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COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

To: Lewis Polishook, Director

From: Michael D. Seelman, Investigator II

Subject: Ridge Road Cemetery Association, #28-032

Re: Addendum to Columbarium Report

Date: July 3, 2025

The Ridge Road Cemetery Association has applied for approval to install a 96-niche columbarium. After posting the required signs, it received a negative comment from a lot-owner, who is concerned that the columbarium is too close to his lot and blocks it from view. The application was presented to the Cemetery Board at the April 2025 meeting. The Division had recommended approval of this application. The lot owner addressed the Board with his concerns. The Cemetery Board tabled the application for further discussions involving the cemetery representatives, lot owner, and Division to attempt to address the lot owner's concerns.

After the Board meeting, Division Investigator Michael Catena met with members of the cemetery's board and the lot owner to discuss the location and review alternatives to the planned location. This meeting did not resolve the issue. Following that meeting, I met with the board of directors of the cemetery on June 6, 2025. All members were aware of the complaint that the proposed placement of the columbarium could obstruct the view of the lots in question from Latona Road. All agreed that the alternative locations proposed by the lot owner were not feasible. The board explained that the proposed location was chosen because it is near the front of the cemetery, ear the municipal sidewalk and bus stop for ease of visitation, and near the existing veteran's memorial and flagpole. These features make it easily visible and accessible to prospective customers

The lot owner proposed that the cemetery place the columbarium near its equipment storage building. The area to the left of that building is the parking space for the caretaker. The location to the right of the equipment building is used for storing excess dirt from graves and there is no other location for this storage, the area to the right of that holds the last available graves in the cemetery. None of these spaces are visible from the front of the cemetery or easily accessible to the public sidewalk and bus stop. The cemetery's board believes that the location for the columbarium they selected is the best one for the columbarium. I myself walked the grounds of the cemetery and did not see an alternative location close to the front of the cemetery, sidewalk, or bus stop.

The board intends to be available to discuss this at the July meeting of the New York State Cemetery Board.

The lot owner provided a copy of the rules and regulations that were included with the deed for their lots and referenced the rule that states, “No vault of mausoleum shall be built.” The Division understands this approved rule to prohibit lot owners from installing private mausoleums and does not apply to the cemetery itself installing a columbarium (which, of course, is also not a mausoleum).

The proposed location may obstruct the view of the monuments from Latona Road. However, the installation of a columbarium on that site will not prevent reasonable access to any lot. The receiving vault, the veteran’s memorial and a dumpster are all located on the east side of the cemetery along Latona Road.

As the Division reported to the Board in April, both operational and financial assessments indicate that the installation of a columbarium will benefit the cemetery and its lot owners. The cemetery’s board was unable to locate any substantially effective location for the columbarium further from the lot owner’s graves. We therefore renew our recommendation that the Board approve the columbarium project.