



Information Item

August 4, 2016

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Susan Cline, Director of Public Works
Subject: Development of Green Burial Section at Woodlawn Cemetery

Introduction

Woodlawn Cemetery, Mausoleum & Mortuary is developing a green, or “natural,” burial section. Green burial is well-aligned with the City’s commitment to protecting the environment and promoting sustainability. This new section, Eternal Meadow, will offer families and individuals an eco-friendly alternative to traditional burial. The area will serve as a meaningful memorial landscape that contributes to the ecological health of the surrounding community.

Discussion

Green, or natural burial, is a way of caring for the dead that minimizes environmental impact, aids in the conservation of natural resources, and reduces carbon emissions. It requires the use of non-toxic and biodegradable materials, such as all-wood caskets, linen shrouds, and biodegradable urns. Green burial utilizes an environmentally friendly approach, as it does not require embalming or the use of a cement vault. Instead, one is buried in a simple wooden casket or a shroud.

In November 2014, Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary in Los Angeles opened its green burial section, Gan Eden. It is currently the only other cemetery in the surrounding area that offers green burials. However, Hillside primarily provides services to members of the Jewish community; in order to purchase a plot one must have ties to

Jewish lineage. By contrast, Woodlawn is nonsectarian and offers services to people of all faiths and ethnicities.

In October 2015, Woodlawn staff achieved certification from the Green Burial Council (GBC) as a hybrid cemetery. The GBC is an environmental certification organization that sets the standard for green burial in North America. Woodlawn qualifies as a hybrid cemetery because it offers both traditional burial with a vault and embalming as well as green burial. Woodlawn is now listed as a “green provider” in the GBC’s directory. Staff anticipates that Woodlawn will benefit from marketing efforts led by the GBC, such as referring families interested in green burial to Woodlawn, listing Woodlawn on its provider website, announcing Woodlawn as a provider in its newsletter, and supplying informational materials for Woodlawn’s use.

Criteria for certification as a hybrid cemetery include:

- The facility should not require the use of a vault;
- Decedents are not to be embalmed;
- Eco-friendly burial containers are to be accommodated, including the use of shrouds; and
- Information regarding green burials needs to be available on the cemetery website.

Pricing for a green burial plot is set at \$10,450 plus a 35% endowment care cost. The cost exceeds that of a traditional plot (\$7,837.50 plus a 25% endowment care cost) due to the larger plot size required for green burial. The plots must be larger to accommodate burial without a vault, or in some cases, with only a shroud. The maintenance costs of the area must also be covered. The larger size of the plots will provide a safe distance for digging operations so as to not disturb remains already interred.

The newly developed green burial section will be landscaped with a variety of native California wildflowers and grasses, as well as climate-appropriate desert and Mediterranean wildflowers. The area provides a natural cycle of life as nutrients from decedents nourish the surrounding plant life. After burial, families will be given wildflower seeds to plant on their loved ones graves. To keep the area in its natural state, no markers will be allowed in this section. Identification of decedents will be tracked using radio frequency identification devices (RFID). These RFID devices will be programmed with all pertinent information such as decedent name, plot location, interment date, date of death, next of kin, purchaser information, and family contact information.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) process was held for the landscape design and development at Eternal Meadow. Happy Earth, LLC, was chosen as the landscape designer, and Mystic Water Gardens will provide installation of the landscaping. Completion of the new section is slated for late August 2016.

The location of Eternal Meadow is on 15th Street, within the Cemetery grounds, between Michigan Avenue and Delaware Avenue. This roadway was formerly vacated in 2009 as part of the Cemetery Business Plan. Below is a rendering of the newly designed area.



The addition of this new section will contribute to the financial sustainability of the Cemetery by adding 364 green burial plots, generating approximately \$3.8 million in total revenues from cemetery lot sales and \$1.3 million to the perpetual care fund over time once all plots are sold.

Prepared By: Cindy Tomlinson, Cemetery Administrator