

SPECIAL MEETING
CEMETERIES BOARD OF TRUSTEES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Hall 8th Floor Conference Room
Monday, April 30, 2007
3:00 p.m.

<u>Board Member</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
Alfred Calloway	P
Victoria Mowrey, Vice Chair	P
Ann Platt	P
Jose Portela	P
Larry Sherman	P
Mark Van Rees, Chair	P

Also Present

Julius Delisio, Cemetery Board Liaison
Jamie Opperlee, Recording Secretary
Lisa Slagle, City of Ft. Lauderdale
Jeff Moderelli, Director, Fort Lauderdale Business Enterprises
Bud Bentley, Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association

The meeting was called to order by Chair Van Rees at 3:10 pm.

1. EVERGREEN CEMETERY RESTORATION PROJECT

Mr. Delisio explained that the first of two public hearings to fund the project had been scheduled to be held in March and the second had been scheduled for April, but after the City Commission conference meeting, the second public hearing had been indefinitely tabled. In order to obtain funding, the item must be presented on the City Commission's agenda.

Chair Van Rees referred to a letter sent to City Commissioners on behalf of the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association, and noted that the letter contained statements that were "not factual, 100%." Chair Van Rees felt that the information was erroneous regarding the intent of the project.

Chair Van Rees said he had spoken with Commissioner Hutchinson, and she had indicated that she would have liked a presentation made to the Commission. Mr. Delisio informed Chair Van Rees that City staff had made a presentation, and the neighborhood had presented their position and letter. Chair Van Rees was concerned how the Commission could not have understood the scope of the

project after the presentation, which contradicted some of the information in the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association's letter.

As an example, Chair Van Rees referred to the letter's statement that 188 large trees would be removed, and another 257 trees would be pruned along the western boundary of Cliff Lake. He noted that there were not 257 trees on that western boundary: he thought the entire cemetery might have 257 trees. Chair Van Rees said he was very disappointed that this information was sent to the City Commissioners that they could not verify.

Ms. Platt said the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association was not included in Fort Lauderdale's list of officially recognized neighborhood associations, but Lauderdale Harbors Association was. The Board wondered if this was a legitimate neighborhood association.

Ms. Platt felt that the Commission had followed the advice of Commissioner Hutchinson on this matter, since this was in her district.

Ms. Platt was also concerned because this was a City park. Chair Van Rees noted that the letter stated "... although not a park..." Ms. Platt read from a description of the park: "Park size, 3.5 acres. It has water frontage fishing and a boat access ramp."

Chair Van Rees had been very upset that the letter referred to "waterfront mausoleums in excess of \$600,000." He noted this was possible, but it was not the case at Evergreen Cemetery and it was not the intent. Chair Van Rees felt that inserting this arbitrary figure in the letter and the presentation, and referring to "waterfront mausoleums" was a "slap to ... City cemeteries."

Chair Van Rees continued that the letter referred to "mangrove wetland shoreline" and he was unaware that Cliff Lake met the requirements for such designation.

Ms. Platt took issue with the letter's contention that Australian Pines provided a "resource for birds and wildlife." She stated that all material she found on the Internet refuted this claim, and indicated that the Australian Pine was not suitable for natural habitat development.

Ms. Mowrey asked if any mausoleum was currently located 10 feet from the water's edge. Mr. Delisio thought the letter was referring to the fact that a Brazilian Pepper had fallen in the last hurricane and taken land with it; the nearby mausoleum was therefore now closer to the water.

Ms. Delisio stated that all mausoleums were permitted by the City and went through the Zoning Department. He explained that geotechnical testing was

conducted before every mausoleum was built, in order to properly design the foundation and required with the permit application.

Chair Van Rees pointed out that the Brazilian Pepper, like the Malelucca, would eventually take over and kill off native species, and they should take a proactive approach to avoid the destruction of the native varieties in the cemetery.

Ms. Platt was concerned with damage to gravesites in the cemetery in the event the trees fell the other way [not into the lake]. She reminded the Board that it was their responsibility to protect the cemetery, and they could not afford to lose the property they currently had.

Ms. Platt had drafted a letter to the Commission in response to the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association letter, and said she felt the Board needed to make a statement of their belief that there were liabilities, and it was incumbent upon the Board to remind the Commission of those liabilities. If the Commission took no action, the Board could not either. Ms. Platt felt the City Park system should be responsible.

Chair Van Rees felt they should send Ms. Platt's letter, and inform the Commission of their contention that the project should be reconsidered.

Chair Van Rees wanted clarification regarding Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association. Bud Bentley, Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association executive board member, explained that the association was incorporated in the 1950s or 1960s, and its bylaws referred to it as the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association, while Mr. Bentley called it the Lauderdale Harbors Civic Association. He said the association included Three Finger Isles, a section of Cordova, 13th Terrace and 12th Way that fronted Cliff Lake.

