



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

March 3, 2017

Lenore Tedesco, PhD.
Laura Hare Charitable Trust
ltedesco@wetlandsinstiute.org

Dear Dr. Tedesco:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and Ms. Kate Simmons on March 1, 2017, about the proposal from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust (LHCT). This issue was previously raised in your November 14, 2016, letter to the Secretary of Veteran's Affairs (VA) and I am responding on behalf of the Secretary on this cemetery development matter.

Once the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) learned that certain members of the community were unaware of our land purchase to build a new columbarium-only national cemetery in Indianapolis, we worked diligently to engage the community. In September 2016, we held a Town Hall meeting at the Indianapolis War Memorial where I, along with NCA staff, spoke with and listened to representatives from various groups, including the Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA). Since the Town Hall, NCA has held formal and informal meetings with IFA and other community representatives.

Based on what we learned through this public engagement process, we significantly revised our cemetery project site plan. The revision preserves more trees than originally planned while maintaining project timelines and the overall operational integrity of the site. I am attaching our public statement on the Crown Hill project, which provides more detail. We continue to believe the site which VA acquired in 2015 builds on NCA's legacy of serving Indianapolis area Veterans and provides a suitable location to begin to serve them again in the timeliest manner.

During our call, I agreed to review the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which I had not reviewed before our call, and to consider whether further discussion was needed. Now that I have reviewed the MOU, I do not believe another call is necessary. While we respect your advocacy and passion, we do not seek to negotiate a land exchange with the LHCT and plan to move forward in a timely fashion to provide a burial option for the Veteran community at Crown Hill.

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Lenore Tedesco, PhD.

I understand this may not be the response you seek but hope that you appreciate VA's mission to serve our Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenn R. Powers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Glenn" being the most prominent.

Glenn R. Powers
Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs
and Cemetery Operations

Enclosure



Land Purchase and Development for Columbaria-Only National Cemetery in Indianapolis, IN.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has a legacy of serving Veterans at Crown Hill National Cemetery, the final resting place of over 2,000 Veterans dating from 1866. Currently, Indianapolis Veterans and their families must travel to Marion National Cemetery, about 60 miles north of Indianapolis to use their VA burial benefits. To remedy this, in September 2015, NCA acquired a 14.75 acre wooded site from Crown Hill Cemetery, Inc. that builds on NCA's legacy of serving Veterans locally.

We take seriously the concerns of local community members and groups regarding the preservation of trees at the Crown Hill site for the planned columbarium-only national cemetery in Indianapolis. In response to what we learned through the public engagement process, NCA instructed the Army Corps of Engineers to revise the site plan to preserve as many mature trees as possible while permitting VA to meet the burial needs of over 250,000 Veterans and families who reside in the Indianapolis metropolitan area.

The Corps was able to revise the plan to retain groves of mature trees, and the revisions will not delay our schedule for the delivery of this burial option for Indianapolis Veterans.

Specifically, this revised plan will retain and incorporate all mature trees measuring 40 inches in caliper (diameter) or greater. Additionally, the plan now retains 73 percent of 30-39 inch caliper trees, a 27 percent increase from the original design. This is in addition to the retention of wetlands areas and an extensive woodland buffer around all areas of planned development.

These groves of retained trees, along with the planting of over 200 new trees, will enhance the project which, when complete, will be a national shrine. NCA is committed to honoring and memorializing the service and sacrifice of Veterans while providing burial options for them, their spouses and other eligible family members.