



Santa Margarita Cemetery District

P.O. Box 606 - Santa Margarita, CA 93453 - 805.438.3502

SANTA MARGARITA CEMETERY DISTRICT

BOARD OF TRUSTEES RESPONSE TO THE 2025–2026 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

"A Final Resting Place's Unrest: Revitalizing Santa Margarita's Cemetery District"

Date: July 7, 2026

Submitted to:

Presiding Judge Tana Coates
Superior Court of California
1035 Palm Street Room 355
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 4910
San Luis Obispo, CA 93403

Heather Moreno, Supervisor District 5
San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
1055 Monterey Street, Suite D430
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

INTRODUCTION

The Santa Margarita Cemetery District Board of Trustees appreciates the work of the 2025–2026 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury and its interest in ensuring that the District provides respectful, transparent and professional cemetery services to the community. The Board welcomes constructive recommendations and has reviewed the findings and recommendations contained in the report.

The District has already initiated many improvements since the Grand Jury started its inquiry, including; the development of a District website, improved public access to meeting information, a Draft Improvement Project Plan, and ongoing efforts to modernize records and operations.

Please note that the District is a very small public agency and operates with limited funding resources. The District endeavors to use its resources efficiently for the purpose of maintaining and administering the Cemetery with the goal of serving the Santa Margarita Area. We depend on our dedicated volunteer Board of Directors and committed community members to continue to maintain and improve the Cemetery. Recently the District formed a Records Subcommittee which is made up of community members and other stakeholders. The Subcommittee has met several times to discuss improving the District's records.

The Board's responses are provided below pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933.05.

FINDING 1

The District has inadequate grave location identification, making it difficult for visitors to locate burial sites.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The Board partially agrees with this finding.

The cemetery contains sections developed over many decades using varying historical practices for mapping and identification. While records exist for burial locations, the Board recognizes that additional section markers, row markers, and wayfinding improvements are needed and would enhance public access and visitor experience.

Actions Completed:

All existing hard copy burial records have been put into an electronic spreadsheet. A master map of the Cemetery has been prepared by volunteer staff of the Santa Margarita Historical Society. We appreciate the detailed efforts of the Historical Society volunteers. The Map has been enlarged and placed on a 2 foot by 3 foot poster board. It will eventually be placed into a kiosk at the Cemetery as a metal map. A copy of the map is attached. Grave location assistance is currently available through the Santa Margarita Historical Society, the District Website with the District's Board and staff helping.

Actions Planned:

Installation of additional section and row markers was completed on July 3, 2026 by the Records Subcommittee. The construction of a Kiosk with a large cemetery site map is planning in the next 60 days. The plan is to have a QR code to Find-A-Grave.com accessible at the Kiosk. Continued improvement of the cemetery's maps and database is ongoing. We are in the process of reconciling the three databases currently available; the Historical Society's, Find-A-Grave's, and the Districts. Currently we are now using all three to locate gravesites.

Implementation Timeline:

Within 3-4 months, subject to available funding and volunteer availability.

FINDING 2

Public access to cemetery records, maps, and information has been limited.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The Board partially agrees with this finding.

The District historically relied on in-person requests and does not have office hours. Recognizing the need for improved public access, the District has already implemented significant improvements.

Actions Completed:

A District website has been developed and is online; www.smcd.org. Email can now be sent to the Board members and contract staff via a link on the website: smcd@sm-cd.org. Meeting agendas, minutes, contact information, and public documents are available online. This will increase responsiveness to public information requests. Maps are now available online and the District is working to increase public access.

Actions Planned:

Continued expansion of online records and cemetery maps. Development of downloadable forms and informational resources. A kiosk at the cemetery with a map that shows the gravesites for the public's use.

Implementation Timeline:

Ongoing; substantially completed within 12 months. Subject to available funding and volunteer availability.

FINDING 3

The District experienced deficiencies in compliance with Brown Act posting requirements.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The Board agrees that deficiencies have occurred in prior years.

The Board has taken corrective action and has implemented procedures designed to ensure ongoing compliance with the Brown Act.

Actions Completed:

- A designated posting location has been established in downtown Santa Margarita.
- Website posting procedures have been implemented.

Actions Planned:

- Annual Brown Act refresher training.
- Periodic compliance review by the District Board.

Implementation Timeline: Implemented and ongoing.

FINDING 4

The District lacks a comprehensive operational and capital improvement plan.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The Board partially agrees with this finding.

The District has historically addressed maintenance and capital needs through annual budgeting and project prioritization. The Board agrees that a more formalized long-range planning document will improve transparency and help facilitate future decision-making. A Draft Improvement Project Plan is attached for your review.

