



Metro | Meeting minutes

Meeting: Cemetery Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting
Date/time: Monday, September 8, 2014 2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Place: Lone Fir Cemetery

Attendees

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

Metro: Paul Slyman, Melisa McDonald, Justin Patterson, Emma Williams, Noel Seats, Kimberly Palmero, Matthew Herbert, Phyllis Cole

Absent

Marie Henry

Chair Verne Duncan called the meeting to order at 2:10, after allowing extra travel time to Lone Fir. Introductions were made and Chair Duncan welcomed all to this special quarterly meeting, which was highlighted by the official reopening of Lone Fir Cemetery to casket sales.

Councilor Craddick was unable to attend, but sent her assurances of the importance of the Cemeteries program and the Cemetery Advisory Committee in the Metro portfolio. She also looks forward to the November presentation to Council, where the year's accomplishments will be represented and the Committee

Paul Slyman spoke briefly to reference the many projects that have kept the Cemetery program, office and grounds contingents busy this summer.

Programmatic Updates

223rd Street Soil Stabilization Project Paul Slyman's comments provided a good segue to Cemetery Ranger Matt Herbert's update on the 223rd Soil Stabilization Project. Stakeholders have been kept apprised of the process during the recent construction phase. One of these is a perimeter check, done daily morning and afternoon, to look for any items of interest inside or outside the fence, and to make sure that security has not been breached.

After goats ate down the blackberries that covered the site, staff was happily surprised to see that the hills were between two and three feet high, instead of the seven to eight feet that had been expected. Before the "flattening" of the lot to an area of gently rolling hills, the soil was tested for arsenic. Thirty samples were taken, and levels came back well within the normal range. Staff was able to assure the neighbors that the area's wells had not been affected by arsenic leaching through the soil.

The site was graded to assure that rain will remain on the property instead of flowing onto the road, as well as kept separate from a Metro-owned wetland adjacent to the site.

When soil was pushed around while making the construction entrance, staff walked alongside and followed the tractors to spot any objects coming to light. This soil had been deposited over the past

ten years, by Metro's and other cemetery programs, as well as some from Metro Parks. Due to winter inaccessibility, taller mounds of soil were left around the edges of the property.

When objects were located, their position and identification were noted, and included bone fragments, a skull, vertebrae and various pieces of casket hardware. All funerary objects have been repatriated to Multnomah Park Cemetery by Cemetery Program Manager Melisa McDonald, who was observed by a Portland Police officer checking the cemetery for unusual occurrences.

A thorough search with highest-quality metal detectors has been done, and another will take place the week of September 14, 2014.

Future steps include spraying the blackberries that will return, continued perimeter checks, and in fall soil will be added, and the site hydro-seeded. In the spring of 2015 staff will add native trees and shrubs obtained from the Sustainability Center Native Plants program.

Matt was thanked for his thorough and fascinating presentation.

Reclamation Project

Kimberly Palmero gave an update on the Reclamation Project. Lone Fir Cemetery opens again to casket sales on September 9, 2014, with approximately 2000 spaces coming back into inventory. Some spaces have mature tree specimens growing on them, and will not be used

On September 8, 2014, approximately 350 letters were sent out to modern purchasers, whose spaces had been contested, letting them know that the reclamation process has been completed and their burial rights are intact. It is anticipated that a number of letters will be returned due to old addresses in the files, and this presents an opportunity to update contact information in our files.

Specific areas will be opened to sales in groupings that include spaces within all three price points. Blocks 19, 20 and 21 will open first. Emma and Noel carefully examined and probed each spot in the opening inventory to make sure that the conditions on site matched exactly the information in our files and in our cemetery software, Stone Orchard.

The modern purchasers will be clearly noted in the records as owners of the spaces they have purchased. If issues arise with spaces where ownership cannot be resolved, other reclaimed spaces will be offered in an equitable way for all involved.

It was asked what would happen with families of original owners who did not come forward during the publicizing of the project, but have heard about it now. Kimberly answered that there is a year 'grace period' and if the exact space(s) in question are no longer available comparable space(s) will be provided if descendancy is proved.

Chair Duncan thanked Kimberly for all her hard work and interesting presentation

Cemetery Program Overview

Melisa McDonald discussed four types of burial rights that Metro is involved with:

1. Burial rights that go to modern owners (whether there is a burial or not);
2. Some burials exist with rights that are in conflict;
3. Some situations where there is no burial to date, but where rights are in conflict. This is most prevalent at Multnomah Park Cemetery. In these cases burial rights will be transferred to other cemeteries, including Lone Fir;
4. New burial rights will be offered when the southeast corner of Multnomah Park, which has not yet been platted and has no burials, is brought into the inventory.

Melisa also shared that with the majority of work on resolution of burial rights in place, staff is moving to a focus on another improvement to our customer service: selling memorials directly to families. It is

anticipated that this will begin in January 2015. It will provide a much better level of control over the markers that are placed in our cemeteries, as well as generate income for the program.

There is ongoing work to enter information into Stone Orchard, and though time consuming the digitization of cemetery information is essential to a strong and vibrant program.

Discussion Item: Headstones

There was discussion on what rules and regulations might need to be in place regarding the historic markers and headstones in our cemeteries, especially Lone Fir.

At what age is a marker deemed "historic?" Should a marker be allowed to weather into a blank shape, and if so, should an identifying marker be allowed as well? Since Lone Fir is on the Historic Register no changes may take place that change the feel of the place when a person enters.

Melisa spoke with a number of cemeteries back east, where there are many more very old stones, and she reported that what is considered appropriate regarding cleaning, repairing, restoring, and/or replacing headstones was "all over the map."

Cemeteries that benefitted from tours were more likely to update memorials to their original state, other cemeteries tended to be more lenient on family replacements.

The Committee decided that this complex and important issue will take time to resolve, and the idea emerged to form a focus group to gather input, ideas and feedback from a broader group of stakeholders.

It was decided that Terry McCall will chair the focus group, and Bo Nevue will represent the Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30.