

Oakwood Cemetery Community Meeting

March 25, 2017

Community Comments

Comments from Tables

Table One: Share general feedback and thoughts for commemoration

- Stop walking pets/dogs from use of cemetery as a park
- City needs to follow health and safety code 713.011 regarding care of municipal cemeteries
- Notifying relatives about any memorials/services
- Do African American churches and funeral homes have records of those buried at Oakwood?
- Try to identify people under the chapel via DNA, Austin History Center records, and church records
- Note not just African American churches but also other people of color and white paupers/"strangers"
- List as a historic site on tours (especially promoted by the City of Austin)
- Empty site- extend memorial into the burial garden (graves are often unmarked, THC is exploring this)
- Incorporate Oakwood into GWCM Juneteenth observances
- Limited view for restoration
- Glass floor for chapel so no one can ignore the significance
- Or raise wooden floor with plaques included after wall is stabilized

Table Two: Provide input for additional outreach or notification ("who is not here?")

- Camacho family (Danny's family) maybe his sister
- Local churches (continue)
- Elderly members (for research into who was there)
- Provide info table at Juneteenth
- Libraries/Carver Museum
- Cyclical process- needs to address it again and again
- Always seeking info
- Always seeking collections
- Funeral homes
- Reach out to the community to get more people of African descent to be in the know
- Encourage groups/people to share this information and to give feedback
- Michelle Mears- author of book about feedman colony in Austin
- Grace will lead home- book

Table Three: Learn about archeological process and construction project

- Questions:
- Artifacts- who do they belong to?

- Memorial- would it have to be in the chapel space?
- Is there a dental expert archeologist?
- What is being done now to mitigate damage?
- What can we learn about the people?
- What condition are the remains in?
- Can the chapel be raised to remove remains?
- Does the chapel have to remain in place?
- Is there any reported history from when the chapel was built and opened?
- Can we do additional GPR?
- Comments:
- Do as much as possible through non-invasive process
- Include Austin Parks Foundation for support
- Michelle Mears Book on Freedman's Colonies

General Comments from the meeting

- Why are you just focusing on this one issue?
- The stones and roads need restoration too. What are you doing to address these funding issues?
- Why not move chapel to Austin Memorial Park? Leave graves alone
- Offer families financial assistance to relocate graves.
- Are you attempting to ID the graves to though DNA analysis?
- Community Conservation: Why has PARD already decided that the graves will be commemoration?
- Are there plans for some type of memorial listing the names and location of prominent African Americans?
- Confusion about what was said 1. City Rep "Building being moved is not an option?" 2. "Decision must be made quickly? Later said time is not of the essence"
- Comment: Archaeological content, regarding the disinterment of the bodies under the Chapel. (Grania Patterson)
- A suspended wood floor can be installed in a way that grave can be undisturbed. Leave the graves alone.
- Has there been any information recovered that would indicate human remains were disinterred purposely or otherwise during the 1914 building construction?

- Any indication that there extant headstones or other markers in 1914 in this area of the cemetery?
- Is there space in the cemetery to rebury the remains?
- I am concerned that the "history" and a historical designation does not allow a relocation of a building, but allows relocation (i.e. exhumation) of skeletons.... Smacks of acculturation & moral elitism.
- Is it morally wrong to build, pave, rebuild or restructure a building over graves?
- How will you memorialize the graves?
- Why are you not discussing North Bound Mopac built over graves too? Commemorate those too.
- Is the THC permit online?
- How are you funding this work?
- Are you saying that the Chapel floor will not be disturbed to consider excavation?
- Was the Chapel renovated earlier and when?
- Can you just move the Oakwood Chapel onsite to a different location and leave the bone fragments' site as a sacred ground with a plaque? (zcjsph@aol.com)
- Is there any records from the original construction of the chapel address the issue?
- Does the existence of the graves pose a structural concern for the building in the future – settlement issues, etc?
- Leave remains in place with significant memorial.
- Will artifacts be preserved and displayed?
- Beneath this floor, enfolded by the walls of this chapel, lie the remains of past citizens of Austin. Not forgotten, but cherished by the community. Dedication date. (Grania Patterson)