

Parks and Recreation Board (PARB) Cemetery Working Group Recommendations Action Plan and Status

Primary Recommendations

Finding:

The PARB does not have current mechanism for getting updates on the condition of city cemeteries, near term issues, and progress on long range planning.

Recommendation:

Provide a quarterly update to the PARB, to include the type and resolution of cemetery issues that have been addressed during the period, progress on the cemetery master planning process, and any other pertinent information about the cemeteries. PARB members will make periodic site visits to maintain first-hand knowledge of the condition of the Austin cemeteries.

Status:

The Parks and Recreation Department (PARB) will provide quarterly updates to PARB the month following PARB's quarterly public input meetings that allow PARB staff and the public to meet, receive, and respond to issues. PARB staff will provide a summary of the prior quarter activities regarding new and status updates of existing cemetery efforts and issues. An update will be provided to PARB July 2012.

Finding:

The 2006 Amended and Restated Contract between the City of Austin and InterCare Corporation introduces additional ambiguities and discrepancies.

Recommendation:

Revise the 2006 Contract to clarify contractual terms and responsibilities for each of the contracting parties, addressing only the operations and maintenance responsibilities and resolving discrepancies while making no changes to the financial terms.

Status:

PARB is completing the restated agreement clarifying the operations and maintenance responsibilities by incorporating performance measures for cemetery operations, removing the \$50,000 threshold related to the watering plan and removal of the \$200 definition between minor and major repairs. Restated agreement will be provided to ICC and posted on the City's website July 2012.

Finding:

The City of Austin does not have a vision or a long-term plan for maintenance and operation of the five cemeteries.

Recommendation:

Develop a plan and schedule for engaging the public and developing a cemeteries master plan.

Status

PARB has designated Kim McKnight, PARB's Preservation Planner and Cultural Resource Specialist, with a Master of Science in Historic Preservation, as the Department's coordinator on

*the Cemetery Master Plan project. Ms. McKnight's current role is to facilitate the development of the preliminary Scope of Work (SOW) and schedule that includes a community engagement component that will be a part of the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to select a qualified firm to conduct the master plan. **Currently, \$140,000 is budgeted in FY 2012 for the Cemetery Master Plan with another \$150,000 requested in the FY 2013 Proposed Budget as an unmet need.** It is estimated that the total budget necessary for the Master Plan is \$290,000. The proposed Master Plan will be comprehensive and include a dedicated public input component that will actively seek the public's participation. An internal Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is being assembled to help guide the process. Updates on the timeline and funding will be provided at the quarterly cemetery meetings, sent to stakeholders through our email list and a section on the website for the cemetery master planning process will be created and updated throughout the RFQ process. The process for hiring a consultant includes:*

- *Development of a SOW (review by public, stakeholders, PARB)*
- *Contract Management Department (CMD) along with PARD will establish a solicitation schedule*
- *CMD issues a request for qualifications*
- *Consultants submit qualifications proposals*
- *Evaluation Team scores proposals and interview candidates if necessary*
- *CMD sponsors a Request for Council Action (RCA) and award of Profession Services Agreement (PSA)*
- *Once scope and fee are negotiated and approved, CMD finalizes PSA for execution*
- *After contract execution, CMD assigns Project Manager and a Notice to Proceed is issued.*

If funding is not received, PARD will explore alternative private funding and or donations. If total Master Plan funding is received for FY 13, the SOW and RFQ will begin in the fall of 2012 with the consultant retained by Fall 2013. It is anticipated that the plan can be completed by mid 2014.

Finding:

The financial model defined in the 2006 contract does not meet the goal of having a self-funded program, is not a sustainable or stable model for perpetual care cemeteries, and does not serve the best interests of the city or community.

Recommendation:

Review and analyze cemetery contracts from other municipal cemeteries and develop a Request for Proposal that is based on a fee-for-services financial model and reflects best practices for both cemetery and tree care.

Status

PARD is reviewing and has requested other municipal cemetery contracts for best practices in the development of a draft financial model. PARD will complete its review August 2012.

Finding

All of the municipal cemetery records are maintained manually. Inaccurate record keeping of space ownership is an endemic problem in the cemetery business (p32 of October 2010 Business Case Analysis), and use of appropriate technology can improve operational efficiency and increase transparency for the public.

Recommendation:

PARD and the Contractor agree to implement by September 30, 2013 a computer-based cemetery management information system to keep track of ownership and maintain contact with owners of cemetery plots.

Status:

PARD and ICC have mutually agreed to acquire, install, and support a computer-based cemetery management system (CMIS) as a condition of the restated agreement process. Funding for a CMIS has been identified as an unbudgeted, unmet need. PARD has requested \$15,000 through the City's Communications Technology Management (CTM) Department to fund this unmet need the last two budget years 2011 & 2012. The \$15,000 includes the cost of software, data migration, training hardware, and miscellaneous IT needs that include routers, switches, and associated networking equipment. PARD staff, in cooperation with the City's CTM Department, will research and determine options including requirements for a CMIS. Staff research, options, and recommendation is planned for September 2012.

