

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** ARA MIHRANIAN, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
**FROM:** SO KIM, DEPUTY DIRECTOR/PLANNING MANAGER  
**DATE:** APRIL 10, 2017  
**SUBJECT:** SITE PLAN REVIEW (CASE NO. ZON2017-00060) FOR PROPERTY LOCATED AT GREEN HILLS MEMORIAL PARK (APPLICANT/OWNER – GREEN HILLS MEMORIAL PARK).

### RECOMMENDATION

Approve Site Plan Review (Case No. ZON2017-00060), subject to the conditions in Exhibit "A", to allow the installation of up to 1,571 upright custom gravestones throughout the internal boundary limits of the cemetery, except St. Peter's Church yard and portions of Arroyo Vista, at a maximum height of the existing adjacent walls/hedges or 6', whichever is lower, within existing private garden or family estate areas and up to 6' in height within the St. Peter's Church yard.

### BACKGROUND

On February 13, 2017, Pursuant to Council-adopted Condition No. 2.a(3) of Resolution No. 2017-03, Green Hills Memorial Park submitted a Site Plan Review application requesting to continue installing upright custom gravestones in existing interment areas at a height that exceeds 36". On March 2, 2016, the application was deemed complete for processing.

On March 2, 2017, a 15-day public notice was provided to all property owners within 500' radius of the subject site for comments. Staff received 4 emails in support and 1 email in opposition, which are attached to this report and discussed in more detail under the 'Additional Information' section of this report.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

Green Hills Memorial Park cemetery is located at 27501 Western Avenue in the northeast corner of the City, bordering the City of Lomita, the City of Rolling Hills Estates, and the City of Los Angeles. The cemetery was first established in 1948 and, at the time, was located within an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County. The site became part of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes when the "Eastview" area was annexed in 1984. The property is approximately 121-acres in size, and is a privately owned and operated cemetery facility within the City's Cemetery (C) Zoning District. The operation of the cemetery is governed by a Conditional Use Permit approved by the City Council on January 31, 2017 under Resolution No. 2017-03. The cemetery operates Monday through Sunday, and consists of interments, mausoleum buildings, an office building, mortuary, chapel, flower shop, and a maintenance yard and related buildings. The cemetery is bordered by residential uses to the north and south, a major street to the east (Western Avenue), Rolling Hills Covenant Church and Palos Verdes Reservoir to the west.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant requests approval to allow up to 1,571 upright custom gravestones that exceed 36" in height (as described in detail below) within the interior boundary limits of the cemetery site with the exception of the St. Peter's Church yard and portions of Arroyo Vista. Specifically, the applicant's request is to:

- 1) Install upright custom gravestones within existing private garden or family estate areas limited to the height of the existing adjacent walls/hedges or 6', whichever is lower; and,



Private Garden Area



- 2) Install upright custom gravestones up to 6' in height within the St. Peter's Church yard.



Historic Church Yard



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Site Plan Review**

Pursuant to City Council Resolution No. 2017-03, Condition of Approval No. 2.a(3), customary cemetery related features over 36" in height may be reviewed by the Director through a Site Plan Review, provided that the height of such features do not exceed 16'. The Site Plan Review procedure enables the Director to check development proposals for conformity with the provisions of the Development Code, such as heights and setbacks. Furthermore, Condition No. 2 requires public notification for a Site Plan Review that is to be considered by the Director.

The proposed request is to allow the installation of no more than 1,571 upright custom gravestones that exceed 36" in the height up to a maximum height of 6' within existing private family estate and garden areas, and within the St. Peter's Church yard. It should be noted that most of the existing family estate and garden areas are enclosed with 3' to 4' tall walls or hedges throughout the cemetery. However, there are some small private areas that are enclosed with 6' tall walls or hedges. The applicant is requesting to continue installing upright custom gravestones throughout

the cemetery to allow its customers the option of having upright custom gravestones inside the private areas, but only up to the height of the enclosure and not to exceed 6' in height. As for the historical St. Peter's Church yard area, there are currently individual earth interment plots with stand-alone upright custom gravestones that are up to approximately 8' in height. The applicant would like to continue allowing for these upright gravestones in the St. Peter's Church yard area to maintain the appearance of a historic interment area, but are now requesting to reduce the height limit to a 6' maximum from this point forward. Additionally, in an effort to avoid the proliferation and perceived aesthetic density of upright gravestones within the St. Peter's Church yard area, which is approximately 220' from the rear property line of the Rolling Riveria HOA, the applicant proposes to limit the upright custom gravestones based on the following:

