Memorandum

To: Plainfield Township Board

From: Cameron L. Van Wyngarden, Township Superintendent

Date: 3/4/2026

Re: Recommendation to adopt changes to the cemetery ordinance

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Board,

As you recall from our meeting last December, we have recently received interest from residents in allowing "green burials" in our cemetery. Since that meeting our staff has conducted additional research and worked with the Township's attorney to draft amendments to the cemetery ordinance.

At our last meeting on February 9, the Board conducted a first reading of the ordinance and set a public notice that these changes would be considered at the March 9 meeting. If the Board is comfortable with the proposed changes to the ordinance, they may adopt it, and the ordinance changes would go into effect seven days after publication in a local newspaper (Grand Rapids Press).

The proposed amendments establish the terminology and rules regarding green burials as well as scatter gardens for cremains. However, under the ordinance changes, the Board will have to establish the location(s) for both items under a separate resolution. This approach allows the Board to make changes to the size or location of these areas without going through the process of amending the entire ordinance which saves time and publication costs.

I recommend adopting the proposed changes to the cemetery ordinance as presented.

Sincerely,

Cameron Van Wyngarden
Superintendent

PLAINFIELD CHARTER TOWNSHIP
KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

ORDINANCE NO. 2026-____

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 32, ARTICLE III, ENTITLED "CEMETERIES" OF THE PLAINFIELD CHARTER TOWNSHIP CODE OF ORDINANCES

At a regular meeting of the Plainfield Charter Township Board, Kent County, Michigan, held in the Township Hall on the ___ day of _____, 2026, at _____ p.m., the following Ordinance was offered for adoption by Township Board Member _____, and was seconded by Township Board Member _____:

THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF PLAINFIELD ORDAINS:

Section 1. Amendment of Chapter 32, Article III. That Chapter 32, Article III of the Code of Ordinances of Plainfield Charter Township, Michigan, is hereby amended to read in its entirety as follows:

Sec. 32-51. Title and applicability.

This article shall be known and may be cited as the Township Cemetery Ordinance. Plainfield Charter Township owns two cemeteries, being the Plainfield Cemetery located at 6205 Packer Drive NE at Rogue River Road NE and Packer Drive NE and the Oakwood Cemetery located at 3985 Cannonsburg Road on Cannonsburg Road NE and Brewer Drive NE.

Sec. 32-52. Definitions.

(a) A "grave" is a burial space for human remains, which consists of a land area four feet wide by ten feet in length. Graves in a natural burial section shall consist of a land area five feet wide by ten feet in length. The "head" of a grave shall be defined as the end boundary of a grave nearest to the location where monuments and markers have traditionally been located in the cemetery. If it is unclear as to which end of the grave is the "head" as to a particular grave, the decision of the township superintendent shall be final.

(b) A "lot" is a group of several graves. Lot sizes vary from two graves to ten graves. Each lot is designated with a numerical marker placed on the surface of the ground at the southeast corner of each lot and three rod markers embedded on the other three corners.

(c) A "block" is a group of several lots. A block is used for orientating the placement of lots and graves. Each grave has a block, lot, and grave number.

(d) A "walkway" is an open space located at the foot of each grave and in between the lots. Walkways vary in width.

(e) A "service drive" is an area on which equipment may be driven without traversing a grave.

(f) A "tribute area" is that part of the surface of a grave located within 36 inches of the head (boundary) of a grave, except where monuments and markers have been permitted at the foot of the grave, in which case, the tribute area will be considered 36 inches from the foot (boundary) of the grave.

(g) The "township" is Plainfield Charter Township.

(h) A “green burial” means the interment of a deceased human body in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition and that allows the body to return naturally to the earth, without the use of embalming chemicals, metal caskets, concrete vaults, or other non-biodegradable materials.

(i) A “natural burial section” means a portion of the cemetery, if any, that the township has approved by resolution as a designated area reserved solely for green burials.

(j) A “scatter garden” means a portion of the cemetery, if any, that the township has approved by resolution as a designated area reserved solely for placing cremains in the soil without a container.

Sec. 32-53. Sale of graves or burial rights.

(a) The township may sell one or more graves in the cemeteries for the purpose of granting to the purchaser the right of interment and burial of human remains within a grave.

(b) The sale price of a grave or graves shall be established by the township in its annual rates and charges resolution.

(c) The township shall issue a cemetery lot certificate to the purchaser of a grave.

(d) The sale of a grave, together with the issuance of a cemetery lot certificate, grants only a right of interment of human remains and does not convey absolute title to the grave or any other interest in real property.

(e) The person or persons to whom a cemetery lot certificate has been issued, and their heirs and assigns, may transfer and assign all the rights contained therein by execution and delivery to the township of such transfer document as may be required by the township.

(f) All graves shall be subject to the rules, regulations and terms contained in this ordinance and as may be amended from time to time.

Sec. 32-54. Monuments, markers, and other adornment of graves.

