

OAKLAND

Cemetery's expansion plan goes before panel

Mountain View seeks to add 7.5 acres and remove nearly 100 mature oak trees

By **Laura Casey**
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OAKLAND » The Oakland Planning Commission will hear Mountain View Cemetery officials' request to approve a contested expansion project on 7.5 acres of cemetery land, which includes the removal of nearly 100 mature coastal live oak trees, on Wednesday.

The growth would result in about 6,500 more burial plots over three non-historic sections of the cemetery, which would provide Mountain View Cemetery with approximately 15 years of additional operational capacity. About 315 new trees will be planted in the three sections, including at least 92 new coastal live oaks, during construction. That number of new trees is beyond what the city requires for the removal of protected oaks and other trees.

Twenty older coastal live oaks will be spared from being cut as planned in the original design.

"We are trying to respond to the public's comments on the project," said Jeff Lindeman, the cemetery's general manager, who also said the cemetery has planted 1,500 additional trees in the past decade. He estimated there are about 5,000 trees on the cemetery's 220 acres.

Mountain View Cemetery, at the end of Piedmont Avenue, is a historic cemetery dating to 1863. Its original landscape concept was designed by the renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who helped to design New York City's Central Park. Mountain View Cemetery is considered one of the most beloved private open spaces in the city with joggers, bicyclists and dog walkers enjoying rolling hillside paths and expanses of lawn.

Lindeman said there's a demand for the plots on the proposed hillside land that "enjoy the views of the San Francisco Bay and the Oakland and San Francisco skylines."

The project, he said, will serve a community need to be buried in land with such million-dollar views.

Current Mountain View Cemetery plots are almost sold out, Lindeman added, and he said it would be necessary to offer these extra plots to perform maintenance for



LAURA A. ODA - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Wisterias bloom over a path where many residents walk at the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland.

FYI

What: Oakland Planning Commission meeting

When: 6 p.m. Wednesday

Where: council chambers of City Hall, One Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland.

Project information: To read its environmental impact report, visit www.oaklandnet.com and search "Mountain View Cemetery expansion."

the cemetery in perpetuity.

"If it's not approved," he said, "we would have to come back with some other plan, but we studied the other options closely and the plan we have is a well-thought-out plan and the plan we have we hope will be approved."

Dozens of Oakland residents and a handful of environmental organizations have opposed the plan for years. They said, in public comment and letters to the city, that the cost of cutting down nearly 100 coastal live oak trees is too great for the benefit for Mountain View Cemetery.

"Oakland is already losing many of its mature oaks to disease, drought and development," resident Beth Wurzburg wrote city planners during the public comments period. "A thoughtlessly planned expansion is not an unavoidable loss

of our namesake trees."

Judy Schwartz, who plans on attending Wednesday's meeting, said she's concerned about where the new trees will be planted. She said they may be planted in sections of the cemetery where redwoods are planted, where she believes they won't thrive, or in sections of the cemetery that will eventually be developed and the new trees removed.

"One theory is that they will develop every square inch of the cemetery and there might not be a live oak in it," Schwartz said.

She is concerned that the cemetery develops in piecemeal and there is no cohesive, long-term plan for development that protects mature trees and shrubs.

"There's just a lot of wildlife that grow with the mature oak trees. They provide food for blue jays and squirrels," she said. "Replacing a large oak with a (smaller) one is not an equal exchange."

According to the city's final environmental impact report, 92 coastal live oaks will be removed, 32 non-oak protected trees will be removed and 32 non-protected trees will be removed. Some of the new oaks will come from 60-inch nursery boxes, which are considered larger new trees.