

Five Year Plan & Needs Assessment

Oak Ridge Cemetery

1441 Monument Avenue
Springfield, Illinois
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Introduction

Established in 1856, Oak Ridge Cemetery is the largest municipal owned cemetery in the state of Illinois. Encompassing 365 acres, with over 7 miles of roadways, and approximately 78,000 interments. Oak Ridge Cemetery has many unique advantages that are exclusive to Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge is registered as a National Historic Site and a National Living Memorial site. Oak Ridge is the final resting place of our nation's 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. It is the home of the Sangamon County WWI, The WWII, Korean and Vietnam War Memorials. Coupled with its well-maintained natural rural landscape beauty, affords it the opportunity to be renowned and marketed not only locally, but also nationwide. Oak Ridge is known as the second most visited cemetery in the nation next to Arlington National. It is estimated that over 500,000 visitors enter the cemetery grounds annually to pay homage to President Lincoln, fallen Veterans at the War Memorials, family members, and friends who have passed before them.

Oak Ridge Cemetery has a 5 member advisory Board of Managers who convenes monthly public meetings, establishes cemetery rules, regulations, and pricing for the products and services in the cemetery. Members are appointed by the Mayor to a three year term. The Executive Director is certified by the State of Illinois as a "Cemetery Manager", is appointed by the Mayor, and is responsible for overall operations of the cemetery. Oak Ridge Cemetery is a division of the city of Springfield Department of Public Works. The department occasionally assists the cemetery with infrastructure repairs, signs, and dead tree removal. However, the Public Works Department does not subsidize the cemetery financially.

Oak Ridge Cemetery was a self-funded enterprise, strictly by the sale of products and services from interments that averaged around 500 a year. Over the last 20 years, the interments has decreased to less than 300 a year, creating a cash flow problem. In addition, the ever increasing popularity of families choosing cremations over conventional burials and then choosing not to inurn the cremains at a cemetery. Cremations rates in Sangamon County have now exceeded 50% of the disposition type and continue to rise annually both locally and nationally. This is a contributing factor to the decline in interments and revenues.

Competition is another factor. Local private cemeteries are vastly smaller in size, have reduced staffing costs, no public mausoleums, and very little infrastructure to maintain. Therefore,

affording them to offer lower cost inurnment and interment services than Oak Ridge. At Camp Butler National Cemetery, (a federal funded cemetery) burials are free for Veterans and their spouses of WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf Wars. Oak Ridge is not able to compete on this level. However, Oak Ridge offers discounts to Veterans. Very few choose to be buried near family or have a customized memorial stone over the free inurnment or interment at Camp Butler.

Steps taken over the last several years to be more competitive have included; decreasing prices for inurnments, selling merchandise (memorials, florals, outer burial containers and now urns), marketing, (radio, media, print, social media) community outreach, and awareness (presentations and open houses). All of which have increased interests and sales, but not enough to make a substantial positive financial impact. Annual subsidies of \$500,000 from the city of Springfield's corporate fund, (generated from tourism) has kept the cemetery operating.

Infrastructure

- **Roads-** All 7 miles of the cemetery roadways were repaved in 2016. However, considerable curb and gutter replacements are needed to improve safety of motorists and walks in addition to, reduce the cemetery's liability.
- **Sewer tiles-**tiles are needed on the north western side of Block 33. In front of the Vose site, south of Lincoln's tomb and in front of the Staab site. Tiles are also needed in Block 54 directly west of Lincoln's tomb.
- **Trees** – In the summer of 2012, severe drought conditions in the city of Springfield led to a high mortality rate of trees within the cemetery and throughout the city. Most were lost including some of the cemeteries largest Oaks and Pines. In 2013, the city Department of Public Works assisted the cemetery maintenance staff in removing 60 of the 85 trees that had succumbed to the drought. In 2014, as anticipated, an additional 60+ large trees were identified as dead or dying, and only 5 of the most easily accessible were removed by a local contractor and cemetery staff due to the lack of proper equipment. In addition, the Public Works crews were not available to assist with aerial bucket trucks and equipment.

It should be noted that removal of large trees within the cemetery grounds creates challenges in that many of these trees are surrounded by large upright memorial markers, precluding driving aerial trucks within reach or merely dropping trees without damaging markers, some of which are too large to easily move aside. Compounding the challenges includes the fact that many of these large trees are dead and brittle, and too dangerous for crews to climb and drop incrementally. In 2018, Public Works crews removed 8 trees, which were within aerial truck reach, but

at last count, over 85 still require removal. While reforestation and replacement of lost trees is desirable, unfortunately replacing trees within grave lots in the exact locations is not possible due to the large ground level stumps that remain and even if stump grinders were utilized to bring stumps below ground surface level, new plantings would not survive over submerged stumps. Replanting “close” to grave lot removed trees would either encroach on someone’s existing grave space with root systems, or eliminate potential available grave lots, neither of which is desirable. Approximately 30 new trees have been planted over the last 5 years within areas that don’t encroach grave lots, and staff is working closely with Guy Sternburg of Starhill Arboretum to continue to plant his recommended native species within cemetery grounds.

