

Article 12.

Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries.

Part 1. General.

§ 65-85. Definitions.

As used in this Article, the following terms mean:

- (1) Abandoned. – Ceased from maintenance or use by the person with legal right to the real property with the intent of not again maintaining the real property in the foreseeable future.
- (2) Cemetery. – A tract of land used for burial of multiple graves.
- (3) Department. – The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.
- (4) Grave. – A place of burial for a single decedent.
- (5) Neglected. – Left unattended or uncared for through carelessness or intention and lacking a caretaker.
- (6) Public cemetery. – A cemetery for which there is no qualification to purchase, own, or come into possession of a grave in that cemetery. (2007-118, s. 1; 2015-241, s. 14.30(s).)

§ 65-86: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-87: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-88: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-89: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-90: Reserved for future codification purposes.

Part 2. Trust Funds for Care of Cemeteries.

§ 65-91. Money deposited with the clerk of superior court.

For the maintenance and preservation of abandoned or neglected graves or abandoned or neglected cemeteries, any person, firm, or corporation may, by will or otherwise, place in the hands of the clerk of the superior court of any county in the State where such grave or lot is located any sum of money not less than five thousand dollars (\$5,000), the income from which is to be used for keeping in good condition the abandoned or neglected grave or the abandoned or neglected cemetery with specific instructions as to the use of the fund. (1917, c. 155, s. 1; C.S., s. 5024; 1979, c. 38; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-92. Separate record of accounts to be kept.

It shall be the duty of the clerk of the superior court to keep a separate record for keeping account of the money deposited as provided in G.S. 65-91, to keep a perpetual account of the same therein, and to record therein the specific instructions about the use of the income on such money. The clerk shall see that the income is spent according to such specific instructions and shall place a copy of the accounting in the estate file. (1917, c. 155, s. 1; C.S., s. 5025; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-93. Funds to be kept perpetually.

All money placed in the office of the superior court clerk in accordance with this Part shall be held perpetually, or until such time as the balance of the trust corpus falls below one hundred dollars (\$100.00), at which time the trust shall terminate, and the clerk shall disburse the remaining balance. Except as otherwise provided herein, no one shall have authority to withdraw or change the direction of the income on same. (1917, c. 155, s. 2; C.S., s. 5026; 1995, c. 225, s. 2; 2007-118, s. 1; 2024-33, s. 9.)

§ 65-94. Investment of funds.

Money placed in the office of the superior court clerk in accordance with this Part shall be invested in the same manner as is provided by law for the investment of other trust funds by the clerk of the superior court. (1917, c. 155, s. 3; C.S., s. 5027; 1943, c. 97, s. 1; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-95. Substitution of bank or trust company as trustee.

In lieu of the provisions of this section, the clerk may appoint any bank or trust company authorized to do business in this State as trustee for the funds authorized to be paid into his office by virtue of this Part; provided, that no bank or trust company shall be appointed as such trustee unless such bank or trust company is authorized and licensed to act as fiduciary under the laws of this State.

Before any clerk shall turn over such funds to the trustee so appointed, the clerk shall require that the trustee so named qualify before the clerk as such trustee in the same way and manner and to the same extent as guardians are by law required to so qualify. After such trustee has qualified as herein provided, all such funds coming into the clerk's hands may be invested by the trustee only in the securities set out in G.S. 7A-112 and the income therefrom invested for the purposes and in the manner heretofore set out in this Part. All trustees appointed under the provisions of this Part shall render and file in the office of the clerk of the superior court all reports that are now required by law of guardians. (1917, c. 155, ss. 3, 4; C.S., s. 5028; 1939, c. 18; 1943, c. 97, s. 2; 2007-118, s. 1; 2024-33, s. 21.)

§ 65-96. Funds exempt from taxation.

All money referred to in the preceding sections of this Part shall be exempt from all State, county, township, town, and city taxes. (1917, c. 155, s. 4; C.S., s. 5029; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-97: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-98: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-99: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-100: Reserved for future codification purposes.

Part 3. Access to and Maintenance of Abandoned or Neglected Cemeteries.

§ 65-101. Entering public or private property to maintain or visit with consent.

Any of the following persons, with the consent of the public or private landowner, may enter the property of another to discover, restore, maintain, or visit a grave or abandoned public cemetery:

- (1) A descendant of the person whose remains are reasonably believed to be interred in the grave or abandoned public cemetery.
- (2) A descendant's designee.
- (3) Any other person who has a special personal interest in the grave or abandoned public cemetery. (1987, c. 686, s. 1; 1991, c. 36, s. 1; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-102. Entering public or private property to maintain or visit without consent.

