



## AUSTIN CEMETERIES MASTER PLAN

Community Meeting #4 – Summary Report  
Steph McDougal, McDoux Preservation LLC  
November 4, 2014

The Austin Cemeteries Master Plan project (2014–2015) will produce a long-range planning document to help the City of Austin manage the preservation and future development of the five city-owned cemeteries: Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery.

The public engagement portion of the project includes five community meetings, to be held approximately every two months throughout the project period. At these meetings, members of the public will receive information about the project and will be encouraged to provide input and feedback on various aspects of the Master Plan.

The fourth community meeting was held on Monday, November 3, 2014, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Zilker Botanical Gardens at 2220 Barton Springs Road. Approximately 40 people attended the meeting, including a number of University of Texas students who had been assigned to attend a public meeting.

Project team members in attendance included:

- Kim McKnight, project coordinator, PARD Cultural Resources Specialist
- Mason Miller (AmaTerra Environmental, Inc.)
- Steph McDougal (McDoux Preservation LLC)

City staff member Kevin Johnson (Capital Improvements) and architects Tom Hatch and Charles Melanson (Hatch + Ulland Owen Architects) also were present.

The majority of the meeting consisted of a presentation by Steph McDougal of her preliminary recommendations for programming at the cemeteries. The meeting also included a review of project status, an update on the cemetery rules initiative, and a presentation by Kevin Johnson and Charlie Melanson about capital improvement projects. After the meeting, attendees were encouraged to share their opinions on the preliminary programming recommendations, as well as natural burial options. Each topic was the focus of a Speak Up Austin community survey during September and October.

## Introduction and Project Status

Kim McKnight opened the meeting, reviewed the evening's agenda, and summarized the goals and purpose of the master plan. She stated that the Master Plan will include both overarching recommendations that are common to all five of the cemeteries, as well as recommendations that are specific to each cemetery's individual condition, context, and needs.

Steph McDougal then presented an overview of the project status to date, stating that the team is currently developing recommendations and drafting the Master Plan document. Preliminary concepts will be available online for public review in early December, and the draft master plan will be posted in early January. It will remain online through the end of the project. The team will present the draft master plan in the fifth and final community meeting on Saturday morning, January 24, from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Austin Public Library, Carver Branch. Following the public comment period and subsequent revisions, Kim McKnight will bring the plan forward to multiple city boards, committees, and commissions before it is presented to City Council for adoption. The team anticipates that those public meetings will take place in March 2015.

## Cemetery Rules Update

Kim McKnight summarized the cemetery rules project to date and announced that the Master Plan team's Steph McDougal will work with the City to help complete the next phase of that project.

In May-June 2014, consultants Smith/Associates held several meetings to gather the public's input on the existing cemetery rules, particularly those involving gravesite ornamentation and memorialization. Going forward, Steph McDougal will analyze and summarize all of the comments collected from the Smith/Associates process and the Master Plan process, prepare a report of findings, develop criteria for the evaluation of alternative solutions, and prepare a few example alternate solutions. The City will then determine how best to continue with the public engagement process to reach a workable solution.

Ms. McKnight and Ms. McDougal explained that the Cemetery Master Plan scope of work had included a review of the existing rules and recommendations for any changes needed to bring the rules into alignment with the Master Plan recommendations. The scope of work also included recommendations for a dispute resolution process. Both of those items will be incorporated into the additional data analysis and reporting described above.

## Capital Improvements

Kevin Johnson explained that several capital improvement projects are taking place concurrently and in coordination with the development of the Cemetery Master Plan. These projects are funded by the \$2 million bond issue and will make improvements to buildings at three of the historic city cemeteries and irrigation infrastructure at four cemeteries.

Irrigation systems have been upgraded at four cemeteries: Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, Evergreen Cemetery, and Austin Memorial Park Cemetery. (Plummers Cemetery is not irrigated.) Improvements include the replacement of couplers and hose bibs, as well as repairs to the irrigation systems. That project is complete.

At Oakwood Cemetery Annex, the ladies restroom building has been repaired with a new roof and reconstructed windows and doors. That project is now complete.

Two additional projects are ongoing and include the development of plans for the restoration of the chapel at Oakwood Cemetery and the rehabilitation of the buildings and structures at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery.

Charlie Melanson from Hatch + Ulland Owen Architects described those projects. Both projects are in the planning stages, and no construction activities are scheduled at this time. The Oakwood Cemetery chapel building had been divided with interior partitions, which would be removed to restore an open space with plenty of natural light. The concrete floor of that building has cracked and deteriorated due to shifting of soil beneath the building, and the floor would be repaired/replaced. Additional improvements would better handle drainage around the building and add restroom facilities. The architects shared renderings that illustrate what the restored chapel would look like.

At Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, HVO Architects has completed a conditions assessment of the building complex there, identifying code compliance and architectural, engineering, and accessibility issues that would need to be addressed.

Kim McKnight explained that the conditions assessment for Austin Memorial Park Cemetery did not include any design recommendations, and that at some point in the future, when the City does consider design recommendations for buildings at that cemetery, the public will have visibility and input to that process.

### Programming

Steph McDougal began her discussion of recreational and educational programming that could take place in the cemeteries by describing the importance of educational programming and explaining that “recreation” in this context refers to “leisure activities”, not organized sports or games. Ms. McDougal stated that many other historic cemeteries around the United States have been successfully creating educational and recreational programs for many years, so it is clear that that can be done in an appropriate and respectful way.

Ms. McDougal reiterated Kim McKnight’s earlier comment about the Master Plan including both general and cemetery-specific recommendations. Ms. McDougal stated that the city cemeteries are all different, and the team is not going to recommend a one-size-fits-all approach. Specifically, three of the cemeteries – Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery – are relatively inactive, with few or no burials each year. In contrast, Evergreen Cemetery and Austin Memorial Park Cemetery are very active, with hundreds of burials annually.

Ms. McDougal said that public input to the Master Plan process has shown that the community supports programming in the three older, mostly inactive cemeteries, as long as all programs are respectful and appropriate. Ms. McDougal noted that her goal is to develop a programming plan that will be fair to everyone and not favor any ethnic, cultural, or community group over another. She explained that some cultural traditions or activities that are considered appropriate by one group may be considered inappropriate by another group, and that this provides the community with an opportunity to educate everyone about Austin's cultural diversity. The Dia de los Muertos holiday, which is observed by many Mexican-American residents, had taken place over the weekend and provided a timely example. Ms. McDougal mentioned, as an aside, that the gravesite ornamentation rules similarly must respect Austin's rich diversity of cultural traditions.

Ms. McDougal went on to share her recommendations, which include:

1. Classify Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery as "historic sites" and encourage funding for educational programming.
  - This would require additional funding through the city budget process for staff and operations. PARD has no financial or staff capacity for this, at this time.
  - Similar programming in the park system is coordinated through the PARD History, Arts, and Nature Division, which oversee historic sites such as the Old Bakery, Elisabet Ney Museum, and the Dickinson and O. Henry Museums.
2. Add one full-time PARD staff person to manage programming at Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery.
  - This position also can begin to work with stakeholders for Evergreen Cemetery, particularly as it gets closer to having all plots sold.
  - The City will not consider recreational or educational programming at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery at this time.
3. Require community groups to apply for permission to hold events at cemeteries.
  - This does not include individual use of the cemeteries or projects such as the development of a self-guided tour for individuals.
  - Sponsoring organization must submit a proposal/application.
  - Group activities, classes or workshops, and special events may be allowed as long as participants follow PARD rules of cemetery etiquette (to be developed).
  - Some portion of any program fees collected must go to support the historic-site cemeteries.
4. Create a Cemeteries Committee to evaluate potential programming.
  - Although they recognize that the City has been trying to streamline the number of boards/committees, the Master Plan team believes that this one is needed.
  - The committee would include a diverse group of residents.
  - It would take the decision-making out of the hands of a single person.
  - This also would involve having regular public meetings, where members of sponsoring organizations and the public can speak on the subject of, or for or against, a proposed program/event.

5. Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events. These also would function to guide the development of programming proposals. The proposed criteria are:
  - Programs/events should engage visitors and enhance their experience and understanding of the City of Austin and its historic cemeteries.
  - Programs/events should highlight or draw attention to a particular aspect of the cemetery (history, art, culture, or nature).
  - Presentations should be based on credible information, gathered and documented through research.
  - Programs/events will occur within the cemeteries and be temporary in nature (one year or less), with the exception of projects designed to be more permanent, such as the development of interpretive materials, self-guided walking tours, etc.
  - Programs/events should have little or no impact on historical, cultural, or natural resources.
  - Programs/events should be sensitive to accessibility and safety issues for both visitors and staff.
  - Programs/events should include contingency planning in order to respect the privacy of any persons visiting the graves of loved ones or mourners who may be present in the cemetery. Also, Cemetery Manager can work with families and programming to avoid conflicts.
  - The proposal must explain how the sponsoring organization will:
    - Provide participants with a copy of PARD cemetery etiquette guidelines;
    - require participants to behave appropriately during the program/event; and
    - remove participants whose behavior is inappropriate or could damage historical, cultural, or natural resources in the cemetery.
  - Programs/events should describe how transportation and parking will be managed. (Note that parking is not available at Plummers Cemetery.)

