

## Cemeteries Preservation Project: News Conference Summary

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**In attendance:** Local Media. Main Speaker: Jacksonville City Councilwoman Gwen Yates. Blue Ribbon Commission Members: Brenda Ezell, Jon Ferguson, Marion Graham, Emily Lisska, Joel McEachin, Jerry Spinks, Louise Warren. JCCI Staff: Skip Cramer, Steve Rankin, Samantha Allick.

**Meeting Time:** 11:00 – 11:30 a.m.

**Location:** Old City Cemetery; Jacksonville, FL

**What Occurred:** Skip Cramer welcomed everyone and introduced Councilwoman Gwen Yates for her remarks. Mrs. Yates indicated that the purpose of the news conference was to announce a project approved by the Jacksonville City Council to develop a plan for the maintenance and preservation of the more than 120 cemeteries and burial grounds in Duval County.

She noted that once cemeteries are full and are no longer producing revenue, they often are neglected by their owners and fall into disrepair. Over time, some are even lost.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Inventory existing burial sites and cemeteries in Duval County
- Identify concerns regarding these cemeteries, including maintenance, record-keeping, preservation of head stones and markers, and public access.
- Examine current legislation and policies regarding these issues, and explore alternative solutions, including best practices from other communities
- Develop a plan to address the issues identified with older and abandoned cemeteries in Jacksonville.

Mrs. Yates said that City Council President Michael Corrigan appointed a nine-member Blue Ribbon Commission to oversee the project. The Commission will complete background research this summer, and will hold a series of meetings open to the public this fall. Completion of the project is scheduled for December, 2007. She also emphasized that the input and participation of the citizens of Jacksonville is invited, and that there will be many opportunities during the duration of the project for public input and involvement.

Mrs. Yates explained that JCCI was retained by the City Council to assist the Blue Ribbon Commission in facilitating the project. She noted that with over 30 years experience in engaging citizens in Jacksonville, JCCI was the logical organization to assist in guiding the process for this project.

Mrs. Yates then introduced Jerry Spinks, who will serve as Chairman of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Mr. Spinks said that cemeteries are an important part of any community, and that they should to be maintained and preserved with a certain level of respect. He indicated that the Blue Ribbon Commission takes this responsibility seriously and will strive to produce for City Council review a plan with specific recommendations for how best to preserve the burial sites in Duval County.



Mr. Spinks then introduced the other members of the Blue Ribbon Commission, as follows:

- Brenda Ezell – local attorney
- Jon Ferguson – Southern Genealogists Exchange Society
- Marion Graham – owner/operator of Marion Graham Mortuaries
- Emily Lisska – Executive Director of Jacksonville Historical Society
- Joel McEachin – City of Jacksonville Planning & Development Department
- Louise Warren – Pilot Club – Cemetery Heritage Programs

Other members of the Commission not present:

- Hazel Mack – representing Jewish cemeteries
- Richard Mueller – a licensed cemetery operator

The news conference concluded at 11:30 a.m.