

ORANGE COUNTY CEMETERY DISTRICT
Board of Trustees
April 10, 2024

MINUTES

The regular monthly meeting of the Orange County Cemetery District Board of Trustees was called to order by Trustee Rivers at 10:01 a.m., in the Board Room of the Orange County Cemetery District, 25751 Trabuco Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Trustee Kelly Rivers.
Roll Call by Board Secretary, Mary Funk.

PRESENT:	Cynthia Ward, Chair (Attended remotely)	Fourth District
	Kelly Rivers	Second District
	Vladimir A. Anderson	Third District
	Noel Hatch	Fifth District
ABSENT:	Maribel Marroquin-Waldram, Vice Chair	First District
STAFF:	Tim Deutsch, General Manager	
	Brenda Manriquez, Finance and Accounting Manager	
	Mary Funk, Board Secretary	
	Julio Amarillas, Cemetery Manager	
	Bud Bales, Cemetery Manager	

GM Deutsch explained that Chair Ward was ill and would be attending the meeting remotely. In order for Chair Ward to join the meeting the Board members present at the meeting must take action to allow her to attend remotely.

MOTION: of Trustee Rivers, seconded by Trustee Anderson and carried by a vote of 3-0 (Vice Chair Marroquin-Waldram absent for the vote), approved allowing Chair Ward to attend the April 10, 2024 Board Meeting remotely.

PUBLIC COMMENTS - None

STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION

GM Deutsch presented the matrix he developed to help the Trustees and staff develop the key goals for the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. Of course, the number one goal and first priority is to develop the new cemetery. This objective will drive everything else in the Strategic Plan. In terms of a general timeline for the development of the new cemetery, GM Deutsch is estimating that the project will go before the Anaheim Planning Commission in June and expects the Anaheim City Council to consider it in July. Throughout the rest of the 2024-25 fiscal year, the design team will start construction documents and begin to apply for needed permits. In fiscal year 2025-26, GM Deutsch expects to go through the process of selecting the development contractor and awarding the contract. Full construction should begin in fiscal year 2026-27. GM

mmw
Chair

MJ
Secretary

Deutsch hopes to complete construction and prepare for operations in 2027-28. Prior to April 2029 we should be conducting our first burials, in agreement with the time limitation first set forth by the County when the District was given the property. During the remainder of fiscal year 2028-29, the District will be looking ahead to planning the future organizational needs of the District as well as preparing for future development of new interment areas at Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park, as the original three public cemeteries become maintenance only properties.

GM Deutsch explained to the Board that the original concept of doing mass grading for a Veterans cemetery of 100 acres and a public cemetery of 80 acres likely won't happen, due to budget constraints. More likely, the Veterans initial development will be closer to 80 acres with the public cemetery's initial pad being more like 25 to 30 acres. The rest would be left undeveloped for future use.

GM Deutsch showed that the matrix he developed has 8 broad goal categories which include: 1) New Cemetery Development; 2) Serving Families Now and in the Future; 3) Maintaining Quality Level of Service for Families; 4) Sound Financial Management for Current and Future Operations and Capital Projects; 5) Retaining and/or hiring Quality Staff; 6) Retaining Knowledgeable Trustees; 7) Establishing and Maintaining a Positive Profile of the District; and 8) Long-Term Stewardship of the cemeteries (including environmentally friendly options).

GM Deutsch explained that within each of these broad goals, the Strategic Plan should have smaller specific goals with action items to accomplish these objectives. Some action items may be limited in duration, others may continue throughout the five-year plan depending on the goal. GM Deutsch said we will also be conducting a SWOT analysis that will help identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as we examine each objective and establish goals and action items to carry out the strategic plan. GM Deutsch stated that most agencies that conduct strategic plans will identify 30 to 40 SWOT items per category.

The Board and staff spent the remainder of the meeting in a brainstorming session discussing a variety of topics that will need to be explored further in developing the strategic plan.

Chair Ward suggested that at the new cemetery we could serve as our own nursery, by designing our landscaping plan with the idea that plantings can purposely propagated with the goal of moving mature plants into new landscaping areas, saving the District the costs of having to buy mature plants from outside nurseries.