In 2020, Jeff Reim, the city’s arborist, conducted a survey and identified over 35 dead trees that the Public Works staff would not be able to assist in removing. Based on recent quotes the removal cost is approximately \$3,000-\$10,000 per tree. With this estimates it could cost approximately \$350,000.00 to safely remove dead trees.

Buildings (6 total) Oak Ridge Cemetery is responsible for maintaining several buildings/structures to include:

1. **Abby** (Constructed 1910) Houses Full casketed remains and cremation niches. The roof was replaced in 2018. The life expectancy of the roof is estimated at 15-25 years.

Replacement cost \$350,000.

2. **Chapel/Mausoleum** Originally built in October 1974. (Renovated 1991-1992)

A) Roof: Estimated Useful Life: The sloped asphalt shingle portions and flashing are in fair condition. It is estimated to have 2 years of life remaining.

The flat roof has a mineral coated membrane layered roofing that is beyond its useful life. The flat roof portions have areas that are bubbled up. The roofs are very slightly sloped to the scuppers, but there is a ridge at the scupper that causes the water to pond.

A recommendation to add tapered insulation to increase the slope and replace the asphalt roll roofing with membrane roofing. There could be additional costs if the existing underlayment is damaged.

Replacement cost \$250,000

B) Furnace and Central air unit: The Chapel/Mausoleum has 2 furnaces and 2 air conditioning units. In July 2021, a combined furnace/ AC unit was installed. Replacement cost of \$8,600.

3. **Office** – (Renovated 1958)

A) Roof: Estimated Useful Life: The sloped asphalt shingle mansard roof has 2 years remaining. The ballasted flat roof portion has 2 years remaining. The ballasted flat roof portion is in fair condition as they have been replaced. It has rock on it from protection of the sun. There is a wooden cupola in the center of the roofline which does not match the architectural era of the building and should be removed when the asphalt roof is replaced

B) Turret: Copper roof on the interior of the turret repaired and stones restored in the fall of 2020. Repair cost \$16,000

C) Interior wallpaper and refresh: Over 1200 sq. ft. of wallpaper was removed and walls were repainted in March 2021. Additional furniture purchased for Exec office and lobby. Total cost \$16,000.

4. **Original Maintenance Building** The original maintenance building is located in a flood plain, is an eyesore, and functions only as a location to store dry soil for grave excavation backfills. The area north of this building is currently utilized by the cemetery to store trees and brush which can/should be hauled away annually.

5. **New Maintenance Building** – (Constructed in 2000) The roof is sloped rubber membrane and should last another 5-10 years before considering replacing.

6. **Museum Building** – (Constructed in 199) The roof is flat and has rubber membrane. It is beyond its useful life and is in need of replacement. Replacement cost \$100,000

Equipment – The cemetery owns several pieces of equipment as listed.

Much of the equipment has far exceeded their useful “lives” and are in constant need of repair and routinely breaking down.

A) **Mowers** Every year a 60 inch or a 72inch Exmark riding mower is replaced.

Replacement cost \$10,000-\$12,000 annually

B) **Pro Gator** which is utilized in restricted sized areas for hauling of grave soil spoils and headstones.

Replacement cost \$42,000 (*pending 2021 purchase*)

C) **Golf Carts** (2) golf carts for the use of grave layout, transportation and maintenance of the cemetery. \$25,000

D) **Truck F150** use for grave layouts, lead services and maintenance of the roads.
Replacement cost \$28,000

E) **Office Vehicle** for use to transport prospective clients, lot owners and their loved ones
Cost estimation for replacement \$30,000

F) **Dump truck** for hauling the brush away, secondary road plow.

Cost Estimation for replacement \$100,000

Staffing

Full time staffing is adequate to “maintain” but not enough to effectuate many improvements/enhancements without working considerable overtime.

- Office
 - Sales/Project Coordinator -1
 - Office Coordinator -1
 - Executive Director -1

- Maintenance Full Time (One per 45.6 Acres – National Average 1 per 10 Acres)
 - Public Works Supervisor -1
 - Foreman -1
 - Cemetery Specialist-0
 - EQ I - 4
 - EQ II – 1

- Maintenance Seasonal (6-8) – April through October (String Trimming Headstones and waste pickup)

- Financial Status – It is a known fact that the decrease of full bodied interments from an annual average of 500 in the 1990’s to under 300 over the last 5-10 years has affected the financial solvency of the Cemetery Enterprise Fund. This has necessitated the need for a subsidy from the city corporate fund in order to not draw daily operational funds down from the endowed care fund as had been done for several years prior to 2012.

