



Metro | *Meeting minutes*

Meeting: Cemetery Advisory Committee
Date/time: Dec. 5, 2012, 10:00 a.m.
Place: Room 301
Purpose: Quarterly meeting: Designation of the committee vice chair. Review cleanup efforts and division of duties between maintenance and sales staff. Review marketing concepts for feedback.

Attendees

Verne Duncan, Hannah Allen, Michelle Gregory, Meg McCauley, Bo Nevue, David Noble, Laurel Smith.
Metro staff: Justin Patterson, Rachel Fox, Paul Slyman, Monty Woods, Brian Kennedy, Dan Kromer, Clyde Keebaugh, Noel Seats, Emma Williams and Phyllis Cole.

Absent

Terry McCall, Merlene Drapela, Larry Potter
Metro Councilors - Barbara Roberts, Shirley Craddick

Topics

Vice Chair designation –

Verne Duncan moved to nominate Hannah Allen as Vice Chair of the committee. Her nomination was accepted.

Cemeteries staff structure and responsibilities -

Metro Parks and Property Stewardship Director, Justin Patterson handed out roles and responsibilities matrices to the committee, and walked the committee through how the division of duties in the management of the cemetery program is determined. Delineating between maintenance and sales. The committee concurred with the process.

Metro cemeteries cleanup project

Metro Parks and Property Stewardship Director, Justin Patterson presented the issues of non compliant graves, provided examples and discussed situations where staff worked with customers to resolve issue. He reviewed the proposed clean up schedule for the cemeteries.

- Metro's intent is to provide a consistency of enforcement of its policies. It is regrettable that policies were ignored in the past, but the current cemetery program is doing the right thing by enforcing from now on. David Noble stressed that above all a cemetery's rules and regulations must be enforced completely and consistently.
- Information was provided on the Metro Council's direction that enforcement not being retroactive in enforcing oversized grave markers and borders. Small sundry items were ok to remove.
- Information was provided that older historic monuments are protected by law and would not be considered for the cleanup.

- Review of the plan consisted of: Metro posted notice May 2012 at each cemetery property that rules would be enforced after Nov. 2012. Metro would then post a 30 day notice at each grave in violation, after 30 days if the customers did not remove items from the graves that staff would remove the items, bag the items and hold them for 30 days at Blue Lake Park. The notice indicates this information.
- The Committee felt that on-site 30 day grave notification could be effectively seen as no notification at all, since families may not visit within a 30 day period, especially during December and the wet months.
- The committee suggested that direct contact by letter/phone call would be appropriate and caring. It would decrease the amount of pain the families are already feeling at the death, although this is a painful and difficult process. Also, even if letters are returned, they will provide a documentation of effort made to contact them. This is a process that needs to happen, even if it is difficult.
- Staff reviewed the desire from the committee to ensure understanding and buy in.
- The committee was asked to give feedback on the issue of newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Trees and shrubs that have reached maturity and become part of the landscape will stay.
- As for newly planted saplings, there was discussion as to whether the families should be contacted with a 30 day window to remove the plant themselves, and that Metro staff would not be able to care for the trees after that period.
- The committee suggested that Metro give customers the opportunity to remove plantings themselves by notice via letter or telephone.
- The suggestion of designating areas for benches and/or trees was made. Areas in the cemeteries could be set aside for trees, and Metro could control the species planted. Metro could also provide specific direction for locations and types of benches.
- Michelle Gregory suggested that Metro explore the possibility of a “tree bank” for restoration efforts.
- The committee endorsed the cleanup efforts with the caveat that Metro makes direct contact with individual interment right owners. The contact would be in the form of a letter, sent after the first of the year. The letter would include the need for clean up within 30 days, highlight previous notices given, summary of the overall effort, where a patron could obtain their items if removed by Metro, and the rules moving forward.
- The committee requested that the 2004 rules hand out and the draft hand out be sent to them after the meeting.

Revenue and Marketing Update

Cemetery Program Manager, Rachel Fox provided information about Metro’s cemetery revenue issue and review background issues in operations, work done to date to increase efficiencies and how Metro cemeteries maybe viewed by the public. Discussion was around Metro’s fee increase and whether or not the increase resulted in lower revenues, or if it has been the bad press, operational issues that

prohibit staff from being proactive in sales or a combination of everything. Handouts were provided with regard to Metro's efforts to improve operations and Metro's staff proposed marketing brief.

- Emma Williams, Cemetery Coordinator presented the marketing strategy being developed with the help of EnviroMedia, a public relations firm.
- The marketing brief was reviewed with the committee: objectives, external perceptions, desired responses, tone and personality, brand values, services and deliverables, graphic design, audience and communication audiences.
- The presentation showcased the limited information that Metro provides the public about its cemeteries in comparison to other cemetery operators.
- David Noble didn't recommend wide media campaigns as much as he stressed the importance of the personal contact. He also noted that the fee increase was likely too high for Metro but that the cemetery customer does not choose on price and likely it did not matter to the customer especially if the customer has a loved one in a Metro cemetery. But that the fee increase affected referrals from other funeral institutions.
- David Noble suggested that Metro begin to respectfully follow up with families of recently departed, about 30-45 days out indicating that this will create additional sales.
- David Noble imparted that networking is key to this industry, and that Metro cemetery staff should be prepared to share on a wide basis the story of the improvements to the program and what Metro offers. He suggested that Metro focus on the fact that the cemeteries are with Metro and that Metro has sustainable and habitat friendly land management practices. In his opinion that is one of Metro's greatest assets for the cemetery customer.
- David Noble concluded that the closing of three of the fourteen cemeteries and the bad press have impacted Metro's abilities to compete and there is a lot of work to be done to overcome these challenges.
- Hannah Allen suggested that the cemeteries should be showcased that they are special because one can be buried with Hawthorne or Lovejoy. That these are special and different than other cemeteries because of the community pioneers who are laid to rest in Metro's cemeteries.
- The Committee requested that EnviroMedia be invited to the next meeting.

Next Meeting – issues to be discussed, so far, include:

- A more complete report on revenues and expenditures, ongoing expenditures vs. one time expenditures.
- EnviroMedia will be invited, and will have deliverables available by the next meeting.
- More discussion on the issue of trees, including utilizing our natural areas.