

Public Right to Public Records And Cemetery Memorial Park

Summary

The Ventura County 2004-2005 Grand Jury undertook an investigation into the policies, procedures and practices of the Clerk's office of the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura or City) with respect to requests for public records.

The complainant stated unequivocally (citing specific examples) that employees in the Clerk's office failed on several occasions to provide requested public documents and files concerning Cemetery Memorial Park.

After a seven month investigation the Grand Jury was unable to confirm the complainant's allegations.

However, during the investigation the Grand Jury discovered some disturbing historical information about the cemetery and actions taken by the City in the past. It is important to note that the Grand Jury found no evidence of illegal actions.

Since 1862, this site has undergone a number of significant changes, driven in part by the actions and inactions of the City. Ventura is planning additional improvements and must face the challenge of balancing the diverse needs and desires of the community. The Grand Jury recommends that the City thoughtfully consider a wide range of options that will rectify the mistakes of the past, appropriately acknowledge the historical significance of the site and those interred, and re-establish a more serene and sacred environment consistent with a cemetery.

Attachment 1 contains a brief history of Cemetery Memorial Park, including the chain of ownership, the conversion of the site from cemetery to the current dual-function cemetery and park, and the removal and disposition of tombstones and crypts. Attachment 2 shows an aerial photograph of Cemetery Memorial Park taken in 2004.

Background

The Grand Jury received a citizen complaint that employees in the Clerk's office failed on a number of occasions to provide requested public documents and files concerning Cemetery Memorial Park. The allegations called into question the policies and procedures of the Clerk's office.

The California Government Code section 6250 states, "... the Legislature... finds and declares that access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business is a fundamental and necessary right of every person in this state." Consistent with its oversight responsibilities, the Grand Jury considers a charge, if true, that a local government failed to provide access to not exempt public records, to be a serious violation of the public trust, so in October, 2004, the Grand Jury initiated an investigation.

The investigation focused on the policies, procedures and practices of the Clerk's office with respect to providing the public with requested public records. Subsequently the Grand Jury looked into the history of the property known as Cemetery Memorial Park, its conversion to its current dual-function cemetery and park and the City's ongoing improvement plan.

The Grand Jury was unable to confirm the complainant's allegations, however, during the investigation the Grand Jury discovered some disturbing historical information about the cemetery and actions taken by Ventura officials in the past.

The following six concerns deal with the conversion of the City Cemetery to its current dual-function cemetery and park and the City's current improvement plan:

- The City allowed the cemetery to deteriorate without taking appropriate remedial action, other than to build high hedges to shield the unsightly view and once each year weeded and cleaned the site. After years of neglect, the City then used the cemetery's run-down condition to justify a plan to convert the site to a dual-function cemetery and park.
- The City adopted an improvement plan for the cemetery, marketed the plan to obtain public support and then failed to perform fully to the terms of the plan.
- The City removed and stored some 500 tombstones and crypts, moving them from time to time, using some to stabilize the land beneath a golf course and ultimately discarding those remaining.
- The current dual-function site contains no signage that identifies it as an historic cemetery. It is neither fenced nor gated and therefore never closes. People allow their dogs to run freely without regard to the inevitable result.
- The City is planning to renovate the site and is currently conducting a survey to collect public input. The survey focuses on that portion of the property containing a paved parking lot and a small lawn area, representing only 19% of the total property. Although the City has stated awareness that there is significant history relative to those buried on the site, there appears to be more interest in developing a more active park with children's play area and structure, picnic area and benches as opposed to providing a more serene or sacred environment.
- Although the City acknowledges there may be bodies buried beneath the parking lot asphalt, there is no immediate plan to implement an existing proposal to verify burials. The City plans to perform the verification if and when this portion of the site is renovated.

Another concern is the lack of a deed or other definitive City action in the acquisition of two parcels, known as the Protestant and Hebrew sections, of the cemetery. The chain of ownership for these parcels is unclear and incomplete.

