



CEMETERY OPERATIONS

Parks and Recreation Board

October 26, 2021

MISSION STATEMENT | Cemetery Operations strives to honor the past, present, and future of Austin's sacred municipal burial grounds with integrity, empathy, and respect.

VISION STATEMENT | Cemetery Operations utilizes available resources to provide the best quality of service and care to our diverse community and historic cemeteries.

Cemetery Operations

The Founding of Historic Cemeteries



1839

- Oakwood Cemetery



1872

- Stanley-Nolen



1878

- Cemetery at Longview Park



1898

- Plummers Cemetery



1915

- Oakwood Cemetery Annex



1926

- Evergreen Cemetery



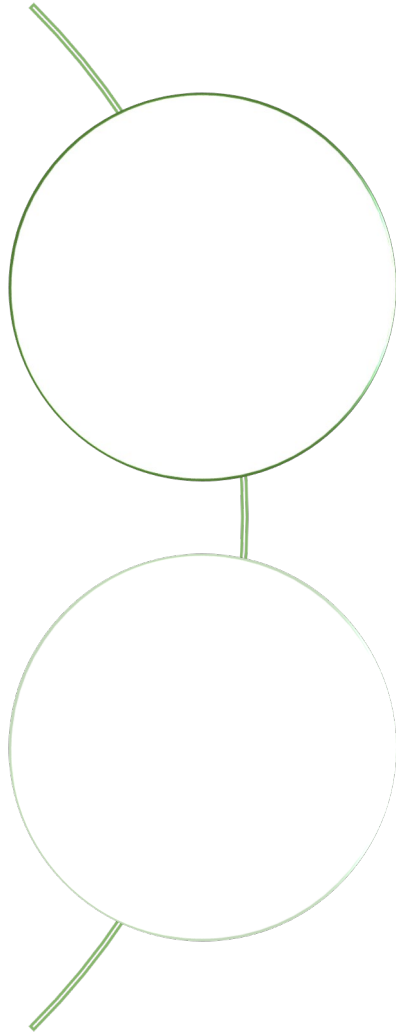
1927

- Austin Memorial Cemetery



Cemetery Operations

Background and History



Public Works Department manages cemeteries.

- **26 Full-Time Employees** (All are Grounds employees (with 15 Seasonal)).
- Public Works management ends in 1986.
- 1990-2013 Intercare assumes management of cemeteries.

Parks and Recreation Department takes on management responsibility.

- 2013- Present
- April 1, 2013, PARD assumed management of the City of Austin municipal cemeteries, and the cemetery team was established to handle the administration, interment, and maintenance functions.
- **23 Full-time Employees:** 6 administrative and 17 grounds (5 Seasonal)
- Cemetery Operations maintain 200+ acres of cemetery land, which consists of over 80,000 burials
- An average of 600 interments per year and 800 space sales

Cemetery Operations

Background and History (cont'd.)

1990-2013

PARD contracted with a vendor to manage all cemetery responsibilities.

April 2013

Due to several years of stakeholder complaints and documented vendor mismanagement, PARD began directly managing the sales, operations, and maintenance areas. PARD contracted with ISI to provide interments and burials services.

November 28, 2018

PARD amended the existing contract with vendor for interments and burial services only and assumed settings in-house. Currently, the vendor performs grave opening/closing and graveside preparation and set-up services at all five (5) municipal cemeteries.

Cemetery Operations

Interment Contract

In **June 2013**, City Council approved a five-year contract, for \$3.8 million, with Interment Services, Inc. In **November 2018**, under Resolution 20181115-022, with the direction to return to Council for approval of contract extension options, City Council approved a three-year extension option. Staff estimates the need to continue to outsource these services, thus utilizing the remaining two years options extension. Without this extension, the contract for burial and interment services expires **November 28, 2021**.



Cemetery Operations

At the moment...

- PARD staff is actively managing interments in all five of the cemeteries.

Effective April 1, 2013, Cemetery services

include:

- Sales administration and management (PARD)
 - Cemetery operations and maintenance (PARD)
 - Interment and burial services (Contractual)
- Currently, burial spaces are only sold in Austin Memorial Cemetery and Evergreen Cemetery.
 - There is over 30 acres of undeveloped land at Austin Memorial Park for future burials.





