

**CITY COUNCIL  
COMMUNICATION:**

**99-325**

**AGENDA:**

JULY 12, 1999

**SUBJECT:**

WOODLAND  
CEMETERY  
DONATION

**TYPE:**

**RESOLUTION**  
ORDINANCE  
RECEIVE/FILE

**SUBMITTED BY:**

DONALD M. TRIPP  
PARK AND  
RECREATION  
DIRECTOR

**ITEM \_\_\_\_\_**

**OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA**

**SYNOPSIS -**

Acceptance of donation of \$8,000 raised by the Talented and Gifted Youth of Callanan Middle School to be used for repairs to the exterior of the Woodland Cemetery Receiving Vault.

**FISCAL IMPACT -**

The Fiscal Impact would be \$16,000 [\$8,000 from Callanan Middle School matched with \$8,000 from the City's Cemetery Capital Improvement Program (CIP)].

**RECOMMENDATION -**

Approval.

**BACKGROUND -**

The Woodland Cemetery Receiving Vault is a unique architectural structure that played an interesting role in the history of the City. The City constructed it c. 1882 and used it to preserve/store dead bodies during the winter until the ground thawed in the spring to allow burial. The City has not used it for its intended purpose for over 60 years. The use of modern pneumatic devices and portable heaters now permits year-round burials. In years past, the City used the vault as a maintenance office and storage area for cemetery equipment and supplies. It is currently empty.

On January 20, 1999, the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance (IHPA) placed the receiving vault on "Iowa's Most Endangered Properties" list. The citizen group acknowledged the historical importance of the structure and its current state of disrepair. IHPA has offered its assistance to review potential strategies in rehabilitating the building and has referenced two State grant

programs relating to historic properties that may be used to rehabilitate, stabilize, and/or to adapt the building for reuse. Staff will research and recommend applications for these funds as applicable.

Because of its age, uniqueness, and historic importance, staff and local cemetery historian Gerald LaBlanc recommend that the City examine the building for its potential as a museum. A Des Moines engineering firm recommended in a recent study that the structure not be opened to the public without implementing significant modifications including: 1) Replacing or reinforcing the concrete arched roof; 2) Determining and reinforcing as appropriate the extent of aggregate deterioration in the vault's walls; and 3) Removing the high levels of lead and chromium in the remaining painted areas.

Since the above modifications will require large expenditures of funds and take considerable time to complete, staff recommends that they not be undertaken at this time. Sources of funding for these improvements may be partially available through state and federal matching grants. In the mean time, it is recommended that the City give immediate attention to the exterior of the structure. Repairs needed include: 1) Tarring or fitting a waterproof membrane over the roof, reinstalling drain tile, and re-sodding the surface; 2) Re-bricking a portion of the east wall; 3) Re-bricking portions of the front of the building and tuck-pointing all surfaces; 4) Straightening or replacing the iron entrance gates; 5) Repairing or replacing the wooden entrance doors; 6) cleaning all surfaces; and 7) general cleanup and landscaping. If funds remain after completing these tasks, further work will include cleaning and repairing portions of the vault's alcoves.

To help with immediate expenditures for repairs to the exterior, Mr. LaBlanc has enlisted the aid of students from Callanan Middle School who utilize the cemetery as a laboratory for some of their school studies. The youth have raised over \$8,000 to date, which they have asked the City to match, to begin the needed repairs to the structure.

Staff met recently and agreed to defer a portion of cemetery road repairs and use the CIP funds to match the middle school donation. The exterior improvements will be the main focus of expenditures. Work will continue until funds are exhausted. Meanwhile, other sources of assistance will be pursued, particularly grants.

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