



## Austin Cemeteries Master Plan

Community Meeting #1—April 30, 2014  
Summary Report  
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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.

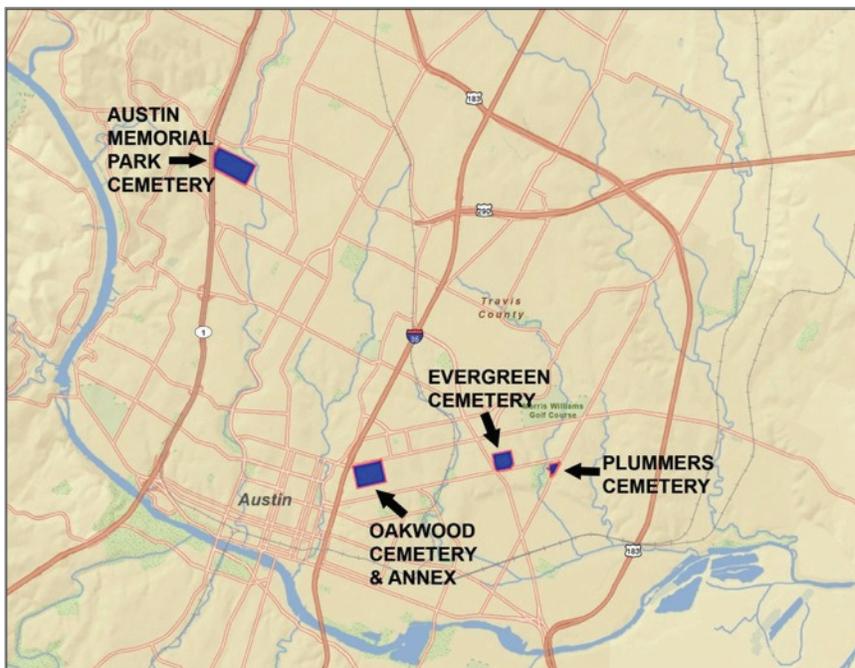


Figure 1. Map of municipal cemeteries in the City of Austin.

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 first community meeting was held on Wednesday, April 30, 2014, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Austin Public Library's Carver branch on Angelina Street, in East Austin.

Approximately 40 people attended the meeting, including representatives from Save Austin Cemeteries, community leaders, and people who live near the cemeteries. When asked, approximately 25% of the audience indicated that they had not attended the stakeholder meetings previously held in Summer 2013, during the development of the Master Plan Scope of Work.

City staff in attendance included:

- Kim McKnight, PARD Project Coordinator, Cultural Resources Specialist
- Gilbert Hernandez, PARD Cemeteries Manager
- Marion Sanchez, Community Engagement Consultant
- Kevin Johnson, PARD Capital Projects
- Alan Halter, PARD Forestry
- Dan Pedersen, Austin Water Utility

Members of the consultant team included Mason Miller, Jill Madden and Victor Palma (AmaTerra Environmental, Inc.), Laura Knott and Christina Osborn (John Milner Associates, Inc.), and Steph McDougal (McDoux Preservation LLC).

The presentation portion of the meeting included background information about the project, introductions to City staff and the consultant team, a brief explanation of the project's overall activities and schedule, and a list of opportunities for people to participate.

Attendees were able to interact with the team during the remainder of the meeting, through:

- A Questions and Answers session
- A breakout session, where people could speak with team members about specific topics
- A mini-Memory Workshop, to gather information about how people experience and connect with the five cemeteries.

As they arrived, attendees were asked to sign in at the door. They received several handouts, including an agenda, information about the Cemetery Rules and Regulations Plan, and a Memory Workshop worksheet (handouts attached at the end of this document).

### Introductions

Kim McKnight opened the meeting and greeted participants, then introduced Steph McDougal, who is leading the public engagement components of the project. Steph welcomed attendees and, after attending to housekeeping issues (location of restrooms, reminder to turn off cell phones), explained the agenda for the meeting.

