

Corcoran Cemetery District February 28, 2022

SUMMARY

The 2021-2022 Kings County Grand Jury received two complaints regarding the Corcoran Cemetery District (“Cemetery”) upon entering service in early July. The Cemetery is located at 4170 Waukena Avenue in rural Corcoran, California. Both complaints were received by the 2020-2021 Grand Jury but were not acted upon because of the lack of time in their service year to fully investigate the issues.

A Grand Jury visit to the Cemetery was conducted in order to view, firsthand, the situation at the Cemetery. The Cemetery was found to be in good order with green grass in most areas. At the time of the visit, watering was being done and staff was working to maintain the grounds.

The Cemetery has new leadership in place with a strong plan to improve the appearance of the Cemetery as well as the quality of services provided. Staff was very accommodating to the Grand Jury by providing answers to all questions asked of them.

BACKGROUND

The complaints received about the Cemetery were that the grass was dry and the grounds were unkept with flags and flowers strewn about.



The Cemetery is managed by an elected Board of Trustees which operates under a *special district* authorized by California Health & Safety Code §9000 et seq. Special Districts are formed as divisions of local government to provide specialized services to a community. They are subject to state regulations governing special districts and must conform to the requirements of the Brown Act and Public Records Act. They are required to submit an annual financial report to the Office of the State Controller and are

subject to audits of finances. The Cemetery operates with revenue from local property taxes and sale of grave sites and cremation niches.

The Cemetery staff includes the manager, an assistant manager and several laborers. Work is assigned by the manager as necessary to meet the needs of pending services and ensure maintenance of the grounds.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury conducted a site tour of the Cemetery on Thursday, August 5, 2021. Members of the Grand Jury spoke with the interim supervisor who has been promoted to the position of supervisor since

the Grand Jury visit. Information sheets, including a price list at the Cemetery were provided at the time of the visit. These were reviewed by the Grand Jury to better understand the business operations of the Cemetery.

DISCUSSION

The Cemetery is a community facility which means that its burial plots have a wide variety of headstones. Some are very simple while others are more elaborate. Most headstones have a container to hold flowers. The Grand Jury noticed that some headstones were below the level of the grass which created a ponding situation with water covering the headstones. The Grand Jury observed watering being done and that headstones were actually standing in water.

The Cemetery has given special consideration to those who are cremated. Two areas of the Cemetery have been developed to accommodate cremains. The first is a special area of the Cemetery that was elevated and separated to accommodate the urns of those who wish to be buried in a “regular” in ground burial site. The second is above ground and will accommodate many urns in a small area. It appeared that the community has accepted this type of burial.

There is apparently no policy regarding flowers at the cemetery. Most cemeteries visited by the Grand Jury have published procedures which state specific requirements for the removal of flowers at least once or twice a year. At the Cemetery, both real and artificial flowers are left at the grave site until they are blown away or removed by visitors.

While the interim supervisor was helpful in providing a price list and information sheets, no preprinted documents were available. The information provided was complete but not a professional presentation. Also, no Corcoran Cemetery or Corcoran Cemetery District website were found.



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding #1 – There is a need to develop a specific schedule for maintenance of the grounds including lawn care, filling gopher holes and tree trimming.

Recommendation #1 – Continue to develop a specific schedule for maintenance of the grounds to make sure that the grounds remain respectful.

Finding #2 – There is not a regular schedule for cleaning out fresh or artificial flowers that have been placed on gravesites.

Recommendation #2 – A policy should be adopted and published that identifies a regular schedule for removing flowers that are no longer appropriate to be displayed.

Finding #3 – Information sheets and price lists of the Cemetery were only available when the manager actually printed a copy on his computer.

Recommendation #3 – A professional brochure should be printed and made available not only at the Cemetery but be available at other agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce.

Finding #4 – It appears that there is greater need for specific communication to staff regarding a work schedule as well as work expectations, including a policies and procedures manual.

Recommendation #4 – A regular maintenance schedule and policies and procedures manual should be adopted and approved by the Board of Trustees and distributed to each employee to create understanding and work expectations.

Finding #5 – Many headstones are below ground level causing them to collect ponding water.

Recommendation #5 – Adopt and carry out a plan to raise sunken headstones back to ground level.

Finding #6 – There is no website for the Cemetery.

Recommendation #6 – Create a professional website to help communicate information regarding the Cemetery.

REQUIRED AND INVITED RESPONSES

California Penal Code §933 provides in part: "... within 90 days of receipt of a report the public agency shall submit its response to the presiding judge. If the report is on an elected public official, the response shall be submitted to the presiding judge within 60 days of receipt..."

Corcoran Cemetery District Board of Trustees.
Corcoran Cemetery District Manager

SEND FINAL REPORT RESPONSES TO:

Original to:
Shane Burns, Presiding Judge
Kings County Superior Court
1640 Kings Court Drive
Hanford, CA 93230

Copy to:
Kings County Grand Jury
Post Office Box #1562
Hanford, CA 93232