(a) The tribute area within the boundary of a grave may only include a monument, marker, floral displays, plantings, and/or such other adornment as shall not encroach outside the perimeter

of the tribute area. Benches may be used as monuments. Shepherd's crooks, with the hooks turned inward toward the center of the tribute area, may be placed in the tribute area. Adornment within a tribute area, other than natural floral displays and plantings, shall be of a nature that they must be firmly secured to the ground or such as will not easily be windblown from the tribute area. No adornment shall be placed on any grave that does not contain human remains. Monuments or markers may be installed at the head of graves that are not occupied by human remains.

(b) The tribute area within the boundary of a grave within a natural burial section may only include a marker that is level and flush with the ground. Such markers shall not encroach outside the perimeter of the tribute area or interfere with mowing and maintenance of the natural burial section. Flush with the ground means at the same surface height as the ground.

(c) Each monument or marker shall be of durable permanent material, such as stone, and shall not exceed 36 inches in height from ground level.

(d) A monument or marker that commemorates more than one person on contiguous graves may be centered on such graves within the tribute area.

(e) Each monument or marker shall be placed on a foundation, which shall be constructed by or at the direction of the township. The cost of such foundation shall be paid by the person making application to the township for the construction of the foundation.

(f) Each monument or marker shall be placed at the head of a grave and in line with other nearby monuments or markers.

(g) No floral display, planting, or other adornment is permitted in a walkway or service drive.

(h) The township is not responsible for the loss, theft, or damage to any monument, marker, floral display, planting, or other adornment located within the cemeteries, including those located within a tribute area.

(i) Bushes, shrubs, or trees may not be planted within the tribute area, and no floral display, planting, or other adornment may be located outside the tribute area.

(j) No loose debris (ex: stones, gravel, mulch, shells, glass, marbles) or artificial ground cover may be located on any part of a grave, including within a tribute area.

(k) No borders shall be constructed around or within the perimeter of a tribute area or grave space.

(l) Flag holders shall be only those as are furnished by the township or its designee.

(m) Floral ground displays such as a wreath or funeral spray may be left on that portion of a grave outside of the tribute area following a burial for up to 48 hours.

(n) A temporary marker indicating the name of the deceased person may be placed on a grave for one year after a burial.

(o) Nothing in the tribute area shall exceed 60 inches in height.

Sec. 32-55. Ground maintenance.

(a) All grading, leveling, or excavating of a grave shall be the responsibility of the township. Surfaces other than earth are not permitted. Mounds that hinder the free use of a lawn mower or other maintenance apparatus are prohibited.

(b) The township reserves the right to remove or trim any tree, plant, or shrub located within the cemeteries in the interest of reasonable maintenance of the cemeteries.

(c) The township may remove from a grave and dispose of any and all growth, emblems, displays, containers, or other adornment that, through decay, deterioration, or damage, has become unsightly or a hindrance to maintenance without notice to any person.

(d) The township reserves the right to establish rules regarding seasonal cleanup practices including establishing cleanup dates.

(e) Any floral display, planting, or other adornment located outside a tribute area may be removed by the township without notice to any person.

(f) No fencing or enclosures shall be placed around a burial plot and no rocks, mulch, glass or cans, of any kind, will be permitted to be placed on any burial plot.

(g) Surfaces other than earth or sod are prohibited.

(h) Natural burial sections will be generally maintained as follows:

1. The township will endeavor to have areas designated as natural burial sections maintained in such a way as to reflect natural growth with minimal maintenance.

2. No grass or ground covers will be planted, mowed, or otherwise maintained or permitted, unless the township, in its sole discretion, authorizes the same.

3. Growth of native ground cover plants will be allowed to occur naturally.

4. After a block of graves is deemed full and equipment access is no longer required for burials, native tree seedling may be permitted to grow naturally throughout the natural burial section, as approved by the township superintendent.

5. A rough, unpaved 10-foot service drive through the natural burial section will be minimally maintained for use by burial equipment, trucks or similar passenger vehicles,

and pedestrians.

Sec. 32-56. Columbarium.

(a) Columbarium shall be located only in areas of the cemeteries as approved by the township superintendent. Columbarium shall be constructed of durable permanent materials and according to specifications approved by the township board.

(b) No columbarium shall be used for any purpose other than for the interment of human remains.

(c) Procedures for interment and disinterment shall be the same as those for burials.

(d) A temporary tribute area shall be provided by the township at the base of a columbarium for use for a maximum of one week after an interment by families of those interred.

Sec. 32-57. Interment.

(a) A burial permit shall be presented to the township prior to interment.

(b) All burials of a human body shall be in a vault in the ground, except for green burials in a natural burial section. All cremation ashes shall be placed in an airtight container and interred, except for cremains scattered in a scatter garden.

(c) Township staff, or its designee, shall prepare a grave for interment. The fees associated with interments, green burials, and scattering cremains in a scatter garden shall be established by resolution of the township.

(d) A grave may contain the human remains of one person, or one person and one infant, or one person and one cremation, or two cremations.

(e) Dates and times of internment shall be determined by the township.

