FIVE

FIVE HISTORIC CEMETERIES.
FIVE TEAM PARTNERS.
FIVE COMMUNITY MEETINGS.
HUNDREDS OF STAKEHOLDERS.
ONE MASTER PLAN.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN CEMETERY MASTER PLAN

Issue #7, November 2014

Next Meeting

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

Recommendations!

A first look at the Master Plan team's preliminary recommendations for the treatment of each cemetery are now available online at **austincemeteryplan.com**. These include brief descriptions of activities that could be undertaken at each cemetery. While the draft Master Plan, to be presented in January, will provide a detailed explanation of these recommendations, PARD cultural resources specialist Kim McKnight and the Master Plan team seek initial feedback on these concepts now.

Please visit the Cemetery Master Plan website, review the information for each cemetery in which you have an interest, and let us know what you think! Kim McKnight welcomes your telephone calls and emails. Kim.McKnight@austintexas.gov • 512-974-9478

AUSTIN PARKS & RECREATION
Cultural Places, Natural Spaces

CITY OF AUSTIN FOUNDED 1839

Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies CAPRA ACCREDITED

Speak Up Austin! Survey Results

The community provides feedback on natural burial options.

This fall, the Master Plan team asked for your feedback through the Speak Up Austin! online survey tool. More than 300 people completed each survey.

One survey asked about natural burial options. The concept of "natural" or "green" burials has become more popular in recent years. Natural burials reduce the environmental impacts of traditional burial, including chemicals used in embalming, steel and hardwoods used in caskets, and the energy required to make concrete vaults.

The Master Plan survey found that almost all respondents were aware of and interested in these options. Specifically 73.6% were in favor of the City offering the interment of cremated remains in a columbarium, and 79.5% were in favor of the City offering the following options.

☆ A **hybrid burial ground**, where remains can be buried with or without a vault.

☆ A **natural burial ground**, which prohibits the use of vaults, vault lids, concrete boxes, slabs, or partitioned liners where remains are placed during burial, as well as embalming with toxic chemicals; all burial containers must be biodegradable, and grave markers are limited to preserve the natural look of the area.

☆ A **conservation burial ground**, which has all of the same requirements as Natural Burial Grounds, but with the addition of a conservation easement or deed restriction held by a government agency or non-profit conservation organization.

New Trees in Old Stumps

Did you know that it's possible to plant a new tree where one previously grew, without first grinding the old stump? The process starts by encouraging a stump to decay, by drilling holes into the stump and filling them with a mixture of compost, topsoil, and fertilizer. The holes are re-filled as needed and the stump is kept moist during dry periods.

After 1–3 years, if decomposition is well advanced, the stump will be ready to re-plant. Hand tools are used to create a hole in the decaying wood, big enough to plant a new tree.

The new tree should be relatively small and fit into the hole in the stump with at least 6–8 inches of space around the rootball. Soil is added around the roots.

Image courtesy of the *National Park Service*, *Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation*.

For more information: http://www.nps.gov/oclp/Clippings.pdf

National Register Eligibility Update

Oakwood Cemetery and the Oakwood Cemetery Annex are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Master Plan team investigates the possibility of nominating the other three city cemeteries.

One component of the Master Plan includes an evaluation of potential historic designations, including listing on the National Register. However, cemeteries generally are not listed on the National Register unless they meet very specific requirements.

A cemetery first must qualify for the National Register on the basis of significance in one of the following areas: (A) association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; (B) association with significant persons; (C) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or (D) that have yielded or are likely to yield information in history or prehistory.

A cemetery may be listed on the National Register if it meets at least one of these requirements and derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events.

Oakwood Cemetery is listed on the National Register under Criteria C for art and architecture; Oakwood Cemetery Annex is listed under Criteria C for art and landscape architecture.

In November, master plan team member Steph McDougal met with Gregory Smith, the state coordinator for the National Register of Historic Places program at the Texas Historical Commission, to visit Plummers Cemetery and Evergreen Cemetery and discuss their potential eligibility for the National Register.

Informally, Mr. Smith suggested that the most historic section of Evergreen Cemetery (Section A) may be *potentially* eligible based on the importance of the people buried there to the East Austin community during segregation, as well as on the basis of the many handmade grave markers in that section. (It is common for only the most historic section of a cemetery to be nominated to the Register, as the presence of too many modern grave markers can detract from a burial ground's historic integrity.)

Similarly, Plummers Cemetery may be *potentially* eligible as an example of a rural African American folk cemetery with many handmade grave markers.

Ms. McDougal also has asked Mr. Smith to provide a formal determination of eligibility for Austin Memorial Park Cemetery.

Substantial research will be required to prepare any future nominations to the Register.

