




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

THRU: Shannon Jones, Interim Assistant City Manager

FROM: Kimberly McNeeley, M.Ed., CPRP, Director 
Austin Parks and Recreation Department

DATE: January 22, 2021

SUBJECT: Capital Improvement and Security Investments – Austin’s Cemetery System

This memo serves as an update related to Council questions about cemetery security and capital improvement investments following gravestone monument vandalism at Evergreen Cemetery. The Parks and Recreation Department (Department) is pleased to report the gravestone restoration is in its final stages. The process required the efforts of many including the Department’s Cemetery Division and graffiti removal staff and contracted restoration services. Each family impacted will be or has been notified of the restoration completion.

Following this outrageous act, the Department received a series of questions related to security needs, security options, capital improvement investments associated with security and associated costs. In the past five years, the Cemetery Division has documented five separate incidents of vandalism at one of the five managed cemeteries. The chart below outlines the occurrences:

Date	Location	Event Description
2016	Austin Memorial Park Cemetery	Burglary
2018	Plummers Cemetery	Monuments Knocked Over
2019	Oakwood Cemetery	Graffiti of Confederate Monument
2020	Oakwood Cemetery	Graffiti of Confederate Monument
2020	Evergreen Cemetery	Graffiti of Gravestones throughout Cemetery

It is also important to note graffiti occasionally occurs along the cement wall of the Oakwood Cemetery. When this occurs, the Department’s graffiti team is called upon to remove the graffiti.

In considering security options, the Department researched capital investment options and general fund expenditure options for consideration.

Capital Investments:

The Austin community via the 2018 Bond Program approved \$2.5 million for cemetery capital improvements. To date, the Department has encumbered approximately \$1.2 million for cemetery road

improvements, using the adopted 2015 Cemetery Vision Plan as guidance for selection of roadway improvements. Approximately \$1.3 million of dedicated bond funding remains for cemetery improvements.

The Department researched a variety of capital investment security options for each of the cemeteries. The chart below outlines the costs associated with each of these options.

Physical Environment Security Capital Improvement Estimates

Cemetery Name	Fencing	Cameras	Night Watchman Lighting	Solar Lighting	Security Signage	TOTAL Capital Investment
Austin Memorial Park	\$267,673	\$0	\$17,500	\$36,000	\$400	\$321,573
Evergreen Cemetery	\$170,170	\$114,657	\$20,000	\$24,000	\$300	\$329,127
Oakwood Cemetery	\$0	\$170,413	\$12,500	\$0	\$400	\$183,313
Oakwood Annex	\$0	included above	\$15,000	\$6,000	\$400	\$21,400
Plummers Cemetery	\$0	\$60,537	\$2,500	\$6,000	\$100	\$69,137
Grand Total						\$924,550

Operational Investments:

The Cemetery Operation Division researched operational security opportunities for each of the cemeteries. Each of these opportunities are considered general fund budget expenditures and require appropriate annual allocations for ongoing monitoring.

Annual Operational Security Opportunity Cost Estimates

Cemetery Name	Security Guard 24/7/365	Security Guard 365 Sunset to Sunrise	Security Guard Fri/Sat/Sun 24/7	Security Guard Fri/Sat/Sun Sunset to Sunrise	Security Signage
Austin Memorial Park	\$189,697	\$102,948	\$78,163	\$53,378	\$400
Evergreen Cemetery	\$189,697	\$102,948	\$78,163	\$53,378	\$300
Oakwood Cemetery	\$189,697	\$102,948	\$78,163	\$53,378	\$400
Oakwood Annex	included above	included above	included above	included above	\$400
Plummers Cemetery	\$189,697	\$102,948	\$78,163	\$53,378	\$100

Cemetery Name	2-Camera Units plus 1 random patrol 24/7 between 5 properties	2-Camera Units plus 1 random patrol Fri/Sat/Sun between 5 properties	2-Camera Units Per Location Only		
Austin Memorial Park	\$495,097	\$358,778	\$61,080		
Evergreen Cemetery	included above	included above	\$61,080		
Oakwood Cemetery	included above	included above	\$61,080		
Oakwood Annex	included above	included above	\$61,080		
Plummers Cemetery	included above	included above	\$61,080		

The Cemetery Operations Division is able to absorb annual security signage cost but will be challenged with annual costs associated with security guards and camera monitoring even at just one cemetery location.

Consistent with the Department's commitment to community engagement, the Cemetery Division distributed a survey to those community members who own a plot(s) at one of the cemeteries. The purpose of the survey was to gather information related to stakeholder recommendations for the remaining bond funding expenditures and prioritization of the expenditures. The survey included Cemetery vision plan recommended expenditures and security options that were not originally included in the Cemetery vision plan expenditure recommendations. Of the 1,150 surveys distributed to our shareholder distribution list, 164 responses were received (approximately 14% return rate). The details of the responses are as follows:

- 64% of the responses received were associated with the Austin Memorial Park Cemetery followed by 24% from Evergreen Cemetery.
- 83% of respondents either had a loved one buried at one of the cemeteries or had previously purchased a plot.
- The top three priorities ranked for future capital improvements projects overall included:
 1. Update irrigation systems for turf watering – 23%,
 2. Update Restroom Facilities – 20% and
 3. Cemetery Information Access System – 17%.
- The proposed installation of security cameras ranked 5th, the proposed installation of fencing ranked 7th, and the proposed installation of lighting ranked 8th out of eight choice selections for future capital improvement projects.
- 58% responded that they would like for the City of Austin Cemetery Operations Division to invest in a future Columbarium.
- 47% responded that they would like for the City of Austin Cemetery Operations Division to invest in a future Scatter Garden.
- 73% of all respondents have lived in Austin for more than 30 years.
- 70% of all respondents were 65+.
- 63% of all respondents identified as white followed by 21% who identified as African American.

Recommendation:

Based upon the research and stakeholder community survey feedback, the Department recommends and intends to utilize 2018 bond funding to move forward with the following improvements:

- Install a combination of solar and night watchman lighting to enhance security at Evergreen Cemetery and
- Facilitate the needed roadway repairs at Evergreen Cemetery.

The Department will reevaluate the remaining 2018 bond funding allocated for cemeteries and will review capital improvement projects highlighted from the cemetery stakeholder community survey.

Additionally, the Department will install single security cameras at each entrance of the Evergreen Cemetery and reallocated funding from within the Parks and Recreation Annual Operating Budget to support appropriate monitoring of the cameras.

Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (512) 974-6717.

cc: Liana Kallivoka, PhD., P.E. LEED Fellow, Director
Lucas Massie, M.Ed., CPRP, Assistant Director
Anthony Segura, MPA, MS, Assistant Director
Suzanne Piper, DBA, Chief Administrative Office