
APPENDIX L

PROJECT WEBSITE



CITY OF AUSTIN MUNICIPAL CEMETERY MASTER PLAN



THE DRAFT MASTER PLAN IS NOW ONLINE

The draft Austin Cemetery Master Plan document is [now available online](#) for comments, and will remain available for review and comment until March 5.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov or 512/974-9478. Thank you for your feedback!



PART I: FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH

The first part of this project involves hundreds of person-hours of fieldwork, community interviews and surveys, and archival research. The project team collects all of the information that they will need to provide the City and the community with well-documented findings and data-driven recommendations.



PART II: ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

The team evaluates all of the information gathered — on current conditions, best practices, and community input — and uses this to document its findings and draft its recommendations. Feedback from the community is collected along the way, with plenty of opportunities for public input.



PART III: FINAL PRODUCTS

At the end of the project, the City of Austin receives the Master Plan document, as well as geospatial (GIS) maps and all of the backup data used to develop the final report. The project team presents a draft version to the community for feedback before completing the final version.

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CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

Evaluating grave markers, landscape elements, roadways, and infrastructure.



TREE SURVEY

Measuring, tagging, and evaluating trees for health and viability.



HISTORY & CULTURE

Researching community heritage, cultural traditions, and notable persons.



BEST PRACTICES

Documenting proven approaches for effective cemetery management.



OUR TEAM'S PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH



The City of Austin is excited to develop a plan for our treasured historic cemeteries in collaboration with our community members. Identifying best practices in conservation, fostering stronger partnerships and pinpointing priority projects are just some of the outcomes we look forward to seeing in the planning process.

KIM MCKNIGHT / [Project Manager, CITY OF AUSTIN](#)



We are excited to work with a tremendous team and the citizens of Austin — our neighbors — to enhance and preserve these integral components of our history and our home.

MASON MILLER / [Project Manager, AMATERRA](#)



The key to success in this project will be to protect the historic character of these cemeteries while providing opportunities to increase their value as community resources.

LAURA KNOTT / [Landscape Architect, JMA](#)



We are fortunate that so many community members are passionate about these cemeteries and willing to become involved in this process.

STEPH MCDUGAL / [Consultant, MCDQUX PRESERVATION](#)

WE WANT YOU TO GET INVOLVED!

Sign up for our e-mailing list and monthly newsletter, attend community meetings, and share your memories and family traditions.

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AMOUNT OF WORK COMPLETED TO DATE



Conditions Assessment



Tree Survey



Public Engagement



GIS Maps



Overall Plan Development

LATEST NEWS



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SIGNAGE AND INTERPRETATION BASICS

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Cemeteries throughout the world invite visitors to

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GRAVE MARKER ASSESSMENT

Jul

Anyone who has been in Austin's city cemeteries

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT KIM MCKNIGHT:

512/978-9478

kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov

NEXT PUBLIC MEETING

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

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER!

Get all the news about this project every month in your e-mailbox. Just send an email to Kim McKnight and ask to subscribe.

CEMETERY RULES PROCESS

The Master Plan team has been asked to provide data analysis, research into best practices, and a summary of findings regarding the gravesite ornamentation rules process that began in Spring 2014. More information will be available as this phase of the project progresses.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Background



The City of Austin manages five historic municipal cemeteries:

<u>Cemetery Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date Established</u>
Oakwood Cemetery	1601 Navasota Street	1839
Oakwood Cemetery Annex	1600 Comal Drive	1914
Evergreen Cemetery	3310 East 12th Street	1928
Austin Memorial Park	2800 Hancock Drive	1927
Plummers Cemetery	1204 Springdale Road	c.1898

These cemeteries were managed by the City's Public Works and Transportation Department until 1985, when that responsibility was transferred to the Parks and Recreation Department (PAR); in 1990, cemetery management was outsourced to contractor InterCare, Inc. In 2013, PAR resumed active management of the cemeteries. PAR and community stakeholders, including the non-profit organization Save Austin's Cemeteries, recognized the need for a Master Plan to guide the preservation and development of these cemeteries.

Purpose

The Cemeteries Master Plan will provide the City of Austin with a comprehensive assessment of the current conditions of all five city cemeteries; information about best practices in cemetery management; and a plan for the preservation and development of the cemeteries.

Team Selection

In Summer 2013, PAR engaged the community in a series of meetings that explained the Master Plan process, gathered detailed feedback, and ultimately resulted in the development of a draft Scope of Work. In September 2013, PAR issued a Request For Proposals (RFP), seeking consulting firms or individuals to create a Cemetery Master Plan for the City of Austin's five cemeteries. The Austin City Council authorized the award, negotiation, and execution of a contract with AmaTerra Environmental, Inc. to provide those services in March 2014.

Activities

The Cemetery Master Plan project will include:

- Development of reports that describe each of the five cemeteries' historical, cultural, and natural context
- Creation of geospatial datasets and detailed maps for each of the five cemeteries
- General assessment of the condition of grave markers and other above-ground features (except buildings, which are being evaluated separately)
- Treatment, development, expansion, and management plans for each cemetery
- Best practices and recommendations for preservation policies, including regulations, oversight, emergency preparedness, historic designations, funding and revenue, partnerships and programs, and heritage tourism, educational programs, and other public engagement opportunities
- Survey of trees in each cemetery

A *separate* gravesite ornamentation and maintenance initiative is being undertaken by the City and will be conducted in May 2014. Findings and recommendations from that initiative will be incorporated into the Master Plan.

Schedule

The project team received their Notice to Proceed (approval to begin work) on March 6, 2014, and held a kick-off meeting with PARD project manager Kim McKnight and City cemeteries manager Gilbert Hernandez on March 11. The project is scheduled to be completed in one year. Five public meetings will be held to provide information to interested individuals and to gather input to and feedback on the plan as it is developed. The meeting dates are as follows:

Meeting #1

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Austin Public Library, Carver Branch, 1161 Angelina St, Austin, TX 78702

Agenda: Introduce the project team, activities, and schedule; conduct first mini Memory Workshop; scan photos/documents shared by attendees

Meeting #2

Thursday, June 26, 2014

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Northwest Recreation Center, 2913 Northland Dr, Austin, TX 78757

Agenda: Present results of stakeholder interviews and community survey; collect feedback on signage and interpretation options

Meeting #3

Saturday, August 23, 2014

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Austin Public Library, Ruiz Branch, 1600 Grove Blvd., Austin, TX 78741

Agenda: Present findings of condition assessments; collect feedback on alternatives for public engagement with cemeteries

Meeting #4

November 3, 2014

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746

Agenda: Present programming recommendations; gather feedback

Meeting #5

January 24, 2014

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Austin Public Library, Carver Branch, 1161 Angelina St, Austin, TX 78702

Agenda: Present highlights of draft Master Plan report; gather feedback

MEET THE TEAM

AMATERRA ENVIRONMENTAL, INC.

project management, GIS mapping, archaeology, natural context

Mason Miller, M.A., archeological principal investigator at AmaTerra Environmental, Inc. is the project manager. AmaTerra's most recent work on behalf of the City of Austin involved the successful community-engaging archeological excavations of the Vara Daniel Site in Zilker Park back in 2009. Additionally, AmaTerra Environmental was awarded the Texas Historical Commission's Award of Merit in Archeology for their recovery excavations at the previously abandoned and inundated Montgomery Hill Cemetery along the shores of Richland Chambers Reservoir in Navarro County, Texas.

JOHN MILNER ASSOCIATES, INC.

landscape architecture, conditions assessments, site and development plans

Laura Knott, RLA, ASLA, from John Milner Associates, a Virginia-based cultural resource management and historic preservation firm, will be the principal landscape architect for the City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan. Knott recently directed successful historic cemetery management plans for the City of New Braunfels and a cultural landscape report for Austin's Oakwood Cemetery. Knott, a 25-year Austin resident and practicing Texas landscape architect, specializes in the development of cultural landscape reports, historic landscape design and management plans.

MCDoux PRESERVATION LLC

historical reports, grave marker condition assessment, best practices and policy recommendations, public engagement

Steph McDougal, MTSC, MSHP, of McDoux Preservation, a Houston-based historic preservation consulting firm, specializes in public outreach, education, and strategic planning. McDougal, a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, recently led the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas to develop its new 10-year plan and implementation guide; she is currently working with the City of Houston on the ongoing development of design guidelines and web resources for that city's historic districts.

DAVEY TREE EXPERT COMPANY

cemetery tree survey

Since 1880, Davey has been involved in natural resource preservation. The Davey Resource Group works with clients looking for reliable management of their urban forest asset. Davey's team of ISA certified arborists and highly trained scientists provides GIS-based tree inventories and management plans.

GET INVOLVED

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 A PUBLIC MEETING

Informational meetings, including opportunities to give feedback on the project, will be held approximately every two months, in April, June, August, and October 2014 and January 2015. 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 be there. Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend! The current meeting schedule is shown below. Dates and times for Meetings 4 and 5 will be added as soon as they are set.

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Meeting #4

November 3, 2014

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd., Austin, TX 78746

Agenda: Summarize project findings and work completed to date; discuss programming recommendations; gather feedback

Meeting #5

January 24, 2014

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Carver Branch, Austin Public Library, 1161 Angelina St, Austin, TX 78702

Agenda: Present draft Master Plan report; gather feedback

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR EMAIL LIST AND MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Want more information? Email Kim McKnight (Kim.McKnight@AustinTexas.gov) to be added to the newsletter mailing list. Printed copies of the newsletter will also be available at selected locations around the city. Look for it at your local library, community center, or senior center. Share it with your friends and neighbors.

GIVE US A CALL

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

Participate in Speak Up Austin! Surveys (CLOSED)

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

- [Leave a comment here](#)
- Email kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov
- Call 512-974-9478
- Send a letter to PAR, Attn: Kim McKnight, P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088

READ THE BLOG

Visit www.austincemeteryplan.com each week for updates.

FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS



- What is a Master Plan?

A master plan is a roadmap or blueprint for the future. The Austin Cemetery Master Plan will:

- Provide a historic context for the cemeteries
- How did they develop?
- What persons buried there played an important role in local, state, or national history?
- Examine the issues that face the cemeteries, such as:
 - Condition of grave markers, trees and vegetation, infrastructure, buildings, walls and fences, etc.
 - Security and preventing vandalism
 - Legal issues around plot ownership
 - Establish goals for the future
 - Maintenance, restoration, preservation
 - Interpretive programs, signage, partnerships, volunteer corps
- Outline a plan for achieving those goals

+ Why does Austin need a Master Plan for its municipal cemeteries?

+ When will this project start and finish?

+ Why isn't the City taking care of ____ cemetery near my house?

FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS



+ What is a Master Plan?

- Why does Austin need a Master Plan for its municipal cemeteries?

For the past 20 years, the City of Austin outsourced the maintenance and management of its city cemeteries to a contractor. The City ended that contract and resumed management of the cemeteries in April 2013. The Parks and Recreation Department, which is responsible for the five city-owned cemeteries, recognizes that it needs a structured process for addressing the current conditions of the cemeteries today, including trees that were stressed or killed by the past several years of drought conditions, as well as the movement of monuments and markers and other concerns.

+ When will this project start and finish?

+ Why isn't the City taking care of ____ cemetery near my house?

FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS



- What is a Master Plan?
- Why does Austin need a Master Plan for its municipal cemeteries?
- When will this project start and finish?

The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department spent several months working with members of the community to develop a Scope of Work for the Master Plan in 2012. The contract was awarded in February 2014, and the project started shortly thereafter. It will be finished by March 2015.

- Why isn't the City taking care of ____ cemetery near my house?

FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS



- What is a Master Plan?
- Why does Austin need a Master Plan for its municipal cemeteries?
- When will this project start and finish?
- Why isn't the City taking care of ____ cemetery near my house?

Although nearly 300 cemeteries are located within Travis County, the City of Austin only owns — and, therefore, has oversight and responsibility for — five cemeteries: Austin Memorial Park, Evergreen Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery. If you are concerned about a non-city-owned cemetery, however, the Parks and Recreation Department may be able to help you find out who owns and is responsible for that cemetery.

CONTACT FORM

Send

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT KIM MCKNIGHT:

512/974-9478

kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov

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CEMETERY RULES PROCESS

The Master Plan team has been asked to
provide data analysis, research into best
practices, and a summary of findings
regarding the gravesite ornamentation rules
process that began in Spring 2014. More
information will be available as this phase of
the project progresses.

WELCOME!

By admin | No comments yet

The City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan project has been in the works for several years and officially got underway in March 2014. This website has been created to share information about the project and give everyone a chance to participate. It will be updated on a weekly basis, so keep checking back for all of the latest news.

The Cemetery Master Plan project will provide the City's Parks and Recreation Department with a long-range plan of action to preserve and maintain the five municipally owned cemeteries, as well as a guide for implementation of recommended activities, policies, etc. The cemeteries included in this plan are Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery. The master plan project will also provide a framework that can be shared with those who want to help preserve and maintain other cemeteries within Austin that are not City-owned.

For more information about the master plan project and what the end result will include, download the project Scope of Work [here](#).



