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Filer cemetery district could proceed to ballot

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Tom Lancaster talks about the columbarium Feb. 21 at the Filer Cemetery in Filer.

PAT SUTPHIN, TIMES-NEWS FILE

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FILER — Filer area residents could help determine the future of their local cemetery in November.

Twin Falls County Commissioners will hold a public hearing Friday regarding the establishment of a cemetery maintenance district for Filer Cemetery. After the hearing, the commission will verify signatures and vote on whether to put the petition on the November ballot.

The 1908 cemetery was opened by the Filer Independent Order of the Odd Fellows Lodge. When that club disbanded, the cemetery became a private nonprofit corporation. Today, it's overseen by a small board of directors, and run by 80-year-old Filer resident Tom Lancaster.

“The records are in Tom’s basement,” County Commissioner Terry Kramer said.

As he has gone around collecting signatures for his petition, most people have been asking him why it’s taken so long, Lancaster said.

“It’s taken this long for the cemetery to run out of money,” he said.

With no surplus or backup funds, he admits that at times he has to cut his own wages in order to do what needs to be done. There are about 2,700 graves in the Filer Cemetery, but as more people switch to cremation, it’s been difficult to get adequate money to fund maintenance.

“I have had nothing but favorable comments about the plan to turn the cemetery into a maintenance district,” Lancaster said.

Twin Falls County uses about 20 percent of the Filer Cemetery for indigent burials, Kramer said.

Kramer himself would not like to see the cemetery fall into disrepair. He recalls what happened with the Artesian City Cemetery south of Murtaugh Lake, where grave sites were disturbed and uncared for.

“This is a situation where I certainly don’t want this to happen again,” Kramer said.

The cemetery taxing district is proposed to cover the same boundaries as the Filer School District, with a tax rate similar to the West End Cemetery District in Buhl. That would be about \$13 per \$100,000 in taxable value, Kramer said.

Lancaster said that if voters agree to a public cemetery, he will stick around for a year after it takes effect in order to help others take over the maintenance.

The hearing starts at 10 a.m. Friday in the Twin Falls County Commissioners room on the second floor at 650 Addison Ave. W.

If you go...

The public hearing takes place at 10 a.m. Friday in the second-floor Commissioners Meeting Room at 650 Addison Ave. W.

MORE INFORMATION



TF Commissioners wait to decide Filer Cemetery ballot measure