Methodology

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with a number of individuals possessing pertinent information. Some of those interviewed included the complainant, a number of knowledgeable past and present employees in the City Clerk's office, the City Attorney, the Park Supervisor, a member of the Park and Recreation Commission and the City Manager.

In addition the Grand Jury collected and reviewed a wide variety of documents, maps, drawings and photographs and toured Cemetery Memorial Park.

Documents examined included deeds, letters, City Council minutes, Park and Recreation Commission minutes, agendas, a variety of reports and memoranda, applicable State statutes, Assessor records, City policies and procedures, and other information provided by the City.

Findings

Public Access to Public Records

- F-01.** A City document titled "City of San Buenaventura; Access to Public Records," dated January 2005, states: "With certain exceptions, all records of the City are public documents to which the public is entitled access."
- F-02.** Written City procedures define the fee for requested records, the expected time to reproduce and other pertinent information.
- F-03.** A written request form is most often used by Clerk employees in responding to a request for records.
- F-04.** Records dealing with personnel information, law suits, claims and other like matters are considered exempt from general public access.
- F-05.** Information related to Cemetery Memorial Park does not fall under the category of exempt records.
- F-06.** City policies demand that requests for public records be honored and processed in a timely fashion.
- F-07.** No evidence of deviation from policy and procedure was found.
- F-08.** No evidence of direction or request to withhold public records were found.
- F-09.** The Grand Jury requested and received a number of public records from the Clerk's office.
- F-10.** Employees in the City Clerk's office were cooperative and knowledgeable in the performance of their duties.

Cemetery Memorial Park

- F-11.** Deeds transferring the ownership of the two parcels known as the Protestant and Hebrew sections of the cemetery site are not available.
- F-12.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate the City acquired the Protestant and Hebrew section of the cemetery by a combination of the following actions:
- The City Cemetery was shown on an official City map in 1887.
 - The City passed Ordinance No. 41 in 1889 to provide for regulating and protecting the public cemetery.
 - The City Cemetery was shown on an official City map in 1889.
 - The City passed Ordinance No. 86 in 1896 to set up a cemetery fund.
 - The City assumed ownership under provisions of the State Political Code (currently found in section 8126 of the California Health and Safety Code).
- F-13.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate that the City of Ventura acquired title to the Protestant and Hebrew sections of the cemetery site in 1889.
- F-14.** The City passed an ordinance in 1944 prohibiting burials within the city limits.
- F-15.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate that for many years the Protestant and Hebrew cemeteries were allowed to deteriorate.
- F-16.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate that for many years the St. Mary's Cemetery was allowed to deteriorate.
- F-17.** The City acquired ownership of the 1.12 acre westernmost portion of St. Mary's Cemetery in 1955 after a negotiation with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles, a Superior Court condemnation judgment and the payment of \$15,000 to the Archbishop (Archdiocese).
- F-18.** The City acquired ownership of the 2.57 acre portion of St. Mary's Cemetery in 1965 when the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles deeded the property to the City.
- F-19.** The deed transferring ownership of the 2.57 acre portion of St. Mary's Cemetery to the City states: "Said real property is granted for cemetery use, provided, however, that if said cemetery is abandoned or no longer maintained for such purposes, the real property shall revert to the grantor."
- F-20.** A memorandum to the City Council from the City Manager, dated March 22, 1963, stated there are a total of 2,298 graves on the cemetery property. Msgr. Francis J. Webber, Archivist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, writing in the Ventura County Historic Society Quarterly, Fall 1980, stated there are approximately 2,980 internments, but the exact number cannot be determined.

