he just wants them to do what is right. He also said he wished he had more time because he feels like he could come up with more information.

Chairman Glass called for any other Public Hearing Comments. There being none, Vice-Chairman Horton made a motion at 7:42 p.m. to close the Public Hearing. Commissioner Heiney seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Charles Glass, Chairman

Bennie Horton, Vice-Chairman

Robert Heiney, Commissioner

Ryran Traylor, Commissioner

Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: _____ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk