

December 5, 2024

TO: Oak Lawn and Sand Hill Cemeteries Lot Owners and Families of Lot Owners
FROM: City of Decatur Cemetery Board of Directors – Angela C. Smith, President; Fabiola Valdez, Vice-President; Joyce Horton, Secretary; and Board Members: Gene Blagg, Cynthia DesRoches, Dennis Lee, Wayne Stone, Cathy Tally, Jerry Watson, LaDonna Wren

ENDOWMENT INCOME

Interest earned from the endowment fund and the sale of grave spaces are the two main sources of income. If you have already endowed your family lot and would like to make an additional donation to increase the endowment fund, mark category 1 on the donation card. Your name will be listed with other donors in the 2025 report. \$2,980.00 was donated in 2024 to the endowment fund, and their names are listed on the “Donors” page in this report.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Special contributions not designated for endowments are earmarked as “Special Project” donations and will be used for capital improvements or special projects decided on by the Cemetery Board. Because cemetery expenses have been exceeding its income, Special Project donations allow the Board to do projects it could not do otherwise. Regular donations of \$21,970.00 (whose names are listed on the “Donors” page in this report) and a special donation of \$40,471.17 allowed the Board to complete several special projects. A special thank you to those who made donations in 2024.

With the increased trend toward cremations, the Board purchased a columbarium for the placement of cremains. It is located on the north end of Oak Lawn. Work is still in progress on developing two areas adjacent to the columbarium: (1) an area for the burial of cremains in small, individual plots; and (2) a section designated as baby land.

The Board plans to continue with monument repairs in both cemeteries. If you wish to help with the cost of these repairs, a \$50.00 donation will normally cover the cost of one monument.

2024 projects:

- (1) Additional surveying is being done in the area to be opened in the future on the east side of Hickory Street in Oak Lawn. Roads have been made in this section with plans to pave these streets before this area will be opened for sale. Lots are currently being sold on the north end of Oak Lawn and on the west side of Sand Hill Cemetery.
- (2) Expenses involving the house owned by the cemetery and used for the secretary’s office included the installation of a new septic tank/lateral line system along with additional repairs to the house.
- (3) Roads at the north and south entrances of Oak Lawn were repaved.
- (4) A special donation helped allow the Board to replace the two gates and the old cyclone and barbed wire fence along the entire west side of Oak Lawn with a black metal fence and new gates.

CEMETERY INFORMATION

The pavilion on the east side of Oak Lawn, which has fourteen benches for seating, is available to be used for grave side services. The Board encourages you to use this pavilion, believing it will be safer to use than holding services at the actual grave site. Having ceremonies at the actual grave site involves people having to walk over curbs and uneven ground, with these obstacles increasing the chances of someone falling. There is no charge for the use of the pavilion.

To help us maintain current contact information, please send us the names and addresses of your adult children or family members who are not on our mailing list. If you or any family members prefer to receive future yearly reports delivered to your e-mail, send your e-mail address on the enclosed donation/comment card and return in the enclosed envelope.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 10/1/23 - 9/30/24

REGULAR ENDOWMENT FUND:

Endowment Fund Balance 9/30/24 (includes \$9,167.50 endowment deposits/donations) \$603,919.19

INCOME/EXPENSE STATEMENT:

Total Income Deposited into General Fund \$ 44,057.50

(income listed does not include \$28,823.77 endowment interest for the year to be to be transferred into the General Fund at a later date)

Total Disbursements out of General Fund (operating expenses) (\$113,658.19)

SPECIAL PROJECTS FUND:

Total Income Special Projects Fund (donations + interest) \$ 69,390.40

Total Disbursements out of Special Projects Fund (\$121,002.78)

DECATUR CEMETERY BOARD 2024 SUMMARY REPORT

Both Oak Lawn Cemetery and Sand Hill Cemetery are part of a single municipal cemetery system operated by the City of Decatur. The Board is appointed annually by the Decatur City Council and is under City supervision. Its financial operations are managed by the City. The Board meets bimonthly, in the odd-numbered months, on the third Monday, at the City Hall at 10:00 a.m. Individuals who wish to address the Board about Agenda items must sign an “Opinion/Speaker Registration Form” and are allowed three minutes to speak (six minutes if needing assistance from an interpreter they bring.)

SALE OF GRAVE SPACES - The current price is **\$700.00 for each grave space**, which is the same for both cemeteries and includes a perpetual care fee to provide upkeep of the space. Columbarium niches are \$850.00 for one set of cremains and \$1,100.00 for two sets of cremains in the same niche (does not include the cost for engraving information on the door.) Lots can be purchased from Joyce Horton or Chet Niblett. The phone number for Decatur Cemetery Board is 940-627-3980.

MAINTENANCE/UPKEEP FEES - It is very important that each family who has a lot purchased prior to 1984 in Oak Lawn or Sand Hill makes sure their family lot is being taken care of by either paying yearly dues or by paying an endowment fee to provide perpetual care for the lot.

(1) For all lot owners who purchased lots prior to 1984 and who have not endowed their lot, annual dues are required for upkeep of lots. The \$10.00 minimum, payable in January of each year, will provide upkeep for up to five grave spaces with \$2.00 added for each additional space.

(2) Lot owners who purchased lots prior to 1984 may choose to endow their lots instead of paying annual upkeep dues. The \$125.00 minimum will provide upkeep for up to five grave spaces with \$25.00 added for each additional space. The money is placed in a perpetual care fund, known as the endowment fund. Only the interest earned from the endowment fund can be used for general operating expenses. Endowments deposited into the endowment fund cannot be used.

(3) Since 1984 a perpetual care fee is included in the purchase price. If you purchased a lot after 1984 you DO NOT owe anything for upkeep. Donations to increase the endowment fund or to Special Projects are appreciated, though.