RECENT POSTS

- › Draft Master Plan – your comments are requested!
- › Final meeting for the Cemetery Master Plan
- › Please let us know what you think!
- › Mark Your Calendar!
- › Preliminary concepts for all cemeteries are now available online

RECENT COMMENTS

- admin on Cemetery Tourism
- Joyce Clendennen on Cemetery Tourism

ARCHIVES

- February 2015
- January 2015
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- October 2014
- September 2014
- August 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- April 2014

CATEGORIES

- › Uncategorized

SIGNAGE AND INTERPRETATION BASICS

By admin | No comments yet

The topic of signage and interpretation was on the agenda of the June 26 community meeting, and the project team would like to get your feedback on that subject. To help you prepare for that meeting, here is some information about signage in cemeteries.

Signs can be used in cemeteries for several different purposes.

Wayfinding signs help people find their way. Here are some examples:



Informational signs are used to tell people about rules and regulations, or to convey straightforward facts, such as the hours when a cemetery is open to the public.



Interpretive signs provide information, but they also tell a story, explain concepts, and highlight important historical events and people. Interpretive signs help people understand what they are viewing. Interpretive signs often take the form of large illustrated panels in order to convey as much information as possible.



QR (Quick Response) codes are being used on a few test signs in Oakwood Cemetery. When QR codes are scanned by a smartphone that is equipped with a QR code reader, the phone automatically opens a corresponding website. In cemeteries, QR codes can be used to provide information about a specific person. Some monument companies offer QR-enabled marker tags which link to websites with additional private information that can be accessed only by pre-approved family members or friends.



Notice boards or information kiosks can be used to share information that is likely to change on a regular basis.

The Americans with Disabilities Act includes guidelines for designing the various types of signs so that they are accessible to all people.

Austin's city cemeteries currently contain very little signage. At the second community meeting in June, the project team will present examples of the types of signs and interpretive materials that can be used in cemeteries and ask for your feedback. We will also have this information on the website and in the newsletter. Your opinions are welcomed and encouraged! Please share your comments and suggestions on this or any other cemetery-related topic in the Comments below or by sending an email message or calling Kim McKnight, kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov, 512-974-9478.

FIRST COMMUNITY MEETING REPORT

By admin | No comments yet

The first meeting for the Austin Cemetery Master Plan was held on April 30, 2014, at the Austin Public Library's George Washington Carver Branch in east Austin. Participants included approximately 50 citizens, along with City staff and the consultant team. Kim McKnight welcomed everyone and described the process of developing the project scope of work, which took place in Summer 2013 with the help of a large group of stakeholders. The consultants then introduced themselves and explained their various roles in the project.

- Mason Miller, with AmaTerra Environmental, Inc., is the project manager. The AmaTerra team is responsible for GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping of the cemeteries, as well as overseeing the survey of cemetery trees being conducted in collaboration with Davey Tree Service. AmaTerra is an environmental consulting firm located in Austin.
- Laura Knott, historical landscape architect and principal investigator for the master plan project, is based in Virginia, where she leads a branch office for John Milner Associates, Inc., a cultural resources management firm. Laura previously led the development of a cultural landscapes report for Oakwood Cemetery and produced the historic cemetery master plan for New Braunfels, Texas.
- Steph McDougal is an historic preservation consultant in the Houston area whose firm, McDoux Preservation LLC, has worked with cities and non-profit organizations throughout Texas and the U.S. Steph is leading the public engagement portion of the master plan project and also producing the grave marker condition assessment, historical context, and preservation policy portions of the final master plan report.

Steph McDougal explained that the team's work will take place in three phases.

- 1) The first phase, which is ongoing now, consists of fieldwork and research, including gathering input from the public. All of the team partners have spent many hours at the cemeteries, gathering firsthand data. Additional research is also being conducted. Two community meetings are scheduled during the spring and summer on April 30 and June 26.
- 2) In the fall, the team will analyze their findings and begin to develop recommendations. Laura Knott will present her findings at a community meeting on August 23, and a fourth community meeting will take place in October.
- 3) During Winter 2014-2015, the team will draft the master plan, present it for public feedback at a community meeting in January, make revisions, and then deliver the final product.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to a question-and-answer session and then breakout sessions where attendees could talk to team members about specific topics of interest. This project will include many opportunities for citizens to participate, share their opinions, provide input and feedback, and make their voices heard. PARD and the project team encourage everyone to get involved!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUSTIN'S CITY CEMETERIES

By admin No comments yet

A complete history of each of the cemeteries, including a list of historically significant people who are buried there, will be included in the Cemetery Master Plan. Much of this work has already been done for Oakwood Cemetery, and it is important to make sure that all five cemeteries are equitably represented. If you know of a civic or community leader, early pioneer, architect, artist, writer, poet, musician, military hero, business leader, religious leader, educator, or notorious outlaw who is buried at Plummers Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery, or Austin Memorial Park, please send an email to memories@austincemeteryplan.com.

In 1839, the City of Austin — the new capital of the Republic of Texas — was established. A burial ground was located beyond the city's borders to the east. Originally known as the City Cemetery, it was renamed Oakwood Cemetery in 1907. The oldest recorded burial there took place in 1841. The cemetery was segregated, with most African American burials taking place on the north side of Main Street (the road through the cemetery) and most Anglo/white burials on the south side. The oldest Mexican American graves are located along the northeast edge of the cemetery.

Oakwood Cemetery contains more than 23,000 burials. When most of the plots in Oakwood had been sold, the City added the Oakwood Cemetery Annex on the opposite side of Comal Street in 1914. The Oakwood Annex contains an additional 13,000+ graves. Like the main Oakwood Cemetery grounds, the Annex contains several mausoleums, or buildings in which the dead were interred above ground.

Evergreen Cemetery — historically, one of several burial grounds for the African American residents of nearby East Austin neighborhoods — was established by the City of Austin in 1926. It contains part of an earlier cemetery called Highland Park. Approximately 150 paupers were buried in Highland Park between 1891 and 1893, mostly in unmarked graves. Evergreen Cemetery now contains more than 13,000 graves and adds more than 200 more each year.

Austin Memorial Park Cemetery was founded in 1927 and acquired by the City in 1941. More than 18,500 people are already buried at Austin Memorial Park, and it remains active, with 30 acres remaining for future development.

Plummers Cemetery was established by Thomas Plummer around 1910. It was originally called Mount Calvary Cemetery. (Another cemetery with that name is located at I-35 and Dean Keeton Street.) Plummer's son, Tom Sylvester Plummer, who was the first black deputy sheriff in Travis County, purchased the cemetery from his father in 1923. Nearly 300 people were buried there while the cemetery was active, between 1909–1976. The City of Austin acquired this predominantly African American cemetery in 1957, when it also purchased the land for Givens Park. At just eight acres in size, Plummers is the smallest of the five Austin city cemeteries.

