



City of Gainesville Agenda Item Report

File Number: 2024-510

Agenda Date: July 18, 2024

Department: Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

Title: 2024-510 Cemetery Ordinance Chapter 7 Update (B)

Department: Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

Description: PRCA staff and the members of the Evergreen Cemetery Association of Gainesville, Inc., are seeking City Commission approval to amend the Gainesville Code of Ordinances, Chapter 7 – Cemeteries to provide options for natural burials, develop a small pet cemetery, and to revise rules for monument sizes.

Fiscal Note: The updates are expected to increase revenue for Evergreen Cemetery and the City through additional sales.

Explanation: Evergreen Cemetery has been owned and operated by the municipality since 1944. It has operated as a traditional burial cemetery with full body and cremains burials. The Cemetery currently has the remains of 11,300 individuals interred with more than 3,000 spaces available for future burials.

In 2022, the Evergreen Cemetery Association of Gainesville, Inc., an independent support organization for the Cemetery, began working with PRCA staff to review the Chapter 7 – Cemeteries ordinance. This was in response to requests for natural burials and pet burials.

The current ordinance requires use of a burial vault, which eliminates the possibility of natural burials. Natural burials do not have vaults and require a larger footprint than traditional graves. To accommodate a natural burial option, an unused section of the cemetery would be designated by ordinance. Cemetery staff have identified an area of the Pinkoson Section of Evergreen Cemetery appropriate for this purpose.

Staff also has identified a small section of the property suitable for a pet cemetery. The ordinance change would allow one section of the cemetery, separated from the traditional gravesites, to be designated for pets only.

Finally, when the cemetery was founded in 1856 there were no restrictions on the height or design of headstones. Although a two-foot height restriction was adopted in the mid-1980s, requests are frequently made for taller monuments. To accommodate these

requests and support a consistent historic aesthetic, the City is seeking to amend the ordinance to allow monuments and statuary of up to four feet in height without requiring approval from the cemetery supervisor.

The Cemetery is in the process of becoming an arboretum in partnership with the Urban Forestry Program of the Public Works Department, which will make it a living, outdoor classroom and an inspiration for a greener, healthier, and more beautiful world. These changes to the ordinance, along with the creation of the Arboretum, will bring awareness and attention to the natural beauty of Evergreen Cemetery. The changes are also expected to increase sales within the cemetery and generate new streams of revenue, in addition to meeting the needs of our clients.

The Evergreen Cemetery Association and PRCA staff have drafted proposed updates to the ordinance with consultation from the City Attorney's Office and are seeking City Commission approval to advertise the proposed ordinance for first and second reading.

Strategic Connection:

- Goal 1: Equitable Community
- Goal 2: More Sustainable Community
- Goal 3: A Great Place to Live and Experience
- Goal 4: Resilient Local Economy
- Goal 5: "Best in Class" Neighbor Services

Recommendation: The City Commission authorize the City Attorney or designee to advertise the proposed ordinance amendments for first and second reading.