



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 21-1304, **Version:** 1

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Planning and Building Department, Cemeteries Division, recommending the Board receive and file an update to review the attached work plan for administration of El Dorado County-managed cemeteries.

**FUNDING:** Fees for services, plot sales, parcel taxes for the Georgetown Cemetery Zone of Benefit, General Fund.

### **DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND**

The Cemeteries Division manages seventeen (17) public cemeteries, providing burial and other services to residents and non-residents of El Dorado County. Eight (8) of the 17 cemeteries are active, and staff handle an average of forty-five (45) burials in the course of a year. The Facilities Division performs landscape maintenance at ten (10) of these cemeteries and the Cemeteries Division manages contracts and contractors to provide landscape maintenance at five (5) cemeteries while volunteers provide occasional landscape maintenance at two (2) cemeteries. The Division also sells plots, crypts, and niches, makes arrangements for burials, and performs research to provide information to queries from the public about previous burials or other questions about El Dorado County cemeteries and assists with the work of two advisory committees: the Georgetown Zone of Benefit Advisory Committee and the countywide Cemetery Advisory Committee.

Included in the 17 cemeteries that are managed by El Dorado County are several cemeteries for which the County provides services, but does not have clear title (the titles are in the name of each cemetery). Efforts to engage in a quiet title process on these are underway with County Counsel, and are expected to be concluded by 2025.

In an effort to maximize resources, Cemeteries Division staff also handle some administrative work for the County's two Airports. Between the two divisions there are four (4) FTEs (1.5 in Cemeteries and 2.5 in Airports), with one (1) FTE from outside this group currently assisting the Airports Division by processing airport ground leases and performing other administrative tasks.

In 2018, the Chief Administrative Office, Cemeteries Division, presented an update to the Board on cemeteries within El Dorado County (Legistar Number 18-0987). During the presentation it was noted that compared to other counties in California, El Dorado County is unique in the number of cemeteries it oversees and that most jurisdictions utilize special districts to oversee their cemeteries. Given the County's limited General Fund, this unique situation makes County management of its cemeteries especially challenging, which has resulted in limited dedicated funds to manage cemeteries. El Dorado County has only two cemetery special districts, which cover a very limited area (Kelsey on the West Slope and Happy Homestead in Tahoe), while three County-managed cemeteries located in Georgetown are funded by parcel taxes. Attachment A compares staff levels for El Dorado County and special districts in other counties, as well as the number of managed cemeteries compared to budgets. Staff used information from the California Association of Public Cemeteries website to identify districts that are similar in location and characteristics, while controlling for a like number of burials between each of the comparator jurisdictions. El Dorado

County is managing more cemeteries with fewer staff than other counties, and with less dedicated funding.

On September 10, 2019 (Legistar Number 19-1323), the Board directed staff to formulate a plan for a cemeteries Zone of Benefit (ZOB) on the West Slope. On November 5, 2019 (Legistar Number 19-1585) staff returned with the required hearing for the parcel tax proposal associated with the ZOB. The Board approved the formation of the Western Slope Cemetery ZOB within County Service Area 9 subject to voter approval in the November 2022 election. If approved by voters each parcel would be assessed a \$9.00 parcel tax to provide dedicated funding for County cemeteries and would fund capital projects, an endowment, and administration of additional cemeteries the County may acquire when no other entity is available to care for them.

At the June 6, 2021 budget workshop, staff alerted the Board that work had commenced on an updated Cemeteries Work Plan. The Work Plan (Attachment B) incorporates tasks that are required, as well as tasks that would improve and expand the services provided by the Cemeteries Division to citizens. The Work Plan includes work that is budgeted in the current fiscal year, as well as tasks laid out for the following four years.

The most significant constraint to accomplishing these tasks (including those in the current fiscal year) is the lack of staff resources. However, in working with the Cemetery Advisory Committee staff have identified a number of potential ways to marginally increase revenue outside of a ballot initiative, including: increasing the visibility of County cemeteries through joint marketing efforts with the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce and El Dorado County Visitors Authority; developing County cemeteries to provide services that are more in line with the needs and wishes of El Dorado County citizens, such as adding niches and developing new sections for in-ground cremains plots, green burials, scattering grounds, and ossuaries; and updating the fee schedule to ensure fees charged by the County for provided services are more in line with what other cemetery service providers are charging. To this end, the Planning and Building Department is currently working with a consultant to perform a department-wide fee study, and cemeteries will be part of this study. The results of the Fee Study will be available in late-fall, early winter of 2021.

Additionally, staff have worked with the Cemetery Advisory Committee to strengthen the Adopt-a-Cemetery-Project Program (Legistar Number 17-1213). This program has been utilized by staff with some success when projects are proposed or when a volunteer comes forward with a specific request. However, without a coordinated outreach effort to secure a larger number of volunteers, which would take significant staff time as well as additional funding, the program cannot be spread across multiple cemeteries to handle the large amount of work that is required to administer these cemeteries.

Operating in a resource-constrained environment remains the biggest challenge for the Cemeteries Division. Managing 17 cemeteries with the equivalent of 1.5 staff presents a significant barrier to carrying out the items enumerated in the Work Plan. Legacy issues and decreasing staff levels throughout the years have unfortunately led to a decreased level of service and an increase in the number of complaints.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

NA

### **PRIOR BOARD ACTION**

Legistar File No. 19-1585 (Hearing for Western Slope ZOB formation, Item 41, 11/5/19), Legistar File No. 19-1323 (Western Slope ZOB formation approval and adoption of Resolution 148-2019, Item 25, 9/10/19), Legistar File No. 18-0987 (cemetery program presentation, Item 55, 6/26/18), Legistar File No. 17-1213 (ACPP approval, Item 56, 6/26/18).

### **OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

NA

### **CAO RECOMMENDATION / COMMENTS**

It is recommended that the Board approve the workplan. In order to support the workplan, the Department's request for an additional Administrative Technician to support the Cemeteries program is included in the recommended FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There is no financial impact or change to Net County Cost associated with this item. The Cemeteries Division anticipates that some of the tasks on the work plan will be achievable by including them in the budget process in future fiscal years. Many of the goals on the work plan will only be accomplished if additional staff are added to the Cemeteries Division and the Division's budget is increased.

### **CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS**

None

### **STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT**

Economic Development, Good Governance, Healthy Communities, Infrastructure

### **CONTACT**

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