Both Oakwood Cemetery and Austin Memorial Park contain Jewish sections. In Oakwood, both sections are for the members of Temple Beth Israel. In AMP, the Jewish sections are for the congregations of Temple Beth Shalom and Agudas Achim. Jewish burial traditions require that their cemeteries are separate and that only Jewish people are buried there.

LANDSCAPE FIELDWORK

By admin | No comments yet

Historical landscape architect Laura Knott, with the cultural resources management firm John Milner Associates, Inc., of Charlottesville, Virginia, is the principal investigator for the Austin Cemetery Master Plan project. In late April, Ms. Knott and her associate, landscape designer Christina Osborn, spent nearly a week conducting their assessment of existing conditions in Austin's five city cemeteries. Ms. Knott will report on her initial findings at the August 23 community meeting.

The final master plan will include an inventory and assessment of all above-ground features at the cemeteries, except for cemetery buildings (which are being evaluated separately).

Future drafts of the master plan will include recommendations for:

- The preservation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of perimeter fencing, roadways, drainage systems, irrigations, sidewalks, and pedestrian pathways
- Better organization of the cemeteries, including pedestrian-related amenities, such as restrooms, seating areas, maintenance areas, and spoils storage areas ("Spoils" refers to the soil removed from a gravesite in preparation for interment.)
- Improved access and circulation for both pedestrians and vehicles, parking, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Informational and directional signage, as well as interpretative signage that explains the history of the cemetery, kiosks, maps, etc.
- Security and the reduction of vandalism, theft, and other crimes
- Site furnishings for public areas, such as benches, flag poles, trash receptacles, and lighting

The master plan's recommendations for vegetation will include:

- Preservation and replacement of existing vegetation and the planting of new vegetation in a way that complements the historic character of the cemeteries.
- Identification of best practices with regard to tree care and maintenance, including recommendations for a cyclical maintenance program.
- Maintenance with regard to mowing, edging, and weed-removal to ensure safety of gravestones and monuments.
- Identification of best practices with regard to documenting and protecting plantings, such as bulbs, groundcover, perennials and annuals in public spaces and throughout the cemeteries.
- Recommendations for turf grass that requires less water, but still maintains the historical appearance of the cemeteries.
- Recommendations on best practices with regard to stump removal in areas with nearby graves.

Ms. Knott's recommendations will be presented with the rest of the draft master plan at the January 2015 community meeting.

By admin | No comments yet

One of the most important components of the Cemetery Master Plan project is an extensive schedule of public outreach and engagement. This included 25 interviews with stakeholders representing many different groups, including people whose loved ones are buried at the cemeteries; people who live nearby in the MLK, Swede Hill, and Montopolis neighborhoods; representatives of community groups including Save Austin's Cemeteries, PODER, Preservation Austin, and the Austin Genealogical Society; representatives of church and synagogue congregations; community activists; and members of the general public.

Project consultant Steph McDougal conducted the telephone interviews over several weeks, asking interviewees questions about their vision for Austin's cemeteries: How will you know if the master plan development process is a success? How do you feel about concepts such as partnerships between the City and community organizations, or developing the cemeteries as valuable community resources?

Interviewees have provided excellent, helpful information that will help guide the master plan process. It was clear that people have very strong opinions about many issues, and that it will be a challenge to find common ground and/or compromises on some topics. For example, some people believe that the only true stakeholders are those who have loved ones buried in the cemeteries, while others feel that many people can and should have a legitimate interest in the care and use of a City-owned cemetery.

Some people mentioned that they would not be in favor of holding any events or activities in the cemeteries, and that they were opposed to anyone being involved with the cemeteries "just because it's fun". However, other people encouraged the use of cemeteries as community cultural and historic resources, particularly those cemeteries that are no longer being used for active burials. Several people mentioned that it would be appropriate to treat Austin Memorial Park and Evergreen Cemetery, which are quite active with hundreds of burials annually, differently than Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Annex, or Plummers Cemetery, which have only a few new burials each year.

For the most part, people being interviewed agreed on many topics, including the need for better maintenance at all of the cemeteries. The equal treatment for all five cemeteries also was mentioned frequently, and many people said they do not think that Evergreen Cemetery receives the same level of care as Oakwood Cemetery or Austin Memorial Park. In all cemeteries, people would like to see more information and signs that can help them locate graves, as well as adequate restroom facilities.

Some of the other feedback from the stakeholder interviews has been summarized as follows:

- Stakeholders want the cemeteries to contain healthy, attractive plantings (which some people refer to as *landscaping*) but recognize the difficulty of balancing that with the need to restrict or conserve water during drought conditions.
- They are concerned that the master plan will not be implemented, due to a lack of funding or commitment from City Council. Many stakeholders expressed a lack of trust or confidence in the City.
- They would support the City's partnering with community organizations that want to help preserve the cemeteries, as long as the City did not delegate any of its responsibility for maintenance and upkeep.
- The cemeteries should be places where people are respectful. (However, stakeholders do not agree on what "respectful" means, in terms of grave decoration policies, activities or events, and use of the cemeteries by walkers, joggers, genealogists, etc.)

The project team will use some of this information as the basis for a survey of the greater Austin community through Speak Up Austin! during the month of August.

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CATEGORIES

- › Uncategorized

META

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GRAVE MARKER ASSESSMENT

July 28, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

Anyone who has been in Austin's city cemeteries probably has noticed that many grave markers are tilted or sunken, and some have fallen over completely. This appears to be due primarily to the shifting and contracting of soil due to the drought periods that Texas has experienced since 2001. Grave markers in cemeteries all over the United States are subject to these and other types of damage or soiling. To help the City determine the extent of these issues and how to address them, the Cemetery Master Plan includes a condition assessment of grave markers in all five cemeteries.

Steph McDougal and Anne Shelton, consultants from McDoux Preservation, one of the project team members, spent three days in the five cemeteries in late April. In each section of each cemetery, they documented types of markers, marker materials, approximate period of burials, and conditions observed. They also noted the types of designs and inscriptions, whether those included any symbolism, organizational associations, or non-English languages. Although the team's scope of work did not include a grave-by-grave survey of individual markers, each cemetery section was small enough to provide a good look at conditions within different parts of the cemeteries. The team also took more than 3,500 photographs documenting these conditions.

