

INTERMENT AREA LAYOUT

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To update the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Interment Area Layout policy.
2. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive:
 - a. Updates organizational information to reflect current positions and corporate titles;
 - b. Introduces and updates standard terms and definitions;
 - c. Adds newer types of interment areas (e.g., ossuaries and scatter gardens); and
 - d. Updates policy requirements and responsibilities assigned to various officials, to include reassigning certain authorities to make operational decisions.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Office of Cemetery Operations, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the contents of this directive. Questions can be directed to Deputy Director, Cemetery Operations.
4. **RELATED PUBLICATIONS:**
 - a. 41-SOP-022 – Interment Area Layout (September 29, 2022),
 - b. NCA Handbook 3000 – Operational Standards for National Cemeteries (January 1, 2010);
 - c. NCA Directive 3001– VA National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement (October 19, 2020);
 - d. NCA Directive 3140 – Management and Decision Support System (October 18, 2019); and
 - e. NCA Handbook 3140/1 – Management and Decision Support System (November 10, 2011).
5. **RESCISSIONS:** NCA Directive 3120 – Interment Area Layout (November 19, 2004) and NCA Handbook 3120 – Interment Area Layout (March 8, 2001).
6. **RECERTIFICATION:** This directive is scheduled for recertification the last business day of September 2027.

/s/
Matthew T. Quinn
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

INTERMENT AREA LAYOUT

1. PURPOSE/AUTHORITY:

a. This directive outlines current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) policy and responsibilities for layout of interment and memorial areas, and accommodation of remains of eligible individuals in VA national cemeteries. Procedures for implementing the policies in this directive are found in the Interment Area Layout Standard Operating Procedures published by the Office of Cemetery Operations and locally by subordinate organizations and the NCA cemetery design guidelines published by the NCA Design and Construction Service.

b. The statutory authority for this directive is stated in title 38 United States Code, Sections 307 and 512a, and Chapter 24.

2. POLICY: It is VA NCA policy to create and maintain standards for the design of interment and memorial areas that:

a. Maximize the length of time that cemeteries will provide final resting places in national shrines meeting the interment and memorialization needs of the Veteran community;

b. Facilitate NCA's accurate interment of remains and marking of gravesites;

c. Provide safe and accessible environments for employees and visitors; and

d. Preserve the historic designation of existing cemeteries in accordance with NCA Directive 3001, VA National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. The **Executive Director, Cemetery Operations**, is responsible for:

(1) Establishing standards for interments and placement of gravesite markers;

(2) Establishing procedures for the operational capture and upload of geo-spatial data and images in support of NCA's Global Information System (GIS) program; and

(3) Approving interment and gravesite marker options at national cemeteries.

b. The **Director, Design and Construction Service**, is responsible for:

(1) Establishing standards for placement of gravesite layout control markers and section markers;

(2) Developing and maintaining NCA's design standards that govern all interment and memorial options;

(3) Recommending interment and gravesite marker options at national cemeteries through the **Director, Cemetery Development and Improvement Service** for decision by the **Executive Director, Cemetery Operations**;

(4) Preparing cemetery Master Plans, Site Plans, and developmental plans for the applicable **District Executive Director** and **Cemetery Director** and when developing such plans, balancing/rebalancing gravesite allocations amongst burial options so that closure dates for burial options will occur as simultaneously as possible (unless directed otherwise);

(5) Maintaining the official record of cemetery development studies and drawings (e.g., Cemetery Master Plan(s), Cemetery Site Plan(s), and construction documents);

(6) Coordinating with VA's Office of Real Property to prepare documents proposing authorized easements and right-of-way agreements affecting NCA real property interests at VA national cemeteries; and

(7) Providing documentation of such agreements to:

- (i) The **Director, Cemetery Development and Improvement Service**;
- (ii) The applicable **District Executive Director**; and
- (iii) The applicable **Cemetery Director**.

c. The **Director, Cemetery Development and Improvement Service**, is responsible for:

(1) Reviewing recommendations from the **Director, Design and Construction Service** for interment and gravesite marker options and forwarding them to the **Executive Director, Cemetery Operations** for decision; and

(2) Forwarding all inquiries and requests regarding the establishment of easements, rights-of-way, and utility service or use agreements for NCA property to the **Director, Design and Construction Service**.

d. Each **District Executive Director** is responsible for:

(1) Providing **Cemetery Directors** with accurate Gravesite Layout Map(s) (commonly referred to as "GLM(s)") and current gravesite accounting tools;

(2) Providing the **Director, Design and Construction Service**, with revised plans and information regarding physical changes and discrepancies between plans and actual field conditions;

(3) Recommending to the **Director, Design and Construction Service**, the mix of interment and memorial options to be built during cemetery expansions to maximize and balance, (see description of balance in para 3.b(4) above) the length of time the cemetery will meet all interment and memorialization needs; and

(4) Forwarding to the **Director, Cemetery Development and Improvement Service**, inquiries, and requests regarding the establishment of easements, rights-of-way, and utility service or use agreements for NCA property.

e. **Cemetery Directors** are responsible for:

(1) Maintaining accurate Cemetery Site Plans, GLMs, and current gravesite accounting tools;