2016

- Reduced the turnaround time for customers to receive their cemetery deeds and created a more efficient deed process in conjunction with Office of Real Estate Services
- Implemented controls for burials and markings, eliminating risk of double space sales and errors
- Developed a five-year strategic plan (FY 2019 through FY 2024), submitted new Cemetery Rules
- Established full-time maintenance group dedicated to monument installation, setting, and releveling
- Updated and implemented new maintenance practices
- Cleaned up Cemetery at Longview Park on quarterly basis
- Passed the 2014 Cash Audit
- Launched Phase I and Phase II of Cemetery Information Management System (CIMS)
- Hired and trained new staff, including a Grounds Manager, Programs Manager II, General Maintenance Supervisor II
- Maintained stability and workflow by implementing safe medical practices during the COVID-19 global pandemic
- Repaved and curbed roads in Austin Memorial Park
- Developed public outreach and programming to increase visitation and interest in the cemeteries including updated information brochure of Oakwood Cemetery, Font Treatment for publication, and participation in Austin Museum Day
- Streamlined request process for filming and photography for the cemeteries
- Established process for graffiti removal
- Reduced maintenance mowing cycle on average by 10 percent during peak season (May – Sept)
- Update of COA website with new project updates, maps, public programming, and additional information

2021

Cemetery Operations

Business Challenges

- The Parks and Recreation Department's (PARD) goal is to transition all interment services to City personnel within the final two years of the ISI Service Contract.
 - This amendment is needed to allow time to budget for staff and equipment, hire staff and procure equipment, and train newly hired staff to assume these responsibilities in the final year of the extended contract.
 - While staff began initial preparations to transition the interment services, an unforeseen worldwide pandemic (COVID-19) prevented and delayed all necessary preparations and action needed to begin.
 - The City of Austin took quick action to combat the potential health hazards by following CDC guidelines of social distancing and mask protection.
 - Additionally, to assist with economic and social hardships related to the pandemic – FMLA had to be extended to all employees affected either directly or indirectly by COVID-19. As a result, many precautionary measures were adopted by PARD to combat and alleviate any effects of this deadly and costly disease.

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Business Challenges (cont'd.)

- Due to the nature of Cemetery Operations and the increased number of deaths due to the pandemic, staff never stopped reporting to the job site, and day-to-day operations continued.
 - However, more than 90 percent of staff received the expanded FMLA benefits, thus Cemetery Operations operated well below normal standards, oftentimes at skeleton crew levels.
 - In addition, the social distancing guidelines (six-feet apart and one employee per vehicle) prevented most training opportunities.
 - Finally, the economic conditions created by the pandemic resulted in a city-wide hiring freeze that prevented Cemetery Operations from fully hiring the necessary staff to train for the additional interment/burial services.

Cemetery Operations

Coming Soon...

- ❑ Working with Geospatial analysts to develop digital mapping of cemetery in GIS for Maximo.
- ❑ Rehabilitating the Oakwood Annex building to serve as a Cemetery Operations conservation and maintenance workshop.
- ❑ Evergreen Road Improvements including new curbing
- ❑ Evergreen Lighting including the installation of solar and nightwatchmen light for security purposes
- ❑ Austin Memorial Park Tower Restroom Renovation
- ❑ Maintenance Yard reorganization to better utilize space and reduce noise levels.
- ❑ Annual Partnership with Forestry to coordinate Saluting Branches, which promotes and honors veterans by organizing tree care in cemeteries with large veteran presence.
- ❑ Digitization of hard copy records of cemeteries
- ❑ Installation of 14 night-watchmen lights and 6 solar lights at Evergreen Cemetery
- ❑ Installation of signage for self-guided tree tour in the cemeteries
- ❑ Historic designation for Evergreen and Plummers
- ❑ Video tour of Evergreen by Save Austin Cemeteries and MultiMedia Maze

Requested Committee Action

Recommend to the City Council to authorize the negotiation and execution of an amendment to an existing contract with Interment Services, Inc. for continued interment services at city cemeteries and to extend the term by two years.