- No more than 50% of the existing lawn area of the St. Peter's Church yard may be permitted to have an upright custom gravestone;
- Of the 50% allocated for upright custom gravestones for the St. Peter's Church yard, a maximum of 50% (25% of total spaces) will be authorized for placement of monuments up to 6' in height;
- With the exception of existing monuments, any monument 6' in height must allow for a monument 36" or less in height on either side; and,
- The earth interments with upright custom gravestones will be located in alternating rows from the north to the south of the development;

As proposed, the requested upright custom gravestones up to a maximum height of 6', complies with the maximum 16' height limit for cemetery related features pursuant to Condition of Approval No. 2.a(3). Moreover, the proposed custom gravestones will be located in mostly internal areas of the cemetery with exception to the St. Peter's Church yard (Area 6) and the westerly portion of Arroyo Vista (Area 5), which will be at minimum 220' and 40' away, respectively, from the south property line at the closest points. The proposed locations for the custom gravestones will comply with all of the following Council-adopted minimum setbacks:

- 25' east (facing Western Avenue)
- 80' north (facing residential properties along Peninsula Verde)
- 40' south (facing Avenida Feliciano)
- 5' west

As the proposed project complies with both the Development Code guidelines and Council-adopted Conditions of Approval (Resolution No. 2017-03), and will not result in adverse impacts to surrounding properties.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

On April 24, 2007, the Planning Commission adopted P.C. Resolution No. 2007-32, thereby adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for an Environmental Assessment for Case No. ZON2003-00086 (Conditional Use Permit No. 55 Revision "D") for the Green Hills Cemetery Master Plan. In adopting the Mitigated Negative Declaration, the Planning Commission found: 1) that there would be no significant adverse environmental impacts resulting from the adoption of the Green Hills Cemetery Master Plan; and 2) that with mitigation measures there would be no significant adverse environmental impacts resulting from the proposed Master Plan. Subsequently, there were three separate addendums for miscellaneous improvements, which were determined to be within the scope of the previously adopted MND.

The City Council conducted Annual Reviews of the Applicant's compliance with the Conditions of Approval associated with the Conditional Use Permit for the Master Plan in 2015 and most recently in 2017. On January 31, 2017, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 2017-03, thereby approving revisions to the Conditions of Approval that are consistent and in line with the Conditional Use Permit findings. No further environmental review was considered necessary as the modifications to the Council-adopted Conditions of Approval reduces the impacts of those operations on adjacent properties; constitutes minor alterations to existing structures or facilities involving negligible or no expansion of use; and will not have a significant effect on the environment.

The proposed project involving the installation of upright custom gravestones has been determined to be in compliance with the City Council adopted Conditions of Approval for the Master Plan (Resolution 2017-03), as evidenced in the discussions under 'Site Plan Review' above. Therefore, the proposed project is within the scope of the previously adopted MND and no further environmental review is necessary.

## **PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE**

As a result of the required public notice, the City received four separate emails in support and one email in opposition of the proposed project. All of these emails are attached to this report and the email in opposition is described in detail below, followed by Staff's comments (see attachment).

The email in opposition was submitted by the Rolling Hills Riviera HOA ("HOA"), representing the residential neighborhood immediately south of the subject cemetery site. The HOA questions the need for more improvements at the cemetery, including upright gravestones taller than the permitted height of 36". The HOA opposes exceeding the height conditions for gravestones as they believe that granting the applicant's request will lead to the lack of oversight on the improvements and the growth of the cemetery and will result in adverse visual impacts to the surrounding neighborhood.