Kim then briefly summarized the history of the management of the five municipal cemeteries that are the focus of this Master Plan process. She explained why a Master Plan is needed – the City has never had one – and what it will include: information to help understand each cemetery's historic context; data about the current conditions found in each cemetery; and goals and recommendations for further action.

Kim also made the audience aware of a separate public engagement process that will happen concurrently, which involves gravesite ornamentation and is being led by a consulting team from Smith & Associates/San Antonio during May and June 2014. (A consultant from Smith & Associates, Amanda Gangawer, was on hand to answer questions about that initiative.)

Kim then introduced City staff in attendance, including cemeteries manager Gilbert Hernandez and community engagement consultant Marion Sanchez. The Cemetery Master Plan consultant team – Mason Miller, Laura Knott, and Steph McDougal – introduced themselves, described a bit about their backgrounds, and explained their roles in the project.

Steph finished the presentation by explaining that the project will take place in three parts. Fieldwork, stakeholder interviews, and research has already begun and will continue through the summer. The team will spend the autumn months analyzing data and developing recommendations. They will complete the Master Plan report draft, revisions, and final products in the winter. The entire project will be completed in one year.

### Questions and Answers

During the question and answer portion of the meeting, participants asked the following questions:

*Will you map unmarked graves?*

Neither the survey of individual gravesites nor the use of ground-penetrating radar is part of this project. One or both of those activities could be included in the Master Plan recommendations for future action.

*Bethany Cemetery is also deserving of preservation. Can it be added to the Master Plan process?*

Several hundred cemeteries are extant within the City of Austin, and certainly others – like Bethany Cemetery – are historically significant and need to be preserved and managed. While only city-owned cemeteries are part of this Master Plan, the team expects that the tools and recommendations that come out of this process will be applicable to other cemeteries as well.

*Evergreen Cemetery should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

The National Register nomination process requires substantial historical and archival research, which has not been completed for Evergreen Cemetery. Several of the components of this project will address this issue, including identifying historic designations that could be pursued for each of the five cemeteries and preparing an historic context for each cemetery. While this project does not include the preparation of National Register nominations, the information that will be produced for this project should serve as the basis for a nomination, should the City wish to pursue that in the future.

*Who decides which people will be interviewed for the stakeholder surveys?*

The team is gathering a list of potential interviewees, and Steph McDougal will select 25 people who represent a diverse mix of residents, stakeholder groups, etc.

An audience member stated that a group of citizens had been formed to pressure the City to make changes at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, and that other groups of citizens could be formed for similar purposes at Evergreen Cemetery. An audience member responded that it was the City's job to take care of Evergreen and that, because the Master Plan process is underway, no such citizens' group is needed.

*Will the City wait until next year to receive information from the Master Plan process and begin any work? Trees are dying now; monuments need to be repaired now.*

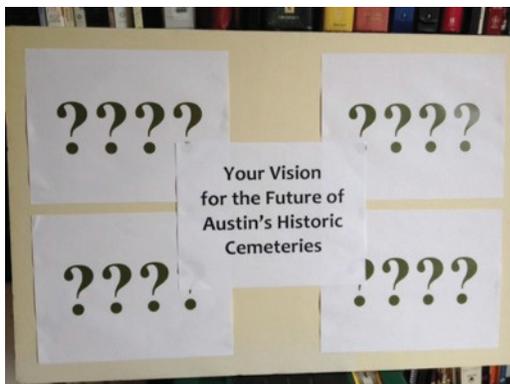
The project team is bringing issues to the City's attention immediately. The team is not waiting until the final document is published to report on emergent situations. In the meantime, the City is already working on things that do not require the project team's input. Mason Miller noted that the tree survey is underway and those results will be provided to the City as soon as possible. The survey crews are required to notify the City's Urban Forestry Department within 24 hours if they observe any trees that are in "critical" condition.

