



APPROVED
CEMETERY SYSTEM BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
TOWER 101 - 101 NE 3rd AVENUE, SUITE 1100, 11th FLOOR
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33311
THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 2025 – 3:30 P.M.

Members	Attendance	Cumulative Attendance 03/2025 through 03/2026	
		Present	Absent
Frank Adderley	P	1	0
Scott Busa	P	2	0
Alfonso Canales*	P	1	1
Chelsea Krebs	P	1	1
Dennis Ulmer, Vice Chair	P	2	0
Patricia Zeiler, Chair	P	2	0

*Mr. Canales arrived at 3:54 p.m.

City Staff

Kimberly Cunningham Mosley, Assistant City Attorney
 Stacy Spates, Cemetery Administrator
 Carl Williams, Director, Parks and Recreation

Others

Karen Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 3:40 p.m.

A. Roll Call

Roll was called.

B. City Ordinance No.C-09-05, Quorum Requirement

It was determined a quorum was present.

2. OLD BUSINESS

A. Administration of the Fort Lauderdale Merchandise Trust with CFS

Mr. Carl Williams, Director, Parks and Recreation, acknowledged findings of a recent cemetery audit; pre-need sales, merchandise, and the associated trust fund were highlighted. He stated that the objective was to outline the current situation, and facilitate a discussion on the potential benefits and risks of engaging a third-party

provider for pre-need services.

Ms. Stacy Spates, Cemetery Administrator, explained the two relevant trust funds: the Perpetual Care Trust Fund, which is used for ongoing cemetery maintenance and capital improvements; and the State-mandated Merchandise and Services Trust Fund, which currently holds over \$5 million for pre-arranged merchandise and services. She noted that Carriage Services, the former contractor for 19 years, currently manages the Merchandise and Services Trust Fund; municipal cemeteries are not permitted by the State to have a pre-need license.

Ms. Spates elaborated on the challenges in obtaining reimbursement for delivered merchandise and services from Carriage due to the lack of an agreement; this hinders the ability of the City to recoup expenses, and is attributing to substantial financial losses. It was noted that Carriage is eager to relinquish responsibility for the trust fund, and transfer it to a third-party institution.

Ms. Spates outlined the urgent need to identify a qualified third-party institution to manage the trust fund, and establish a reimbursement process for unfulfilled contracts. An additional issue to be addressed is the money being accepted for contracts since the separation from Carriage seven years ago; approximately \$500,000 will need to be returned to the trust. A key question was whether the selected third-party should also be responsible for selling new pre-need contracts. Ms. Spates expressed reservations about this based on past negative experiences with third-party vendors, citing an incident with SCI' who refused to honor a pre-need contract.

Chair Zeiler stated there is no reason for the City to bear the liability; she was of the opinion that the Cemetery Trust and City are entitled to interest on payments in that fund; should be receiving regular statements detailing fund activity, and performance reports.

Discussion ensued regarding the outcome of a related lawsuit. Vice Chair Ulmer noted that the outcome was unfavorable and did not address the issue of the accrued interest earned on the fund. Ms. Spates will distribute the findings of the lawsuit to the new members.

Ms. Spates reiterated the importance of procuring a vendor to do the bookkeeping and implement a process for invoicing deliveries; she highlighted the importance of determining what the reimbursement model should look like for the bid solicitation.

Mr. Busa inquired how SCI would fit in; Ms. Spates clarified that it is unknown how many affected contracts are currently out there as the City only deals with cemetery-related items.

There was additional discussion on the perceived challenges; this included reconciling costs and interest; pre-need price points versus current costs; markups, and tariffs.

Ms. Spates presented two options for moving forward: (1) engaging a third-party vendor solely to manage the existing trust fund, and (2) engaging a third-party vendor to manage the trust fund and also sell new pre-need contracts (for merchandise and services). Stacy Spates discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each option; she highlighted the current lean operational structure, and reliance on manual processes.