Cemetery Manager Bud Bales said that it is very important in the next fiscal year to update the cemetery flower policy which was attempted last May. He stated this has a huge impact on what the groundskeeping staff are able to do and it is very important as far as the cemetery clean-ups are concerned. At the new cemetery we need to establish these expectations right from the start and not allow deviations from it. Trustee Hatch stated that we should prepare a simple statement for the new cemetery that is consistent with what the Veterans Cemetery standards are.

Trustee Hatch also commented that Federal Funding for the Veterans Cemetery should be seen as a definite threat. He asked if that funding is not available, would that threaten the District's development?

mmw
Chair

MJ
Secretary

GM Deutsch said that the entire site is still under the ownership of the Orange County Cemetery District. If the Veterans do not move forward, the District will still retain ownership of that land and hold it in reserve as required by the County. He reminded the Trustees, that according to the County timeline, we are five years into the project and should have an operational public cemetery before April 2029.


Cemetery Manager Bud Bales suggested that staff should tour other public cemetery districts to see if they are doing things that are beneficial that we could also implement. GM Deutsch agreed stating that he would love to see what Coachella Cemetery District is doing now. GM Deutsch said that would be good action item pertaining to the future development of the new cemetery.

Cemetery Manager Julio Amarillas asked if the Veterans would copy our procedures and regulations. GM Deutsch said that would not be the case. The State Veteran Cemetery would operate according to their own guidelines. If we want the two cemeteries to compliment each other in either aesthetics or operations, we would need to mimic them. GM Deutsch said that the State is very mindful of environmental concerns. The State cemetery that he and Trustee Anderson toured near Monterey had no grass at all and was completely decomposed granite.

GM Deutsch said he would also like to set up times when Trustees can meet with Leadworkers and/or staff to hear their thoughts about what is needed to ensure the District's ability to provide quality service to families and to ensure that the District can retain highly skilled and qualified staff.

Trustee Hatch asked if there are any issues with the City that may be a threat to the new cemetery development moving forward, adding that there always seems to be concerns about water and other environmental issues on the land. GM Deutsch said that they have reached out in a letter to the Department of Fish and Game, tribal groups and other resource agencies and are waiting to hear back. GM Deutsch said that in terms of the Peer Review, they are also recommending the addendum process to the existing EIR because the District's planned impact on the site is dramatically less than what was planned for the Irvine Company's original development.

Cemetery Manager Bud Bales also suggested encouraging staff to enroll in landscaping or horticultural or irrigation classes to improve their knowledge base. This might be particularly helpful in maintaining the new cemetery as well. Brenda Manriquez agreed, especially if the new cemetery has different landscaping requirements. GM Deutsch noted that staff will also need to maintain the peripheral landscape areas. Brenda Manriquez commented on how that area is very prone to wildfires. GM Deutsch said that a part of the review would be to include fire suppression into the plan. GM Deutsch also stated that Federal funding exists for wildfire prevention. He also stated that we should consider a maintenance yard that could possibly be three acres or more. Since the Orange County Fire Authority does so much training at the site, we may want to consider allowing them to store extra equipment and vehicles right in our maintenance yard. That way its convenient for them to access for training purposes and should an actual fire occur, essential firefighting equipment would already be on site.


Chair


Secretary

Trustee Hatch said that El Toro Memorial Park has a feeling of intimacy. He asked if we know what the new cemetery will actually look like. GM Deutsch said that at El Toro all the trees were planted first and then the burials plots were mapped around the trees. When trees are in lawns you lose interment space. We would want to avoid that and plant trees in common areas and along streets to make the best use of interment areas. He also stated that the new cemetery should avoid all upright markers to reduce trimming needs as much as possible. Unless we add a special feature, all the plots at Gypsum Canyon will have the same price.


Chair Ward asked if the environmental documents at the City are being viewed now. GM Deutsch said that the Peer Group is reviewing them. Chair Ward asked if the public can view them now. GM Deutsch said that until the Peer Review is complete, the addendum documents are in draft form. We would want these experts to complete their evaluation so we can implement any recommended changes to the documents before putting them out for Public Review. Chair Ward said that the District’s project documents were posted and could be viewed, but now she no longer sees them. GM Deutsch said he would ask about that and let Chair Ward know what he finds out. Chair Ward stated that perhaps they were just posted on a different page. Chair Ward also asked if the District could cover the cost of ongoing education for employees if the coursework was directly related to their duties. GM Deutsch said this is already provided for in the Personnel Manual. So far, only Martin Galvez has taken advantage of it.