(2) Adhering to GIS procedures to capture geo-spatial data and images at the time of interment and placement of headstones or markers, and upload of data/images to support NCA accountability and mapping tools;

(3) Maintaining accurate identification of interment sections with associated section markers and notifying their district of anticipated section marker needs;

(4) Maintaining accurate positioning of gravesite layout control markers and arranging for repair or replacement of damaged or disturbed control markers;

(5) Maintaining a current cemetery gravesite inventory in the Management and Decision Support System (commonly referred to as "MADSS") or its successor system, as applicable;

(6) Maintaining current records for all existing agreements affecting cemetery property including easements, rights-of-way, and use agreements;

(7) Following the gravesite layout maps to lay out interment areas and install headstones, markers, niche covers and memorial markers or plaques as designated;

(8) Notifying the **District Executive Director** immediately of physical changes or discrepancies between plans and actual field conditions;

(9) Forwarding all inquiries and requests regarding easements, rights-of-way and utility service or use agreements for NCA property to their **District Executive Director**; and;

(10) Recommending to the **District Executive Director** the combination of interment and memorial options to be built during cemetery expansions to maximize the length of time the cemetery will meet all interment and memorialization needs.

4. DEFINITIONS:

a. **Cemetery Master Plan:** A document showing real estate information including: property boundaries, easements and rights-of-way; physical features such as topography, water bodies or interment areas; and improvements such as columbaria, ossuaries and scattering gardens, buildings, structures, utilities, vehicular and pedestrian pavement, flagpoles, fences and gates. Master Plans indicate future phasing of cemetery development, and proposed infrastructure and burial areas at final cemetery development build-out.

b. **Cemetery Site Plan:** A document showing VA national cemetery property and its existing conditions including: property boundaries and impediments to cemetery development such as easements, rights-of-way and underground utilities; land features including water bodies, vegetation and grading; all built features, such as buildings, structures, roads, walks and memorial areas; and developed interment sections. See example at **APPENDIX A**.

c. **Easement:** A written legal document through which the U.S. Government, holding title to a VA national cemetery, grants authority to a second party to use part of the land or airspace above it for a specific purpose.

d. **Gravesite Layout Map (GLM):** A map that is an official system of record and graphic depiction of planned and designed gravesites that indicates every individual gravesite within an interment section or site within a memorial section. Other features identified include benchmarks of surveys, gravesite layout control markers and orientation of the gravesite and monument. See example at **APPENDIX B**.

e. **Gravesite Layout Control Markers:** Permanent survey markers installed in a grid pattern within each burial or memorial section in a VA national cemetery that staff use to assist in the accurate layout of interment areas and gravesite markers.

f. **Gravesite Marker:** Typically marble or granite markers of various sizes inscribed with information identifying the decedent(s) interred therein or memorialized. Common options and associated terms listed below:

(1) **Flat Marker:** A flat gravesite marker typically 12 inches in depth x 18 inches or 24 inches in width. Marker is a common term sometimes used to generically reference all gravesite marker types.

(2) **Memorial Marker:** An upright, flat, or wall-mounted marker used to memorialize an eligible decedent whose remains are unrecoverable.

(3) **Memorial Plaque:** A wall-mountable plaque affixed to a wall to memorialize an eligible decedent whose remains are unrecoverable, donated to science, interred in an ossuary or scattered in a separate location.

(4) **Niche Cover:** A wall-mountable gravesite marker affixed to a columbarium to enclose a niche typically 11 inches wide x 15 inches in height.

(5) **Upright Marker:** An upright gravesite marker typically 42 inches in height x 13 inches wide.

g. **Interment and Memorial Options:** Any of the following types of gravesites or memorial sites:

(1) **Casket Gravesite:** A plot of land designed to inter casketed remains below ground.

(2) **Columbarium:** An above-ground structure with niches for the interment of cremated remains.

(3) **Green Burial Section:** A designated natural meadow area designed to inter remains below ground in an eco-friendly manner.

(4) **In-ground Cremation Gravesite:** A plot of land designed to inter cremated remains below ground.

(5) **Memorial Site:** A plot of land designated for placement of a memorial marker.

(6) **Memorial Wall:** An above-ground structure displaying memorial plaques.

(7) **Ossuary:** An underground chamber designed and constructed to permanently inter cremated remains in a commingled manner.

(8) **Outer Burial Receptacle:** A rigid box-like structure for the in-ground interment of a burial container:

(i) **Grave Liner:** A type of outer burial receptacle provided by the government to stabilize the gravesite after interment which is typically constructed from concrete or polyurethane.

(ii) **Pre-placed Crypt:** A pre-placed double-depth concrete container installed during development of interment sections, typically in a large array of 3-foot x 8-foot gravesites.

(iii) **Private Vault:** Purchased privately as an upgrade to standard grave liners. Private vaults or vaults are typically more ornate and often contain a permanent seal or gasket for the lid. Vaults come in several different styles and sizes.

(iv) **Urn Crypt:** Concrete crypt used for the interment of urns containing cremated remains. It is not intended to serve as a private ossuary that contains commingled remains.

