

Historic Evergreen Cemetery Frequently Asked Questions

1) How did Historic Evergreen Cemetery fall into such disrepair?

When Evergreen was founded in 1891 there was no provision made for perpetual care, and the Evergreen Cemetery Association lacked an endowment to help maintain the cemetery into the future. Though the cemetery's owners hired staff to care for the cemetery through the years, much of the care/repair of individual gravesites fell to families and loved ones of those interred. With so many Richmonders, particularly young men and women, moving to northern cities in the years and decades after WWI, there were fewer family members present to care for plots at Evergreen. In time, many of the traditional gatherings at Evergreen (including Memorial Day clean-ups and picnics) no longer took place, and the site's deteriorating infrastructure made it increasingly difficult for families and visitors to navigate overgrown walkways and roads.

2) What is the goal of the restoration effort, and has a plan already been created for what a restored Evergreen Cemetery will look like?

We do not yet have a restoration plan for Evergreen—your contributions today will help us determine the nature and content of that plan. The first step has been to define the vision and mission for a restored Evergreen. As articulated by the restoration advisory team in its September meeting, the vision for Historic Evergreen Cemetery is “to inspire present and future generations to honor the nation’s African American cultural, historical, and spiritual inheritance.”

Evergreen’s mission is “to reveal and celebrate African American cultural and spiritual experiences, legacies, and places through public programming.”

Ideas, suggestions, and memories you convey during this and other community conversations will directly inform the planning process that follows, so that the above vision and mission are appropriately reflected in the physical restoration of Evergreen. In 2019, a range of preliminary restoration design options informed by these community conversations and the advisory team’s recommendations will be presented to the public for feedback, suggestions, and improvements. Only then will we begin to consider finalizing the master restoration plan for Evergreen, with the hope of beginning the restoration phase in Fall 2019.

3) Are descendant families involved in Evergreen’s restoration?

Yes! Most of the initial members of the advisory team are descendant family, and they are helping to guide the restoration process, (including community engagement), create opportunities for educational programming at the cemetery, and collaborate with volunteers.

In addition, we have Evergreen families regularly volunteering in our ongoing Saturday morning clean-up events. A kiosk flyer at Evergreen’s entrance invites families to become involved in the restoration process, and our onsite staff regularly meet with family during their visits to the cemetery.

4) What is the Executive Planning and Review Team (ExPRT) for Historic Evergreen Cemetery?

The Executive Planning and Review Team (ExPRT) is the advisory team assisting the Enrichmond Foundation in planning, reviewing, and prioritizing initiatives relating to the restoration of Historic Evergreen Cemetery. The advisory team’s discussions, decisions, and recommendations will inform the strategic priorities and implementation of Evergreen’s multi-year restoration process. The team meets monthly on the campus of Virginia Union University.

Comprised of 15–25 Historic Evergreen Cemetery stakeholders, the advisory team will record, consider, and address the ideas, suggestions, concerns you share at this community conversation, to help strengthen the impact, quality, and sustainability of the restoration project. Advisory team members are committed to the successful restoration of Historic Evergreen Cemetery as a sacred, accessible, public place where African American perspectives and histories are dignified and celebrated.

5) Who owns Historic Evergreen Cemetery?

The Enrichmond Foundation purchased Historic Evergreen Cemetery from the Entzminger family, who had privately owned and managed Evergreen (as well as Woodland Cemetery in Henrico County) for more than 40 years. Woodland Cemetery remains under the ownership of the Entzmingers.

6) **What is the Enrichmond Foundation?**

The Enrichmond Foundation was formed in 1990 by the City of Richmond's Parks Advisory Board. The impetus to establish a park foundation was to protect Belle Isle from large scale residential development and open the island to the public. Over our 28-year history we have acted as the fiscal agent for over 130 "Friends" groups and special projects driven by community-based volunteer efforts. Enrichmond and our neighborhood volunteer groups do amazing work in the City's parks, but we support multiple public and open space efforts throughout the City. These include cemeteries, community gardens, street trees, pop-up parks, playgrounds, trails, farmers markets, dog parks, amphitheaters, and historic structures.

We saw the preservation and restoration of Historic Evergreen Cemetery as an urgent, critical need for Richmond's East End community, and Preservation Virginia and Virginia Community Capital committed the resources to help make it possible. Restoring this sacred place, originally conceived as a community gathering place and significant African American site of memory, aligns with Enrichmond's mission to enhance public places in our communities through volunteerism, a respect for the City's history, and community collaboration.

7) **How is Evergreen being cleaned-up and maintained?**

Maintenance of the property is one of our biggest tasks. We are leveraging our local and state-wide partnerships, fundraising, passionate volunteers, and a professional network of experts to elevate maintenance work. We continue to work with the volunteers and volunteer organizations that have been working at Evergreen and offer tools, equipment, training, storage, supplies, and other services on site. Enrichmond's Volunteer Coordinator, Caretaker, and (soon) Groundskeeper will work together to coordinate regularly scheduled professional maintenance, as well as volunteer efforts at the cemetery.

Nearly all of the research, outreach, and maintenance for Evergreen to date has been accomplished by devoted and tireless volunteers for decades. The Maggie L. Walker Foundation mobilized volunteers to clear and maintain portions of Evergreen in the 1970s, followed by Dwight Storke, Jr. and Jim Bell of the National Park Service. Veronica A. Davis of Virginia Roots reinvigorated the volunteer effort in the 1990s, followed by John Shuck and Marvin Harris, who continue to lead volunteer groups in East End Cemetery and Evergreen, respectively. Enrichmond is now able to provide dedicated, paid staff support to ensure that volunteer efforts culminate in a fully preserved cemetery that is completely open and accessible to the public.

8) **Restoration is going to take a long time and cost a lot of money. How are you funding this?**

We envision restoration of Evergreen as a multiyear, multimillion-dollar project that will demand collective creativity, resourcefulness, and determination until this national treasure is honored and cared for as it should be. Restoration will likely take at least five years.

Restoring and maintaining Historic Evergreen Cemetery will indeed be expensive. The Enrichmond Foundation has received a generous commitment of funds from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, to help defray the costs associated with the purchase and restoration of the cemetery. However, Enrichmond has not yet received this gift; once Enrichmond secures a conservation easement on the property, the foundation will then receive most of this gift. In the meantime, Enrichmond has received generous support from two great organizations—Preservation Virginia and Virginia Community Capital as we work through the early phases of planning and restoration.

In June 2018, Gov. Ralph Northam signed into law a bill providing support to care for and maintain a number of historic African American cemeteries, including Evergreen. Though Enrichmond has yet to receive any funding under this new law, this critical state support will surely contribute to and enhance the restoration effort at Evergreen.

9) **What are you doing to support preservation efforts of other cemeteries in need?**

We currently partner with Friends of Shockoe Hill Cemetery and Friends of Forest View Cemetery by serving as their fiscal agents. Moving forward, Enrichmond seeks to become the owner of East End Cemetery, which is adjacent to Evergreen and abandoned, to preserve this significant site and to work with family and community members as well as volunteers to properly restore it for the benefit of the community. Like Evergreen, East End has been cared for by a long list of dedicated volunteers under the leadership of John Shuck, an advisory team member, and most recently by Friends of East End. Should Enrichmond become the owner of East End Cemetery, we will work closely with Friends of East End, as we will with the families of those interred, community organizations, and anyone who wants to volunteer, to partner in restoring, maintaining, and researching the cemetery.