

# ELK RAPIDS NEWS

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Main entrance to Maple Grove Cemetery.

## PROPOSED MAPLE GROVE IMPROVEMENTS

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On November 8, residents of Elk Rapids Township will be asked to approve a millage of .60 per \$1,000 of taxable value to support improvements, repair and maintenance for 20-acre Maple Grove Cemetery. According to Dorrance Amos, Elk Rapids Township Supervisor, the decision to seek millage approval was difficult but important. "The Township Cemetery is a big part of who we are. We have 471 veterans in the cemetery. It is an entrance to the township, and it is hurtful to have it in disrepair. I feel horrible when I must tell people that we cannot afford water and other items. Our proposal is a basic approach. There are no frills in the plan or new buildings. It is a simple maintenance plan to bring the cemetery to a better level."

A June 2022 notice on the Maple Grove Cemetery website was a strong indicator that repair and maintenance at the cemetery is an issue for the township. "Due to a number of leaks and breaks in the water line at Maple Grove Cemetery, the water

throughout the cemetery has been turned off," the notice explained. "There are now only four (4) water faucets that have water, and they are located near each entrance. Please bring your own container."

Since the cemetery was created in 1910, funds to maintain the grounds were the result of plot sales and the township general fund. Until recently, plot owners could purchase "Perpetual Care" for \$1. As maintenance expenses outran income from plot sales over the years, expenses were covered from the general fund and the township was forced to stop offering "perpetual care" for \$1 for long-term maintenance. In 2019, the Elk Rapids Township Board developed a ten-year plan, budget and millage proposal for repairs and maintenance at Maple Grove Cemetery. While the millage request was narrowly defeated in 2020, the plan and needs for the cemetery have continued to impact the overall Township General Fund Budget. This year, total expenses will represent almost 10% of the annual township budget. According to May 2022 township financial reports, the cemetery costs for



Headstone adjustments, stump removal and ground leveling plans are on hold.

the minimum maintenance of mowing, trimming grass and roads are estimated to reach \$68,000 this year, far above the 2021-2022 budget of \$58,500 and 2020-2021 actual expense of \$42,500. Other needed maintenance items, including the water lines were set aside for lack of funds.

If approved, according to Amos, the board has decided to use the original 2019 project budget as a base and evaluate the items that would be completed from that list with the funds available. Those long-term plans include mapping and reconciliation of records, irrigation supply and system installation, landscaping and site restoration, database management and the development of columbarium/cremation centers in available areas. Due to the shortage of plots available, the township passed a resolution in 2020 to set new plot and burial fees with a new purchase limit of two plots per family unless approved by the township.

According to Shelley Boisvert, Township Clerk, Maple Grove Cemetery includes 1,570 plots with each plot having eight burial spaces. "We show approximately 393 available spaces," Boisvert said. "Part of our planned project would be to contact family or heirs of spaces from the late 1800s through the 1900s where a plot had been purchased but only one or two burials are on the plot, because we are so short of space. That will be an investigative and legal project to try to advertise or contact heirs to see if we can purchase spaces back that have not been used."

The irrigation, landscaping, and site restoration project segments, according to the 2019 plan, will carry most of the cost. With almost 100 water taps in



