Austin Cemeteries Master Plan

Community Meeting #5 — Summary Report
Steph McDougal, McDoux Preservation LLC
January 26, 2015

The Austin Cemeteries Master Plan project (2014–2015) has produced 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 included five community meetings, to be held approximately every two months throughout the project period. At these meetings, members of the public received information about the project and were encouraged to provide input and feedback on various aspects of the Master Plan.

The fifth and final community meeting was held on Saturday, January 24, 2015, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Austin Public Library Carver Branch at 1161 Angelina Street. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting, including Austin City Council Member Leslie Pool; Joe Petronis, aide to Council Member Don Zimmerman; and Beverly Wilson, aide to Council Member Ora Houston.

Project team members in attendance included:
- Kim McKnight, project coordinator, PARD Cultural Resources Specialist
- Mason Miller (AmaTerra Environmental, Inc.)
- Laura Knott (JMA/John Milner Associates, Inc.)
- Steph McDougal (McDoux Preservation LLC)

City staff members Gilbert Hernandez (cemeteries manager), Lara Schuman (PARD Urban Forestry), and Laura Esparza (Division Manager, PARD History, Art, and Nature) also were present.

After welcoming everyone and introducing the project team, city staff, and dignitaries, Kim McKnight explained the format of the meeting, which included an open-house session at the end for questions and comments. Steph McDougal then described the organization of the draft master plan document and gave a brief overview of the "Policy and Funding Recommendations" section. The majority of the meeting consisted of a presentation by Laura Knott, who discussed existing conditions and shared her recommendations for

general management guidelines (those common across all five cemeteries), as well as the conditions and recommendations for each cemetery.

At the end of the meeting, team members manned stations for each cemetery, where large-scale plans, illustrating the recommendations, were available for viewing. Participants were encouraged to share their opinions on the recommendations. Team members made notes of all verbal comments, and attendees also wrote their comments on post-it notes and large sheets of paper affixed to each table. Approximately 45 minutes were set aside for the open-house portion of the meeting.

The meeting then adjourned.

Community Comments/Questions

Comments are presented here in the order that the presentation and master plan present the cemeteries, from oldest to most recent.

Overall Comments/Questions
- Contemporary kiosks don't blend with these cemeteries. Design for each cemetery.
- Please replant trees that were removed at the same spots and of the same species. Water trees during time of insufficient rainfall. Mulch trees to as much as possible of the root zone but no more than 3 inches deep. Apply 1 inch of organic compost (not Dillo Dirt) on grass just below the blade if can't apply mulch.
- "One size fits all" benches do not work with historic cemeteries. Make the cemeteries furniture relate to the architecture. After all, outdoor furniture was invented for cemeteries!
- Cost of burial has skyrocketed and many families are scattering cremains in parks (salting arch. sites). Giving spaces for ceremonies and scattering brings families back to Austin city cemeteries. Support more family do-it-yourself burials.
- There has been too much talk, not enough "boots on the ground."
- City needs to put perpetual fund money into the cemeteries, not into the general fund.
- Need to mark each unknown grave with small marker after locating them (with ground penetrating radar or other means).
- Would like to get more information about how cemeteries should be irrigated and whether they are currently being irrigated sufficiently.

Oakwood Cemetery/Oakwood Cemetery Annex
- How would someone go about proving that they have the right to be buried in a family plot? (Gilbert Hernandez advised that the person would need to document their ancestry and family connections.)
- Street signs are desperately needed in Oakwood Cemetery.
- Improve the ditch.
- Shell mounds – SAC members note that they may have photos of these graves showing previous condition, before damage took place.
- SAC members are cleaning graves with water and soft brushes. They suggested that

the team might include before-and-after photos of the cleaning of the Townsend monument in the master plan report. Photos may be available on the SAC website or from Dale Flatt. They have also recently made some repairs to the McKinney marker.