- F-21.** Msgr. Francis J. Webber, Archivist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, writing in the Ventura County Historic Society Quarterly, Fall 1980, states “... the westernmost 110 feet of Saint Mary’s Cemetery were never developed for interment purposes...”
- F-22.** The cover letter to a 2005 City sponsored public survey dealing with Cemetery Memorial Park states, “According to written statements from the Catholic Archdiocese, the westernmost 110x400 feet does not contain any gravesites.” The same letter states, “Various informational sources indicate that there may possibly be burials in this area.”
- F-23.** In 1955 the City built a youth recreation center on the southern end of the westernmost portion of St. Mary’s Cemetery.
- F-24.** Sometime shortly after 1955, the youth recreation center was demolished due to severe slippages and unstable land.
- F-25.** Since 1944, as families of those interred moved away, private attention to the graves grew less frequent.
- F-26.** Since 1944, as earlier sources of revenue such as income from sale of plots and family provided bonds were depleted, maintenance of the cemetery gradually stopped.
- F-27.** Memoranda provided by the City show that there was almost no maintenance or attention to any of the graves, except the City’s annual weeding and cleaning, for the twenty years prior to the City’s cemetery improvement project.
- F-28.** Memoranda provided by the City show that vandalism such as the pushing over breaking and carrying off of headstones was a common occurrence.
- F-29.** In 1963 the City adopted a plan to improve the cemetery site.
- F-30.** Memoranda provided by the City cite the Health and Safety Code of California as the legal basis giving the City the authority to proceed with the cemetery improvement plan.
- F-31.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate the Health and Safety Code of California, section 7600 as the authority to remove human remains from a cemetery that has not had an interment for a period of two years.
- F-32.** The cemetery improvement plan, proposed by the City Manager and adopted by the City Council in March 1963, called for the following:
- Remove all existing markers
 - Flush grade the area
 - Install walkways
 - Install benches and fountains
 - Install plantings
 - Install lawn

- In place of individual headstones, set small brass markers flush with the ground with a number keyed to a large memorial
- Two memorials, one each for the Catholic and Protestant sections may be required
- The memorials will carry the names of all those interred

F-33. The City notified the families of the deceased of the planned development by mail, sent letters to all local churches and published articles about the project in local newspapers.

F-34. A form letter (presented in its entirety in Attachment 3), sent to one particular family, dated January 3, 1964, and signed by the City Manager, states, in part, the following:

Over 90% of the graves are no longer cared for. Headstones have been broken and moved, curbing has deteriorated, and iron work has rusted away. We feel this condition should not be permitted to continue, yet the expense of putting all the plots back into original condition with proper plantings, and repairing or resetting existing monuments, would be very high. Furthermore, if this was done, maintenance would be extremely costly because of the necessity to hand-trim between plots and around monuments. Also there was no perpetual care fund provided to take care of this expense.

We propose to remove all existing markers, finish-grade the area, install walkways, benches and fountains, plantings and lawn; but rather than install individual stones, set small brass markers flush with the ground, with the number keyed to a large memorial. It will be necessary to have separate memorials for the Catholic and Protestant sections. These memorials would carry the names of all those interred, including all graves that are not now marked.

The proposed program has been explained to the Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and is acceptable to the Church. A deed to their property will be granted to the City, provided the work is done as outlined.

F-35. Cemetery Memorial Park does not have walkways, fountains or grave markers flush with the ground, with the numbers keyed to either a large single memorial or separate memorials for the Catholic and Protestant sections.

F-36. The City has a policy and procedure for installing grave markers for anyone interred in Cemetery Memorial Park, if requested by a family member. The City's Park Division will establish the location and perform the physical installation. The family member will bear the cost for the marker and the installation.