Actions Planned:

Development of an Improvement and Maintenance Plan-a Draft Plan is attached to this document. Prioritization of water system improvements. Assessment of road and paving needs. Evaluation of fencing and gate repairs.Ongoing pest and vermin management. Long-range planning for future burial capacity. Development of a new section has been designated for future use.The draft plan for improvement projects has been presented and approved by the Board. The Plan is reviewed at each Board meeting.

Implementation Timeline:

Ongoing; Capital improvements are subject to available funding and volunteer availability.

FINDING 5

The District should improve organizational transparency and clarify roles and responsibilities.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The Board agrees with this response.

Actions Completed:

Preliminary organizational structure developed and is attached to this document.

Actions Planned:

Adoption of updated Policies and Procedures for District operations. A formal organizational chart and Scope of work for contractors shall be developed. Development of written position descriptions. Review and update of Board policies and procedures.

Implementation Timeline:

The Policies and Procedures are being updated and should be adopted by the Board within the next 90 days. This task is subject to available funding and volunteer availability.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Install and maintain clear section, row, and plot markers.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The recommendation will be implemented within 3 months, subject to funding and volunteer availability. Row markers will be installed on July 3, 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Improve public access to records, maps, and information.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The recommendation has been implemented and is ongoing. The District has established a public website and continues to expand available resources and records. The District has three spreadsheets available to search for grave records. A kiosk with a large map of the cemetery will be constructed in the next few months.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Maintain compliance with Brown Act requirements.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The recommendation has been implemented and will be ongoing.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop a formal maintenance and improvement plan addressing infrastructure and future needs.

BOARD RESPONSE:

A Draft Improvement Project Plan has been prepared by the District. The planning process will continue and should be implemented within 3 months.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Create an organizational chart.

BOARD RESPONSE:

A draft Organizational Chart is attached to this document.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Develop written job descriptions and responsibilities.

BOARD RESPONSE:

The recommendation will be implemented within 3 months.

CONCLUSION

The Santa Margarita Cemetery District is committed to continuous improvement, transparency, and responsible stewardship of public resources. The Board appreciates the Grand Jury's review and recommendations and looks forward to implementing additional improvements that enhance service to the community while preserving the historic and cultural significance of the cemetery.

Approved by the Santa Margarita Cemetery District Board of Trustees on July 7, 2026.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gilbert Cabrera", written in a cursive style.

Gilbert Cabrera
Chairman of the Board
Santa Margarita Cemetery District

Santa Margarita Cemetery Map

This map is a work in progress.

(Based on 1985 Map and what it looks like from air in 2024- not to scale)

Attachment B - Draft Improvement Project Plan**Santa Margarita Cemetery District**

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Draft - Improvement Project Plan**July 7, 2026**

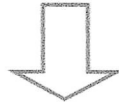
Project	Summary	Cost Estimate	Priority
New Automatic Entrance Gate	Replace the old gate entrance with new automatic closing gate.	\$7,000-15,000	
Kiosk with Map	Build a Kiosk that would contain a map of the Cemetery. Met with Jim at Cemetery.	\$1,000-5,000	
Irrigation/Waterlines	a. Prepare a plan for the repair and replacement of irrigation/waterlines b. Hire contractor - Complete repair and replacement	\$10,000	
Picnic Table	Identify where the Picnic Table should go. Construct or purchase a picnic table. Eagle project if a Scout is available.	\$500-\$1,200	
Owl Boxes	Installed	Donated	Done
Survey New Area	Contact Joanna Head - Surveyor	\$1000/acre	
Chain Link Fence	Contact Fence Repair Companies	\$500-\$1,000	Done
Row Markers	Subcommittee to place row markers	\$500-\$1,200	
Dirt Relocation	Wait until the next internment. Request that dirt get moved then.		

Attachment C - Draft Organization Chart

**Santa Margarita Public Cemetery District
Draft - Organizational Chart**

Board of Trustees

Appointed by the County Supervisor
Sets policy and strategic direction
Approves budgets and expenditures
Ensures compliance with California cemetery district laws
Hires and evaluates the District Contractors



Administrator/Clerk

Responsible for coordinating the District's services and operations
Responds to public inquiries and requests
Oversees daily operations and Implements board policies
Manages contractors and prepares budgets and reports
Coordinates public meetings and district planning



Maintenance/Operations

Responsible for regular maintenance of the cemetery grounds
Grounds maintenance and equipment management
Contractor oversight, safety and regulatory compliance