

Hermosa Cemetery Community Update – MEETING NOTES

Wed, Aug 20, 17:07 (1 hr 4 mins)

Historical Overview and Ownership

- Hermosa Garden Cemetery was dedicated in 1877 and is 148 years old, making it unique for its age and continued active burials.
- The cemetery was under independent management until 1917, when the City of Colton purchased it for \$3,600.
- From the 1980s onward, cemeteries often shifted from municipal to private or religious operation; Colton entered a 55-year lease with Inland Memorial Mortuary in 2000.
- The lease was not robust, which led to inconsistent maintenance and several changes in operators over the years.
- In August 2023, the operator ended their contract early, giving the city 45 days to take over management, which led to a one-month closure in October 2023 for transition.

Transition to City Management and Improvements

- The city partnered with Omni for day-to-day operations, handling tasks like burials, marker orders, and maintenance.
- Transition involved significant upgrades: cleaning and remodeling the office and chapel, installing new flooring, restrooms, alarm systems, and computers.
- Infrastructure repairs included fixing irrigation, replacing old equipment, and major tree trimming (over \$75,000 spent so far).
- New processes introduced: digitizing all records, establishing clear office hours and posted maintenance schedules, adding video surveillance, and systematizing service requests.
- Customer service was identified as a key area for improvement, leading to retraining and a focus on responsiveness.
- The city spent approximately \$1 million since September 2023, with revenues lagging and added costs for water, maintenance, and administrative upgrades.
- Community events such as Día de los Muertos altar, holiday tree, and Memorial Day celebration have been added to foster community engagement.

Ongoing Challenges and Community Concerns

- Key issues remain: pervasive gopher and ground squirrel problems causing unevenness and sunken headstones; irrigation issues still being addressed section by section.
- Staff shortages are acute: a three-person grounds crew handles all maintenance and burials; recruitment is ongoing, including for seasonal help.
- Residents expressed concern over missing paperwork and delays in marker delivery (some waited years for previously purchased markers), but the city now honors any valid receipts or contracts for cemetery-related services.
- The city has a system for service requests and is open to appointments to review individual paperwork; efforts continue to resolve historic documentation gaps.
- Critiques were shared about police responsiveness, historic decline in cemetery conditions, changes to Rose Garden, and resource allocation. City acknowledged these and encouraged continued resident feedback.
- Transparency and open communication are emphasized, with information available online, posted QR codes, and regular meeting notifications for residents.

Engagement and Support Services

- Direct communication methods include office visits, email (cemetery@coltonca.gov), phone (909-370-5168), and online forms, with multiple layers of follow-up promised.
- Reception space (two hours free) is available at the Gonzales Center for families holding services.
- Residents provided feedback about family plot management, deed and mortuary records, and transfer of burial spaces within families. The city strives to clarify and honor every legitimate request within regulatory boundaries.
- Cleaning and maintenance resources for headstones are available; both self-service cleaning instructions and staff assistance (acid washing for mineral deposits) can be requested.

Suggested Action Items

- Continue repairs to irrigation and address gopher/ground squirrel infestations, with a new specialist vendor starting September 1st.
- Maintain open hiring for grounds and cemetery maintenance staff, including outreach beyond online ads.
- Increase engagement with local organizations (like Boy Scouts) for non-specialized volunteer events.
- Encourage all families to review and submit their documentation; appointments available for personalized support.
- Monitor and keep up with regular headstone, vase, and grounds service requests and respond promptly to community concerns.