- F-37.** Cemetery Memorial Park has had a number of flush-mounted markers installed since the cemetery was converted to a dual-function cemetery and park.
- F-38.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate that 500 tombstones and crypts were removed and stored in a variety of locations during a seven year period.
- F-39.** Memoranda provided by the City indicate that some tombstones and crypts were used to protect the Olivas Park and Golf Course, some destroyed and others discarded.
- F-40.** Cemetery Memorial Park, located in a residential section of the city, is a well maintained passive park with trees, shrubs, a grass lawn and an unrestricted view of the ocean.
- F-41.** Cemetery Memorial Park is used by individuals, families and pets.
- F-42.** The City provides bags and a container for the removal of dog waste in the park.
- F-43.** The City has installed signage to encourage dog owners to pick up after their pets.
- F-44.** The City has installed signage requiring dog owners to obey the City's leash laws.
- F-45.** There is no signage identifying the property as a cemetery.

Conclusions

Public Access to Public Records

- C-01.** The Grand Jury was unable to find evidence that employees in the Clerk's office of the City of Ventura failed to provide requested public documents and files concerning Cemetery Memorial Park. (F-01 thru F-10)
- C-02.** The Grand Jury was unable to find evidence that employees in the Clerk's office of the City of Ventura were either directed or requested to withhold public information concerning Cemetery Memorial Park. (F-01 thru F-10)
- C-03.** The Clerk's office has in place appropriate policies and procedures to adequately deal with requests for public records. (F-01 thru F-10)
- C-04.** Employees in the Clerk's office are knowledgeable and cooperative in the performance of their duties. (F-01 thru F-10)

Cemetery Memorial Park

- C-05.** The Grand Jury found no evidence of anything illegal in the acquisition of the property known as Cemetery Memorial Park. (F-11 thru F-19, F-21, F-22, F-25 thru F-28)
- C-06.** The Grand Jury found no evidence of anything illegal in the conversion of the Catholic, Protestant, and Hebrew cemeteries into a dual-function cemetery and park. (F-21 thru F-34)

- C-07.** The City appears to have been somewhat insensitive to those interred in the cemetery, their families, and the cemetery's historical significance. (F-15, F-16, F-25 thru F-28, F-35, F-38, F-39, F-45)
- C-08.** The City allowed the Protestant and Hebrew sections of the cemetery to deteriorate without taking appropriate action. (F-15, F-25 thru F-28)
- C-09.** The City failed to compel the Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles to take appropriate action to prevent the deterioration of St. Mary's Cemetery. (F-16, F-25 thru F-28)
- C-10.** After allowing the cemeteries to deteriorate the City used that deterioration as a justification for converting the site to a cemetery and park. (F-29 thru F-34)
- C-11.** The City failed to install walkways, benches and fountains, and small brass markers flush with the ground, with the number keyed to two large memorials, although these specific items were promoted to gain the support of the general public and the families of those interred. (F-32 thru F-35)
- C-12.** The City removed, stored, used for other purposes and ultimately discarded approximately 500 tombstones and crypts without regard to their historical significance. (F-38, F-39)
- C-13.** The chain of ownership for the Protestant and Hebrew sections of the cemetery is unclear and incomplete due to the lack of a deed or other definitive City action. (F-11 thru F-14)
- C-14.** Dogs roam off-the-leash through Cemetery Memorial Park. (F-41 thru F-44)
- C-15.** Cemetery Memorial Park is a well maintained passive park with trees, shrubs and a grass lawn with signage requiring dog owners to obey the leash laws and pick up after their pets. (F-40 thru F-44)
- C-16.** Cemetery Memorial Park is used extensively by the public. (F-41)
- C-17.** The Grand Jury found no evidence that the complainant, the City or the Archdiocese acted in bad faith or with the intention of doing harm. (F-01 thru F-45)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura thoughtfully consider a wide range of options in the on-going process to improve Cemetery Memorial Park. (C-07 thru C-12)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura consider improvement options that will rectify the mistakes of the past and re-establish a more serene and sacred environment more consistent with a cemetery. (C-07 thru C-12)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura consider improvement options that will appropriately acknowledge the historical significance of those interred on the site. (C-07 thru C-12)
- R-04.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura enforce the existing leash laws. (C-14)

Response

City Manager of the City of San Buenaventura (R-01 thru R-04)

