To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Donna Mitchell and I am a concerned resident of the Municipality of Meaford. I am writing to you about an inactive cemetery in Southgate Township known as Watson's Cemetery, formerly the Mount Zion Church cemetery, which is adjacent to lands being considered for severance by the Township of Southgate in The Application for Consent file number B13-22.

Subject land: Con. 13 Lot 26 and 27, Geographic Township of Egremont, further described as 144642 Southgate Rd. 14.
Parties: Dale George Watson and Lynda Mae Watson // The Trustees of the Old Order Mennonite Conference
Agent: Loft Planning Inc., Collingwood

It is my understanding that this planning application will be discussed before the Southgate Committee of Adjustment on January 25th, 2023.

Having done some research on the site I have a question about the ownership and registered operator status of this cemetery as well as some additional concerns:

1. Who is the owner of this property? A staff report from 2021 states the Township is the current owner of the property (CL2021-002 - Land Assumption Request - Watson's Cemetery – Conc 13 N, Pt Lot 27, Egremont (escribemeetings.com) but land records sent to a concerned citizen list the ownership as belonging to a different party.
2. Who has been licensed as the registered operator of this cemetery with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario as outlined in the Funerals, Burials and Cremation Services Act? The Township of Southgate is listed on the public record, but the Township asserts it is not the registered operator of the cemetery.
3. Has the size, boundary and capacity of this cemetery ever been established?
4. Has the current registered operator of the cemetery been providing maintenance on the site as well as providing for safe access for descendants of the individuals buried in the cemetery, in compliance with the Funerals, Burials and Cremation Services Act?
5. Has the applicant or the municipality contacted the Bereavement Association of Ontario to request an inspection of the site as part of this application process?

As it stands, I would urge your Committee of Adjustment to reconsider approving this application until such time as the applicant, the municipality and the BAO can determine:

1. Ownership and registered operator status of the cemetery,
2. The size, boundary and capacity of the cemetery (see note below),
3. Outstanding maintenance and access issues,
4. Archaeological assessment and location of unmarked burials on the site.

Genealogical research and community knowledge indicate that there may be more burials on this site than are currently known or registered, including the remains of an early Black Grey County settler; a school teacher named William Jones purportedly buried “outside” the fence line of the cemetery grounds, for unknown reasons, in 1878. This anecdotal documentation can be found on page 161 in the book “While We Still Remember” A History of Egremont Township 1840 – 1983” written by Mr. Campbell Cork, a well-known historian, reporter for Blackburn News, author, and speaker.

Existing documentation points to the burial of James Nickle/Nichol (1814-1856) and daughter Elizabeth (1846-1864) in the Mount Zion Methodist Cemetery. James’ wife Elizabeth (Sr.) passed away in Egremont in 1875 and may also have been buried in this cemetery.

Although the intention is not clearly stated in the planning application, it is now understood that the Trustees of the Old Order Mennonite Conference wish to expand this cemetery through this severance and convert this registered cemetery’s status from inactive to active, to use the space again for burials of members of the community. From the planning application, it is is clear that the surrounding lands will be redeveloped to allow for the new build of an Old Order Mennonite meeting house, a laneway to the meeting house, and an access lane to the cemetery.

As ownership and boundaries of the property are unclear, and as no monuments remain to help point to the location of existing grave shafts, approval of this application as it currently stands would not be in the public interest. It may also set a precedent in your Township and beyond, implying that burial sites and human remains are not worthy of respect or due process in the path of development.

I hope you will give this matter your deepest consideration.

Please add this email to the public correspondence to be read into the record at your COA meeting on January 25th, 2023, and please keep me updated regarding progress of this severance application.

Thank you,

Donna Mitchell
[redacted]