

November 13, 2025

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

202501997

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager

Subject: **City Owned or City Maintained Cemeteries**

REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202500444

At its March 4, 2025 session, City Council referred the following item for review and report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmembers Owens, Jeffreys, Nolan and Cramerding, WE MOVE that the administration prepare a report within 60 days to create a directory of all City owned or city-maintained cemeteries. WE FURTHER MOVE that the administration directly reference what department(s) have the responsibility of maintaining specific cemeteries).

OVERVIEW

Over its history, the City of Cincinnati has acquired property that has included historic cemeteries, the City has operated burial and internment locations, and the City has inherited certain burial sites due to abandonment of the public cemetery by prior ownership. The Unclaimed Remains Crypt of the Cincinnati Health Department is the City's only active burial facility. The other properties are managed by City Departments either as park spaces where the burial sites are unmarked or as cemetery grounds where burial markers are in place for many of the graves and the maintenance responsibility has fallen to the City due to acquisition by the City or abandonment of the public cemetery by prior ownership.

While some Ohio Townships, Villages and Cities operate active cemeteries, the City of Cincinnati is primarily an owner of park property that contains a historic cemetery or a cemetery maintenance agent of last resort. The Ohio Cemetery Dispute Resolution Commission has adopted Cemetery Minimum Maintenance Guidelines under Ohio Revised Code 4767.06(H) and the City seeks to meet or exceed these standards in its maintenance of its cemetery inventory to the extent practical for each site given the circumstances listed below.

The City Departments below are contacted from time to time by relatives or descendants seeking to locate burial information. The City's available information varies by cemetery location depending on the existence and completeness of any records passed on to the City at the time it assumed maintenance responsibility. Given limited resources the City does not have resources dedicated to locating specific burial sites but strives to ensure the existing records are made publicly available for volunteers and other groups seeking to locate this information. A few of the properties contain unmarked graves which present an additional challenge for those seeking to locate a specific burial. Individuals or groups seeking to dedicate their time and resources to creating or supplementing existing burial inventories can contact the responsible Department to obtain available information about a specific cemetery.

INVENTORY

The City of Cincinnati owns or is responsible for maintenance of the following cemetery properties:

Cemetery Name	Cemetery Address	Responsible Department
Pioneer Memorial Cemetery	333 Wilmer Road	Cincinnati Park Board
Potter's Field Cemetery	4700 Guerley Road	Cincinnati Park Board
Washington Park	1230 Elm Street	Cincinnati Park Board
Madison Park	Intersection of Erie and Madison	Cincinnati Park Board
Wesleyan Cemetery	4003 Colerain Avenue	Dept. of Public Services
Finneytown Historical Cemetery	5922 ½ Winton Ridge Lane	Greater Cincinnati Water Works
Unclaimed Remains Crypt		Cincinnati Health Department

Potter's Field Cemetery - Established in 1852, Potter's Field was a public burial location for those who had no one to provide for their burial. It was especially needed during outbreaks of influenza, cholera, and tuberculosis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An estimated 20,000 people were laid to rest in Price Hill's Potter's Field, from 1852 to 1981, when the last burial occurred. In that same year, Potter's Field was transferred from Hamilton County to the City of Cincinnati and assigned to the Park Board by the City Manager. However, without additional funding for the care and maintenance of the land, the decision was made to allow the site to return to its natural state in order to preserve and protect the many graves, known and unknown, and the plant growth that has occurred over the passing years. Today, Potter's Field continues to be maintained in a natural state. On April 26, 2024, the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior listed Potter's Field on the National Register of Historic Places due to its historical significance.