Additional Specific Recommendations for the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD)

Following are additional recommended actions to improve the oversight and management of the cemeteries.

Recommendation:

Analyze the Perpetual Care Fund and project a model that shows the expected funding that will be available in the Principal and Investment Income Funds to maintain the cemeteries after all existing spaces are sold. Begin depositing the \$100/space Cemetery Maintenance Fee into the interest-bearing Principal Perpetual Care Fund.

Status:

Effective FY 2012, City Council approved a \$100 fee per burial space sold to be used for ongoing cemetery operations and maintenance. PARD will work with the City's Financial Services Department (Corporate) to conduct an analysis of the Principal and Investment income Funds based on current trends and industry best practices in the first quarter of fiscal year 2013.

Recommendation:

Develop distinct Sales Contracts for payment-in-full and time-sales. Include an annual interest rate for time-sales of spaces beyond a one-year payout. Review the outstanding time-sales contracts and notify any purchasers who have outstanding payments that they need to pay for the space in full or execute a new Sales Contract within a given deadline.

Status:

PARD staff is working with ICC to update the notice procedures to time sales purchasers with specific deadlines, notices, and actions as identified in the current contract for sales agreements. PARD will evaluate regional cemetery installment sales contract parameters and establish a policy and procedure by October 2012.

Recommendation:

Create a plan for increased enforcement of the Cemetery Rules and Regulations, to include a date by which spaces must be brought into compliance, notification of space owners, and who will be responsible for spaces where the descendants are unknown or cannot be located. Reformat the Cemetery Rules and Regulations to improve the readability and reduce wasted space. Add a signature block where the purchaser/owner of a space signs to indicate acceptance of the rules and regulations. Send the reformatted Rules and Regulations to each existing space owner with a letter notifying that increased enforcement of the rules and regulations is being implemented and the date by which any violations of the rules must be remedied.

Status:

PARD will reformat and enforce Cemetery Rules and Regulations through its contract with ICC. Rules enforcement plan will be completed August 2012.

Recommendation:

Review the equipment needed to maintain the Austin cemeteries and compare to equipment lists since 1990, the number of annual burials since then, and the equipment required to maintain other municipal cemeteries, and develop a method to ensure that only the equipment required to maintain and operate Austin cemeteries is being stored at Austin cemeteries.

Status:

PARD has compiled a list of equipment used and stored by ICC and Interment Services (IS) at Austin municipal cemeteries. PARD is working with ICC to identify equipment needed to support Austin municipal cemeteries. Review will take into account types and number of equipment determined to meet both burial and property maintenance services and requirements. PARD will begin to require ICC and IS to restrict storage of its equipment and agree to only store equipment that is used to support City of Austin cemeteries on cemetery premises. PARD and ICC will complete this review August 2012.

Recommendation:

Revise the Cemetery On-site Compliance Form to reflect the clarifications of the contract (after it is revised per above major recommendation) and to assess the cemeteries for compliance with HB 2927, and ensure that all other written processes and forms are updated to reflect the expectations and policies for maintaining the cemeteries.

Status:

PARD will update its Cemetery On-site Compliance Form to assess performance standards and expectations to reflect clarifications of the contract July 2012.

Recommendation:

Update the Public Cemeteries' Water Plan to reflect forestry best practices, resolve discrepancies, and clarify language. Develop process for monitoring compliance with the Water Plan.

Status:

In July 2010, PARD implemented an updated turf and water management plan for all irrigated cemeteries, to include trees. In coordination with the PARD Forestry Division, all cemeteries participate in an annual review of trees designated for supplemental watering. ICC is required to be compliant and water in conformance with the City's water restriction policies. The cemetery

turf and water management plan was developed in June 2012. PARD will review its 2012 plan and incorporate forestry best practices as appropriate and feasible by July 2012. PARD will forward this new cemetery turf and water management plan for PARB review prior to implementation.

Recommendation:

Include in the PARD budget for the next budget cycle a full-time position for a Cemetery General Manager that has extensive experience with maintenance and operation of cemeteries and can serve in the capacity of guiding service contracts, engaging in master planning, budgeting, policy creation and generally represent the City's interests in managing the cemetery facilities and grounds now and into the future.

Status:

PARD requested an additional contract position to manage and monitor the cemetery contract as part of the FY2012-2013 budget process.

Recommendation:

Update the City website to better market the municipal cemetery services (such as pre-sales, cemetery maps, photos and available spaces) providing increased service to citizens interested in purchasing cemetery plots as well as following the public to monitor the management of the cemeteries on-line.

Status:

PARD will determine and develop site content for better marketing of municipal cemetery services to include pre-sales, cemetery maps, photos, and available spaces. PARD will complete its assessment and develop a plan and timeline August 2012. PARD continues to update the cemetery website to include reports, public meeting notes, and meeting schedules. PARD is developing a new website link that will allow the public to access burial locations July 2012.

Recommendation:

Explore expanding revenue and providing more choice to the public by providing columbarium space or area dedicated to spreading of cremains to maintain the viability of the City's involvement in the cemetery business.

Status:

This recommendation will be included as an item in the master planning effort and is a potential new revenue source that can be included in future financial analysis.