

HISTORIC CEMETERY PRESERVATION PLAN GUIDELINES

What is a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan?

A Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan is a preservation, rehabilitation, and management tool used by owners or responsible advocacy organizations to better care for and be stewards of historic cemeteries. A Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan characterizes and evaluates a historic cemetery to provide the necessary information for responsibly dealing with existing issues and concerns about the cemetery, plan for its future use and management, guide implementation of the plan's recommendations, and act as a reference source. It should also be organized so that it provides this necessary information in a manner understandable by the end user, who may not be an expert in the field.

Pre-Planning Requirements

Before a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan is commissioned, the cemetery owner or advocacy organization needs to accomplish pre-planning activities to establish the objectives of the plan. These activities include gathering existing information about the cemetery, such as maps, histories, burial records, use regulations, and maintenance records, consulting with other cemetery entities to find out what they have done, reviewing existing cemetery preservation plans and guidance materials, and determining what financial resources are available for planning purposes. Using this information and the following guidelines, planning objectives can then be refined to establish the plan's scope of work.

Components of a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan

A Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan is a comprehensive document that should be developed for all historic cemeteries. However, that does not mean it has to be produced from a single effort. If resources are limited, a series of companion reports can be done in phases, which combined become the comprehensive plan. The major components of a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan are the Conditions Assessment Report, plot condition surveys, maintenance plan, and cemetery management plan.

Consultants

Although some activities associated with producing a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan can likely be done by members of the cemetery advocacy organization or other volunteers, engaging a professional cemetery consultant will be necessary in order to incorporate specialized technical analysis and treatment measures into the plan. When hiring a cemetery consultant, their qualifications should be evaluated in the context of the planning project objectives. Considerations should include the consultant's education, training, and experience, but also review of their previous work and contacting references to find out how end users are using those planning documents. However, in selecting a consultant, it is also important to remember the limits of their role in the planning process. While they gather information and make recommendations, it is the responsibility of the cemetery owner/advocacy organization commissioning the Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan to understand and establish the plan's objectives so that the consultant understands expectations.

Context

The size and degree of detail in a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan is dependent on the complexity of the cemetery, the amount of information available or attainable, previous documentation, cemetery organization resources available to commission or develop the plan, and its intended use as a planning tool. As a tool, a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan or components are not static documents, but ones that should be regularly revised and updated as information and circumstances allow. Once produced, it should also be the primary reference for developing and implementing preservation and other work within the cemetery and use of the cemetery; in other words, anything that has a physical impact on the cemetery should be considered within the context of the plan.

A Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan should include:

Generally, a Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan should be divided into sections addressing the following items. Also, for quick reference and as applicable, recommendations should be summarized in list form at the end of sections with page/subsection/figure references to associated text.

1. Introductory information, including a table of contents, property identification information, including: address, ownership, listing on historic registries, type (city, family, church), etc, and an executive summary, including acknowledgements, why the plan is being done, its current use (active, full, abandoned, etc.), restrictions on use (if applicable), requirements for management or use, etc.
2. Cemetery history, including an introduction section on the historical development of cemeteries, burial practices, and symbolism, date and details of the cemetery's founding, identification of cemetery type, expansions (if any), prominent burials, significant features, etc. In cases where an adequate separate cemetery history has already been written, a summary history is appropriate, which should include reference to the more complete history.
3. Terminology, including definitions of features, objects, and vegetation typically found in cemeteries and cited in the descriptive sections of the plan document, including types of grave markers, monuments, plot enclosures, grave offerings, ornamentation, landscape features, etc. To the extent possible, definitions should also include photo or illustration examples of the terminology.
4. Location and boundary information, including location of the cemetery on a local/county map and a site plan showing the cemetery's boundaries, orientation to streets/roads, entrances, roadways and pathways, and major geographical features. Global Positioning System (GPS) technology should be used if available.
5. Conditions Assessment Report (CAR)* for the cemetery's built and landscape features, including grave markers, monuments, plot enclosures, fencing, site furniture and amenities, retaining walls, roadways, pedestrian paths, buildings, etc. Content of the CAR should include:
 - Identification/categorization of type of features
 - Quantification of different types of features
 - Documentation of drainage and erosion issues
 - Documentation of vegetation, trees, and plantings, including descriptions of types and quantities, analysis of their health, and growth control issues
 - Plot surveys** – site-specific recordation, including photo-documentation and physical condition assessment of features in all individual burial plots, including descriptions of existing damage and repair needs
6. Unmarked grave investigation and recordation to determine locations, probable locations, and delineate exact boundaries of the cemetery using appropriate archaeological methods.
7. Recommendations for stabilization, repair, conservation, cleaning, or restoration treatments, as applicable, for the cemetery's built, landscape, and other features, **including** a list of projects prioritized according to their urgency, projects requiring professional services, and projects that can be accomplished with volunteer labor (with training). Recommendations should be consistent with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, *Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Documentation*, and other applicable guidance.
8. Project information, including as applicable or available, estimates, material quantities, material specifications, equipment and tool requirements, training requirements, and material, products, and service vendors, etc.
9. Analysis of mapping needs for the cemetery and associated recommendations. Analysis should include adequacy of existing maps, if any, and address accuracy of boundaries, marked and unmarked grave locations and their orientation, locations of landscape and built features, roadways, fencing and gates, etc. Recommendations should also include providing location information of cemetery on local, county, state, and USGS topological maps using Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates.
10. Analysis of recordation needs for cemetery and associated recommendations, including developing gravesite inventory information forms. Information that should be recorded on inventory information forms includes, as applicable, type of marker, inscription, symbols, type of stone, and other distinguishing information, such as stone carver or manufacturer's identity. Recordation of gravesites should also include photos of the plot, including markers, enclosure materials, objects, plantings, and other features.