- SAC founder Dale Flatt created a "cradle" for broken marker close to the wall behind the chapel. (He subsequently shared more information with the master plan team.)
- Wants City to replace all curbs at Oakwood Cemetery. Number one priority should be pipe ditch and plant on top. Doesn't want cedar trees.
- Phil Baum (chair of Congregation Beth Israel's cemetery committee) wanted to make sure that the recommendations for Oakwood generally also applied to the two Beth Israel sections.
- Would like to see a pavilion/shelter in or adjacent to a scatter garden in all cemeteries, if possible, for graveside services.
- Would like to know where benches can be located in Oakwood Cemetery.

Plummers Cemetery

- I am opposed to closing off the cemetery to vehicular traffic because the cemetery is large and the landscape is rolling; it would be a precarious, difficult walk for visitors to reach graves.
- I do not like the boulders. Why are there boulders here but fences everywhere else?
- Parking is needed along Springdale Road, along the bike path.
- Consider a driveway loop or, alternatively, two entrances on Springdale Road.
- Where is the plat information for this cemetery?
- If a remote sensing survey is conducted, have a permanent marker for each of the likely unmarked graves. Even if it is small, the local community would want to know where their predecessors are.
- Austin has actively tried to marginalize this community, so please do not forget about Plummers Cemetery.
- It was not a rural cemetery. It was the center of the community for east Austin.

Evergreen Cemetery
- If a garden area is added under the old oaks by the current entrance, please stay away from the critical root zone (a circle with a radioum of 1 ft per 1 inch of trunk diameter measured 4.5 feet from ground) to avoid soil compaction from people. Those oaks are doing well because very few people walk in that area. Mulch these trees to the edge of the canopy with no more than 3 inches of mulch and keep people away by not adding features or walks under these trees.Same for all very large trees, specially post oaks and live oaks. Thanks for caring for the trees!
- If there is going to be an entrance on Tillery, we need a sidewalk on that side of the street as well as speed bumps. Cars drive very fast through there and it's dangerous.
- Concerns about how funeral processions would be able to use the Tillery entrance and how that would affect traffic when processions are trying to turn onto Tillery from 12th Street.
- Important to keep the main entrance on 12th Street. If you add a gate or sign over an entrance, it should be at he 12th Street entrance because that is the historical entrance and the prominent families are buried there.

- It wasn't that long ago that 12th Street wasn't paved, because we (African Americans) didn't get services. This cemetery is important and we should get the same treatment as everybody else.
- Would like some way to scatter ashes over the creek, such as from a footbridge.
- It was not clear that the new restroom would be a proper facility and not just another portalet. Want the old restroom to be removed.
- Equity among the cemeteries is critical.

Austin Memorial Park Cemetery
- Street names should not be after specific people or families; instead, name streets after trees, plants, landforms, etc. (in other words, generic names).
- Have a concern about security at this entrance.
- I support public gathering spaces for memorial gatherings such as what is happening at Laguna Gloria and Mayfield.
- Concerned about wet, depressed area and footstones.
- Please be specific about use.
- Would like to see something about the hedges separating the Congregation Agudas Achim cemetery section from the rest of the cemetery, in regard to Jewish traditions.

Cemetery Master Plan
Public Meeting #5
10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., **January 24, 2015**

Austin Public Library/Carver Branch
1161 Angelina Street
Austin, TX 78702

AGENDA

Purpose of Meeting
To present the draft City of Austin Historic Cemeteries Master Plan, to receive your comments, and to gather your input.

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

10:30 – 10:40 a.m.	Welcome and introductions (Kim McKnight)
10:40 – 11:00 a.m.	Overview of the Master Plan document (Steph McDougal)
11:00 – 11:45 a.m.	Highlights of the Master Plan (Laura Knott)
11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback

For updated information about the master plan process,
Visit: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/cemetery-master-plan
Call Kim McKnight at (512) 974-9478 or email kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov
Email kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov