

**ORANGE COUNTY CEMETERY DISTRICT**  
**Board of Trustees**  
**May 14, 2024**

**MINUTES**

The regular monthly meeting of the Orange County Cemetery District Board of Trustees was called to order by Chair Ward at 10:08 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 Cemetery Manager Bud Bales.  
Roll Call by Board Secretary, Mary Funk.

PRESENT:	Cynthia Ward, Chair	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	

**PUBLIC COMMENTS – None**

**BOARD COMMENTS**

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

Trustee Anderson stated that he attended the meeting via Zoom. GM Deutsch asked if the meeting was about reviewing the CSDA Award nominees. Trustee Anderson stated that it was. There are about 24 people on the committee so they meet virtually.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

GM Deutsch stated that he attended a meeting at the new site on Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup> so that CalVet Secretary, Lindsey Sin could have an opportunity to see the property in person. The meeting was coordinated through the office of Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva. Supervisor Wagner, Assemblymember Dixon, Senator Bob Archuleta, Anaheim Mayor Ashleigh Aitken, Anaheim Councilmember Natalie Meeks, County CEO Frank Kim, and VALOR members Bill Cook, Nick Berardino, and Bobby McDonald all attended.

  
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Trustee Hatch asked what was discussed at the meeting. GM Deutsch said that they talked about the tremendous collaborative effort that is taking place by all parties to help the project move forward. GM Deutsch said that Assemblymember Dixon asked about funding that the District has in place. He explained how our District has been setting aside money for the last 18 years in preparation for the construction of a new cemetery. Between those funds and the debt service we have taken on the District has about \$50 million at its disposal to put toward the development of a new public cemetery. GM Deutsch also reminded the Board that CalVet at \$24.5 million set aside for the Veterans Cemetery and the County has earmarked another \$20 million. The team is hopeful that Federal Funding might also be available, but that would only be for tangible components like roads, buildings, niche gardens, etc. Federal funding could not be used for the rough grading or utility infrastructure.

GM Deutsch reported that it was a very positive meeting. The public cemetery development is still on track to appear before Anaheim's Planning Commission in June and then will come before the City Council in July. GM Deutsch said he would let the Trustees know when those dates are set. The project is just going through the last few questions from Peer Review and he is not expecting any setbacks at this point.

Trustee Rivers stated that the public is basically unaware that the County Cemetery will be on the same site. In general, the public is only hearing about the Veterans Cemetery. Chair Ward asked if the meeting was something that the Trustees should have attended. GM Deutsch said that it was not our meeting. It was coordinated through Assemblymember Quirk-Silva's office in cooperation with CalVet and the County. The District was asked to help facilitate the meeting because we are the land owners.

**B. 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.

GM Deutsch reminded the Trustees that the Memorial Day Programs will be taking place on May 27<sup>th</sup>.

**STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION**

GM Deutsch stated that in the Strategic Planning discussions today he would like to explore where the Board wants to commit their resources, staff's resources, and outside resources. GM Deutsch referred to the Strategic Plan 2024 Worksheet that lists nine categories for areas that the Trustees and Staff will focus on over the next five years as they work together to carry out the strategic plan. Those nine categories are: 1) New Cemetery Development, 2) New Cemetery Preparation, 3) Serving Families Now and in the Future, 4) Quality Service Level, 5) Financial Management (Projects, Current & Future Operations), 6) Retaining and Hiring Quality Staff, 7) Retaining Knowledgeable Trustees, 8) Establishing & Maintaining a Positive Profile of the District, and 9) Long-Term Stewardship (Environmentally Friendly Options for the new and existing cemeteries.)

  
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The Worksheet then lists goals for each category that appear in the years that those goals should be addressed. GM Deutsch stated that he has scheduled meetings so that staff can be educated about the Strategic Plan and have an opportunity to provide feedback on goals that they think need to be addressed in these nine categories. Vice Chair Marroquin-Waldram will meet with Santa Ana Staff. Trustee Rivers and Trustee Hatch will meet with El Toro Staff. Chair Ward will meet with Anaheim Staff.

