

**REPORT OF THE
CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST**

DATE: May 10, 2013

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations
Committee

FROM: Gerry F. Miller 
Chief Legislative Analyst

Council File: 13-0002-S57
Assignment No.: 13-04-0305

SUBJECT: Resolution (Perry-Parks) to support any legislation and/or administrative action by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to adopt a suitable historic/cultural designation for the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery as a first step in preserving this important landmark or our common heritage.

CLA RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution to include in the City's 2013-2014 State Legislative Program SUPPORT of any legislation and/or administrative action by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to adopt a suitable historic/cultural designation for the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery as a first step in preserving this important landmark or our common heritage.

SUMMARY

Resolution (Perry-Parks), introduced April 10, 2013, proposes that the City of Los Angeles support any legislation and/or administrative action by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to adopt a suitable historic/cultural designation for the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery as a first step in preserving this important landmark or our common heritage. Mount Zion is the final resting place of many prominent members in the history of the Jewish Community of Southern California and therefore should be preserved.

BACKGROUND

Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery was in 1916 in East Los Angeles by a burial society dedicated to provide free burials for economically poor Jews who could not afford to bury their dead in other more expensive cemeteries in the Los Angeles area. Although Mount Zion consisted largely of concrete and dirt and lacked some of the aesthetics of other more expensive cemeteries that featured vast expanses of trimmed grass, handsome columns, and statuary, it provided poor Jewish families with an affordable means of burial. In June 1969, after over 50 years of operation, the burial society that founded Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery notified the Jewish Federation that it would discontinue operating the cemetery.

In the years following the burial society's announcement that it would no longer be involved in the operations of the cemetery, burials at Mount Zion decreased substantially and it is believed that the cemetery has been inactive for several years – the last reported burial at Mount Zion occurred approximately six years ago. Although Mount Zion is currently under the nominal care of the Home of Peace Cemetery and the Jewish Federation, the actual owner of the cemetery is unknown – county records list the now defunct burial society as the owner. Recent media reports

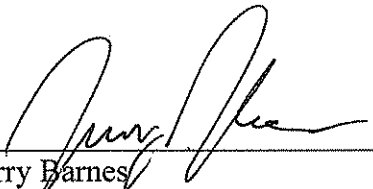
have brought to light the current perilous condition of the cemetery. A recent visit to Mount Zion showed the cemetery in a state of complete disrepair, with hundreds of headstones knocked over and/or vandalized with graffiti. The current state of Mount Zion is shameful given that this cemetery is the final resting place of many prominent members in the history of the Jewish Community of Southern California. Resolution (Perry-Parks) therefore urges that the City of Los Angeles support any legislation and/or administrative action by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to adopt a suitable historic/cultural designation for the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery.

DEPARTMENTS NOTIFIED

None

BILL STATUS

None



Jerry Barnes
Analyst

GFM:jb

Attachment: Resolution (Perry-Parks)

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13-0002-557

RULES, ORDINANCES & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, recent media reports have brought to light the perilous condition of the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery in East Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS, the black gates of Mount Zion are chained shut; a sign stamped on a wall asks visitors to call a neighboring graveyard if they want to go in but the phone number no longer exists; and

WHEREAS, a recent visit to this historic site showed a state of disrepair with headstones knocked down, a 'carpet' of dried cypress leaves, hundreds of tombstones fallen on the ground, and some vandalized and covered with graffiti; and

WHEREAS, this cemetery is the final resting place of many prominent members in the history of the Jewish Community of Southern California; and

WHEREAS, Mount Zion was opened in 1916 by a burial society dedicated to provide free burials for poor Jews; where other cemeteries featured vast expanses of trimmed grass, handsome columns and statuary, Mount Zion was mostly concrete and dirt; and

WHEREAS, Mount Zion hasn't been an active cemetery in years; the last burial there was about six years ago and it is currently under the nominal care of the Home of Peace Cemetery and the Jewish Federation but neither organization knows who actually owns the property, and county records are inconclusive, listing the name of the apparently defunct burial society; and

WHEREAS, in June 1969, the Jewish Federation was notified by the burial society that founded Mount Zion stating that the organization would no longer continue operating the cemetery; and

WHEREAS, some would say that this is a cemetery that no longer really belongs to anyone, however it is a vital part of our history and therefore it belongs to all of us; and

WHEREAS, although funding and other issues still need to be addressed one step that can be taken immediately is to give a historic-cultural designation to this cemetery so that it can be preserved as part of our history; and

WHEREAS, this cemetery is located not in the City of Los Angeles but in unincorporated Los Angeles County territory;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2013-2014 State Legislative Program SUPPORT for legislation and/or administrative action by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to adopt a suitable historic / cultural designation for the Mount Zion Jewish Cemetery as a first step in preserving this important landmark of our common heritage.

[Signature]
APR 10 2013

PRESENTED BY:

[Signature]
JAN C. PERRY
Councilwoman, 9th District

SECONDED BY:

[Signature]

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