The master plan will include recommendations for the treatment of grave markers and monuments, including:

- Conserving and cleaning markers, monuments, curbing, fencing, and plot coverings
- Appropriate methods for restoring or repairing existing markers, installing new markers, or replacing markers
- The use of herbicides and pesticides to prevent damage to gravestones and monuments
- Documenting and handling loose marker fragments
- Resetting gravestones and monuments

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CATEGORIES

SECOND COMMUNITY MEETING REPORT

August 4, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The Cemetery Master Plan project will include a total of five community meetings. The first was held on April 30 in East Austin; Meeting #2 was held on June 26 at the Northwest Recreation Center on the northwest side of town. Approximately 40 people attended.

Historic preservation consultant Steph McDougal, who is part of the master plan project team, began the meeting by explaining the stakeholder interview process and her findings. In summary:

- Interviewees agreed on the need for a higher level of maintenance that is equal across all cemeteries, as well as concerns about the health of cemetery trees.
- Many people had very different opinions about whether the cemeteries should be used for any purpose other than burials, such as heritage tourism or educational programming, although many recognized that Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery (all of which have only a few burials per year) would be better suited for those sorts of uses than would Austin Memorial Park Cemetery and Evergreen Cemetery, which are still actively being used for interment.
- Interviewees agreed on the need for wayfinding signage and information to help visitors locate graves.

A more detailed report of the Stakeholder Interview process can be found [here](#).

The main topic of the second meeting was signage and interpretation in cemeteries. Ms. McDougal presented examples of different types of signage and how they could be used to help people find their way in cemeteries, access important information, and learn about historical people and events and different cultural traditions. Ms. McDougal emphasized that all five City-owned cemeteries should be treated equitably in terms of signage and interpretation.

Meeting attendees were encouraged to share their feedback on different types of signs and options for interpretative panels. Some of the comments received from attendees can be summarized as follows:

"I like the idea of a kiosk with a map and a tour you could take on your own."

"Signs should be appropriate located and sized, and there should not be too many of them."

"Technology can be an important, helpful tool for people who are from out of town, but I don't want it to be too obtrusive or unattractive."

"I would like signs that tell the history of the cemetery and the people who are buried there."

The next meeting will take place on August 23, from 9:30-11:30 a.m. at the Ruiz Branch, Austin Public Library. Everyone is encouraged to attend. If you have any questions or comments, please send an email message or call Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@cityofaustin.org or 512-974-9478.



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CATEGORIES

GET READY FOR MEETING #3!

August 11, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The Austin Cemetery Plan project team has been asked to research best practices and provide recommendations about programming, use, recreation, and heritage tourism opportunities. During the third community meeting, the team will ask for your feedback on the following topics:

1. Developing a heritage cemetery tourism program.

As discussed in last week's post, many cities encourage tourism in their historic cemeteries as a way to introduce and engage visitors with the history of the community and the people who lived there. That may be more appropriate for Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, and Plummers Cemeteries, where no new burials are taking place, rather than Evergreen Cemetery and Austin Memorial Park. We would like to know what you think about the idea of cemetery tourism and the different kinds of programs that could be offered.

2. Developing a process that allows descendants, friends groups, and city staff to document the histories of people and families who are buried in the cemeteries.

As historic preservation consultant Steph McDougal explains, "Those of us with training in archival research can sometimes find information that just isn't easily accessible to family members. I recently was able to provide a gentleman with a great deal of information about his grandfather, primarily because I knew where and how to look for it." Working together, descendants and other volunteers can help City staff weave together the story of the people who made Austin what it is today.

Your ideas on this topic are encouraged!

3. Identify educational and artistic partnerships that may benefit the community.

Cemeteries are full of history, and they provide a personal way to explore the heritage of all the different people and cultures who settled Austin. Educational programs that teach about state and local history, as well as the appropriate ways to behave in and treat cemeteries, could engage both adults and children.

The quiet spaces in cemeteries are also appealing to artists. Learning to sketch or paint? Practicing photography? The wide variety of historical markers, particularly in Oakwood Cemetery and Oakwood Cemetery Annex, are themselves works of art. Whether towering monuments or handmade memorials, these highly personal artistic expressions have the power to inspire creativity in people today.

How would you encourage people to learn about and be inspired by Austin's cemeteries?

4. Identify potential recreational partnerships that are legal and appropriate and might benefit the cemeteries.

What do you think about people practicing yoga or tai chi in a cemetery? Meditating? At the turn of the 20th century, cemeteries were popular places for families to picnic. Could they be again?

The project team will capture your opinions and suggestions for developing a list of criteria that could be used to evaluate potential recreational partnerships. You can also share your ideas by sending them via email to Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@cityofaustin.org or by calling Austin 3-1-1.

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CEMETERY TOURISM

August 18, 2014 | By admin | 2 comments

Cemeteries throughout the world invite visitors to experience tours, particularly during the month of October around Hallowe'en (or All Hallows Eve) and Dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead). Many of those tours are conducted in the evening and feature costumed actors, stories about famous (and infamous) "residents", and the history of the cemetery, city, state, or nation.

During daylight hours, cemeteries may be visited by people who are interested in history, genealogy, or the art and architecture of monuments and grave markers. According to a recent news report, many Japanese and European tourists are particularly interested in visiting cemeteries.

In Austin, the organization Save Austin's Cemeteries has held tours of Oakwood Cemetery on several occasions. When project consultant Steph McDougal was completing grave marker conditions assessment in Oakwood Cemetery, she met a husband and wife from Alaska who spent two days visiting graves in the cemetery.

Here in Texas, many cities promote their cemeteries as tourist destinations.

- According to visitelpaso.com, **Concordia Cemetery** in El Paso was founded in 1853, when rancher Hugh Stevenson's wife "tragically died from blood poisoning after being gored by a pet deer. She became the first resident of what was to become the largest cemetery in the southwest. Concordia is the resting place for over 60, 000 historical citizens and early pioneers of El Paso and Juarez."
- **Oak Grove Cemetery** in Nacogdoches provides "tour itineraries" throughout town so that visitors can learn about significant residents buried there. After stops at various locations, the tours end at the person's grave in the cemetery.
- **La Grange** invites visitors to "Wander through the **Old La Grange City Cemetery** that features Texas State Historical Markers, ornate Italian marble statuary, and wooden markers that have become almost illegible over time."
- **Fayetteville** has held cemetery tours to highlight the distinctive cast iron crosses in St. John's Catholic Church cemetery. Made by Charles Andera using a formula unknown today, these ornate crosses were used to mark the graves of early Czech pioneers who settled in Fayetteville. During the tour, costumed actors - including children - portrayed early Fayetteville residents buried in the cemetery and told their stories.