Trustee Hatch asked what the median age of staff is. GM Deutsch was not sure, but stated that over the next three to five years there will likely be 4 to 5 employees who will be retiring. GM Deutsch said that the District has never had a problem recruiting qualified groundskeepers. Other cemetery staff always want to apply here when there are openings. Chair Ward asked if that is because the pay is better. GM Deutsch said that that is one reason, but we also provide better benefits and the working environment overall is better. Chair Ward asked if the Union has been curious at all. GM Deutsch said that we have not had much communication with the Union lately, but negotiations are coming up next year. Chair Ward asked if SCI is unionized. GM Deutsch said that it was not and neither are most of the privately owned cemeteries.

GM Deutsch said that today’s primary goal is to make sure we are not missing any goals. After we are done with the staff meetings, hopefully some additional goals will be added. Once we are in agreement as to what goals we want to achieve, the next task will be to create specific action steps for each goal and assign who will be responsible for carrying out each action step.

Trustee Hatch asked how the District will approach construction and the bid process.

GM Deutsch stated that we have a Public Works Policy, but noted that the Board will have to carefully consider this, as this will be the biggest contract the Board will ever award. We may want to hire a firm that has the expertise to review and analyze the bids we receive. None of the contractors that the District has used in the past would have the staffing and capabilities to take on a project of this magnitude. He also added that of course any contractors would need to be registered with the Department of Industrial Relations and the District would be required to pay prevailing wages. GM Deutsch said that we have never managed a \$50 million project. Trustee Hatch suggested hiring a Construction Manager. GM Deutsch agreed stating that it would be essential to have eyes and ears on the ground supervising all of the contractors to ensure everything is being done properly and according to the plans and specifications. We have to make certain that everything is contained in the scope of work. GM Deutsch said that Murrow Development Consultants might be a good candidate to help the District analyze bids.

GM Deutsch said that once we have Anaheim’s approvals in place, the next step is to develop construction documents which will also require Anaheim’s approval and to request the needed permits. GM Deutsch hopes to post the bid documents in 2025 and begin construction sometime around late 2025 or early 2026.

Under the category New Cemetery Preparation, GM Deutsch said that the goal of designing a maintenance area in cooperation with OCFA for storage of training equipment, is not as high a priority as some of the other goals in that category for 2024-25. Trustee Rivers stated that as we work with First Responders to prepare for the development of their new section, we have to make sure we have rules in place ahead of time in regards to what kind of monuments will and

  
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won't be allowed. GM Deutsch said that any monuments will have to have Board approval. She understands that there will need to be entry monumentation, however, she just wants to make it clear that the District does need to have clear policies in place before any requests by First Responders are even made. Chair Ward asked if we can pull the current policy for monuments and build off of that. Trustee Hatch stated that the key adhering to the policy that we have in place, adding that there can be absolutely no exceptions.

GM Deutsch said that in terms of cemetery rules and regulations, the District will have two sets of rules. One that governs the existing cemeteries and one that governs the new Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park.

GM Deutsch stated that one nice way to create a revenue stream would be to have a walkway going from the office to the flag pole where people can sponsor a brick to memorialize their loved one. Trustee Rivers said that she liked that idea. Brenda Manriquez questioned if this could be done through a Non-Profit. GM Deutsch said that it could be. The District could establish a non-profit such as "Friends of the Orange County Cemetery District" that would allow individuals and organizations to make tax-deductible contributions for a variety of purposes that would benefit the community.

Trustee Hatch asked if GM Deutsch could walk the Board through each category and the corresponding goals for fiscal year 2024-25 and highlight the most critical, must-do items. GM Deutsch said that as we continue with developing the Strategic Plan we will also need to establish priorities, define action steps for each goal, and assign who will do each task.

The meeting broke for lunch at 11:30 a.m. for lunch and resumed at 12:00 p.m.

GM Deutsch stated that he had hoped to present the final Strategic Plan for Board approval at the June 4<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting, but it is more realistic to expect the Board to review it at the July Board Meeting. Per Trustee Hatch's suggestions, GM Deutsch went over the goals for 2024-25 as follows:

**New Cemetery Preparation:**

GM Deutsch mentioned that grant funding might be possible for a new water well under proposition 50.

GM Deutsch noted that trees don't make money and if they are planted in the wrong spot they can cause the District to lose money. If we plan accordingly, we can have a beautiful cemetery with tree-lined streets that won't impact interment spaces. GM Deutsch stated that everything is conceptual now, but as designs move forward it will all come to the Board for Trustee input and approval.

GM Deutsch reported that he is meeting with the First Responders every couple of months and will start to meet more frequently as we get closer to construction. Chair Ward asked if a Trustee should participate in these meetings. GM Deutsch said that the Board will probably want to develop an ad hoc committee where two trustees would be able to attend and it would not have to have a posted agenda. This should be an action step under this goal.

  
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**Serving Families Now and in the Future:**

The road closures at Santa Cemetery should take place this summer and yield around 500 additional casket spaces. This should take some of the pressure off of El Toro Memorial Park and help with the longevity of the District being able to assist families for a longer period of time.

Both cemetery managers will be looking at spaces that were purchased many years ago with no burials taking place to see if any of those families may be willing to consider selling spaces back to the District. At El Toro Memorial Park, if the Keating and Whiting families are willing, the District could gain back 50 to 60 spaces.

GM Deutsch stated that El Toro will need additional niches first and he is currently working to get plans prepared to add additional niches around the So Cal Edison box in the Maureen Rivers Memorial Niche Garden.

He stated that he is also working on a masterplan for future cremation options at all three cemeteries. GM Deutsch also added that we can't forget about maintaining the three existing cemeteries and other projects will need to include not only adding new niches, but water well updates, and additional painting and fence repair projects. Santa Ana Cemetery will also need a new cremation feature.

**Quality Service Level:**

GM Deutsch said that the District has never done any formal customer service training and he would like to explore that possibility. He would also like to expand training opportunities for staff.

While Anaheim and Santa Ana are pretty on top of maintenance, El Toro Memorial Park is behind. We do need to focus on solutions for getting El Toro Memorial Park maintenance caught up.

We have also postponed updating the flower policy. GM Deutsch stressed that under this category, revising the flower policy should be the District's top priority. Trustee Hatch asked when the new cemetery opens, will that make it easier to maintain the other three cemeteries? GM Deutsch did not think that would be the case. He expects El Toro to remain a very active cemetery for some time. He did stress that the Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park would have its own set of rules and regulations that will be different from what is currently in place at the three existing District cemeteries. GM Deutsch said it will be important to educate families so they have correct, realistic expectations. Cemetery Manager, Julio Amarillas stated that he feels there are two keys, educate first and then enforce. It was suggested that families should be required to sign the rules and regulations when they are making arrangements, so there is evidence that they were informed about cemetery policies at the time of purchase. Cemetery Manager, Bud Bales also stated that many people are visual learners. He suggested creating some kind of video that highlights the most important cemetery policies. This could be posted to the District website.

  
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**Financial Management:**

GM Deutsch stated that he and Finance and Accounting Manager, Brenda Manriquez will be working on a five-year financial management plan that will give a snapshot of the District’s financial health over the next five years.

Every year as a part of budget preparation all fees for spaces, services and endowments are reviewed. The Consumer Price Index rate is factored in to account for any inflation. GM Deutsch stated that last year the CPI was 4%.

In the past staff have toured other cemetery districts when attending CAPC Local Area Meetings. GM Deutsch hopes to schedule more visits to other Districts, so staff can see if we can learn any new procedures or policies that might improve our service to families.

GM Deutsch also stated that a part of the budget process is to discuss with the Cemetery Managers what they feel their upcoming equipment needs will be. He anticipates that in Fiscal Year 2026-27, the District will start to make purchases for new equipment that will be needed for operations at the Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park.

GM Deutsch said that Brenda Manriquez and Diana Vosler have been diligently working to close out past due 12-month contracts. At one point the District had close to 400 open contracts. That number is now closer to 80. Of those about 50 are not responding. The District will need to decide when to void those outstanding contracts and put those spaces back in to available inventory. GM Deutsch stated that the District will not be allowing any more new 12-month contract to be opened.

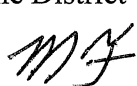
GM Deutsch also mentioned that staff is already exploring alternative software options beyond Cemsites that may provide greater mapping capabilities, better productivity and more efficiencies. When Gypsum Canyon Memorial Park opens it will likely be using a program other than Cemsites. It will have to be determined if it is worthwhile to try to convert the other existing cemeteries over to a new platform or if it would be safer to stay with Cemsites.

**Retaining and Hiring Quality Staff:**

GM Deutsch said that in the upcoming fiscal year it will be important to create a staffing plan of existing staff and potential retirements that are likely to occur within the next five years. We will also be updating the District’s organizational chart, and staff will need to create a succession plan for key positions that will be retiring.

GM Deutsch announced that Union negotiations will begin in February or March of 2025 for the MOU that is ending on June 30, 2025. Trustee Hatch asked how many staff are represented by the union. GM Deutsch said we currently have 26 employees. Of those, 14 employees are represented by the union. They include three leadworkers and eleven groundskeepers. The non-represented employees are the Irrigation Specialist and the Equipment Mechanic and nine staff members who have office positions. GM Deutsch noted that in all the years he has been here there has never been a formal grievance filed through the union. If the union dissolved it would save those employees from having to pay dues and it would save the District about \$30,000 every time we have to go through Union Negotiations. GM Deutsch said he would need to consult with the District’s legal counsel about how to properly address this issue with staff

  
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without venturing into bad faith bargaining. Cemetery Manager Julio Amarillas thought it would be helpful if we could educate staff on the role of the Trustees, so that they could understand that the Trustees want to act in the best interest of the District's employees. Trustee Rivers stated that she thought very few public cemeteries have unionized staff. GM Deutsch stated that even without union representation, there are steps that have to be followed according to the public sector labor law that have to be followed which act to protect employees from improper termination. If the Board wanted to approach staff on this topic, GM Deutsch felt that Counsel Quintanilla would have to lead the discussions. GM Deutsch thought that if he was involved it could be considered bad faith bargaining.

GM Deutsch said that the District will be conducting a full salary study on all positions. He said the last time this was done, it was only for the leadworker and groundskeeper positions.

GM Deutsch said that as part of the Strategic Plan, he would also like to schedule meetings with staff and Trustees, so that staff can express what they need to be skilled and knowledgeable employees. It will also give the Trustees an opportunity to hear from staff about what they think of the Orange County Cemetery District as an employer. GM Deutsch said that in August or September all staff will receive the required Sexual Harassment Prevention Training as required by Cal/OSHA.

GM Deutsch would also like to investigate new Certification programs for staff. For example, while Mary Funk is handling human resources, she has never had any formal training in that area. Groundskeeping and office staff could also benefit from additional training opportunities.

**Retaining Knowledgeable Trustees:**

GM Deutsch said that in the upcoming fiscal year they will be working to sort out the re-appointment issues for Trustee Rivers.

GM Deutsch said that Finance and Accounting Manager, Brenda Manriquez could also put together Trustee trainings for anyone interested in learning more about our accounting practices and financial statements.

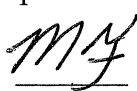
Chair Ward stated that she would like to take some courses on grant writing, since that may be helpful for the District especially as we begin to develop the new cemetery.

GM Deutsch stated that he would also like to meet individually with each Trustee at least once a year.

GM Deutsch stated that for the last two categories, Establishing and Maintaining a Positive Profile and Long-Term Stewardship that he did not have many goals for the first two years of the strategic plan. Chair Ward said that she may have some more ideas for the first year and would bring those back at the next meeting.

GM Deutsch said that once the Trustees have completed their meetings with staff over the next week, GM Deutsch will take that feedback and incorporate it into the Strategic Plan 2024 Worksheet. The next steps will be to create action steps for each goal and give assignments as to who will be responsible for completing each action step.

  
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**ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS – None**

Since some of the Board member had expressed conflicts with the May 22<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Planning Meeting and since GM Deutsch thought he would need more time to prepare for the next Strategic Planning Meeting, the May 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting at 12:00 p.m. was canceled. The Finance and Investment Committee will still meet on May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00 a.m. The Board agreed to adjourn this meeting to June 4, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.

The next regular meeting will be held on **Tuesday, June 4, 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 1:22 p.m.

  
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