Realizing the need for additional revenues, the executive director and the Board of Managers have taken a number of steps to increase operational revenues to include:

- Reduced pricing of services and products to be more competitive with other area cemeteries.
- Held the line on purchase of much needed equipment and continued to repair vehicles and equipment that should be replaced.
- Increased memorial sales and size restrictions for larger memorials.
- Added cremation deluxe package, florals and urns to merchandise list.
- Promote awareness and community outreach with educational and informational presentations, open houses and social media presence.
- Improved the customer experience with consistent training and coaching of office staff.

Summary of Costs (2021 estimates)

- Current Dead Tree Removal - \$350,000
- Chapel Roof – \$250,000
- Office Bldg.- new roof \$100,000
- Equipment: mowers, trucks and vehicle - \$450,000
- Perimeter fencing- \$250,000
- GIS mapping and accounting software- \$50,000

Issues relative to “Summary of Costs”

- **Dead Tree Removal** - Over the last several years, the Public Works Department has assisted with tree removal. However, because many of these trees are located within headstone areas and not accessible by bucket trucks, as well as the fact that the Public Works Forestry Division has normally indicated that their work load citywide has precluded their full time efforts at Oak Ridge, the cemetery finds itself currently with approximately 80 large trees that are dead and need removed, many of which have become dangerous to walk around or under, which creates liability issues to not only visitors and maintenance staff, but for potential damage to memorial markers and headstones when they fall.
- **Chapel Roof** – This structure houses casketed remains as well, and upon inspection, it was noted that there should be immediate replacement of a portion of the structure that currently is “roll roofed” Roof failure could lead to very undesirable consequences.

- **Museum Building** – The Museum Building is currently under a three year lease agreement. The annual revenue from the lease is \$2,400. The museum roof is beyond its life expectancy. There has been a series of roof leaks. The mulberry tree in the neighboring yard south of the Museum has created some issues with the tree. It has been recommended that the tree is removed to prevent rodents from climbing on top of the building and eating at the roof membrane, creating the additional holes and damage to the roof.

- **Equipment** - One of the pickup trucks is 4 wheel drive F150 and 11 years old. It is use for grave layouts, lead services and maintenance of the roads. It is extremely poor condition.
 - The “Pro-Gator” as well as several riding mowers which see an average of 2000 engine hours a year will need to be replaced within the next couple of years.
 - Oak Ridge currently owns a single axle dump truck that is 20 years old. This truck is used to haul brush, plow and salt the roads.
 - The administrative vehicle is a 2003 Buick Century. It is used to transport clients interested in purchasing grave spaces, deliver florals to decedent’s grave spaces, transport families to verify grave spaces for interment or inurnment, and deliver interoffice items to City Hall.

- **Perimeter fencing**- Considering the significance of Lincoln’s Tomb, it is imperative that the cemetery is secured with fencing along its border. The current 6 foot chain link fencing surrounding the cemetery, is unsightly. Over the years, trees and shrubs has permeated the chain links to the point where removal is impossible. Phased replacement with black ornamental iron fencing is highly recommended. This style of fencing will be pleasing to the eye and give the entrances to the cemetery a distinguished classy look that is well deserving.

- **GIS mapping and accounting software**- There are approximately 78,000 burials in Oak Ridge Cemetery. The current process of locating graves requires two maps and can be time consuming for several locations. Especially, if the decedent does not have a grave marker or memorial stone. Implementing a GIS mapping software will improve efficiency, increase revenue and get loved ones and visitors to the respected graves spaces. Electronic mapping helps visualize critical data, improve field operations, efficiently and customer experience, which increases revenue growth.

5 YEAR COST ALLOCATION PLAN

Year 1

1. **Dead Tree Removal** – 1/5 of projected total cost - \$70,000
2. **Replace Flat Roof on Mausoleum/Chapel** (*Critical-Holds Casketed Interments*) - \$250,000
3. **Equipment Purchase/Replace**
 - **One “60 inch mowers”** \$11,000
 - **Replace golf cart-** \$12,000
4. **One vehicle for Administrative office-** \$30,000
5. **GIS mapping -** \$50,000
6. **Perimeter fencing-** \$50,000