Hollywood Forever Cemetery (formerly Hollywood Memorial Park) is one of the oldest cemeteries in Los Angeles, and the place where many stars of stage and screen are buried. The cemetery hosts three different walking tours, led by film historian Karie Bible: The Cemetery of the Stars tour; the Jewish Heritage tour; and The Hidden Hollywood tour. The cemetery sells books about famous people who are buried there, and recommends other heritage tours, events, and historic places to visit in nearby downtown Los Angeles. Saturday nights in the summer are movie nights at Hollywood Forever, when crowds gather on the lawn to picnic and watch films projected on the rear wall of one of the cemetery buildings. Tickets routinely sell out for film classics as well as contemporary movies of various genres. The cemetery's Masonic Lodge also hosts live music and comedy performances. Hollywood Forever hosts a Dia de los Muertos festival, including costume contests for adults and children, arts and crafts vendors, food vendors, Aztec ritual dancers, musical performances, and art exhibitions. More than 100 ceremonial altars are constructed by local residents, with the best traditional, contemporary, and annual-theme altars receiving awards of \$3,000 each.

What do you think about heritage tourism in cemeteries? Let us know by calling Austin 3-1-1.



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GIS DIGITIZATION AND MAPPING

August 25, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

As part of the Austin Cemetery Master Plan project, the project team at AmaTerra Environmental, Inc., has converted existing paper copies of cemetery maps into a digital format. The digitization process captures the location of legal boundaries, buildings and structures, irrigation lines and equipment, roadways, and paths. The AmaTerra team has also completed fieldwork using Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment to record the location of other features, such as sprinkler heads and trash bins that were not shown on the existing maps.

The cemetery tree survey, conducted by AmaTerra with Davey Tree Service, has also mapped the larger trees in all five cemeteries. In order to be mapped, a tree located in an open area must be at least 2" in diameter, and a tree located in a heavily wooded area must be at least 8" in diameter. The locations of stumps, where trees have been cut down, also have been mapped.

The result is a set of Geographic Information System (GIS) databases, which will be incorporated into the City's existing GIS system. Some of the other maps that the City of Austin uses are shown here: <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/gis-and-maps>. Previously, the City has not had GIS maps of the features found within City cemeteries.

GIS software uses "layers" to show different features on the same base map. Before computers, this could be accomplished by overlaying transparencies (maps printed on plastic film) on a light table. For example, one transparency might show the location of all trees (with sizes indicated), while another might show the location of the irrigation system. By looking at these layers together, one on top of the other, the viewer might see a relationship between a tree's proximity to the irrigation line and its size. The same idea — overlaying map layers — is used by GIS software.

The digitization process typically involves taking old maps or aerial photographs that were created before the invention of digital mapping systems and telling a computer which points on those old maps or photos correspond to coordinates in a modern digital map. The computer then aligns and scales the old map image to make it fit the known points in the digital map. This is called "georeferencing." The old map image is converted into lines, points, and shapes, and each of those "shapefiles" can be assigned additional information for use in GIS.

After the master plan and all of the associated GIS maps and databases are complete, the City of Austin will have a valuable new resource for information and decision-making.

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CATEGORIES

SPEAKUPAUSTIN! TAKE OUR SURVEYS

September 1, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet



The SpeakUp Austin! website provides a way for the City of Austin to gather feedback from citizens. Now through November 1, two cemetery-related surveys are available for your input.

The first survey, "Potential Programming in City Cemeteries", seeks to learn more about whether and how the Austin community currently interacts with the five historic, municipal cemeteries.

The second survey, "Burial Options", seeks to learn about Austin residents' opinions about the many interment options that are available today, including cremation and green burial.

Your answers will provide valuable input to the City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan, which is in the process of being developed. If you have any questions about this survey or would like more information, please contact Kim McKnight, PARD Project Coordinator and Cultural Resources Specialist, at kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov.

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PROGRESS REPORT

September 8, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The Cemetery Master Plan project is basically divided into three phases. Phase I, which took place over the spring and summer, consisted of fieldwork and research to document current conditions in all five of the cemeteries and develop the historical, cultural, and environmental contexts for each cemetery. A first-look draft of what will eventually become the master plan has been submitted to the City of Austin for initial review and comments.

The project team is now moving into Phase II, during which their findings will provide the basis for a thorough analysis and developing recommendations, as well as an Implementation Guide to help the City move forward with the preservation and ongoing management of the cemeteries.

This winter, the final phase of the project will present concepts and treatment options in draft form for the community to review and comment on. The project team, along with City staff, will then revise the master plan accordingly and present the final version at a fifth community meeting in January (date and time still to be determined).

In the meantime, please mark your calendar and plan to join us for the fourth community meeting, to be held on Monday, November 3, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Zilker Botanical Garden.

Meeting location: 2220 Barton Springs Rd., Austin, TX 78746

Select this link for facility and location information:

<https://austintexas.gov/zilkerbotanicalgarden>

For information about previous meetings, please visit:

<http://austintexas.gov/department/cemetery-master-plan>

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CATEGORIES

IDENTIFYING HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT PERSONS

September 15, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

One of the tasks set out in the Cemetery Master Plan scope of work is the identification of “historically significant persons” buried at each cemetery. The concept of “significance” is defined by the National Register of Historic Places; in order to be listed on the National Register, a property must meet at least one of the Register’s Criteria for the Evaluation of Significance.

It’s important to note that cemeteries and graves of historical figures are not usually eligible for listing on the National Register. Exceptions are made for the grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building associated with his or her productive life, or for a cemetery that derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events.

What does “outstanding importance” or “transcendent importance” mean?

According to the National Register, Criterion B, a “significant” person is someone who gained importance within an identifiable profession, class, or social or ethnic group; for whom research has revealed specific information about the person’s activities and their impact; and whose activities and contributions were historically important.

For the purposes of the Cemetery Master Plan, the project team seeks to identify persons who were historically important in a variety of ways. The main criteria for evaluating “significance”, in this project, is whether *someone else* thought that person was important. So, if the African American community recognizes someone as having made an impact or contribution to the history of Austin or a neighborhood or ethnic group, so will the project team. We are currently working with a number of people to help us identify “historically significant persons”, and everyone’s input is valued and welcome.

Some other historic cemeteries around the United States are working to research and create biographies for the people buried there. This is often accomplished through collaborative efforts between cemetery staff, non-profit staff, volunteers, and high school or college students. Should the City of Austin encourage or take on such a project, it would be helpful to have established some parameters for research (such as how to cite sources) and decided in advance where and in what format the biographical information would be stored. Uses for this information include Cemetery Walks, where actors present the lives of the deceased, preferably in their own words if those are available; interpretive signs, brochures, or other materials; and programs and events that encourage descendants to become involved with the cemetery.