In summary, Ms. McDougal explained that the consideration of each proposal would be based on:

- Ability to increase awareness and appreciation of Austin's historic city cemeteries
- Potential to engage a diverse group of residents
- Potential to benefit the cemetery in some way
- Quality of program content
- Projected attendance and ability of sponsoring organization to manage expected number of participants
- Ability to ensure safety, accessibility, and security

Ms. McDougal then opened the floor to comments and questions, which were overwhelmingly positive and in support of the programming recommendations. Ms. McDougal also noted that part of this recommendation would move the budget for the three historic-site cemeteries into the General Fund, while revenue generated through the sales of plots at Evergreen Cemetery and Austin Memorial Park Cemetery would remain in the Enterprise Fund and be used to support only those cemeteries, helping to make them more financially self-sufficient.

The meeting then adjourned.

### Community Comments/Questions

“Programming is inappropriate in cemeteries, period.”

“I like the programming recommendations proposed tonight. This is a fair way to do it. For many years, people in minority communities weren’t allowed into the city cemetery (Oakwood) or only around the edges. As a minority person, I appreciate that one group isn’t going to decide what’s appropriate for everybody.”

“I appreciate that the cemeteries are being considered separately.”

“There are a lot of famous people buried at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, like James Michener. Could the programming at least include a self-guided walking tour brochure for that cemetery?”

“For-profit entities, like tour groups, need to be regulated. We see buses with tours pull up all the time in Oakwood.” (Note: The programming application plan as proposed would apply to for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and other community groups.)

“The idea for a programming person is excellent! That’s a great way to leverage outside resources and coordinate with other historic sites and museums.”

“I enjoy visiting cemeteries wherever I am ... including cemeteries where I have relatives. Cemeteries are both parks and history.” (A second person added “Yes!”)

“I really appreciate the efforts of the MP (master plan) staff. Great job. Recreation in cemeteries has been in effect since the early to mid 1800s. It must be respectful, safe and appropriate. SAC has a history book for Oakwood Cemetery and a beautiful calendar produced annually. Go to SACHome.org for information.”

“Ball moss – the angle at which the large sprinklers spray encourages ball moss. Reducing the spray angle would help discourage moss growth. A lower angle or a different sprinkler type would help.”

“The City should have the equivalent of Find-A-Grave.com. It should be updated all the time, a website where you can plug in a name and find that person’s grave.” (There was concern from another person about privacy, vandalism, etc.)

“Please include a green burial option, both for cremated and uncremated remains. (Plant a body, fertilize a tree!) Ideally we would like to see this at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery. It would be nice if you would allow family plots in the green burial area, and allow families to bury as many people as they wish, over the years. Keeping the green burial areas natural and chemical free would be idea. Thank you for considering our comments.” (signed on behalf of four citizens)

## Agenda



**Cemetery Master Plan  
Public Meeting #4  
6–8pm, November 3, 2014**

**Zilker Botanical Gardens  
2220 Barton Springs Rd.  
Austin, TX 78746**

### AGENDA

#### **Purpose of Meeting**

To update the community on the status of the project, to share findings from the Austin Cemetery Master Plan project team regarding programming for Austin's municipal cemeteries, to receive your comments, and to gather your input.

#### **Purpose of Feedback**

Feedback will be reviewed and used to help guide development of the draft master plan.

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| 6:00 – 6:30 p.m. | Welcome and introductions, recap of Cemetery Master Plan process (Kim McKnight)<br>Project status update (Steph McDougal)<br>Update on cemetery rules project (Kim McKnight) |
| 6:30 – 6:45 p.m. | Report on capital improvement projects (Kevin Johnson and HUO Architects)  |
| 6:45 – 7:30 p.m. | Report on programming findings and recommendations (Steph McDougal)  |
| 7:30 – 8:00 p.m. | Questions and answers  |

#### **Mark your calendar for Public Meeting #5**

10:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m., Saturday, January 24, 2015  
Carver Branch Library  
1161 Angelina St.  
Austin, TX 78702

For updated information about the master plan process,  
Visit: <http://www.austintexas.gov/cmp>  
Call Kim McKnight at (512) 974-9478 or email [kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov](mailto:kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov)



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