Mr. Bentley stated Mr. Nardone had created the letter and presented it to the association board in April; the board had subsequently approved the letter's submission to the City Commission on the association's letterhead. This had surprised Mr. Bentley, because at the March neighbor association meeting, they had spoken with the Commissioner regarding the need to support the transfer of funds which would allow the Cemetery Board to make improvements. The association board had acknowledged that the support for the budget transfer did not endorse the project they anticipated. The neighborhood believed the project was to remove all Australian Pines and other invasives and then decide what to do.

Mr. Bentley believed that neighborhood objections stemmed from the two-step process to first perform removal and then design a new landscape plan. The existing Australian Pines and other foliage now provided an intense visual buffer

of the cemetery, houses to the west, and streetlights. The neighborhood was concerned with how long the view would be completely bare.

Ms. Platt said she was beginning to think that the City should be responsible, since the lake was a park. She suggested they inform the City that they would only deal with the trees that were on cemetery property and posed an immediate threat, and the neighborhood could keep its "wonderful view." She noted what a mess the foliage actually was, and Mr. Bentley remarked that it appeared much different from 200 feet away. Mr. Bentley said the suggestion was a phased removal of the pines and replacement landscaping. Ms. Platt said there were no funds available to do any work, since the process had been stopped.

Mr. Moderelli explained that the second hearing on the transfer of funds had been tabled, and could come back before the Commission in the future. Chair Van Rees felt perhaps a more detailed presentation should be made to Commissioner Hutchinson to refute some of the inaccuracies in the Lauderdale Improvement Association letter. He acknowledged that the lack of a landscape plan was an issue. Ms. Platt explained that the Cemeteries Board could not spend money for plans, only for projects.

Mr. Bentley reiterated that the neighbors would like a phased removal, and Ms. Platt reminded him that the remaining invasives would just repopulate the area, and Chair Van Rees added that this would cause costs to escalate. Mr. Delisio clarified that the funding request included \$43,000 for removal [for which they had a bid], and \$260,000 that could be used for landscaping if the transfer of funds was approved.

Ms. Platt said she was disappointed that Commissioner Hutchinson had not contacted the Board. She explained that she thought the Board was trying to be proactive with hurricane season approaching, and responsive to the neighborhood as well.

Chair Van Rees asked the Board to decide whether to move ahead and come to an agreement with the neighborhood and the Commission, or to drop the project and allow the City to come up with the funds to address the problems. Chair Van Rees pointed out that the timing was such that the project could probably not start until the end of hurricane season. Ms. Platt wanted the Commission to know that they were disappointed the Commission had not communicated and worked more closely with them to protect the cemeteries.

Ms. Mowrey suggested that since nothing could be accomplished prior to hurricane season, perhaps they should table the item to the fall. She felt that if non-native trees caused further damage to the banks during the upcoming hurricane season, the neighborhood might have a different view of the project. In the fall, they could work with the association, Commissioner Hutchinson and

the City Commission to do what was right for the neighborhood and the cemeteries. Ms. Platt felt they should take no further action on the matter; she felt it was a Parks and Recreation Department issue. She suggested they send a letter to Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Moderelli stated the direction of the Commission was for Commissioner Hutchinson to work with staff and the neighborhood on this issue. Ms. Mowrey clarified that the Cemeteries Board had not been included in this. Mr. Moderelli said the Board could make their own recommendation today.

Ms. Mowrey wondered if the neighborhood association wanted to assume responsibility for, and help to fund, whatever solutions were developed for the problem. Since the Board had been excluded from the process, she felt they should allow the Commissioner and the association come to an agreement about what they would like done in their neighborhood. She thought that the Board's requesting to be part of the discussion seemed inappropriate.

Motion made by Ms. Platt, seconded by Ms. Mowrey, to table the item to November 2007. In a voice vote, Board unanimously approved.

Chair Van Rees wanted to offer to participate in discussions with the neighborhood association and the Commission, but Ms. Platt felt "this whole situation is ridiculous." Chair Van Rees said they would table the item to November, and perhaps by then, City staff, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Commissioner would contact them with a plan. He said that when he learned that this was a City park, he realized that the City should be using tax dollars for this project. Ms. Platt said when she discovered this was a City park, she felt the Board had "overstepped ourselves... we have no business, with cemetery dollars, improving a park."

Ms. Platt thought they should trim the Australian Pines in preparation for hurricane season; this would be within their maintenance. She felt they should set up a foundation to receive donations for landscaping on cemetery properties.

Mr. Sherman felt the Board should revise Ms. Platt's letter to address the inaccuracies in the Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association letter. Ms. Platt felt they should also stress that it was a City park. Ms. Mowrey felt they should send the letter as soon as possible, so that when the Commission and Lauderdale Harbors Improvement Association met, they would have that information.

Ms. Mowrey wanted the letter to include the fact that this was a park, and that the Board had not used this as a catalyst for removal of the non-native trees. Mr. Delisio advised the Board that they could assign a Board member to draft a letter, and they could approve it at their May 10 meeting.

2. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, the special meeting was adjourned at 4:13 p.m.