Do you know of a historically significant person who should be recognized and is buried at one of the municipal cemeteries? Let us know! Please send an email to Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov or call the Austin 3-1-1 line.

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CATEGORIES

NATIVE GRASSES VS. MANICURED TURF

September 23, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The City of Austin will likely have to consider how to make adjustments to landscaping in its five historic municipal cemeteries, in light of the ongoing drought conditions in Central Texas. According to the Lower Colorado River Authority, the drought that has affected Austin and surrounding areas for the past six years is likely to continue. Water conservation efforts, which restrict irrigation in the cemeteries, may become even more stringent in the new year if the reservoir lakes (Buchanan and Travis) drop below 30% capacity.

One option that may be considered is planting with native grasses instead of sod. The municipal cemeteries are currently covered in a mix of St. Augustine grass, Bermuda grass, and native grasses. Interestingly, the most healthy grass at all the cemeteries is probably in Plummers Cemetery, which is the only municipal cemetery with no irrigation system. (Some drought-tolerant native grasses grow more densely and prevent intrusion by weeds better when they are not watered frequently or fertilized.)

If the City decides to use native grasses – which is only a possibility at this point, not a certainty – signage and informational materials are likely to be required to help educate the public about appropriate watering practices.

What do you think? Share your comments via email to Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov or call the Austin 3-1-1 line.

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CATEGORIES

ACCESSIBILITY AT CEMETERIES

September 29, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

Around the country, some cemeteries have instituted creative ways to make visiting the grave of a loved one easier for people who may have mobility challenges or use wheelchairs or other assistive devices (scooters, walkers, canes, etc.) Here in Austin, the Cemetery Master Plan team is investigating ways to provide accessibility in the five historic municipal cemeteries. (While this post focuses on mobility-related issues, the Cemetery Master Plan will also address adaptive resources for vision- or hearing-impaired persons.)

One of the top priorities is the construction of accessible restroom facilities. Projects will include updating existing buildings at Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Austin Memorial Park Cemetery to create restrooms compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act. At Evergreen Cemetery, where the old restrooms have been out of order for several years, plans will likely include an entirely new accessible restroom facility.

Another issue is parking. Some of Austin's municipal cemeteries have little or no available parking, other than the shoulder of a roadway or path within the cemetery. The project team is looking at the possibility of creating restricted parking areas with van-accessible parking spaces for vehicle-mounted wheelchair lifts.

Other strategies that other cities use include:

- Having wheelchairs available for loan at each cemetery, by request
- Rubber matting to enable wheelchair access from roadways to funeral areas, by request
- Plaques and exhibits designed to be read from a seated position

What do you think? Do you have issues that are not addressed here? Let us know by contacting Kim McKnight (kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov) or by calling the Austin 3-1-1 line.

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CATEGORIES

THE BENCH SITUATION

October 6, 2014 By admin No comments yet



As most people reading this post will already know, the City of Austin's Cemetery Department has been working with interested citizens during the spring and summer to determine how to sensitively balance the desire of loved ones to express their grief in personal and creative ways with the need to maintain the cemetery grounds. This is particularly an issue at Austin Memorial Park.

Although a variety of different grave decorations have been discussed during this process, one of the most pressing maintenance issues has to do with benches. Considerations related to benches include:

- People visiting the graves of loved ones may need or want a place to sit, particularly if their visit is lengthy or if they find it difficult to stand for periods of time.
- Benches are often placed outside of the grave plot, creating an obstacle for both visitors and maintenance workers and, in some cases, intruding upon other gravesites.
- Although a few memorial benches are made of durable stone, other types of benches deteriorate through constant exposure to weather, and damaged benches frequently are not removed from the cemetery in a timely manner by their owners.
- The cost of and time required for maintenance is increased dramatically when benches make it impossible for mowing large sections of the cemetery and, instead, grass has to be cut with weed trimmers.

While many (perhaps even "most") cemeteries around the United States do not allow benches, trellises, or other furnishings to be placed around graves, we recognize that the existing rules about grave ornamentation were not enforced for many years at Austin Memorial Park, and as a result, some people purchased plots there specifically because they thought they would be allowed to decorate their loved ones' graves with benches and other items.

The Cemetery Master Plan team, in collaboration with City Cemetery staff and the consultants from Smith|Associates who managed the Rules and Regulations public engagement process, are now considering how the City can balance these conflicting concerns. Nearly 3,000 individual comments have been collected from citizens and are being reviewed and considered very closely. We feel confident that we can find solutions to both the benches situation and the other gravesite decorations.

Please plan to attend the fourth Cemetery Master Plan community meeting, where these topics will be discussed in greater detail.

Monday, November 3, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Rd.
Austin, TX 78746

Select this link for facility and location information:

<https://austintexas.gov/zilkerbotanicalgarden>

For information about previous meetings, please visit:

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META

HALLOWEEN-THEMED CEMETERY TOURS

October 13, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

Many historic cemeteries offer tours that highlight the people who are buried there. These tours sometimes include a special Halloween-themed tour during the month of October. The Cemetery Master Plan team investigated best practices from around the United States to find out what makes a Halloween cemetery tour successful.

1. Focus on history, not frights.

One place that you might rightfully expect to be scared is the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery – yes, *that* Sleepy Hollow, where author Washington Irving, who wrote about the headless horseman, is buried. Even though the cemetery's tag line is "Be prepared to lose your head!" their tours engage participants with many of the citizens who are buried there, as well as the art, architecture, and symbolism found in the cemetery.

The City of San Antonio offers Halloween-themed tours of that city's cemeteries, also focusing primarily on history; the main tie to Halloween is an invitation for participants to attend in costume.

2. Offer tours year-round, not just at Halloween.

A regular program of themed tours is on the slate of New York City's city cemeteries, including Green-Wood Cemetery's annual fall "Spirited Strolls" tour, which offers "tales of murder, mayhem, spirits and the utterly bizarre" as well as a rare visit to the cemetery's catacombs (normally closed to the public).

Many cemeteries that offer tours do so year-round, although some – like Green-Wood – have a special Halloween version in the spirit of the season.

3. Only include activities that are appropriate for the cemetery.

Candy apples, hay rides, and pumpkin carving may be fun for all ages, but many cities keep those activities apart from their cemetery tours. A quiet walk through the cemetery, with a knowledgeable guide, and perhaps actors providing historical interpretations of the deceased, seems to be the norm. Add lanterns after dark, so that everyone can see where they're going, and you have a typical cemetery tour – dignified and respectful.

4. Clearly identify tours that are not appropriate for children.

"Murder, Mayhem, and Mystery" is a fairly common cemetery tour theme! However, some of these tours at other, non-Austin cemeteries include subject matter that might upset the little ones. Smart tour operators include that information in their promotional materials so that parents can decide what is best for their children.

