



2013-2014

Madera County Grand Jury

Final Report

Chowchilla Cemetery

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Introduction:

The Chowchilla Cemetery (Cemetery), a Special District, located at 23359 Road 14-1/2, Chowchilla, CA 93610, was selected for investigation because it has been five years since it was last reviewed.

The Board of Trustees (Trustees) of the Cemetery has historically consisted of three members appointed by the Madera County Board of Supervisors for four year terms. In February of 2013, the Board of Supervisors acted to increase the number of directors to five and two additional members were appointed. The Trustees have one regularly scheduled meeting a month and special meetings as needed. The Cemetery conducts approximately 100 interments a year. The staff of the Cemetery consists of a superintendent, office manager (secretary), and two grounds workers.

After several interviews, visiting the Cemetery, attending a Board of Trustees meeting and other research, the Grand Jury (GJ) uncovered numerous concerns.

Facts:

1. Failure to follow the Brown Act:
 - a) Trustees have held Special Board meetings with improper or no notice to the public.
 - b) Trustees held discussions and/or took action on items in closed session that should have been in open session; e.g. approval of the purchase of a lawn mower in closed session on June 26, 2013.
2. Trustee members have made purchases on behalf of the Cemetery without first obtaining Trustees approval and were later reimbursed by the Cemetery.
3. The purchase of a golf cart by a Trustee member on July 1, 2011 was made without prior approval of the Trustees until July 11, 2011.
4. Failure to follow the Trustee approved procedures and policies in employee handbook including:
 - a) No written employee evaluations on a regular basis.
 - b) No clearly defined supervisory structure; e.g. No clear organizational chain of command.
 - c) Trustees are not enforcing the dress code referenced in the handbook.

5. Employee salaries are lower than wages paid in other similar sized cemetery districts in the state.
6. Sidewalks, curbs, gutters and asphalt are in disrepair.
7. There is one bathroom in the office for public and employee use which is not available if the office is closed.
8. There are no eye wash stations on site.

Findings:

1. The employees lack professionalism in their manner of dress which could be offensive to the public.
2. The Cemetery has plans for additional facilities which will include Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA of 1990) compliant rest rooms that will be available to the public during hours of operation.
3. The curbs, gutters, sidewalks and asphalt are in need of repair for the safety of the public.
4. Cemetery district is not in compliance with Cal/OSHA requirements.
5. The Employee handbook of policies and procedures is outdated.
6. Employee job descriptions are outdated and do not reflect current employee duties.
7. Signage for entry of the cemetery is small and difficult to see from the street.
8. Tools and equipment are in need of upgrading and/or replacement.
9. Salaries are less than comparable positions in other cemetery districts.
10. Staffing levels are insufficient to provide adequate site maintenance.
11. The current Hillside Chamber niches are sold out. An architect has been selected to design an additional Hillside Chamber, a public restroom building and a gazebo for ceremonial use.
12. Fees and service charges are low compared to other cemeteries of the same size.
13. The lack of acceptance of credit cards may inconvenience the public who require the Cemetery services.

Recommendations:

The Grand Jury Recommends that:

1. Trustees should require that employees dress appropriately for serving the public by following Madera County dress code requirements.
2. A long term maintenance plan for the repair of curbs, sidewalks and asphalt surfaces be created and implemented as soon as possible.
3. An emergency eye wash station and shower be added for employees in the workshop.
4. The Employee Handbook should be brought up to date.
5. Employee job descriptions should be revised to reflect current employee duties.
6. Clear signage should be provided at the entry to the Cemetery stating hours of operation.
7. A list of current condition and useful lifespan of tools and equipment should be prepared and a plan for replacement be maintained by the Trustees.
8. Salaries of employees be reviewed and brought up to date with comparable size cemeteries in the state.
9. Staffing levels be reviewed to ensure the grounds are maintained and made presentable to the public.
10. Construction of the Hillside Chamber, public bathrooms and pagoda be completed as soon as possible.
11. Review and update charges and fees made to the public to meet the needs of current cemetery cost of operation.
12. The Cemetery begin accepting credit card usage for public convenience.
13. The Trustees should receive training regarding the requirements of the Brown Act.
14. The Board of Supervisors and the Trustees consider that the Cemetery be joined with the Madera County Cemetery District.

Respondents:

Madera County Board of Supervisors
200 West 4th Street
Madera, CA 93637

Board of Trustees
Chowchilla Cemetery District
23359 Road 14-1/2
Chowchilla, CA 93610