Trustee Hatch asked how staff will grow in numbers. GM Deutsch said we will have to look at where we need to be in 2027-28 as we are preparing for operational implementation. GM Deutsch said we should consider contracting out maintenance so our staff can focus on interments. This may be more cost effective. The language in the MOU on this is vague, but may be the best option for longevity and for the well being of our employees. Trustee Hatch asked if the District has a labor pool it can readily draw from if we need to hire multiple staff rapidly. GM Deutsch said that we do not have any kind of a pool like that. He also added that at 26 employees, the District is spread fairly thin. Cemetery Manager Julio Amarillas explained that staff at Santa Ana are coming to El Toro to help fill the gaps.

GM Deutsch acknowledged that one threat the District faces is an adequate succession plan as he, Cemetery Manager Bud Bales, and Assistant General Manager, Mary Funk will all likely retire in within seven years or less.

If the Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park does not move forward, and the existing three public cemeteries become maintenance only, GM Deutsch said sufficient funding is in place to manage those cemeteries in perpetuity. The tax revenues will not go away.

Finance and Accounting Manager, Brenda Manriquez said she would like to revisit investing in our own ERP system and pull those accounting functions away from the County. It is not practical to pull payroll from the County as employee benefits are tied through payroll. It would be impossible for the District to obtain similar health insurance rates outside of the County. Brenda Manriquez explained that currently a lot of work is done manually including all of the financial statements, management of pre-need, and 12-month contracts. The right ERP system would allow much more automation and efficiency. GM Deutsch noted that if we bring finance in house, we would need to review our procedures to ensure that a proper system of checks and balances exist. When the new cemetery opens this type of automation would be essential


Chair


Secretary

especially if we are once again going to allow 12-month contracts for pre-need purchases. GM Deutsch stated that he would like to see all of the open contracts resolved before offering 12-month contracts again. Brenda Manriquez stated it is the follow-up that is time consuming when customers don't pay promptly. These ERP systems can have AR modules to help with that.

Board Secretary, Mary Funk stated that Cemsites is limited in its reporting capabilities and it would be worthwhile to explore alternative cemetery software in preparation for the opening of the new cemetery.

Chair Ward stated that these concerns are more operational in nature. GM Deutsch agreed that these are topics in which the Board would not have direct involvement.


Trustee Hatch asked if the District is going to need any Pro Formas on Pre-Need based on various assumptions. GM Deutsch said he has provided projections on anticipated revenue out to thirty years. A five-year financial plan will be very important, considering that now with no more pre-need sales at El Toro, the District does not have that \$800,000 to \$1 million in sales as we have in the last few years. GM Deutsch also stated that we have a good idea now of the number of interment spaces that could be generated by the Santa Ana road closures.

Julio Amarillas asked at what point will the District hire staff so all our cemeteries are prepared when Gypsum Canyon is ready to open. GM Deutsch said he anticipates hiring staff in fiscal year 2026-27 with employment starting in fiscal year 2027-28. GM Deutsch does not intend to utilize newly hired employees at Gypsum Canyon. Rather he would want to fill those positions with our experienced staff. Cemetery Manager Amarillas stated that it takes approximately two years to fully train a new groundskeeper. He just wants to make sure those newly hired employees are ready to take over at the existing cemeteries when experienced staff are transferred to Gypsum Canyon.

GM Deutsch said he also believes the District should conduct a salary study for all current positions and stated that we may need to develop positions that don't currently exist, such as an Assistant Cemetery Manager.

Julio Amarillas commented that now that he has spent some time at Anaheim Cemetery, he is finding that the names of the sections and lot layouts are extremely confusing. He suggested that we think very carefully about how we layout the interment spaces at Gypsum Canyon so it is logical and simple to follow. GM Deutsch also stated that we will not offer family estate areas at Gypsum Canyon. Those family plots create a sense of entitlement that only causes problems as time goes on.

Bud Bales asked how many acres at Gypsum Canyon will be released for sale. GM Deutsch said that there will be various smaller sections developed in different areas so that when burials are occurring they are not all in the same place. Once we are actually starting construction, we are hoping to start selling pre-need. We would not be selling specific plots but rather the rights to select a space when construction is completed. We would be able to show families on maps where the sections and lots are. There are many legal considerations that would have to be ironed out before such sales could occur, such as cancellations, refunds, or what would happen if a death occurs and the family needs to bury before interment space is available.


Chair


Secretary

Julio Amarillas suggested numbering the trees at each cemetery to better record the type of tree and maintenance each tree receives. Chair Ward stated that Anaheim Public Utilities has a robust tree program where they provide free shade trees. She suggested that it might be worth contacting the public utilities to see if there is any way they could partner with us. It was also suggested that families be allowed to sponsor a tree as a way of memorializing a loved one with a small plaque that could be placed at each tree that was sponsored.

Trustee Hatch provided a list of items to consider in strategic plan discussions as well as some items for the SWOT analysis.

In discussing the list, GM Deutsch mentioned that for equipment he anticipates the first phase of the development will include 15 to 20 acres and require 5 to 6 staff people with applicable equipment. If the Veterans are considering outsourcing maintenance of their grounds, GM Deutsch would like District staff to be considered for this contracted labor. GM Deutsch also said that at CAPC he spoke to PlotBox, a cemetery software firm and would like to see a demonstration of this software. As far as interments in the new cemetery, GM Deutsch said that we should require first burials in the space to always occur at the lower level. Families would be allowed to purchase side-by-side spaces, but interments would still have to occur at the lower level first. Cemetery Manager, Bud Bales asked if the backhoes will be able to do lower burials or would the soil be too hard. GM Deutsch said that all the soil would have already been processed by site grading and would consist of fill that is easy to dig.


Trustee Anderson commented that his in-laws are interred at El Toro Memorial Park and they have a companion marker. What would the regulations be at the new cemetery? There was some limited discussion on the number of markers that a full double-depth casket space should accommodate and whether to allow a variety of sizes or only allow one standard size gravestone of 24"x12" that would match veterans markers.

Brenda Manriquez commented that the District should not expect any revenues from the new cemetery until the 2027-28 fiscal year. At some point we will need to pull money to cover expenses.

In regards to publicity, the use of various media outlets, advertising and use of social media, GM Deutsch said that the District will continue with Idea Hall through project approval, then we will probably handle all public relations and communications internally.

Trustee Hatch noted that the average age in Laguna Woods is 75 and the demand for Pre-Need sales is high. GM Deutsch said we may consider hiring professional staff to help handle the pre-need sales at Gypsum Canyon when it initially opens, as the waiting list is already approaching 90 families. It may be possible for us to accommodate some of those pre-need sales here at El Toro through the use of maps and renderings until the property is actually open and operating.

Trustee Hatch asked if we know what the Veterans want their cemetery to look like? GM Deutsch said that our architect is working with CalVet and we do have a general idea.


Chair


Secretary

GM Deutsch said that at the next Strategic Planning Meeting which is scheduled for Monday, April 29th, we will focus on conducting a SWOT Analysis. He said he will try to have draft of the five-year strategic planning matrix prepared that shows where the items discussed today might fit in to the plan.

Trustee Hatch asked if the Trustees should attend the City of Anaheim Planning Commission Meeting in June when our project will hopefully be brought up for review. GM Deutsch answered that he was not sure if Trustee attendance would be needed as this is a first for the District. Chair Rivers thought it is always best to be present just in case. There is no need to attend County Supervisor Meetings as we already know we have the support of our Supervisors. Trustee Hatch asked if we anticipate a favorable response from the Planning Commission. GM Deutsch said he is not familiar with any of the Commissioners, but the project does have County-wide support and he is confident the Anaheim City Manager is doing all he can to support our project. Chair Ward wondered if it would be helpful to have a presentation prepared to support the staff recommendation. GM Deutsch said that the Design Team at RJM has been very diligent and thorough and he does not believe that the Planning Commission will have any questions.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS - None

BOARD COMMENTS - None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. ISDOC Quarterly Meeting, April 25, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. Featuring Placentia Library District and Buena Park Library District.

Kelly Rivers is registered to attend this meeting.

B. CSDA Professional Development Committee Meeting, May 2, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. (Via Zoom)

Vladimir Anderson will be attending this meeting.

C. Memorial Day Programs, May 27, 2024


Anaheim Cemetery – 11:00 a.m.

El Toro Memorial Park – 11:00 a.m.

Santa Ana Cemetery – 10:00 a.m.

The next regular meeting will be held on **Monday, April 29, 2024**, at 10:00 a.m., at the Orange County Cemetery District, 25751 Trabuco Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:01 p.m.



Chair



Secretary



Chair



Secretary