(a) If the consent of the landowner cannot be obtained, any person listed in G.S. 65-101(1), (2), or (3) may commence a special proceeding by petitioning the clerk of superior court of the county in which the petitioner has reasonable grounds to believe the grave or abandoned public cemetery is located for an order allowing the petitioner to enter the property to discover, restore, maintain, or visit the grave or abandoned public cemetery. The petition shall be verified. The special proceeding shall be in accordance with the provisions of Articles 27A and 33 of Chapter 1 of the General Statutes. The clerk shall issue an order allowing the petitioner to enter the property if the clerk finds all of the following:

- (1) There are reasonable grounds to believe that the grave or abandoned public cemetery is located on the property or it is reasonably necessary to enter or cross the landowner's property to reach the grave or abandoned public cemetery.
 - (2) The petitioner, or the petitioner's designee, is a descendant of the deceased, or the petitioner has a legitimate historical, genealogical, or governmental interest in the grave or abandoned public cemetery.
 - (3) The entry on the property would not unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of the property by the landowner.
- (b) The clerk's order may state one or more of the following:
- (1) Specify the dates and the daylight hours that the petitioner may enter and remain on the property.
 - (2) Grant the petitioner the right to enter the landowner's property periodically, as specified in the order, after the time needed for initial restoration of the grave or abandoned public cemetery.
 - (3) Specify a reasonable route from which the petitioner may not deviate in all entries and exits from the property. (1987, c. 686, s. 1; 1991, c. 36, s. 1; 1999-216, s. 12; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-103: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-104: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-105: Reserved for future codification purposes.

Part 4. Removal of Graves.

§ 65-106. Removal of graves; who may disinter, move, and reinter; notice; certificate filed; reinterment expenses; due care required.

(a) The State of North Carolina and any of its agencies, public institutions, or political subdivisions, the United States of America or any agency thereof, any church, electric power or lighting company, or any person, firm, or corporation may effect the disinterment, removal, and reinterment of graves as follows:

- (1) By the State of North Carolina or any of its agencies, public institutions, or political subdivisions, the United States of America or any agency thereof, when it shall determine and certify to the board of county commissioners in the county from which the bodies are to be disinterred that such removal is reasonably necessary to perform its governmental functions and the duties delegated to it by law.
- (2) By any church authority in order to erect a new church, parish house, parsonage, or any other facility owned and operated exclusively by such church; in order to expand or enlarge an existing church facility; or better to care for and maintain graves not located in a regular cemetery for which such church has assumed responsibility of care and custody.
- (3) By an electric power or lighting company when it owns land on which graves are located, and the land is to be used as a reservoir.
- (4) By any person, firm, or corporation who owns land on which an abandoned cemetery is located after first securing the consent of the governing body of the municipality or county in which the abandoned cemetery is located.

(b) The party effecting the disinterment, removal, and reinterment of a grave containing a decedent's remains under the provisions of this Part shall, before disinterment, give 30 days' written notice of such intention to the next of kin of the decedent, if known or subject to being ascertained by reasonable search and inquiry, and shall cause notice of such disinterment, removal, and reinterment to be published at least once per week for four successive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the county where such grave is located, and the first publication shall be not less than 30 days before disinterment. Any remains disinterred and removed hereunder shall be reinterred in a suitable cemetery.

(c) The party removing or causing the removal of all such graves shall, within 30 days after completion of the removal and reinterment, file with the register of deeds of the county from which the graves were removed and with the register of deeds of the county in which reinterment is made, a written certificate of the removal facts. Such certificate shall contain the full name, if known or reasonably ascertainable, of each decedent whose grave is moved, a precise description of the site from which such grave was removed, a precise description of the site and specific location where the decedent's remains have been reinterred, the full and correct name of the party effecting the removal, and a brief description of the statutory basis or bases upon which such removal or reinterment was effected. If the full name of any decedent cannot reasonably be ascertained, the removing party shall set forth all additional reasonably ascertainable facts about the decedent including birth date, death date, and family name.

The fee for recording instruments in general, as provided in G.S. 161-10(a)(1), for registering a certificate of removal facts shall be paid to the register of deeds of each county in which such certificate is filed for registration.

(d) All expenses of disinterment, removal, and acquisition of the new burial site and reinterment shall be borne by the party effecting such disinterment, removal, and reinterment, including the actual reasonable expense of one of the next of kin incurred in attending the same, not to exceed the sum of two hundred dollars (\$200.00).

(e) The Office of Vital Records of North Carolina shall promulgate regulations affecting the registration and indexing of the written certificate of the removal facts, including the form of that certificate.