MEMORIAL FUND – If you would like to make a donation in memory of a friend or loved one, a card will be sent to the family informing them of the memorial gift. Names of donors in 2024 are listed with other donors in this report.

2024 CEMETERY OPERATION – Oak Lawn was maintained by private mowing firms beginning in 2011. Beginning October 1, 2024, the mowing of Oak Lawn went back under City and will be done by City employees. Sand Hill Cemetery is still maintained by a private mowing firm. In 2024 Oak Lawn was mowed and trimmed numerous times and Sand Hill was mowed four times. We appreciate the assistance provided by the City’s crews who worked at Oak Lawn throughout the year providing tree and shrub trimming, removing trash, repairing roads and water leaks, and adding dirt to graves needing maintenance. Besides mowing and trimming, other cemetery expenses included insurance and taxes on cemetery property, rental of portable restrooms at Oak Lawn, electricity for the flagpole light at Oak Lawn, various maintenance costs, and telephone and other office expenses.

NEW REGULATIONS - To show respect for those buried in the cemetery and their loved ones who visit, we ask that a quiet and respectful conduct be observed in the cemetery. To help assure this, the City passed an Ordinance in 2017 stating the open consumption of alcoholic beverages is not allowed in the cemeteries. Also, action taken stating that no one is allowed in the cemeteries between the hours of 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. is to show respect and help prevent vandalism and accidental damage to lots. Gates are locked nightly.

The Rules and Regulations adopted in 2010 were revised and approved by the Decatur City Council June 10, 2019. Removal of items in violation of the rules has been done yearly the past five years. Items in violation will continue to be removed and disposed of, so we ask for your compliance in abiding by the Rules.

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA AND MILITARY FLAGS – We express appreciation to the Veterans groups that place American flags on military veterans’ graves on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. If the metal cross flag holder on your lot becomes damaged or needs repair, please contact johnbdentonwaa@gmail.com or call 214-232-2124. The Veterans group is compiling biographical sketches of veterans buried in Wise County and are asking families of veterans to help by writing a short biographical sketch of veterans in your family and sending it to the above email. Call the above number for more information. For the fifth straight year Wreaths Across America will place Christmas wreaths on military veterans’ graves in Oak Lawn. To donate to the John B. Denton chapter of Wreaths Across America to help cover the cost of the wreaths, click the “sponsor wreaths” tab on the wreathscrossamerica.org/TX0855P website.

Removal of Items in Violation of the Rules and Regulations

Because of the challenges presented in keeping a cemetery the size of Oak Lawn maintained, special Rules and Regulations were adopted in 2010 to improve the efficiency in maintaining both cemeteries. Some revisions to these rules were made and adopted by the City of Decatur June 10, 2019. All deeds state that ownership of a lot is subject to all rules in place at the time of purchase and also subject to all rules adopted at a later date.

The Rules and Regulations are intended not as restraining, but rather as defining an orderly plan of operation, care, safety, and maintenance, and are designed to ensure compliance. For a complete list of all rules in English and Spanish, go to decaturtx.org/428/Cemetery or contact the cemetery office at 940-627-3980. Signs in English and Spanish listing some of the main rules were posted at cemetery entrances at both cemeteries in 2017.

Below is only a partial list of the rules.

1. Management has the authority to enter upon any space and to remove any items that may have been placed there contrary to the rules and regulations.
2. Any item left on the lot thirty days after a burial shall be deemed abandoned, and the City shall be entitled to dispose of it as it sees fit.
3. All graves must be marked with a durable monument or markers within one year from date of burial. Any temporary markers (including metal funeral home markers and wooden crosses) placed after a burial must be removed once the permanent marker is installed.
4. Maintenance and upkeep of monuments and markers and compliance with the rules and regulations are the responsibility of the lot owners. It is the lot owner's responsibility to notify all family members of the rules and regulations.
5. The use of intoxicating beverages, outdoor cooking, and/or the consumption of food within the cemetery is strictly prohibited.
6. In order to assist the caretaker, only one flower arrangement may be used on each grave. Additional arrangements will be allowed to be placed for Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Christmas, but the additional items not removed after thirty days following these holidays shall be deemed abandoned, and the City shall be entitled to dispose of it as it sees fit.
7. Prior to setting any family or individual markers or monuments or installing any curbs or corner markers, approval must be secured from either the Board secretary, or the Grounds Chairman, so they may mark the boundaries of the effected lot and insure that the contractor complies with all regulations.
8. Vehicles shall not be driven through the grounds at a speed greater than 15 miles per hour, and must at all times be kept on the paved roads throughout the Cemetery.
9. Only approved cement curbing is allowed to mark the borders of lots. Curbs are not allowed in Sand Hill Cemetery nor in sections north of 9th Street in Oak Lawn Cemetery.

The following items are NOT allowed in any part of Sand Hill or Oak Lawn Cemeteries:

Fencing, bricks, white rock, gravel, decorative rock, cement slabs, carpet, or any other type of ground covering placed on any grave or lot.

Seats (benches, chairs, settees), statues, structures (boxes, metal designs, wood or metal cases), religious artifacts, glass items, shells, ornaments, lights, chimes, toys, flagpoles, etc. Benches placed before 2010 may remain on lots (broken ones shall not be replaced.) Benches placed after 2010 will be removed.

No permanent planting of trees, hedges, shrubs, or flowers.

If items currently on your lot are in violation of the Rules and Regulations, we ask for your compliance in removing these items. If there are items that you do not want to be disposed of by personnel in charge of enforcing the rules, it is important that you remove these items, or they will be removed. **Any items not allowed which remain on the lot, or that are considered a safety hazard, will be deemed abandoned and will be removed by City or Cemetery grounds personnel. Once such items have been removed, they shall not be replaced.**