Ms. Krebs liked the exit strategy that was referenced as a protective measure; it was clarified by Ms. Spates that the Commission would be the entity to determine whether the agreement should be terminated.

Chair Zeiler inquired about the possibility of pre-need sales for new mausoleums. Stacy Spates clarified that the sale of property itself was not an issue; the restriction applies only to pre-need sales of services, such as opening and closing, vaults, and headstones.

Ms. Spates explained the current process for handling pre-need arrangements for property, such as plots, niches, and crypts, and highlighted that customers must contact funeral homes directly for pre-need service arrangements; the City is prohibited from selling these services. Ms. Spates also outlined ongoing challenges with “at-need” services provided by funeral homes, which include delays in delivery of vaults and she cited an example failure to provide the City with advance notification of dimensions for oversized remains.

Mr. Busa questioned the policy of not maintaining a small inventory of vaults to address situations where funeral homes fail to deliver promptly. Ms. Spates explained that the City does not have an asset management system and is not responsible for maintaining vault inventory for funeral homes.

Mr. Adderley summarized the current, problematic payment process: the trust fund receives the pre-need payments, but the City bears the cost of fulfilling the services, currently without reimbursement. Ms. Spates highlighted that under option one, an agreement would allow them to invoice the fund for reimbursement of those costs.

Ms. Spates reiterated that it was unknown how many unfulfilled contracts are left in the fund, so a full reconciliation is needed from Carriage. She also clarified how at-need services are currently handed, based on the general price list.

Chair Zeiler expressed concern about the potential financial implications due to the difference between original pre-need pricing paid for in past years, and the current cost of providing those services. Ms. Spates highlighted that the reimbursement structure will be a critical component of the RFP process, and would need to be carefully negotiated with the potential third-party trust fund manager. The 25% savings offered to residents

for property, as well as opening and closing, was noted.

Ms. Spates clarified that opening and closing services are performed by city employees; the associated fees are paid directly to the City at the time of need.

Mr. Carl Williams provided a recap of the two options. Mr. Busa pointed out that if the Board selected option one, option two could be reconsidered at a later date. The advantages and disadvantages of both options were subsequently debated.

Ms. Kimberley Cunningham Mosley, Assistant City Attorney, inquired whether there had been a discussion by Staff on procurement. Mr. Williams shared that they are aware of this issue, that procurement is being discussed, and a motion is pending.

Motion by Mr. Adderley seconded by Mr. Ulmer, to accept Option One: For the City to enter into an agreement with a third-party vendor (private company) to provide management and administration of the 2008 Fort Lauderdale Merchandise Trust for the City municipal cemetery system. In a roll vote, the motion passed (5-1).

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Other Business

Ms. Stacy Spates provided an update on the mausoleum construction project at Sunset Memorial Gardens. Site preparation, including fencing and the mobilization of equipment, has commenced. However, the project is currently in the permitting phase, which involves ongoing coordination with the public works department. A recent meeting was held with public works project managers and the parks manager, to discuss the progress of the permitting process and address any potential delays.

Chair Zeiler inquired about the timeline for the Lauderdale Memorial mausoleum project. Ms. Spates stated that preliminary discussions have taken place, but the immediate priority is addressing critical irrigation and drainage issues. The project will be revisited once these infrastructure improvements are underway.

Mr. Williams informed the Board that the next regular meeting in May will include a presentation of options for cemetery software. Staff is actively researching and evaluating various software solutions to address the operational needs.

Chair Zeiler emphasized the importance of seamless data transfer in the software selection process, recognizing the potential challenges associated with migrating existing cemetery records to a new system. Mr. Williams confirmed that the City is working with the IT department, and plans to engage a data cleansing contractor to streamline the data transfer process; that should ensure a smooth transition to the new software system, and minimize disruption to cemetery operations. He hoped to be able to present options at the next meeting in May.

B. Communications to the City Commission

There was none.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING: Thursday, May 8, 2025 – 3:30 P.M.