

Metro | *Meeting minutes*

Meeting: Cemetery Advisory Committee meeting
Date/time: Monday, Dec. 9, 2013
Place: Room 370A/B
Purpose: Quarterly meeting

Attendees

Committee: Verne Duncan, Hannah Allan, Bo Nevue, Meg McCauley, David Noble, Michelle Gregory, Laurel Smith, Terry McCall, Marie Henry

Metro: Councilor Shirley Craddick, Paul Slyman, Melisa McDonald, Justin Patterson, Monty Woods, Matthew Herbert, Noel Seats, Kimberly Palmero, Phyllis Cole

Absent

None

The meeting was called to order by Chair Duncan at 1:02 p.m.

Summary from the Sept. 23, 2013 meeting was approved without revision.

Introductions were made, and a warm welcome was given to new Cemetery Advisory Committee member, Marie Henry, General Manager of Lincoln Memorial Park and Funeral Home. Her extensive background in the death care industry makes her a valuable addition to the Committee.

Monty Woods also introduced Matthew Herbert, who has been working with Monty in the cemeteries as a seasonal, and has recently been very involved with the Multnomah Park soil removal project as well as the program-wide cleanup project.

Reauthorization of Cemetery Advisory Committee

The reauthorization process was discussed, and Councilor Craddick thanked the Committee for their willingness to serve another year, and conveyed Council's gratitude for the guidance they have shared during the first year. Chair Duncan thanked the Council for their support of the Committee.

Programmatic Updates

Settlement with Oregon Mortuary and Cemetery Board

Melisa McDonald shared details of the recently agreed upon settlement between Metro and the Oregon Mortuary and Cemetery Board (OMCB).

Metro acknowledged that it did not inform OMCB of management changes that took place in 2008 and 2009, that it sold graves that had previously been sold to pioneer families, and that bone fragments were found in a soil depository on Metro property.

The settlement states that, in addition to a \$50,000 fine, Metro will work together with both sets of families to resolve any issues with resold graves. The soil mound on Metro property will be sifted thoroughly, with any bone fragments or funerary items being respectfully interred in a manner consistent with that of similar items recently discovered at the Multnomah Park soil mound removal. The site will be graded, replanted with native vegetation and permanently marked to guarantee no future use of the area. Metro also agrees to meet quarterly with OCMB, in either writing or in person.

Reclamation Project

Kim Palmero, from the Office of Metro Attorney, updated the Committee on the reclamation project currently underway. It was set into motion July 2013 when the Metro Council adopted a resolution acknowledging that ~2000 spaces had been identified in the Metro cemeteries where there had been no contact with the owners for at least 75 years.

The names of the owner families were listed during 12 weeks of public notice, from mid-August to mid-November, utilizing *The Oregonian*, *Oregon Live* and signage in each of the cemeteries. The advertising budget was \$3800.

Kimberly is still receiving calls and email from the public, and has heard from approximately 100 families, which has resulted in 25 families making successful claims on 46 spaces.

Decisions on spaces in question will continue to be made until late March or early April of 2014, at which time the remainder of unclaimed spaces will be declared legally abandoned, and will be made available for use of the community.

During discussion it was agreed that this will be an ongoing project, albeit many times smaller, as other spaces reach the threshold of 75 years without contact from the family.

Cemetery Cleanup Project

Monty Woods gave the Committee an overview of this process, which began in May 2012 with postings in all Metro's Historic cemeteries of the intent to enforce the rules regarding ornamentation of graves.

In March 2013, starting with groups of the smaller cemeteries, Metro rangers posted notices on graves with out of compliance ornamentation and took two photos of each; one of the headstone for identification purposes and one of the entire gravesite.

A letter was then mailed to the owner of each posted space, stating that out of compliance items would be collected 30 days after the date of the letter, bagged individually and held for an additional 30 days at Blue Lake Park. Multnomah Park and Douglass cemeteries each went through this process separately. The last property to be cleaned up will be Lone Fir, and this will take place during early 2014.

Ranger Woods noted that pre-cleanup owner compliance has been significant, and that the great majority of owners are glad to see Metro's efforts to make the cemeteries more safe and orderly. Families who have been upset by this project have been individually heard, and the difficulties they are experiencing acknowledged. This has given Metro the opportunity to share its obligation to provide a safe and respectful environment for the visiting community moving forward into the future. Staff has not seen significant recidivism of out of compliance decoration.

The issue of encroaching grave makers was discussed, and the one vendor who generates the majority of these problematic markers will be monitored throughout the development process to

the point of installation. During the spring of 2014 the issues of existent encroaching markers will be addressed.

Monty acknowledged the delicacy of balancing the healing of personal loss with the importance of creating a safe environment, and how important the manner of this communication has been throughout the project.

He said that KOIN had done a interview with him on the cleanup project, and that it will be aired on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013. Metro will provide a link to the interview, and when asked if they could help, the Committee was invited to email the KOIN reporter, Amy Frazier an email. Melisa McDonald will provide Ms. Frazier's contact information in the next day or so.

New Topics

Bulk Grave Sales

Discussion on this topic examined the pros and cons of bulk grave sales, and enjoyed benefit from the experience of cemetery managers/owners on the Committee.

Whereas sales are good, selling too much of an available inventory effectively locks up space that may be required for other customers in the future. This point takes on a special significance in light of Metro's desire to keep spaces available for members of the public with fewer resources.

There are many complexities in this situation regarding ultimate ownership rights, cultural beliefs, traditions and standards, the families involved, the aims of the purchasing organization and Metro's responsibilities as a government entity.

General consensus of the committee was that careful research would be advised before undertaking this method of revenue generation for Metro. Given the limited inventory at most properties, this would not be a likely option for the program.

Pricing for Infant/Child Services

For some time Metro has a reduced rate for infant/child casket liners, spaces and burial services, but there is no policy in place regarding costs for a cremation option for this age group. Metro has a desire to do the right thing going forward, and this most sensitive of subjects generated a thoughtful discussion, and the realization that more discussion is warranted.

There were a number of issues to be addressed in ongoing discussion. Metro does not have a special section for infant/child burials; typically graves for infants and children are put in full grave spaces that for a variety of reasons are not appropriate for adult casket burials. There are also times when a full size space is used, but sold at the lower price. In cases such as this there is the opportunity for future cremation burial for the parents. Another option is to sell a companion niche, charge a small fee for burial of the infant/child cremated remains, and then add the parents' cremated remains at a later date. Forging a relationship with the family can be a beneficial result of Metro's situation regarding these burials.

The importance of a definitive standard on service fees was also brought up, including the need for a policy on how to pay for owned-space burials when family has limited resources. The concept of a means test in this kind of situation was also brought up.

Next meeting

March 10, 2014, 1 to 2:30 p.m.
Metro Regional Center, 600 NE Grand Ave
Room 370A/B