Staff's Comments: Pursuant to Council-adopted Conditions of Approval for the subject cemetery, additional improvements including various cemetery related features, buildings, and rooftop buildings, etc. are allowed, provided that these requests are processed through the proper review process and measures are taken to mitigate potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods. The HOA is concerned that by allowing upright custom gravestones to exceed 36" in height, as currently allowed by-right, the impacts will result in a denser and cluttered appearance. Due to the location of the proposed upright custom gravestones, Staff does not believe that there will be view or density impacts to the surrounding neighborhood. This is because most of the proposed upright custom gravestones will be screened by existing private interment enclosure walls and hedges, with exception to those that will be placed on the St. Peter's Church yard. In this case, the upright custom gravestones proposed at the Church yard will be located at least 220' away from the rear property lines of the Rolling Riviera HOA properties and will not be in the direction of any protected views. Moreover, the policy of the cemetery, and as conditioned, no more than 25% of the earth interments within the lawn area of the Church yard will have 6' tall upright custom gravestones and in cases where an upright gravestone is located, the neighboring plots on either side must not exceed 36" in height. This policy (and condition) will inherently minimize any visual and density impacts to neighboring properties. Lastly, as the proposed project is being processed appropriately in compliance with the Council-adopted Conditions of Approval and will include related Conditions of Approval (See Exhibit "A"), Staff does not believe approving the request, with conditions, would lead to a lack of oversight on the development or operation of the cemetery.

## **CONCLUSION**


Based upon the discussion above, Staff recommends approval of the requested Site Plan Review to allow the installation of up to 1,571 upright custom gravestones throughout the internal boundary limits of the cemetery, except St. Peter's Church yard and portions of Arroyo Vista, at a maximum height of the existing adjacent walls/hedges or 6', whichever is lower, within existing private garden or family estate areas and up to 6' in height within the St. Peter's Church yard, subject to the Conditions of Approval contained in Exhibit "A" (Case No. ZON2017-00060).

## **ALTERNATIVES**

In addition to Staff's recommendation, the following alternatives are available for the Director's consideration:

1. Identify any issues of concern and direct the applicant to re-design and resubmit the application (Case No. ZON2017-00060); or,
2. Deny, without prejudice, the Site Plan Review (Case No. ZON2017-00060).

**Approved pursuant to Staff's Recommendation.**

Accepted:  \_\_\_\_\_ Dated 4.11.17 \_\_\_\_\_  
Ara Mihranian,  
Community Development Director

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Conditions of Approval – Exhibit "A"
- Project Plans
- Public Comments

**Exhibit "A"**  
**Conditions of Approval**  
**Green Hills Memorial Park**  
**Site Plan Review (Case No. ZON2017-00060)**

General Conditions:

1. Prior to the submittal of plans into Building and Safety plan check, the applicant and the property owner shall submit to the City a statement, in writing, that they have read, understand, and agree to all conditions of approval contained in this Exhibit "A". Failure to provide said written statement within ninety (90) days following the date of this approval shall render this approval null and void.
2. The applicant shall indemnify, protect, defend, and hold harmless, the City, and/or any of its officials, officers, employees, agents, departments, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof, from any and all claims, demands, lawsuits, writs of mandamus, and other actions and proceedings (whether legal, equitable, declaratory, administrative or adjudicatory in nature), and alternative dispute resolutions procedures (including, but not limited to arbitrations, mediations, and other such procedures) (collectively "Actions"), brought against the City, and/or any of its officials, officers, employees, agents, departments, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof, that challenge, attack, or seek to modify, set aside, void, or annul, the action of, or any permit or approval issued by, the City and/or any of its officials, officers, employees, agents, departments, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof (including actions approved by the voters of the City), for or concerning the project.
3. The Conditions of Approval stated under Resolution No. 2017-03 shall remain in full force and effect, unless amended in the future by the City Council in which those Conditions of Approval shall remain in full force and effect, in combination with the conditions set forth herein.
4. Approval of this permit shall not be construed as a waiver of applicable and appropriate zoning regulations, or any Federal, State, County and/or City laws and regulations. Unless otherwise expressly specified, all other requirements of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code shall apply.
5. Pursuant to Council-adopted Condition No. 2.a(1), the Community Development Director is authorized to make minor modifications through a Site Plan Review to the approved plans and any of the conditions that will achieve substantially the same results as would strict compliance with such plans and conditions. Any substantial change to the project shall require approval of a revision by the final body that approved the original project, which may require new and separate environmental review.
6. The project development on the site shall conform to the specific standards contained in these Conditions of Approval or, if not addressed herein, shall conform to the cemetery development standards of the City's Municipal Code, Conditions of Approval, including but not limited to height, setback and lot coverage standards.
7. Failure to comply with and adhere to all of these Conditions of Approval and the Conditions of Approval set forth in City Council-adopted Resolution No. 2017-03 or future related Council-adopted Resolutions, may be cause to revoke the approval of the project pursuant

to the revocation procedures contained in Section 17.86.060 of the City's Municipal Code or administrative citations as described in Section 1.16 of the City's Municipal Code.