(f) The following interment and preparation regulations shall apply to green burials:

1. Green burials shall only occur in a natural burial section of the cemetery.

2. Graves in a natural burial section are generally intended for non-embalmed bodies, but bodies embalmed with certified green, non-toxic, and/or biodegradable fluids are permitted. Conventionally embalmed bodies are not permitted in a natural burial section.

3. No vaults or grave liners of any kind are permitted.

4. Sturdy containers for burials (e.g., untreated wood coffins, wicker or grass baskets, bamboo or cardboard boxes, etc.) must be made of biodegradable materials and must fit easily within the standard grave hole size.

5. Shroud burials using wrappings such as cloth, blankets, or quilts are permitted if such wrappings are biodegradable. Any burials involving shrouds require strapping the remains to a trundle board for interment. Said trundle board must be of appropriate size and strength and must easily fit into the standard burial space. The township shall have no responsibility to procure a trundle board, and all interments shall be completed by a funeral director. Township staff shall not be responsible for placement of the deceased.

6. Green burials must comply with all applicable state and local laws, rules, and regulations, including applicable provisions of the Michigan Public Health Code, MCL 333.1101, *et seq*.

7. Only cemetery staff and/or approved contractors may dig graves for green burials and will use a backhoe and/or other equipment and machinery, as needed.

8. Grave depth will be in the range of three (3) to four (4) feet, respecting the desire for natural burials to be no deeper than necessary.

9. Because the natural burial section service drive will be unpaved and may be inaccessible to hearses and ordinary passenger vehicles, delivery of remains to a grave will require capable pallbearers and/or approved alternative vehicles, as determined by the township superintendent.

(g) The following regulations shall apply to the scattering of cremains:

1. Cremains may only be scattered in a scatter garden and shall not be scattered anywhere else in the cemetery.

2. Scattering may only be scheduled when another burial or scattering is not in process.

3. Cremains shall be lightly raked into the soil by cemetery staff to prevent migration of the cremains.

Sec. 32-58. Cemetery hours.

(a) The cemetery shall be open to the general public from sunrise to sunset (except during maintenance activity that prohibits visitors for safety reasons).

(b) The cemetery may close temporarily for weekly maintenance.

(c) No person shall be permitted within the cemetery at any other time, except with prior written permission of the township.

Sec. 32-59. Forfeiture of vacant graves.

(a) In the event that any grave sold by the township after the effective date of the ordinance from which this article is derived remains vacant 40 years from the date of the last sale or transfer of the grave, the township may initiate a reversion process as described below.

(b) Notice shall be sent by the township by first class mail to the last known address of the last known owner of a cemetery lot certificate as evidenced by the township records, informing such person(s) of the expiration of the 40-year period and that all rights with respect to said grave will be forfeited if a response in writing is not submitted to the township within 60 days from the date of mailing of the notice of an intention to retain rights to such grave. If no written response to such a notice indicating a desire to retain rights to such grave is received by the township within 60 days after the date of mailing of such notice, then all rights to use of the grave shall be deemed reverted to the township.

Sec. 32-60. Repurchase of graves.

The township may repurchase any grave from the then current owner of a cemetery lot certificate upon payment to such owner of an amount equal to the original purchase price, provided the township has received a written request from such owner.

Sec. 32-61. Records.

The township shall maintain a permanent record concerning all burials and issuance of cemetery lot certificates including the name and address of the person or persons to whom each cemetery lot certificate is issued. Such records shall be kept separate and apart from any other records of the township, and the same shall be open to public inspection at all reasonable business hours.

Sec. 32-62. Penalties and enforcement.

Any person who violates or refuses to comply with any provision of this article shall be responsible for a civil infraction. Each day that a violation continues to exist shall constitute a separate offense. In addition, the township may enforce this article in any other manner permitted by law.

The township shall not be responsible for any kinds of damage by the elements, vandals, or thieves or by other causes beyond its control. The defacement of markers, memorials, monuments, graves or cemetery appurtenances, whether intentional or otherwise, and the removal of flowers, urns or any of the cemetery equipment without proper authority will be considered a misdemeanor and the individual will be liable for the damages. The operator of any vehicle will be liable for any damage caused by said vehicle, whether intentional or unintentional. The speed limit established on cemetery roads is ten miles per hour.

Secs. 32-63—32-80. Reserved.

Section 2. Severability. If any provision of this Ordinance or the application thereof to any person or circumstance shall be found to be invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity

shall not affect the remaining provisions of this Ordinance, which shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 3. Effective Date. This Ordinance shall become effective upon the expiration of seven days after its publication or seven days after the publication of a summary of its provisions in a local newspaper of general circulation.

Yeas: _____
Nays: _____
Absent: _____
Ordinance No. _____ declared adopted.

_____
Tom Coleman, Supervisor

_____
Steven McKellar, Clerk

CERTIFICATION

I, Steven McKellar, the Clerk of the Charter Township of Plainfield, certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate copy of an ordinance adopted by the Township Board of the Township at a regular meeting held on _____, 2026.

_____
Steven McKellar, Clerk