



**MADERA  
CEMETERY  
DISTRICT**

# MINUTES

OF THE **PLANNING MEETING** OF THE **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

OF THE **MADERA CEMETERY DISTRICT**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2024, 2:30 p.m.**

**1301 ROBERTS AVE., MADERA, CA 93637**

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE MADERA CEMETERY DISTRICT, HELD TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2024 AT 2:30 P.M. AT THE DISTRICT OFFICE BUILDING IN ARBOR VITAE CEMETERY, LOCATED AT 1301 ROBERTS AVE., MADERA, CA 93637

**TRUSTEES PRESENT:**

CANDY TALLEY  
LOIS BETTY  
BELVA BARE  
DAVID NEMETH  
CELESTE VOYLES

**PUBLIC/EMPLOYEES PRESENT:**

ARTHUR GARDNER - DISTRICT MANAGER  
RONNIE RAMIREZ – OPERATIONS MANAGER  
STEPHEN CLOETERS – H.R. GENERALIST  
TRACY ISAAK – OFFICE TECHNICIAN  
ANTHONY STERNBURG – GROUNDSKEEPER I  
JESUS BRAVO – GROUNDSKEEPER I

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairperson Candy Talley called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL OF BOARD:**

Chairperson Candy Talley took roll of the Board. Trustees Lois Betty, Belva Bare, David Nemeth, and Celeste Voyles were present.

**PLEDGE TO THE FLAG:**

Trustee David Nemeth led the room in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:**

No changes

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY AGENDA ITEM:**

None

**RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION:**

Chairperson Candy Talley asked the Board if anyone felt a closed session was needed. No closed session was held.

### **DISCUSSION OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023:**

District Manager Arthur Gardner reviewed a list of items accomplished across the District in 2023-2024. Trustee David Nemeth commented on the number of projects that had been completed. It was noted that Foreman Jeff Whalley will be retiring at the end of May, not March as indicated in the list.

### **REVIEW OF DISTRICT FINANCES:**

District Manager Arthur Gardner reviewed the financial reports and charts as provided in the booklet for the meeting. He pointed out that the change in the warrants from the previous fiscal year to the current fiscal year is roughly equal to the cost of constructing the new office. The District will operate in the red for 2024 because of the construction costs associated with the new District office. Trustee Celeste Voyles pointed out that there was a good gap between revenues and expenses in fiscal 2022-2023.

### **REVIEW OF PLOT AVAILABILITY AT ALL CEMETERIES:**

H.R. Generalist Stephen Cloeters reviewed the plot availability reports as provided in the planning meeting booklet. He stated that he believes the number of cremation burials will surpass ground burials in about 10 years. He reviewed statistics on pre-need plots sold for 2022-23. Trustee David Nemeth expressed his belief that the District should think about offering more choices for families and that future developments should stand out. District Manager Arthur Gardner reviewed reports on burial counts by calendar year and by burial type. In 2023, the District had 544 total burials, 41% of which were cremations. Cremation burials could have an impact on pricing in coming years.

### **REVIEW OF DISTRICT EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLES:**

Operations Manager Ronnie Ramirez reviewed the list of equipment and vehicles, discussing their condition, general use, hours of use, and what needs to be replaced. A truck at Calvary needs to be replaced. The District has sufficient buggies and electric carts. There are some old sweepers for which parts are not available. Grass trimmers have been purchased in advance of upcoming restrictions. District Manager Arthur Gardner commended the work that is done to maintain the District's equipment and vehicles.

### **REVIEW OF ROAD SEALING/REPAIR ROTATION SCHEDULE:**

Oakhill is next up in the rotation.

### **REVIEW/SETUP OF IMMEDIATE, 2-YEAR, & 5-YEAR GOALS AND COMPLETION OF GOALS SET FOR PREVIOUS YEARS:**

District Manager Arthur Gardner reviewed the list of immediate, 2-year, and 5-year goals; what's been accomplished and what's still pending.

Beautification of the District office continues. Arbor Vitae Superintendent Ignacio Becerra is pushing to complete the sprinklers and get grass up in time for

Memorial Day. A new system will allow the sprinklers to be controlled from the operation manager's office.