8. In the event that any of these conditions conflict with the recommendations and/or requirements of another permitting agency or City department, the stricter standard shall apply.
9. Unless otherwise designated in these Conditions of Approval, all construction shall be completed in substantial conformance with the plans stamped APPROVED by the City with the effective date of this Exhibit "A".
10. This approval is only for the items described within these Conditions and identified on the stamped APPROVED plans and is not an approval of any existing illegal or legal non-conforming structures on the property, unless the approval of such illegal or legal non-conforming structure is specifically identified within these conditions or on the stamped APPROVED plans.
11. All construction sites shall be maintained in a secure, safe, neat and orderly manner, to the satisfaction of the City's Building Official. All construction waste and debris resulting from a construction, alteration or repair project shall be removed on a weekly basis by the contractor or property owner. Existing or temporary portable bathrooms shall be provided during construction. Portable bathrooms shall be placed in a location that will minimize disturbance to the surrounding property owners, to the satisfaction of the City's Building Official.
12. The construction site and adjacent public and private properties and streets shall be kept free of all loose materials resembling trash and debris in excess of that material used for immediate construction purposes. Such excess material may include, but is not limited to: the accumulation of debris, garbage, lumber, scrap metal, concrete, asphalt, piles of earth, salvage materials, abandoned or discarded furniture, appliances or other household fixtures. All landscape pruning, including but not limited to grass, leaves, branches, fertilizer, etc., shall be properly stored in areas with minimal visual impact to adjacent homeowners, and shall be stored in appropriate containers and disposed of in a lawful manner.
13. When not being used in the daily operations of the cemetery, equipment and supplies shall be stored in areas with minimal visual impact to adjacent homeowners or in the maintenance yard if possible. Equipment and supplies shall be neatly stacked so they do not pose a safety hazard or become a property maintenance issue. All landscaping equipment and vehicles, and all vehicles used for maintenance and/or burial preparation shall be stored in the maintenance yard.
14. Construction and grading activities, including but not limited to equipment warm up, geologic investigations, interments excavation for placement of vaults and installation or removal of large landscape materials or landscaping maintenance shall be limited to 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays only. Notwithstanding the foregoing, within 120 feet of any property line abutting a Residential Zoning District, no construction or grading, including grading operations to prepare sites for earth interments, shall occur before 9:00 a.m. or after 3:30 p.m. All equipment shall be equipped with a muffler to reduce on-site grading and construction noise levels.



15. Excavation for removal and replacement of vault tops and earth for preparation of interment sites, individual placement of vaults for funeral services and operation of landscape maintenance equipment shall be allowed in any area of the park between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, Sunday, and federally observed holidays.

Project Specific Conditions:

16. This approval shall allow the installation of up to 1,571 upright custom gravestones throughout the internal boundary limits of the cemetery, except St. Peter's Church yard and portions of Arroyo Vista, at a maximum height of 1) the existing adjacent walls/hedges or 6', whichever is lower, within existing private garden or family estate areas; and 2) up to 6' in height within the St. Peter's Church yard.
17. The following limitations shall be memorialized as a policy implemented by Green Hills for the placement of upright custom gravestones within the lawn area of St. Peter's Church yard area:
  - No more than 50% of the existing lawn area of the St. Peter's Church yard shall be permitted to have an upright custom gravestone;
  - Of the 50% allocated for upright custom gravestones for the St. Peter's Church yard, a maximum of 50% (25% of total spaces) shall be authorized for placement of monuments up to 6' in height;
  - With the exception of existing monuments, any monument 6' in height shall allow for a monument 36" or less in height on either side; and,
  - The earth interments with upright custom gravestones shall be located in alternating rows from the north to the south of the development;