

Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Commission Open Forum Summary

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What: Open public forum to solicit citizen input on abandoned and neglected cemeteries in Duval County.

Where: SOS Academy (6974 Wilson Blvd., Jacksonville)

In attendance: Cemeteries Commission members: Jerry Spinks, Chair. Jon Ferguson, Louise Warren. Concerned citizens: Deborah Cephus, Curtis Johnson, Laura McDuffie, Eddie Mills, Gary Mills, Genell Mills, Marlane Mills, John Pittman, Thomas Waters, Bill Yarbrough. JCCI Staff: Steve Rankin.

Meeting Time: 6:00 – 7:15 p.m.

Discussion: Mr. Spinks called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and invited the citizens to provide their input regarding cemeteries in their area. The focus of attention was on Borden Cemetery off Middleburg Road on Jacksonville's Westside. Most of the citizens attending the meeting had family ties to Borden Cemetery, and some intend to be buried there themselves.

Mr. Johnson explained that the primary issues involving Borden Cemetery are access problems (the road leading into the facility desperately needs paving) and vandalism. He said that vandals had pulled up grave markers throughout the cemetery and piled them under a tree, then drove motorcycles over the graves. When a real estate development went up adjacent to the north side of the cemetery, a fence was removed leaving a ditch which also complicates access.

Three churches jointly own Borden Cemetery (Bethel Baptist, Greater Zion Grove, third unidentified), but they apparently have no maintenance or preservation plan, so what maintenance gets done is the result of the efforts of interested family members. The cemetery opened in 1942 and was originally called Clare Belle Cemetery, named after one of Mr. Johnson's relatives.

The Commissioners suggested that it may be beneficial to get representatives of the three churches to come together cooperatively to create a strategy for preservation and maintenance of the cemetery. Mr. Spinks summarized by suggesting that it appeared that if the city or some other entity can be engaged to do the heavy work in the cemetery (paving the road, tree removal, etc.), there are enough interested parties to join together for regular maintenance. Eliminating the ditch and ensuring good security for the cemetery would be good starting points.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.