Attachments

1. A Brief History of Cemetery Memorial Park
2. Aerial Photograph Showing Cemetery Memorial Park, (2004)
3. Letter from the City of San Buenaventura titled “Proposed Improvement – City Cemetery,” dated 1964

A Brief History of Cemetery Memorial Park

Introduction

Cemetery Memorial Park, consisting of 7.09 acres, is located in the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura). An aerial photograph is presented in Attachment 2. It lies between Main Street to the south, Poli Street to the north, and is bounded on the east by Aliso Lane. It served as a city cemetery from 1862 until 1944 when the City Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting burials within the city limits. Throughout its history the property has had a number of different owners. Since 1969 it has been a dual-function cemetery and park.

Cemetery Memorial Park now consists of the following three separate parcels: (1) the westernmost 1.12 acres (110x400 feet), (2) an adjacent middle 2.57 acres (290x400 feet), and (3) an easternmost 3.4 acres (370x400 feet).

Originally the westernmost and the middle parcels were one 3.69-acre unit (400x400 feet).

Early records indicate that the easternmost portion was longer than it is today by 30 feet. To date no record was found showing what became of the 30 foot strip. However the easternmost edge of the parcel is adjacent to Aliso Lane, so the 30 feet may have been used to make the street.

Chain of Ownership

In 1862, the two western parcels (3.69 acres) were deeded as a single unit to the Catholic Diocese of Monterey by George Wright, Henry Webb, Edmund Goold and Daniel Waterman. This land was subsequently given the name St. Mary's Cemetery.

In 1870 the San Buenaventura Commercial Manufacturing and Mining Company deeded the eastern parcel (3.4 acres) to the First Presbyterian Church of San Buenaventura. The deed identified the parcel as being east of and adjacent to the Catholic Cemetery (St. Mary's) and measured 400x400 feet. This portion of the property is often referred to as the Protestant Cemetery.

In 1876 the Presbyterian Church of San Buenaventura transferred title of the easternmost 100 feet of their property to the Hebrew Cemetery Association.

In 1955 ownership of the 1.12 acre westernmost portion of St. Mary's Cemetery was transferred to the City of Ventura after a negotiation between the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and the City, a Superior Court condemnation judgment, and the payment of \$15,000 to the Archbishop (Archdiocese). The City purchased the land for the purpose of building a youth center. It was completed in 1955 and had to be demolished some years later as a result of unstable land beneath the building.

In 1965 the remaining portion of St. Mary's Cemetery (2.57 acres) was deeded to the

City of Ventura by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles. The grant deed specifies, "Said real property is granted for cemetery use, provided, however, that if said cemetery is abandoned or no longer maintained for such purposes, the real property shall revert to the grantor."

The chain of ownership of the Protestant portion is somewhat incomplete because no deed exists transferring the property from the First Presbyterian Church of San Buenaventura to the City.

In 1940 the City Attorney advised that the City had assumed control of the Protestant Cemetery, including the Hebrew portion, as the result of four actions. In 1887 the cemetery was shown on an official City map. In May 1889, Ordinance No. 41 was passed to provide for regulating and protecting the public cemetery. In June of the same year the cemetery was once again shown on an official map. In 1896, Ordinance No. 86 was passed to set up a cemetery fund.

In a letter to the City Council in 1963, the City Manager stated the following, "Control of the Protestant portion of the cemetery, including the area deeded to the Hebrew Cemetery Association, was apparently assumed by the City under provisions of the State Political Code (currently found in section 8126 of the Health and Safety Code)." He goes on to cite Ordinance No. 41 and 86 and suggests "evidence of control is implied" in these ordinances.

In 1950, the Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles deeded a 10-foot strip of land along the north side of St. Mary's Cemetery on Poli Street for beautification purposes and future widening of the street.

In 1955, the property at 1268 Poli Street and adjacent to the westernmost portion of Cemetery Memorial Park was deeded to the City for approximately \$6,500.