(f) The party effecting the disinterment, removal, and reinterment of a decedent's remains under the provisions of this Part shall ensure that the site in which reinterment is accomplished shall be of such suitable dimensions to accommodate the remains of that decedent only and that such site shall be reasonably accessible to all relatives of that decedent, provided that the remains may be reinterred in a common grave where written consent is obtained from the next of kin. If under the authority of this Part, disinterment, removal, and reinterment are effected by the State of North Carolina or any of its agencies, public institutions, or political subdivisions, the United States of America or any agency thereof, any electric power or lighting company, then such disinterment, removal, and reinterment shall be performed by a funeral director duly licensed as a "funeral director" or a "funeral service licensee" under the provisions of Article 13A of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes.

(g) All disinterment, removal, and reinterment under the provisions of this Part shall be made under the supervision and direction of the county board of commissioners or other appropriate official, including the local health director, appointed by such board for the county where the disinterment, removal, and reinterment take place. If reinterment is effected in a county different from the county of disinterment with the consent of the next of kin of the deceased whose remains are disinterred, then the disinterment and removal shall be made under the supervision and direction of the county board of commissioners or other appropriate official, including the local health director, appointed by such board for the county of the disinterment, and the reinterment shall be made under the supervision and direction of the county board of commissioners or other appropriate official, including the local health director, appointed by such board for the county of reinterment.

Due care shall be taken to do said work in a proper and decent manner, and, if necessary, to furnish suitable coffins or boxes for reintering such remains. Due care shall also be taken to remove, protect, and replace all tombstones or other markers, so as to leave such tombstones or other markers in as good condition as that prior to disinterment. Provided that in cases where the remains are to be moved to a perpetual care cemetery or other cemetery where upright tombstones are not permitted, a suitable replacement marker shall be provided.

(h) Nothing contained in this Part shall be construed to grant or confer the power or authority of eminent domain, or to impair the right of the next of kin of a decedent to remove or cause the removal, at his or their expense, of the remains or grave of such decedent. (1919, c. 245; C.S., ss. 5030, 5030(a); Ex. Sess. 1920, c. 46; 1927, c. 23, s. 1; c. 175, s. 1; 1937, c. 3; 1947, cc. 168, 576; 1961, c. 457; 1963, c. 915, s. 1; 1965, c. 71; 1971, c. 797, s. 1; 1977, c. 311, s. 1; 2001-390, s. 3; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-107: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-108: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-109: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-110: Reserved for future codification purposes.

Part 5. County Care of Rural Cemeteries.

§ 65-111. County commissioners to provide list of public and abandoned cemeteries.

Each board of county commissioners shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

- (1) To prepare and keep on record in the office of the register of deeds a list of all public cemeteries in the county outside the limits of incorporated municipalities, and not established and maintained for the use of an incorporated municipality, including the names and addresses of the persons in possession and control of those public cemeteries.
- (2) To prepare and keep on record in the office of the register of deeds a list of all abandoned public cemeteries.
- (3) To furnish to the Department and the Publications Division in the Department of the Secretary of State copies of the lists of such public and abandoned cemeteries, to the end that it may furnish to the boards of county commissioners, for the use of the persons in control of such cemeteries, suitable literature, suggesting methods of taking care of such places. (1917, c. 101, s. 1; C.S., s. 5019; 1939, c. 316; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-112. Appropriations by county commissioners.

To encourage the persons in possession and control of the public cemeteries referred to in G.S. 65-111 to take proper care of and to beautify such cemeteries, to mark distinctly their boundary lines with evergreen hedges or rows of suitable trees, and otherwise to lay out the grounds in an orderly manner, the board of county commissioners of any county, upon being notified that two-thirds of the expense necessary for so marking and beautifying any cemetery has been raised by the local governing body of the institution which owns the cemetery, and is actually in hand, is hereby authorized to appropriate from the general fund of the county one-third of the expense necessary to pay for such work, the amount appropriated by the board of commissioners in no case to exceed fifty dollars (\$50.00) for each cemetery. (1917, c. 101, s. 2; C.S., s. 5020; 1979, c. 735; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-113. County commissioners to have control of abandoned public cemeteries; trustees.

The county commissioners of the various counties are authorized to oversee all abandoned public cemeteries in their respective counties, to see that the boundaries and lines are clearly laid out, defined, and marked, and to take proper steps to preserve them from encroachment, and they are hereby authorized to appropriate from the general fund of the county whatever sums may be necessary from time to time for the above purposes.

The boards of county commissioners of the various counties may appoint a board of trustees not to exceed five in number and to serve at the will of the board, and may impose upon such trustees the duties required of the board of commissioners by this Article; and such trustees may accept gifts and donations for the purpose of upkeep and beautification of such cemeteries. (1917, c. 101, s. 3; C.S., s. 5021; 1947, c. 236; 2007-118, s. 1.)

§ 65-114: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-115: Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 65-116: Reserved for future codification purposes.

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