(9) **Scattering Garden:** A designated landscape interment area where cremated remains are scattered atop the surface. Scattering is considered an interment and subject to burial eligibility criteria.

h. **Right-of-Way:** A legal agreement similar to an easement but is used only for granting permission for access to and/or passage across Federal land.

i. **Section Markers:** Permanent section identification markers that identify the corner or boundary of burial and memorial sections in a VA national cemetery by inscribing the alpha-numeric identification of the burial or memorial section into granite, marble or concrete posts placed adjacent to roads or access paths.

5. REFERENCES:

a. NCA Directive 3001, Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement (October 19, 2020).

b. NCA Directive 3140, Management and Decision Support System (October 18, 2019).

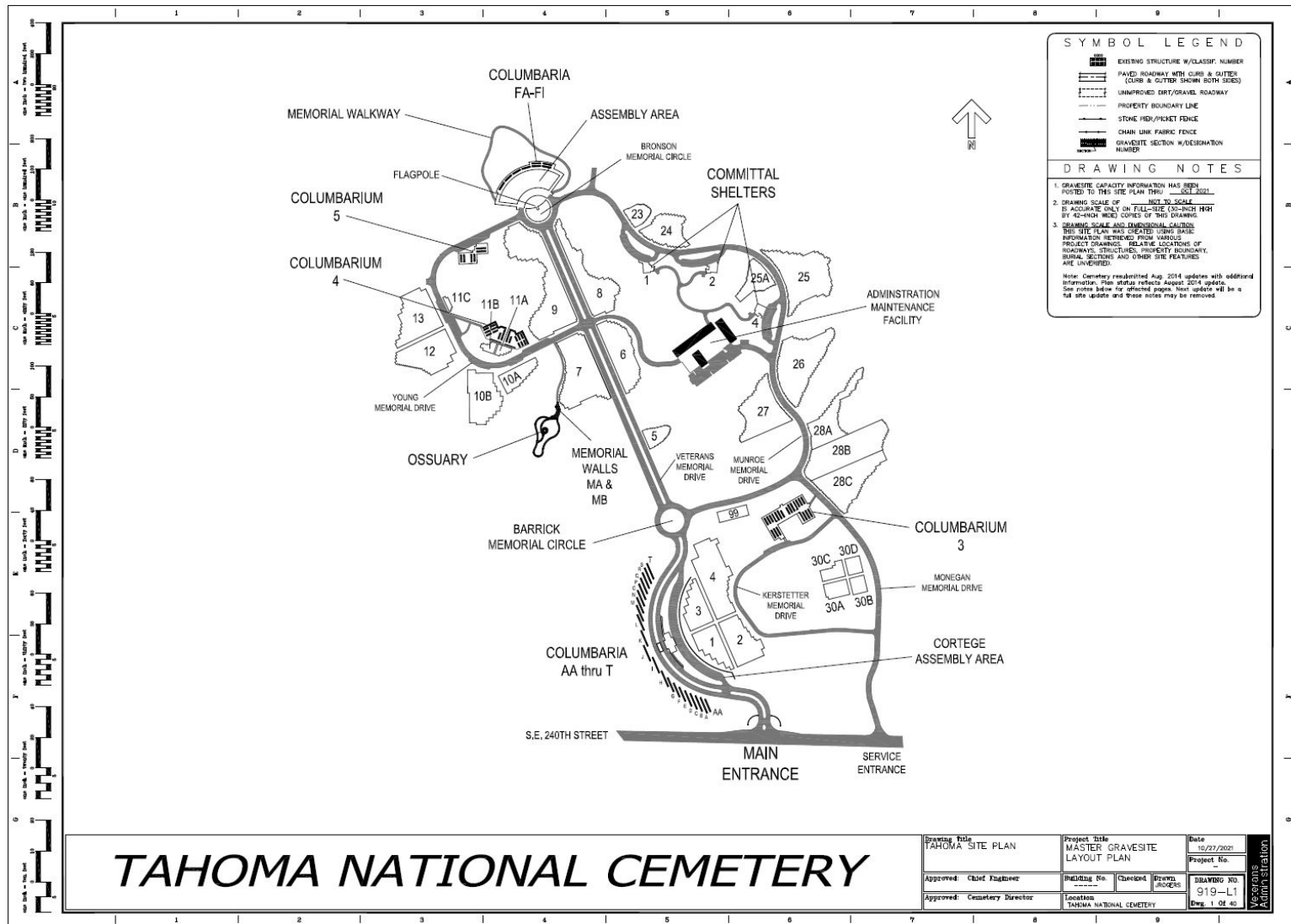
c. NCA Handbook 3140/1, Management and Decision Support System Procedures (November 10, 2011).

d. 41-SOP-022, Interment Area Layout SOP (September 29, 2022).

e. Revised National Cemetery Global Positioning System (GPS) Survey Gravesite Discrepancy Resolution Process Business Rules (April 2020).

f. NCA National Shrine Commitment Operational Standards and Measures Guidebook (February 2021).

APPENDIX A – TYPICAL CEMETERY SITE PLAN



APPENDIX B – TYPICAL GRAVESITE LAYOUT MAP