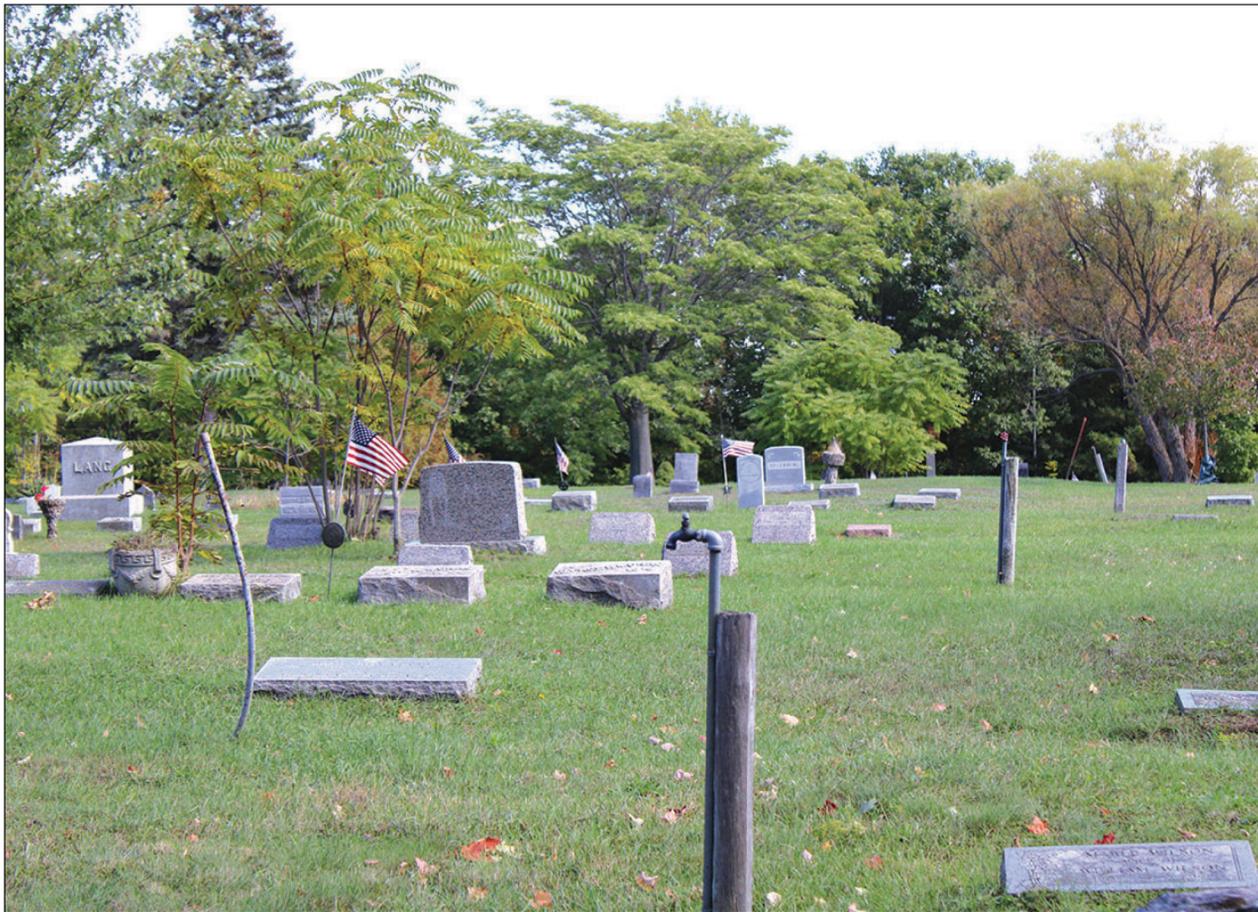
Extensive repairs and maintenance are needed at Maple Grove Cemetery. Photos by Mark McAlpine

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**Although there are almost 100 water taps in the cemetery, only four are currently working.** Photos by Mark McAlpine

the cemetery, and only four working, broken water lines are clearly visible and in need of replacement and repair in all corners of the cemetery. Many reseeding and landscaping projects will be delayed until the water is restored. Money was saved four years ago when an adjoining property owner allowed the township access to lake water to handle future irrigation needs, eliminating the need to add the expense of a dedicated well to the property. Headstone adjustments, stump removal and ground leveling plans have been delayed due to funding and are high on the priority list of landscape and site restoration.

According to Michael Szymanski, Township Treasurer, the board has explored a variety of funding options to cover the expense needs for the cemetery, but he still believes that a ten-year millage plan is the best financial plan for the township. “A lot of people confuse

our budget with the village budget, which is much larger.” Szymanski said, “The township just does not have the funds to cover the increase in expenses for the cemetery. If it passes, the millage will go on the Winter tax bill, which will be collected from December 1, 2022, through the end of March 2023. There would be money available for work to begin in the spring.”

Both Amos and Szymanski are hopeful that the ten-year millage proposal will be approved. “I know that there are a lot of folks in the community who respect and want to maintain the cemetery,” Amos said. “I think it is a big piece of our township heritage. I am fourth generation of township residents. Our family has been there for several generations. When you walk into a cemetery that is poorly maintained, I don’t think it does justice to those who started the cemetery or are part of it.”