11. Routine maintenance plan, including recommendations and guidelines for lawn care, plant care, tree pruning, invasive vegetation control, seasonal work projects, such as weeding and special planting, replacement of trees and plants, procedures for minor repairs to landscape features and markers, such as masonry retaining wall repairs, resetting fallen markers, spot roadway maintenance, and trash removal, etc.
12. Cemetery management plan, including recommendations for daily administration of the cemetery covering regulating visitation and special event use, visitor conduct, funerals, private work activities on cemetery lots, security, including visitor safety and vandalism and theft control, maintaining roadways, parking areas, and visitor amenities, signage, lighting, funding cemetery administrative and maintenance needs, etc. The cemetery management plan should also include analysis of existing planning documents, rules and regulations, etc. regarding their adequacy with associated recommendations for their revision, modification, or development, etc.
13. Interpretation, public outreach and education plan, including analysis of appropriate opportunities and associated recommendations, including heritage tourism possibilities, public school education programs, interpretive signage and cemetery tour guides, etc.
14. Supplemental information, including additional maps and site plans, photos, aerial photos, and technical reports, such as from arborists regarding treatment and health of trees and horticulturalists, botanists, or plant historians regarding plantings.
15. References and bibliography of cemetery publications cited in the planning document and/or containing information that more thoroughly addresses cemetery care and treatment issues, cemetery and burial related laws, and information about cemetery symbolism, objects, and burial traditions.

* *Note on Condition Assessment Reports (CAR) –*

A CAR may be developed as a stand-alone document if the organization commissioning the planning document does not have sufficient resources for a complete Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan or cases where an adequate management plan is already in place. As a stand-alone document, a CAR should include items 1 through 7, 11, 14, and 15 as a minimum. Items 8, 9, and 10 should also be included if resources allow.

** *Note on plot surveys –*

Plot surveys, inventories, or site assessments can be completed for two primary purposes: (1) to record existing features and their condition for an individual burial plot for documentation purposes and initial treatment prioritization evaluation – these can likely be done by trained volunteers using standardized forms, and (2) to assess specific conditions in order to determine repair or other treatment costs – these will have to be done by professional cemetery consultants bidding for associated work and should be done at a time when implementation of the project is imminent so that cost estimates are accurate.

Suggested Reading and Other Resources: (in addition to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines*)

Preservation Guidelines for Municipally Owned Historic Burial Grounds and Cemeteries. Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Management. Contact Jessica Rowcroft, Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, ph: 617.626.1380, email: jessica.rowcroft@state.ma.us

Michigan Historic Cemeteries Preservation Guide, by Gregg G. King, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office. Available online at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_shpo_Cemetery_Guide_105082_7.pdf

Grave Intentions: A Comprehensive Guide to Preserving Historic Cemeteries in Georgia, by Christine Van Voorhies. Contact Historic Chattahoochee Commission, ph: 877.766.2443, website: www.hcc-al-ga.org

Grave Concerns: A Preservation Manual for Historic Cemeteries in Arkansas, by Tammie Trippe-Dillon, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Available online at: http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/pdf/publications/Grave_Concerns.pdf

AHC Cemetery Pamphlet Guide, Alabama Historical Commission. Contact Lee Anne Wofford, ph: 334.230.2659, email: [lawofford@preserveala.org](mailto:lwofford@preserveala.org)

Landscapes of Memories: A Guide for Conserving Historic Cemeteries, Repairing Tombstones, by Tamara Anson-Cartwright, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. 1998.

Preservation of Historical Burial Grounds, by Lynette Strangstad. National Trust Publication (order online from National Trust for Historic Preservation, www.preservationbooks.org - item 2I76)

National Park Service – National Center for Preservation Technology & Training (NCPTT) website: <http://www.ncptt.nps.gov/> Product Catalog has numerous publications addressing cemetery preservation issues.