



ROCKY MOUNT, NC  
THE CENTER OF IT ALL

# Unity Cemetery Update

Rochelle Small-Toney, City Manager  
March 8, 2021

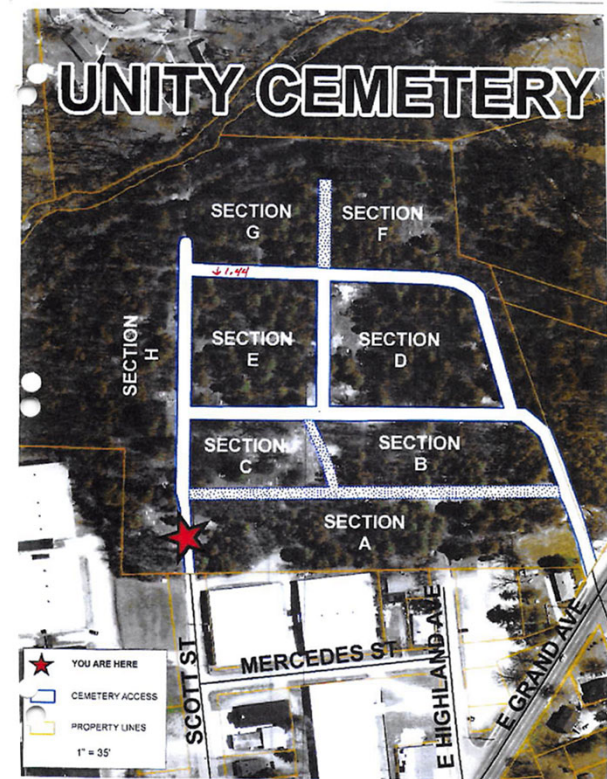




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## History

- Unity Cemetery formally established in 1901
  - Incorporated March 13, 1901
  - 18 Acres
  - Located in Edgecombe County
- Among oldest African American cemeteries in Eastern North Carolina
- Historic Site
  - Civic leaders
  - Veterans (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam)
- 8 Sections





## City Activities to Date

- City does not own Unity Cemetery
- Not definitive information to declare abandoned
- Descendants responsible for maintenance of plots
- For City to gain ownership
  - Survey of cemetery boundaries
  - Deed research to determine heirs of purchased plots and cemetery owners
  - Legal counsel
- City does not have access to burial records
  - Estimate 1,000 plots/acre (18,000 total)



- Past Council Authorizations
  - 2007
    - Re-established drainage system
    - Re-graded, improved access roads
    - Pedestrian footbridges
    - Debris/trash removal
  - 2015
    - Investigated acquisition, history, current status, improvements, annual maintenance
    - Provided maintenance and upkeep
- Staff currently working with African American Cemetery Specialist of the State Office of Archives (Department of Natural & Cultural Resources)





## Next Steps

- Survey boundaries of the cemetery
- Establish exact ownership
- Obtain legal direction from City Attorney to gain access to maintain and make improvements through either:
  - Lease agreement
  - Purchase
  - Transfer
- Continue dialogue with owners regarding their plans for the cemetery
- If agreement can be reached with owners, then City receives ownership or lease of cemetery



## Recommendations



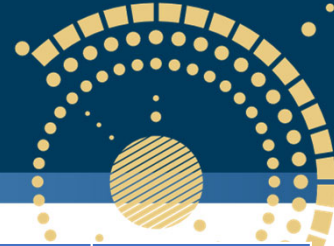
- Establish project in FY 2022 Capital Improvement Program (CIP)
  - \$1.46 Million for FY 2022 to FY 2026
  - \$200,000 FY 2022 Operating Budget
  - Restoration and upkeep as a historical family and heritage tourism site
- Pursue listing of Unity Cemetery as a national landmark
- Pursue grants to support sustainability of cemetery
- Develop cemetery plan under direction of North Carolina Office of Archives
- Establish location and inventory of all burials in the cemetery
- Develop historical tourism program for cemetery
- City Council should form a group of descendants of those interred, conservation consultants, and local historical societies to work with city staff and help guide future direction of cemetery







## Schedule & Budget



Activity	Fiscal Year 2021	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023	Fiscal Year 2024	Fiscal Year 2025	Fiscal Year 2026	Total
Site Survey & Title Search	\$10,000						\$10,000
Acquisition		\$75,000					\$75,000
Hand Thinning		\$150,000					\$150,000
Road Repair		\$50,000					\$50,000
Gravesite Surveying		\$200,000					\$200,000
Cemetery Maintenance Plan		\$50,000					\$50,000
Gravesite Restoration		\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$500,000
Historic Markers & Kiosks			\$50,000				\$50,000
Perpetual Maintenance		\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$375,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>	<b>\$225,000</b>	<b>\$175,000</b>	<b>\$175,000</b>	<b>\$175,000</b>	<b>\$1,460,000</b>