Cemetery Conversion

There have been a number of proposals and plans suggesting different usages for the land now called Cemetery Memorial Park. In 1938, the City Council proposed that the then City Cemetery be converted into a park, but this proposal was not adopted. In 1945, there was a suggestion to build a church on the St. Mary's Cemetery portion. This proposal also was never implemented. In 1949, the City Planning Commission requested the City Council to authorize a survey relative to vacating the cemetery and acquiring the property for multiple housing. This too never came to be.

In 1953 the City Council approved a plan to build a youth center on the westernmost 1.12 acres (110 foot strip) of St. Mary's Cemetery.

In 1955 the youth center was completed.

In 1962 the City approved a budget and began planning for beautification and conversion of the cemetery into a memorial park. The opening paragraph of a City Report, titled “Report – San Buenaventura Memorial Park,” dated December 6, 1967, and unsigned, describes Cemetery Memorial Park prior to the conversion as, “...a source of embarrassment to all who lived there. Its tumbled and broken headstones indicated a neglect entirely uncharacteristic of this well-kept community.” The report further states that City officials planted high dense hedges to hide the cemetery from view.

In a section, titled Legal Authority to Proceed, the same report states, in part, the following:

The Health and Safety Code of California gives significant authority to the City. In the exercise of the police power, the City may forbid all future burials in the City in the interest of public health and general welfare.

Under section 7600 the City may, by ordinance, compel the removal of human remains from cemeteries in which no interments have been made for a period of two years. When all such remains have been removed, the city, as the cemetery authority, may sell, mortgage or otherwise encumber the land as granted by section 7900. It is obvious that if the City is given authority to disinter and remove remains from a cemetery within a city and thereafter sell the land, the headstones can also be removed.

In 1963, in a report to the City Council, the City Manager stated, “There are a total of 2,298 graves on record in both cemeteries. Less than half of these have an existing monument.” He further stated that there are approximately 600 monuments. He recommended two alternative plans for the improvement of the City Cemetery and the City Council approved the following:

Remove all existing markers, flush grade the area, install walkways, benches and fountains, plantings, and lawn, but rather than install individual stones, set small brass markers flush with the ground with a number keyed to a large memorial. It probably would be necessary to have separate monuments for the Catholic and Protestant sections. These memorials would carry the names of all those interred.

The City notified the families of the deceased of the planned development by mail, sent letters to all local churches, and published articles about the project in local newspapers. A form letter, sent to one particular family, dated January 3, 1964, signed by the City Manager and presented in Attachment 3 states, in part, the following:

Over 90% of the graves are no longer cared for. Headstones have been

Attachment (1) 3 of 5

broken and moved, curbing has deteriorated, and iron work has rusted away. We feel this condition should not be permitted to continue, yet the expense of putting all the plots back into original condition with proper plantings, and repairing or resetting existing monuments, would be very high. Furthermore, if this was done, maintenance would be extremely costly because of the necessity to hand-trim between plots and around monuments. Also, there was no perpetual care fund provided to take care of this expense.

We propose to remove all existing markers, finish-grade the area, install walkways, benches and fountains, plantings and lawn; but rather than install individual stones, set small brass markers flush with the ground, with the number keyed to a large memorial. It will be necessary to have separate memorials for the Catholic and Protestant sections. These memorials would carry the names of all those interred, including all graves that are not now marked.

The proposed program has been explained to the Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and is acceptable to the Church. A deed to their property will be granted to the City, provided the work is done as outlined.

A self-addressed postal card was enclosed with the letter for the family member to indicate his or her approval and comments of the cemetery improvement plan.

In 1964 the City Manager, in a letter to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles stated: "All of the families that we sent written notice to have returned cards indicating approval of our program. There were no protests filed on any of the interments within St. Mary's Cemetery.... The tomb stones are being catalogued and stored on City property so that families can take the markers if they wish."