*Will the Master Plan include trees and plants?*

Yes. In addition to the tree survey, Laura Knott and Christina Osborn from JMA are documenting trees and plantings throughout the cemeteries during their overall conditions assessment fieldwork. Steph McDougal and her associate, Anne Shelton, also made note of cultural plantings during their assessment of grave marker conditions.

### Breakout Sessions

Following the question and answer session, attendees were encouraged to visit any of four different tables, where team members were available to discuss specific topics: Natural Resources: Trees and Turf; Preservation of Resources and Buildings; Funding, Safety, and Security; and Your Vision for the Future.





The signs used for breakout session tables consisted of photos and titles mounted on buff-colored poster boards and displayed on tabletop easels. During the breakout sessions, attendees had the opportunity to leave their contact information and/or written comments, and to volunteer as potential interviewees for the stakeholder interviews coming up in May. Team members also made note of participant comments and suggestions, which are paraphrased below.

- Expand public use of cemeteries to include cultural events and other uses beyond funerals.
- Hold more tours; cemeteries as outdoor museums.
- Promote use by groups other than Save Austin's Cemeteries, and not just for bird watching.
- Show movies there, like they do in Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles
- Halloween tours.
- Recognize communities, not just prominent individuals.
- Highlight community through community celebrations, veterans events, alumni events. Need to figure out who would help plan and fund these activities.
- Balance serious/somber uses with celebrations.
- Emphasize cultural resources.
- Compare sexton records to who is actually buried in the plots.
- Need to know how SAC tree tags are being dealt with, since this project also includes a tree survey.
- "This isn't the state capitol. Why are there trees? This used to be a prairie. Look at the problems that trees cause, and don't replicate them."
- "Goth weddings!"
- The cemeteries have too much security. Cemeteries should be more permeable. The fences and other barriers should be more attractive and include more entry points. Cemetery workers who are responsible for unlocking and locking gates could ride bicycles instead of driving trucks.
- "I like the idea of cemeteries as public spaces."
- Need to find alternatives to turf grass; water usage is a concern. Whatever type of grass is planted should not just adhere to watering restrictions but even do better.
- Markers should not be falling over. This is likely due to improper construction of the foundation. Foundations for markers should have gravel bases. Funeral homes need

to be trained to properly set markers with sufficient adhesive to keep the headstones on the bases. Golf courses use gravel foundations under resources to keep things from shifting even when the ground shifts. This approach could be used under markers.

- Landscapes should incorporate butterfly gardens; Oakwood used to have butterflies, fireflies, and wildflowers.

#### Evergreen-specific comments:

- Community needs to get more information about what team is doing there, what team is looking at, etc.
- There is a drainage issue near the restroom.
- Is the city planning to use a newly opened section for a new building? (This might have been a suggestion instead of a question.)
- The entrance needs columns, a gate, etc. to give it presence.
- Section names are hard to find.
- Wayfinding is needed to help descendants find their loved ones' graves.
- Burrs and fire ants are a bad problem.
- Need screening for the new restroom (i.e., portapotty).
- How will large trees be dealt with, since they invade internments? Concerned about trees being planted.

#### AMP-specific comments:

- Says the boundary of AMP is incorrect; the historic boundary extends out to the creek. Gave Laura a map which attendee has annotated.
- Said that encroachment on these boundaries is a problem.

#### Memory Workshop

The memory workshop was intended to gather information about how people experience and connect with the cemeteries, for the project team's reference while developing the Master Plan. Only four people remained in attendance by the time we got to this portion of the meeting, although several people had completed the accompanying worksheet before they left or said that they would mail or email it later. Kim and Steph will convert the worksheet to a fillable PDF file and make it available on the City cemeteries website.

Although a McDoux associate was available to scan photos or documents, no one brought any. Several people commented that the meeting invitation had not clearly explained the Memory Workshop concept and that they were unaware that they could share photos and information at the meeting.

In addition, it was noted that the television news story about the meeting aired at 5:00 p.m., which was too little notice for most people seeing the story to be able to attend. Additional options for making people aware of the meetings include advertising at monthly meetings of neighborhood associations, printed paper flyers, and word of mouth.