Year one estimated total- **\$473,000**

Year 2

1. **Dead Tree removal** – 1/5 -\$70,000
2. **Equipment Purchase/Replace**
 - **Replace One 4 x 4 Pickup Truck** \$30,000
 - **Replace One Used Golf Cart** (Transportation for Seasonal String Trimming Crews) -\$12,500
 - **Replace Eight String Trimmers-** \$4,000
 - **Dump truck-** \$100,000
3. **Replace Administrative office roof** \$80,000
4. **Perimeter fencing-** \$50,000

Year two estimated total - **\$346,500**

Year 3

1. Dead Tree removal –1/5 - \$70,000
2. Equipment Purchase/Replace
 - Replace one 2 wheel drive pickup truck - \$35,000
 - Replace One “Pro Gator” - \$50,000
 - Replace one Exmark Zero Turn Mower- \$13,000
 - Replace 2 seasonal string trimmer \$1,200
 - Replace 2 golf carts - \$25,000
3. Perimeter fencing- \$50,000

Year three estimated total - **\$244,200**

Year 4

1. Dead Tree Removal – 1/5 -\$70,000
2. Equipment – Purchase/Replace
 - 2 Exmark Zero Turn Mowers - \$25,000
 - Replace 2 Golf Carts- \$28,000
 - Replace 5 string trimmers \$3,000
 - 3 chain saws- \$3,000
3. Perimeter fencing- \$50,000

Year four estimated total - **\$179,000**

Year 5

1. Dead Tree Removal 1/5 - \$70,000
2. Equipment –Purchase/ Replace
 - One Exmark Zero Turn Mower - \$12,500
 - Replace 8 String Trimmers - \$5,600
 - Replace 2 Golf Carts-\$30,000
3. Perimeter Fencing- \$50,000

Year five estimated total - **\$168,100**

Executive Summary and Recommendations

While revenue enhancement initiatives have been relatively successful, they have not generated the additional revenue required to close the annual \$400,000 deficit. Even with a \$500,000 annual Corporate subsidy, these subsidies and the annual budget have not allowed for budgeting of any major equipment replacement, major infrastructure repairs/replacements (Roads/Block Signs/Roofs/HVAC systems, etc.) or fleet replacement.

There is no true vision or plan to rectify maintenance, management and fiscal issues. Currently, management resolves one issue and move onto the next crisis. This is not a viable nor prudent option in sustaining Oak Ridge Cemetery, one of the top most visited cemeteries in the nation, a National registered historic site, and home of the Illinois WWII, Korean and Vietnam War memorials. Without a long term strategic plan that includes an in depth analysis of infrastructure, equipment, staffing and future fiscal needs, the cemetery will decline in curb appeal and jeopardize its prestigious national status.

Enhancement of Cemetery Financial Portfolio Options

1. As a division under the department of Public Works, incorporate Oak Ridge Cemetery within the overall Public Works annual budget. The structure would not be like the current sewer department under the Public Works Department. Revenues generated currently by the cemetery would be deposited into the Public Works Account. A Board of Managers would continue to be retained to assist in the State's cemetery oversight. Endowed care and Pre-Need Funds would continue to be maintained and managed internally in partnership with a trust fund provider.
2. Continue to earmark funds from the local hotel/motel tax for cemetery operations. As a historic site, this option would seem to make sense from the standpoint that the cemetery infrastructure needs to be maintained to the highest level because of visitors to the Tomb and War Memorials, as well as wear and tear on the infrastructure through tourism.
3. Pass an ordinance assessing the State of Illinois (IHPA) an annual fee to help support cemetery operations. (locking and unlocking of gates, wear and tear on roadways, maintenance of Infrastructure)

Conclusions

While this study has addressed many of the major issues and needs of Oak Ridge Cemetery, it is by no means entirely complete or conclusive in terms of overall needs.

- The 6 foot chain link fencing surrounding the cemetery is unsightly and over the years, trees and shrubs have been allowed to permeate the chain links to the point where removal is impossible. Phased replacement should be considered with black ornamental iron fencing.
- Hundreds of memorial markers throughout the cemetery, particularly in the original blocks have succumbed to nature, and even with staff's best efforts at straightening them, they continue to tip and fall and break apart due to sandstone construction and crumbling brick footings.
- Over 100 stumps from trees removed over the years remain as barriers to mow around and detract from the aesthetics of the cemetery.
- Currently, an antiquated methodology of locating grave sites includes using 100 year old block and lot maps as a reference and placing a "dot" on a small map for a visitor in the "general" vicinity of the grave space they are seeking. Even many current rural and township cemeteries are now utilizing GIS mapping systems with the ability to print out exact locations within minutes.

Serious consideration should be given to properly funding maintenance of the infrastructure, providing decent and safe equipment in order for maintenance staff to adequately do their jobs, and ultimately providing for a GIS grave locating system that will allow staff to assist the public with grave locations in a manner that is efficient and 21st century based.