Arbor Vitae's new mausoleums are in development, Lees+Associates has been contacted regarding development at Oakhill, PlotBox has gone live but needs more work, digital timekeeping will soon be implemented at North Fork and Oakhill, the contract for Quickbooks has been signed. New time clocks and PlotBox will require internet access at all cemeteries. Updating the District website is a goal, as is updating the Policies and Procedures Manual and Trustee Handbook. Updates were given on other outstanding goals.

The Board stated that they would like to meet in June with the masonry contractor who will be replacing the retaining wall as part of the expansion of the cemetery road at the Oakhill Cemetery.

### **REVIEW OF FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET PROPOSAL:**

District Manager Arthur Gardner reviewed his projections for revenue for fiscal year 2025. Gardner then reviewed estimated expenditures. There was a discussion on PG&E and a review of recent bills. Estimating utility expenses is difficult because of uncertainties about the solar installation at Arbor Vitae.

During a discussion on projected salaries, Trustee Belva Bare stated that a project done in the past showed that salaries and benefits constituted 79% of the District's overall budget, which was good. Gardner pointed out that as tenured employees retire and new ones are hired, salaries and benefits will go down. New employees are hired under the CalPERS PEPRA plan, which requires lower pension contributions from the District.

Capital expenditures planned for 2025 include: new GMC truck, Arbor Vitae mausoleum, updated and expanded security camera system for Calvary, recoating roof at Calvary, QuickBooks, fencing at Oakhill, road widening and retaining wall reconstruction at Oakhill, road maintenance and expansion at Oakhurst. Gardner stated that everything, with the possible exception of the mausoleums, should be completed in the upcoming fiscal year.

The Board was in agreement that the proposed budget seemed to be acceptable. A vote will be taken on the finalized version at the next regular meeting of the Board.

### **REPORT/DISCUSSION OF MASTER PLAN FOR ARBOR VITAE'S 10 ACRES:**

Operations Manager Ronnie Ramirez oversaw the creation of additional grave space at the foot of the Urn Hill. Ramirez has met with a representative with PG&E regarding a change to the easement at the northwest corner of the cemetery to allow more space for burials.

District Manager Arthur Gardner suggested that projects in the 10 Acres area have raised areas, textures, eye-catching features, raised walls, walkways, a water feature, or an *eternity pool* surrounded by niches. Trustee Belva Bare suggested the idea of a water feature surrounded by niches in a circular pattern. A brief discussion was had on prior plans for the area. Mr. Ramirez is supposed to talk further with

PG&E. Trustee Lois Betty asked that Gardner speak with Lees+Associates and that this item be on the agenda of the next regular meeting of the Board.

**REVIEW OF CALPERS UNFUNDED ACCRUED LIABILITY PREPAYMENT:**

The Board directed District Manager Arthur Gardner to pay the annual prepayment amount of \$364,003. Prepaying saves the District money versus paying over the course of a year.

**REPORT/DISCUSSION/DECISION ON HEALTH, VISION, & DENTAL INSURANCE:**

H.R. Generalist Stephen Cloeters reviewed a handout with projections for medical costs in 2025. He won't know what the actual price increase will be until later in 2024, but he predicts an increase of around 11%. The total cost to the District for health benefits would be \$264,997.

**EMPLOYEE TO PRESENT SALARY REQUEST TO THE BOARD:**

Groundskeepers Anthony Sternburg and Jesus Bravo, on behalf of District employees, made their case for a pay raise. Anthony referred to the Consumer Price Index. Inflation has slowed, but it doesn't feel like it because of increases in the cost of critical items needed to sustain life; namely, gas, utilities, and food. A discussion on how many employees had side jobs to supplement their District income followed.

Trustee Belva Bare pointed out that pay raises feel less generous for employees on the low end of the salary schedule than they do for those making higher wages because the dollar amount is smaller. Board Chair Candy Talley suggested that maybe that ought to be re-evaluated.

**REPORT/DISCUSSION/APPROVAL OF SALARY SCHEDULE CHANGES:**

The Board reviewed several options for changing the Salary Schedule, with increases ranging from 3% to 8%. Trustee Celeste Voyles suggested the raise should be at least 5%. Trustee David Nemeth agreed with 5% and stated that the cost of food and gas is huge. Nemeth moved to raise employee compensation by 5%, Trustee Voyles, seconded, and all trustees voted in favor.

The question was asked of how much to raise the prices for sales & services. It will be addressed in the next regular meeting of the Board.

**ADJOURNMENT:** 5:20 p.m.