Cemetery tourism is on the rise around the world and here in the United States, and at Halloween, the idea of a cemetery tour may be especially appealing – particularly since the weather in Austin is usually approaching "cooler" by the end of October, making it more pleasant to spend an hour or so walking around outside.

What do you think? Let us know by contacting Kim McKnight (kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov) or by calling the Austin 3-1-1 line.

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DIA DE LOS MUERTOS AND GRAVE DECORATIONS

October 20, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

With Día de los Muertos coming up soon, this week's post focuses on this colorful cultural tradition. (For festival information, visit austindiadelosmuertos.com.)

Día de los Muertos (November 2) is a holiday that began in Mexico and is now celebrated in many countries, including the United States. The holiday honors those family members and loved ones who are deceased. Some of the traditions associated with Día de los Muertos include making altars (*ofrendas*) for loved ones, decorating sugar skulls (*calaveras*), and decorating graves. Costumes and makeup are also popular ways to honor the dead and the holiday.

Community celebrations often include art exhibits, altar exhibits or decorating contests, live music, dances, crafts (such as marigold making or sugar skull decorating) and other cultural programming. While the thought of dancing skeletons may seem irreverent to some people of other ethnic backgrounds, Día de los Muertos is a festive, joyful celebration of life.

This emphasis on family is typical of Mexican-American burial customs as well. Death is accepted as a normal part of life, and gravesite offerings often include flowers, toys, food, and other things that represent the ongoing relationship between the living and the departed. Fencing or other borders around graves are also common. Graves are decorated all year 'round – not just for Día de los Muertos. Families often celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and other important milestones in what would have been the life of the deceased by decorating the grave for the event.

Today, the practice of decorating graves year-round has spread beyond the Mexican-American community to other ethnic communities, and not just in Austin, but at cemeteries throughout the United States. As a result, cemeteries have begun to create – or start enforcing – rules about grave decorations. Again, this is not unique to Austin. Many other communities are struggling with the need to balance respect for people's cultural beliefs while still being able to maintain the cemetery.

The Cemetery Master Plan team, in collaboration with City Cemetery staff and the consultants from Smith|Associates who managed the Rules and Regulations public engagement process, are now considering how the City can balance these conflicting concerns. Nearly 3,000 individual comments have been collected from citizens and are being reviewed and considered very closely. We feel confident that we can find solutions to both the benches situation and the other gravesite decorations.

Please plan to attend the fourth Cemetery Master Plan community meeting, where these topics will be discussed in greater detail.

Monday, November 3, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Rd.

Austin, TX 78746

Select this link for facility and location information:

<https://austintexas.gov/zilkerbotanicalgarden>

For information about previous meetings, please visit:

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COMMUNITY MEETING TONIGHT!

November 3, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

Please plan to attend the fourth Cemetery Master Plan community meeting this evening. Our agenda will include a brief update on the development of gravesite ornamentation rules and regulations, and the meeting will primarily focus on programming in the cemeteries. You will have opportunities to share your feedback.

We will post a meeting report next week.

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COMMUNITY MEETING #4 REPORT

November 10, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The fourth community meeting for the Cemetery Master Plan was held on November 3 at the Zilker Botanical Garden. Approximately 40 people attended. The focus of this meeting was on programming recommendations, but the project team also presented information about the next phase of the cemetery rules process and ongoing capital improvement projects in the cemeteries. The team gathered attendees' feedback on all of those topics.

The Nov. 3 meeting summary can be viewed at the following link:

<http://goo.gl/WNMMGd>

The Nov. 3 meeting presentation can be viewed at the following link:

<http://goo.gl/xRrq1o>

The fifth and final community meeting will take place on Saturday morning, January 24, 2015 at the Austin Public Library, Carver Branch, 1161 Angelina Street, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At that meeting, the Master Plan team will present the draft master plan, which also will be made available online during the months of January and February.

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PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS FOR ALL CEMETERIES ARE NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

December 4, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

In preparation for presenting the draft Cemetery Master Plan in January 2015, the master plan team has made a summary of its initial recommendations available for review and comment. Links to recommendations for each cemetery can be found on this page:

Preliminary Concepts

Your feedback is welcomed and encouraged! Please call or email Kim McKnight to share your comments, questions, or concerns.

Kim.McKnight@austintexas.gov

512/974-9478

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

December 9, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

The fifth and final Cemetery Master Plan meeting will take place on Saturday morning, January 24, 2015, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

We will be returning to the Austin Public Library Carver Branch (1161 Angelina Street) for this meeting.

The draft master plan will be online and available for viewing prior to the meeting. At the meeting, because of the limited amount of time available, the master plan team will not review the entire draft. Instead, we will explain how the draft is organized and highlight the areas in which community feedback is especially needed. (Feedback is encouraged for all areas of the master plan, of course!) We will then spend a significant portion of the meeting gathering feedback.

The best way to prepare for this meeting will be to review the draft master plan in advance and bring your questions and comments for discussion.

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PLEASE LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

December 18, 2014 | By admin | No comments yet

An overview of the Master Plan team's preliminary recommendations are now available online at www.austincemeteryplan.com, and comments will close on December 23 — that's only five more days to share your feedback! Please review the recommendations for the cemeteries in which you're interested and send your comments to Kim McKnight on or before the 23rd.

We'll be compiling everyone's comments and will include those in the Master Plan, along with all of the other comments that we've received over the course of this project — at meetings, via email, etc.

Your participation is valuable and appreciated. Thank you for taking the time to provide your input!

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FINAL MEETING FOR THE CEMETERY MASTER PLAN

January 12, 2015 | By admin | No comments yet.

Please plan to join the Master Plan team on Saturday, January 24, from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Austin Public Library (Carver Branch), 1161 Angelina Street. The team will present highlights of the *draft* master plan and collect feedback about the proposed treatment plans for each of the five historic city-owned cemeteries.

The draft master plan will be published online prior to the meeting. We are working to get that out to you as soon as possible.

We look forward to seeing you on January 24!

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DRAFT MASTER PLAN – YOUR COMMENTS ARE REQUESTED!

February 2, 2015 | By admin | No comments yet

The draft Master Plan is available online at the City of Austin Cemeteries website. You can download individual chapters or the entire plan. The draft will remain available for comments through Friday, March 6, 2015.

You can provide your feedback by emailing or calling Kim McKnight (512-974-9478 or kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov). You can also post a comment directly to this website. In either case, the master plan team is collecting all comments received and will review and address those as we're revising the Master Plan during the week of March 9.

Let us know what you think!

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