Tombstones and Crypts Removal

In 1965 the City reported that the City Cemetery Tombstones and Crypts removal was completed. The City began storing them initially at Hall Canyon City Parks Yard, where they remained for about five years.

In 1969 the conversion was completed and what was once three cemeteries became a dual-purpose cemetery and park.

In a City report titled Report – San Buenaventura Memorial Park, dated December 6, 1967, a section, titled Public Relations Effort states in part:

There is no specific ordinance covering the ownership of headstones. Presumably a headstone belongs to the heir of the deceased. The stones taken from the City Cemetery were arranged in alphabetical order in the Park Department Yard and the heirs who could be located were invited to claim them.... It was decided all unclaimed stones would be kept a

minimum of five years and then disposed of by burying or dropping them into the ocean. The footings and bases have been placed on a levee which was built to protect the new Olivas Park and Golf Course.

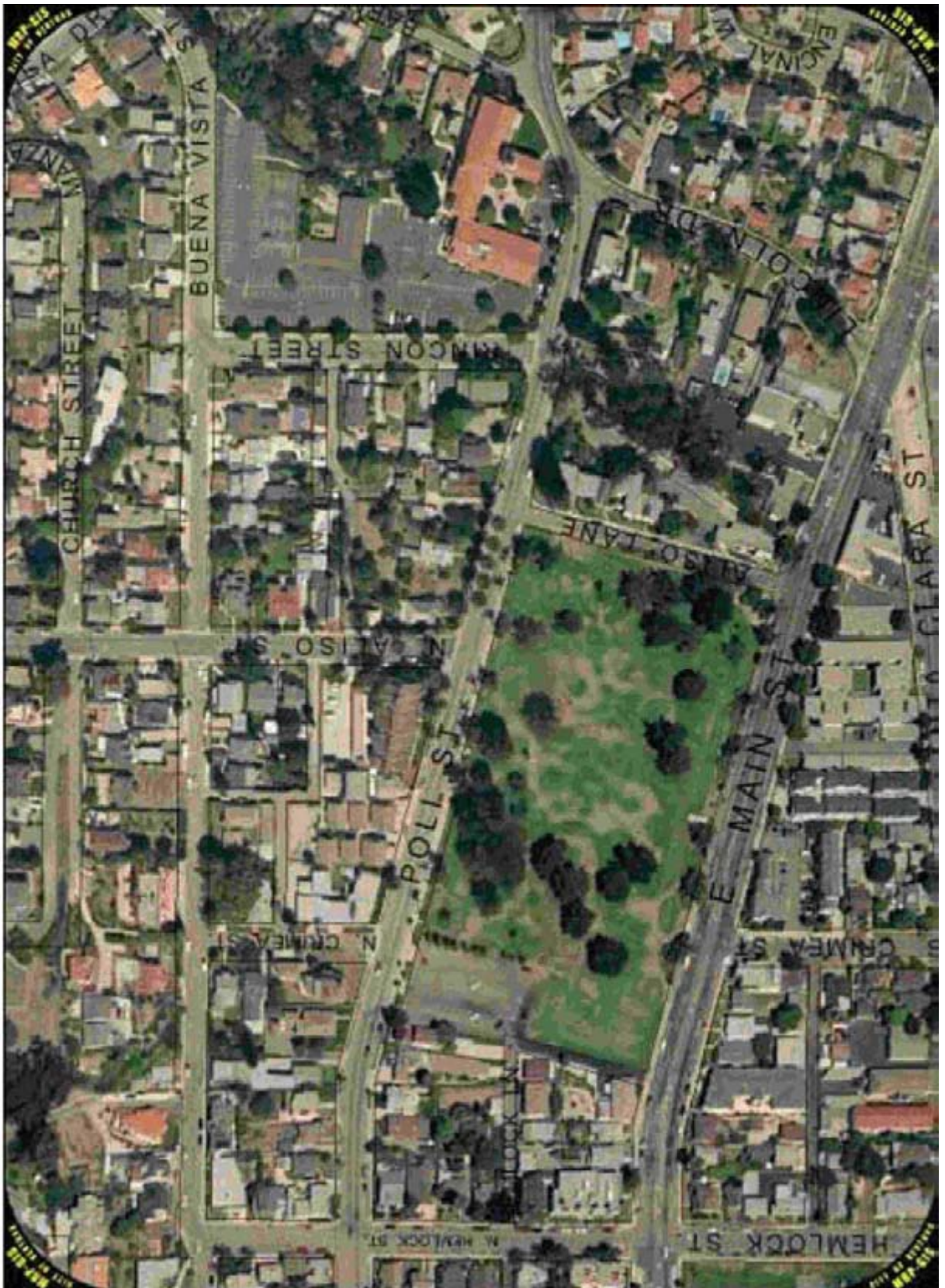
In a memorandum from the Director of Parks, dated July 2, 1970, to the City Manager, it is stated, "Presently there are about five hundred (500) tombstones stored on city property for five years as requested by the City Attorney." The Director continues with the recommendation that they not be given to the public but rather be hauled to the levee and forgotten so as to not turn up in a backyard patio. In response to the memorandum, the City Attorney recommended they be held for seven years and then disposed of as the Director of Parks sees fit.

