

Follow Up to Corcoran Cemetery District Report 2021-2022

March 17, 2023

SUMMARY

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury conducted a follow up review of the Corcoran Cemetery District located at 4170 Waukena Avenue in Corcoran California. The original report was written during the 2021-2022 term. The purpose of this year's visit was to observe if any of the recommendations that had been proposed were being implemented.

BACKGROUND

Following are the complaints that the 2021-2022 Grand Jury received regarding the Cemetery:

- 1) The grass is dry.
- 2) The grounds are unkept. i.e., flags and flowers strewn about.
- 3) Headstones were underwater due to uneven ground.

The Cemetery operates under a *special district* authorized by California statutes. Special Districts are formed as a subdivision of local governments 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. The Corcoran Cemetery is required to submit an annual financial report to the Office of the State Controller and is subject to audits of finances.

The Cemetery operates with revenues from local property taxes, sales of grave sites and cremation niches. The Cemetery is administered by the Corcoran Cemetery Board of Directors. They meet once per month.

The findings of the 2021-2022 Grand Jury were as follows:

Findings:

- 1) Most of the areas of the Corcoran Cemetery were green and contained very few brown spots. The trees were satisfactorily groomed.
- 2) The interim supervisor was knowledgeable and seemed proud of the good things that were happening at the cemetery.
- 3) The written policy and procedures would benefit from an update and more professional presentation.

- 4) The sunken headstones in areas of the Cemetery should be addressed as to how to raise them, and how many at a time. This effects the safety of guests who walk around.
- 5) The lack of uniform headstones in some spots should be addressed.
- 6) There is not a regular schedule for cleaning out faded silk flowers and fresh flowers that have been placed on gravesites.
- 7) No website could be found.

Recommendations of the 2021-2022 Grand Jury were:

Continue a routine watering and tree trimming schedule.

Promote the interim supervisor to a permanent position. (This has been done).

Provide a professional brochure that contains pricing information, rules, and regulations.

Come up with a plan, budget, and schedule to raise the sunken gravestones so that water will no longer collect covering the existing headstones.

Come up with a budget and schedule to replace the simple concrete stones with simple professional headstones with more complete information.

Continue and schedule maintenance of the grass, trees, gopher holes and flower removal as stated in the policy and procedures manual.

Create and post a regular schedule for cleaning out faded silk flowers and fresh flowers that have been placed on gravesites.

Continue the creation of the new raised cremation area.

Create a professional website.

METHODOLOGY

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury gathered information from the 2021-2022 Grand Jury's prior report and conducted a follow-up study of the District through a site tour of the Corcoran Cemetery on Thursday July 14, 2022. During the site tour, the Grand Jury spoke with the Director of Operations and several District employees.

The Grand Jury spoke with the Director of Operations again on January 5, 2023.

The Grand Jury additionally searched the internet to discover whether the District had published a public facing website with informational material such as pricing information, rules, and procedures.

DISCUSSION

When the Grand Jury arrived on July 14, 2022, for the unscheduled visit, the District employees were busy working on a watermain break. The grass was browning even though the cemetery is allowed to water every day, and usually does so. A few gopher holes were observed.

The Grand Jury observed that one section of the cemetery – East side of the main driveway, had freshly disturbed dirt surrounding quite a few of the grave sites. There are still several small, plain, and broken grave markers throughout the cemetery. During the visit, the District employees informed the Grand Jury that sixty-nine (69) headstones in that area alone had been raised so as not to collect water. The groundskeepers are raising as many headstones as possible each week depending on the number of burials they must prepare for, regular maintenance such as mowing and tree trimming, and other emergency repairs that come about which must be addressed.

The Grand Jury observed a few small, plain, and broken grave markers. The District employees stated that it is the responsibility of family members to replace those grave markers.

It was noted that there were no obvious flags or silk flowers strewn about however there were fresh flowers in grave cups that had turned brown. The District employees told the Grand Jury that the removal of spent flowers and other items is the responsibility of the families. Other items such as silk flowers, nick knacks, banners, etc., were seen to be extending over the gravestones and intruded into the grass area. These items do interfere with the regular mowing that takes place. The employees must take extra time to stop and move these items out of the way when mowing.

The Grand Jury observed no postings as to when clean ups are to take place. The Director of Operations informed the Grand Jury on January 5, 2023, that it does post the clean up schedule on the office door and on the three entrances to the cemetery as well as posting it in the local newspaper. The clean up takes place twice a year.

The District does not have a professional brochure available to the public as observed during our visit on July 14, 2022, and confirmed in conversation with the District employees on January 5, 2023.

During our discussion with the District employees on January 5, 2023, we were told that the cemetery does now have a website. This was subsequently confirmed by the Grand Jury as it was, able to locate the website on the internet at. www.corcorancemetery.com

FINDINGS of the 2022-2023 Grand Jury are as follows:

- 1) The Cemetery's large grass areas showing brown, is expected as local temperatures have been quite hot, and the area is experiencing a drought.

- 2) The District employees have raised approximately 69 headstones in Block B of the Cemetery, to the east of the main entrance, to avoid collecting water. The groundskeepers are raising as many as possible each week.
- 3) Several small, plain, and broken grave markers were observed.
- 4) The Grand Jury observed no flags or flowers being strewn about. However, the Grand Jury observed some dried-up flowers and items hanging over the grass area. The District employees are maintaining the cemetery grounds free of unsightly debris and on a regular basis clears the area of spent flowers.
- 5) The District does not produce a publicly available professional brochure.
- 6) A website is now online that explains pricing, policies, Rules/Regulations, and volunteer opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Continue to monitor the watering schedule so as not to let the grass areas totally die off.
- 2) Continue to monitor the number of gopher holes that appear and tend to them as soon as possible.
- 3) Continue to prioritize raising as many headstones as quickly as possible.
- 4) Conduct fundraising events or obtain grants to provide needy families with proper headstones.
- 5) Try and remove spent flowers more frequently, as in once per month. Post the clean-up dates at all three entrances and at the office.
- 6) Continue efforts to create a professional brochure that makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the families to keep all decorations within the scope of the headstone so that proper mowing may be done.
- 7) Monitor the District's website and local newspapers for useful updates or complaints that need to be addressed.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 33.5, the Grand Jury requests responses from the following bodies within 90 days.

Board of Trustees of the Corcoran Cemetery District.
P.O. Box 805
Corcoran, California 93212

INVITED RESPONSES

Corcoran Cemetery District Manager
P.O. Box 805
Corcoran, California 93212

Kings County Board of Supervisors
1400 West Lacey Blvd.
Hanford, California 93230

Corcoran City Manager
832 Whitley Avenue
Corcoran, California 93212

SEND FINAL REPORT RESPONSES TO:

Original to:

Michael Reinhart, Presiding Judge
c/o Shane Burns, Advising Judge
Kings County Superior Court
1640 Kings Court Drive
Hanford, CA 93230

Copy to:

Kings County Grand Jury
P. O. Box 1562
Hanford, Ca 93232