Rapid Run Park – In 1934, the 6.8-acre portion of Potter's Field southeast of Guerley Road was incorporated into Rapid Run Park and adapted for Park use with concrete walking paths and picnic areas. Rapid Run Park was dedicated in June of 1942. In 2021, the Park Board partnered with Price Hill Will to receive a National Parks Service grant to hire an archaeological firm to conduct a geophysical survey using ground penetrating radar to identify potential burial sites and other artifacts within Rapid Run Park. The geophysical survey did not provide conclusive evidence of burial sites; however, it did reveal considerable ground disturbance that could have impacted burial sites, likely caused during the development of Rapid Run Park in the 1940s. The report also advises that if there is to be any further disturbance of the area, it should proceed with caution given the possibility of burial sites near the surface. Given the results of the survey and the history of that portion of the park, the Park Board has no plans for further ground disturbance in the area of Rapid Run Park that was formerly part of Potter's Field and will proceed with extreme caution for the repair of any existing amenity of structure.

Pioneer Memorial Cemetery – The oldest cemetery in Hamilton County, it lies at the site of Columbia Baptist Church, founded in 1790. In 1967, Frederick L. Payne, then Supervising Horticulturalist for the Park Board, began a restoration project for the cemetery which resulted in two volumes of history on those buried at the cemetery since 1790 inclusive of all cemetery markers present at the time. Information on burials at the cemetery is available through the Cincinnati Historical Society.

Washington Park – The 6-acre park served as Presbyterian and Episcopal cemeteries before it was acquired by the city from 1858 to 1863. A majority of the bodies were moved when Cincinnati bought the cemeteries, but an estimated 54 Revolutionary War Veterans remain buried within the Park.

Madison Park – The Fulton Cemetery or Hyde Park cemetery was closed and converted into a park beginning in 1890's. There are no records that the bodies were transferred to other cemeteries, but the headstones were removed and buried in the swale at the rear of the park. It is believed that up to 37 bodies are still buried here.

Wesleyan Cemetery – The United Methodist Church founded Wesleyan Cemetery in the Northside section of Cincinnati in the mid-1800s. The church ran the cemetery for many years, but by 1989 it no longer wanted to contribute its time and money to its operation. In 1989, Wesleyan's board of directors amended the existing articles of incorporation and formed a new corporation that was no longer affiliated with the United Methodist Church. In 1995, a new president and new board members were appointed to the corporation and under their management the cemetery grounds fell into disarray. In 2000, the Cincinnati Police Department began receiving calls from people with family members buried at Wesleyan Cemetery. They complained about the high grass and the condition of the cemetery grounds. Upon investigation, the cemetery president was charged and convicted of failing to maintain the endowment as required by law and theft. Then upon entering into a settlement agreement with the City and State, the cemetery corporation was dissolved. Upon the cemetery corporation's dissolution, Ohio Revised Code 759.08 vested responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the Wesleyan Cemetery in the City of Cincinnati. Wesleyan Cemetery is a historic cemetery with deep connections to the Underground Railroad, and the cemetery is a named Network to Freedom Landmark.

Finneytown Historical Cemetery – Finneytown Historical Cemetery was dedicated as a public burial ground on June 12, 1802, by Ebenezer Ward Finney. This cemetery contains remains of approximately 64 early residents dating back to 1799 with latest burials in 1891. This cemetery was annexed to Cincinnati in 1903. Property records indicate that the prior owners Jacob Compton, Sutton Kitchell and Stephen Flinn dedicated the property as a public burial ground and may have been trustees of Springfield Township (prior to annexation). The property did not have clear maintenance and ownership responsibilities for many years. The Ohio Revised Code makes the City of Cincinnati responsible for maintenance of abandoned cemeteries or cemeteries under management of township owned cemeteries that are annexed into the City. This property is adjacent to a Greater Cincinnati Water Works facility who is assuming mowing and brush clearing responsibilities for the property. Any responsibilities that arise from time to time beyond mowing and brush clearing would be assigned to a different City agency.

Unclaimed Remains Crypt – The Unclaimed Remains Program is a City of Cincinnati Health Department (CHD) program that is committed to the task of handling and managing the unclaimed human remains of citizens who died in the city and are not claimed. This program serves people whose families either could not be located or could not provide for the proper disposition of remains. Decedents in the program are cremated. The decedents are buried in individual containers in a shared crypt.

SUMMARY

This report is for information purposes on the City's inventory of owned and managed cemeteries and no additional action is necessary.

cc: Jason Barron, Director, Parks
Mark Riley, Director of Public Services