Some of the tombstones appear to have been moved to a city-owned parcel of land across from the Hall Canyon Yard and others hauled to Olivas Levee.

May 15, 2005


This summary was prepared by the Ventura County 2004-2005 Grand Jury from information provided by the City of San Buenaventura.

Aerial Photograph Showing Cemetery Memorial Park (2004)



Attachment 2

SENT TO FAMILY MEMBERS.
JK 9/21



CITY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA

P. O. BOX 88 VENTURA, CALIFORNIA MILLER 3-9911

January 3, 1964

MEMORANDUM

To: All Concerned

From: Charles W. Reiman, City Manager

Subject: Proposed Improvements - City Cemetery.

The City of San Buena Ventura is planning to proceed with the proposed improvements to the old cemeteries located between Poll and Main Streets, adjacent to our Recreation Center.

We have in the City Hall the only records available that list the names of the persons that are interred, the removals, and the locations of the graves. This data is available for the Protestant, Jewish and Catholic sections of the cemetery. Existing records indicate that the following members of your family are interred:

1876 - H. Nidever (Child)
1913 - Mrs. Ruth Mary Neidefer

Burials within the City limits were prohibited in 1944. Over 90% of the graves are no longer cared for. Headstones have been broken and moved, curbing has deteriorated, and iron work has rusted away. We feel this condition should not be permitted to continue, yet the expense of putting all the plots back into original condition with proper plantings, and repairing or resetting existing monuments, would be very high. Furthermore, if this was done, maintenance would be extremely costly because of the necessity to hand-trim between plots and around monuments. Also there was no perpetual care fund provided to take care of this expense.

We propose to remove all existing markers, finish-grade the area, install walkways, benches and fountains, plantings and lawn; but rather than install individual stones, set small brass markers flush with the ground, with the number keyed to a large memorial. It will be necessary to have separate monuments for the Catholic and Protestant sections. These memorials would carry the names of all those interred, including all graves that

Proposed Improvements - City Cemetery
January 3, 1964
Page 2

are not now marked.

The proposed program has been explained to the Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and is acceptable to the Church. A deed to their property will be granted to the City, provided the work is done as outlined.

This plan is not original with this City, but has been adopted by many public and private cemeteries throughout California as a means of providing economical perpetual care to burial plots. Those buried there deserve a suitable resting place and the residents of the City deserve a more attractive memorial park.

Enclosed is a self-addressed postal card, on which you may indicate your approval and comments of the cemetery improvement plan as outlined. Your support is solicited and will contribute greatly to the over-all City beautification program.

CWR:ps

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