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ODMH Cemetery Restoration Guidelines

Background: State hospital cemeteries are located on land currently owned by the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) in Athens, Cincinnati, and Columbus. State hospital cemeteries in Dayton, Lima, Tiffin, Toledo and other locations are situated on land previously owned by ODMH.

In the past, several of Ohio's current state departments (Department of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, etc.) were combined agencies and shared facilities and cemeteries. Over time, the agencies evolved into separate departments (ODDD, DRC, ODMH) and institutions were apportioned among these agencies. Furthermore, as the understanding and care for mental illness progressed, the need for long term hospitalization lessened over the years and the state psychiatric hospital system closed and consolidated facilities. Both of these factors caused buildings, land and cemeteries in several locations to be transferred to new owners.

Pursuant to ORC §§ 5122.44 through 5122.47, ODMH has compiled designated information about the people buried in our cemeteries and deposited copies of those compilations with the Ohio Historical Society and the State Library. The compilations include information for cemeteries located on land currently owned by ODMH and for cemeteries in Dayton and Toledo, on land previously owned by the department.

Cemetery Reclamation Project: The Cemetery Reclamation Project is a volunteer effort by ODMH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) -- Ohio chapters, community organizations, consumers and family members working together to preserve and restore state hospital cemeteries. At this time, there are active cemetery reclamation groups in Athens, Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo. These volunteer groups have dedicated countless hours to beautifying the cemeteries by resetting grave markers, improving the landscape, and adding markers identifying the lands as the final resting places of those who lived and died in state hospitals.

The cemeteries at Athens are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "contributing element" to the historic value of the Athens State Hospital site. While not listed on the registry yet, our other cemeteries also have historic value. The Secretary of the Interior publishes standards for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic sites which are offered as guidelines for such work. This link provides an overview of the federal standards for treatment of historic properties:

http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standards_guidelines.htm.

The standards are meant to provide a framework for informed decision-making when seeking to preserve a historic property and will be a significant

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consideration when evaluating future cemetery projects. More specific details regarding rehabilitation are found within this link and also federal rule:

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standards/rehabilitation.htm>

A primary theme of these standards is retention of original materials and character of a site.

Cemetery Management: ODMH, after consultation with its reclamation partners and consideration of the guidelines referenced above, retains final approval relating to maintenance and improvements undertaken on the cemetery grounds under its control. Additionally, with regard to maintenance and improvement efforts proposed for cemetery grounds that have been transferred to new owners, ODMH will work in cooperation with those owners to apply the same or similar standards for maintenance and improvements undertaken on those cemetery grounds.

ODMH and the cemetery reclamation groups are committed to preserving the historical qualities of the state hospital cemeteries, including preservation of and focus on the original headstones (where still available). Much of the work of the cemetery reclamation groups has been to reset, and where necessary replace, original headstones. Other reclamation work has involved general grounds restoration and improvement, such as clearing and maintenance of pathways and stairs, installation of benches and clearing of brush. Finally, ODMH has undertaken some general site improvements, such as placement of memorial markers and perimeter fencing and gates.

Proposals for Cemetery Projects: Proposals from other individuals or groups for cemetery projects and improvements may be submitted to ODMH directly or through its current reclamation partners. Proposals should detail the scope of the project or improvement, including timeline, budget, anticipated funding sources and work plan, as well as a discussion of how the project or improvement contributes to the preservation effort and any impact it may have on the historical integrity of the cemetery.

Family Member Requests: Specific proposals for the placement of supplementary individual grave markers may be submitted by family members of the deceased. Approval of such requests will be conditioned upon the following:

- Family members of the deceased must provide proof of their relationship to the deceased and make a formal request to install a personalized grave marker.
- Persons unable to provide proof of relationship to the deceased must seek written approval for placement of an additional grave marker from the Director of ODMH.
- The original grave marker shall not be removed or altered in any way.

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- Size and dimensions of proposed supplemental grave markers shall be reviewed and approved by ODMH and the cemetery owner prior to installation. Preference will be given to headstones which are least likely to alter the historic integrity of the cemeteries.

Veteran's Markers: Veterans buried in the cemeteries may be honored with both a veteran's flag stand and a US-government issued, single, flush-to-the-ground style monument consistent with the existing veterans' memorials in the cemeteries. Additional styles of veterans markers will be reviewed for approval by the Director of ODMH.