

## Cemeteries Commission Meeting Summary

September 19, 2007

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**What:** Fact-finding meeting of the Commission exploring abandoned and neglected cemeteries in Duval County.

**In attendance:** Commission members: Jerry Spinks, Chair. Brenda Ezell, Jon Ferguson, Emily Lisska, Hazel Mack, Joel McEachin, Richard Mueller, Louise Warren. Citizens: Daphne Colbert, Art Hall, Brent Handley, Miranda Iglesias, Daryl Joseph, Len Loving, Johnson Pace, Shannon Palmer, John Pittman, Larry Rosenblatt, Dwight Sales, Ann Staley, Thomas Walters. JCCI Staff: Steve Rankin.

**Meeting Time:** 8:15 – 9:45 a.m.

**Discussion:** Mr. Spinks welcomed everyone and asked each attendee to introduce him/herself. He reminded everyone that the cemeteries being considered by the Commission are “unlicensed” cemeteries (under Florida Statute 497) that have been abandoned or neglected. In addition, some unlicensed cemeteries are maintained by religious groups, etc., and are not part of the Commission’s deliberations.

Presentations were then provided regarding the mapping and cemetery identification process undertaken by the City of Jacksonville. Commission member Joel McEachin from the COJ Planning & Development Department, and Brent Handley from Environmental Services Inc. (ESI) were the resource speakers for the session. ESI did the actual mapping for the city on a contract basis.

### Resource Speaker Presentations:

#### Highlights of Joel McEachin Presentation -

- The cemetery documentation and mapping program was part of the City of Jacksonville’s 2010 Comprehensive Plan approved in 1990. Under the Historic Preservation Element of the Plan, the stated objective was to identify, document, record and evaluate the historic resources within the city’s jurisdiction by 2010.
- Since 1992, eight cemeteries in Duval County have been designated by the City Council as “landmark sites”. Four others (Old City Cemetery, Gravely Hill Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery, Capt. Mooney Cemetery) are pending landmark designations. A “landmark” cemetery requires City approval for physical changes (e.g., fencing, decorative entry way, location of new administrative or maintenance building, etc.), but not design material or placement of individual markers and mausoleums.
- “Landmark” designation does not impact interment, nor does it imply an obligation for maintenance of the cemetery.
- Since 1988, COJ Planning & Development has established site files on individual cemeteries which includes a variety of information and documentation obtained or provided. The information varies due to availability and is merely provided as a resource for interested citizens.
- Planning & Development coordinated the development of a county-wide archaeological plan that included the establishment of “sensitivity maps” for reviewing proposed projects. Phase one, completed in 2002,

was documenting on a Florida Master Site File Form, as well as mapping on the city's GIS, all 120 known cemeteries in Duval County at that time.

- Listing on a Florida Master Site File is for planning and documenting purposes but does not provide any protections or restrictions.
- A cemetery can be considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places if its primary significance came from the grave of a person of transcendent importance, from age and distinctive design features, or from association with historic events.
- Cemeteries owned by the City of Jacksonville include Old City, Mount Herman and Hillside. Five others are maintained by the City, including Gravely Hills, Memorial, Pinehurst, part of Sunset Memorial, and Mount Olive.
- With the support of then-Councilwoman Denise Lee, funds were made available for the cleanup of four of these cemeteries using Community Development Block Grant Funds.
- Also established in 1994 under the leadership of Councilwoman Lee was a \$660,000 Cemetery Maintenance Trust Fund designed to: provide ongoing maintenance; document and map marked graves in four cemeteries; and rebuild entry gates at Sunset Memorial and Pinehurst Cemeteries.

#### Highlights of Brent Handley presentation -

(Note: Mr. Handley coordinated the documentation and mapping project for Environmental Services Inc.)

- He noted that the goals of the project were to locate all cemeteries on the Duval County Register of Resting Places; complete a site inventory form for each; and establish GPS boundaries of the cemeteries.
- Once the initial elements of the project were completed, an archaeological predictive model was created to establish "sensitivity maps".
- Mr. Handley reviewed unmarked grave detection processes, including remote sensing and subsurface testing.
- He emphasized that a complicating issue in accurate mapping and detection is graves that are located outside cemetery boundaries. This is not uncommon in cemeteries owned by religious groups (e.g., some Catholic cemeteries do not permit burial for persons not christened, so some family members may be buried outside the boundaries of the facility).

#### **What We Learned Today:**

- The cemeteries identification and mapping program initiated by COJ came up under the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. It is important to remember that in order to potentially leverage the recommendations of the Commission as based on that Comp plan approved in 1990.
- It would be helpful to know from COJ Parks & Recreation what it costs to maintain the cemeteries under their guidance. That would provide some frame of reference regarding what it might cost to maintain other cemeteries.
- Because funding will inevitably be a major issue for any maintenance program devised, we should not rely on "things that cost", but we need to rely on "people who care." This suggests an emphasis on grass-roots volunteer programs.
- The identification and mapping program completed by COJ and ESI provides a good baseline of information as it was known at the time. It may be important to consider periodic updates of the study since new information comes to light with some regularity. Perhaps the program could be revised and updated every 3-5 years.
- Former Councilwoman Denise Lee provided the leadership necessary to bring attention to the cemeteries project, and she shepherded the use of Community Development Block Grant Funds and the creation of a Cemetery Maintenance Trust Fund to provide ongoing maintenance for cemeteries under the City of Jacksonville's wing.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