Grass in Graveyards

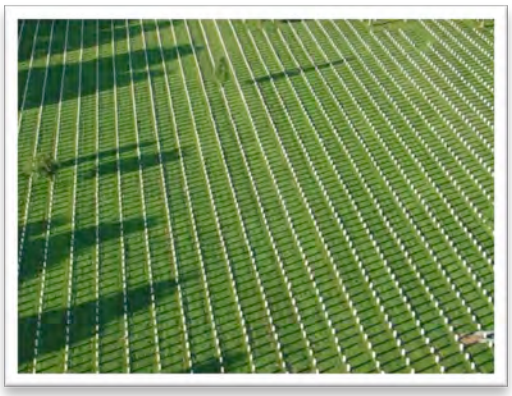
One of the most common complaints heard by the Master Plan team has to do with grass. Although many people understand that the City of Austin must abide by water restrictions during times of drought, we also are used to seeing images like that of Arlington National Cemetery (right), with its lush, manicured lawn. So, what is realistic to expect in Austin's historic city cemeteries? Here are a few things to consider.

1. Lawns were originally cultivated by the royal families of Europe.

Lawns were status symbols for French and English aristocrats who used sheep and goats (or servants with scythes) to keep the grass manicured. Wealthy landowners in Colonial America continued this practice, but lawns did not become commonplace throughout the United States until the 20th century.

2. The American lawn is a relatively new concept.

The Gardening Club of America (established in 1913) actively promoted the idea of a lawn with only one type of grass, kept uniformly mowed and weed-free. Unfortunately, English grasses did not do well in the U.S., and native grasses did not create a nice lawn. The type of grasses used to plant lawns today were developed for golf courses between 1915–1930. Lawns really became popular after World War II, thanks to the development of suburbs and chemical herbicides.



Lawn at Arlington National Cemetery

3. Historically, it was disrespectful to allow grass to grow over graves.

Until the 20th century, graves and burial grounds were traditionally "scraped" or "swept clean" to remove grass. Tending to graves in this way was a regular family and community activity that continued the relationship with the deceased. Later, this practice evolved to include the use of stone or concrete slabs, or paving over individual graves or entire family plots, as seen in all of Austin's city cemeteries.

The Master Plan team is exploring alternatives to traditional lawn grasses that would reduce the need for irrigation, as well as mowing and trimming in Austin's cemeteries. Some of the native grasses and groundcovers being considered are being grown at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's test gardens.

Contact Information for City Officials

Mayor and City Council
Austin City Hall
301 W. Second St. Second Floor
Austin, TX 78701

Mayor Lee Leffingwell

City Council Members:

Sheryl Cole, mayor pro tem

Mike Martinez

Laura Morrison

Chris Riley

Bill Spelman

Kathie Tovo

Office of the City Manager
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City Manager Marc Ott

Deputy City Manager
Michael McDonald

Assistant City Managers:
Rey Arellano
Robert Goode
Sue Edwards
Bert Lumbreras
Anthony Snipes

Parks and Recreation Department
P. O. Box 1088, Austin, TX 78767
512-974-9467

Director Sara Hensley

Assistant Directors:
Kimberly McNeeley
Cora Wright

Project Coordinator
Kim McKnight

Cemetery Manager
Gilbert Hernandez

Our Mission

The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Department is to provide, protect, and preserve a park system that promotes quality recreational, cultural, and outdoor experiences for the Austin community.

The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-9478.

We Want You!

to Participate in the Master Plan Process

In order for this project to be successful, it needs to be inclusive and representative of the Austin community. You can help and make your voice heard. Here's how:

❀ Attend one or more community meetings. The meetings are being held in various locations around the city and on different days and times, so that as many people as possible can attend. The next one will take place on **Saturday, January 24, 2014** from **10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.** at the **Austin Public Library, Carver Branch at 1161 Angelina Street**.

❀ Sign up to receive this newsletter via email, or look for it at your local library, community center, or senior center. Share it with your friends and neighbors.

❀ Sign up for the Austin Cemetery Master Plan email list to get up-to-the-minute information right in your inbox. To subscribe, send an email to Kim.McKnight@AustinTexas.gov.

❀ Visit the Austin Cemetery Master Plan website at http://www.austintexas.gov/department/cemetery-master-plan

❀ Share your input and feedback with Kim McKnight (PARD Project Coordinator):

- Email kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov
- Call 512-974-9478
- Send a letter to PARD, Attn: Kim McKnight, P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088

❀ Call the Austin 3-1-1 line and share your opinions.

austin 3·1·1 Your All Day, Any Day, Info Center

austin 3·1·1 Su Centro de Información, Todo el Día, Todos los Días

The City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan

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Learn more at www.cityofaustin.org/parks

City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department

P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088