

DEVELOPING A MASTER PRESERVATION PLAN FOR A HISTORIC CEMETERY

A master plan is an important first step in the preservation of a historic cemetery. Before a blade of grass is cut, before a stone is leveled, before any work is done, it is essential to develop a master plan for the cemetery. A master plan is a tool to help establish goals, prioritize activities, estimate costs and develop an annual maintenance schedule. It also contains important records such as survey forms and photographs of each gravestone and feature, and a written history, along with other historical data about the cemetery. Adequate planning takes work, but is worth the effort because it will result in a permanent document that will direct future preservation of the cemetery.

The recommended steps for developing a master plan are:

RESEARCH

By researching a cemetery, you learn about its history and character. The use of reliable sources and careful citations is essential to preparing the history of the cemetery. Consult primary sources, such as public records, newspaper accounts, meeting minutes, historical maps and historical photographs. If properly documented, oral histories collected from authoritative sources are also valuable research tools. Professionals, such as archeologists, stonemasons and landscape architects, can contribute invaluable information about the cemetery.

RECORD

To adequately document a cemetery, inventory gravestones and all landscape features.

1. Create a map of the cemetery grounds, including the location of all trees, bushes, roads, fences, gates and other landscape features. Note the location and orientation of each gravestone, mausoleum and crypt. Assign each physical feature (i.e. headstones, footstones, fences, benches) a control number that will tie together the written records, photographs and maps.
2. Make a written record of each gravestone on a survey form. This form should include the control number, recording date, type of gravestone (headstone, footstone, crypt, obelisk, etc.), size of marker, description of gravestone material (limestone, granite, marble, concrete, iron, etc.), condition of the gravestone, name of the deceased, vital dates, description of carving, maker's marks, exact inscription and any other identifying characteristics. Create a survey form for vegetation and landscape features as well.
3. Photographs of gravestones should be included with the written record. Label each photograph with the control number. It is best to use 35 mm, black and white, slow-speed film (about 100 ASA). Black and white photographs do not fade as quickly as color photographs, and the slow-speed film usually provides a sharper image.

SET GOALS

Once all gravestones and features are recorded, define your goals. Do you want to restore the cemetery completely, and if so, to what period? Do you want to preserve the cemetery by cleaning up the grounds and resetting the gravestones?

The following are definitions of treatments that may be considered for historic properties:

- **Stabilization:** Reestablishing the structural stability of an unsafe or deteriorated cemetery while maintaining its essential form.
- **Preservation:** Sustaining the existing form, integrity and material of a cemetery.
- **Restoration:** Accurately recovering the form and details of a cemetery and its setting as it appeared at a particular period of time.

Regardless of the approach, here are recommended guidelines:

1. Identify all features, materials, spaces and spatial relationships that are important in defining the historic character of the cemetery. Features can include gravestones, sculpture, curbing, fences, walks, roads, lights, benches, fountains, pools, land forms (terracing, berms, grading) and vegetation (trees, shrubs, other historic plant material).

2. Preserve distinguishing original qualities that reflect the integrity of the cemetery. Avoid removing or altering any historic material or distinctive landscape feature.
3. Recognize that landscape features are products of their own time. Alterations which have no historic basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance should be discouraged.
4. Recognize that changes over time are evidence of the history and development of the cemetery. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance should be respected.
5. Repair, rather than replace, deteriorated cemetery features when feasible. If replacement is necessary, match the material being replaced with similar composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by historical, physical or pictorial evidence rather than by relying on conjectural designs or on elements copied from other cemeteries.
6. Use the gentlest means possible to clean the surfaces of features in the cemetery. Avoid sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage historic materials.
7. Plan new construction so it will not destroy the historic character of the site. Differentiate new elements from the old, but ensure they are compatible with the general massing, size and scale in order to protect the historic integrity.
8. Make every reasonable effort to protect and preserve archeological resources, including graves, affected by or adjacent to any proposed work.

DEVELOP A SCOPE OF WORK

Once the goals have been established, developing the scope of work is the next step.

- Define the work to be accomplished, determine if the work should be phased and establish a time frame.
- Estimate the cost of each phase.
- Determine if professionals will be required (historic architect, object conservator and/or landscape architect).
- Establish the number of volunteers needed to accomplish certain tasks.

In this way, everyone associated with the project will know how long it will take, what the anticipated results of each phase will be and what the final product will accomplish.

DEVELOP A MAINTENANCE PLAN

It is very important that a maintenance plan is developed to determine when and how certain tasks need to be accomplished. This should include regular inspections of the monuments, walls and fences, and include guidelines for care of vegetation (i.e. mowing, trimming around stones and pruning).

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