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PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

MERGER OF THE TAMPA HOUSING AUTHORITY'S WAITLISTS

Overview:

Regulations by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) require that Public Housing agencies provide public notice by publication in a local newspaper of general circulation and in minority media, as well as other suitable means, in accordance with the administrative plan and HUD's fair housing requirements regarding significant changes to administrative policies.

The Tampa Housing Authority currently operates 22 separate and distinct waitlists for different properties and programs. It is the intention of the agency to merge all project-based waitlists to service the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program and merge all project-based waitlists to service the multiple project-based program. Families that have applied to multiple lists will be serviced through one central list.

A meeting will be held September 25, 2019 at 6 pm, at the offices of the Tampa Housing Authority located at 5301 West Cypress Street, Tampa Florida. This meeting will only be held to discuss the merging of waitlists and not for specific applicant waitlist questions.

Dated this 4th Day of September 2019

BUSINESS

Can Tampa Bay's housing void be filled by making it harder to sue banks, developers?

Tampa Bay Times, Graham Brink, gbrink@tampabay.com | Published Aug. 19, 2019



A view of the Ella affordable housing apartment complex in Tampa. (Times files)

The Trump administration wants to make it much harder to sue for alleged discriminatory housing practices.

The controversial move sets up a classic capitalist argument. Which side you come down on likely depends on your confidence in free enterprise. It also could have a lasting effect — for better or worse — on affordable housing in the Tampa Bay area, which many observers say has reached crisis levels.

For years, banks, landlords, developers and others in the housing industry could wind up in court for unintentionally discriminating against minority groups. That is, they created policies that they did not think were discriminatory but turned out to be.

Plaintiffs attorneys didn't have to prove that an apartment owner purposefully refused to lease to African-Americans. They only had to show that the owner had a policy that led to discrimination, deliberately or not.

It's a potent legal tool, known as "disparate impact."

A new rule pushed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development lays out much more stringent standards for plaintiffs to prove their cases. The five-part test includes a requirement to show that statistical disparities were caused by specific policies, not by chance.

Liberal housing advocates contend that the changes amount to an insurmountable burden that will leave minorities vulnerable to discrimination. They've used the existing rule to overturn discriminatory zoning rules and to go after unfair insurance practices. The Justice Department has used the law to collect more than \$500 million from companies accused of bias against minorities.

The advocates argue that lawsuits keep profit-driven companies honest. Those that step over the line know they face a legal slapping.

A particular worry centers on mathematical algorithms, which companies use for pricing, credit scores, marketing and insurance underwriting.

Algorithms "can have starkly discriminatory effects but can operate as a hidden box," the National Fair Housing Alliance said late last week. The "proposed rule could effectively immunize such covert discrimination."

Banks, developers and insurance companies like (and pushed for) the new rule. Why wouldn't they? It means fewer lawsuits, many of which they call frivolous.

They also argue that the threat of getting dinged for inadvertent discrimination curtails innovation. It makes them less likely to experiment with new practices that could promote more affordable housing or lower the cost of insurance. Algorithms could help with those breakthroughs, if only they felt confident they wouldn't get sued for even trying.

Disparate impact "can have unintended consequences, such as causing financial institutions to shrink their operations rather than risk litigation, hurting the very groups it is intended to help," said American Bankers Association president and chief executive Frank Keating in a news release.

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson said the rule change would increase "access to fair and affordable housing."

The rule cannot officially take effect until after a 60-day comment period. Could unshackling banks and insurance companies help fill Tampa Bay's affordable housing void? Or will it have the opposite effect?

We could be just a few months from finding out.

Tampa Housing Authority to Relocate Residents of Buildings Built on Historic Cemetery

Tampa Housing Authority Senior Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer Leroy Moore talks to residents at Robles Park Villages in Tampa, Thursday, August 22, 2019. (Sarah Blazonis/Spectrum Bay News 9)

Spectrum Bay News 9, Sarah Blazonis and Roy De Jesus Hillsborough County | PUBLISHED August 22, 2019 @10:24 PM

TAMPA, Fla. — The **Tampa Housing Authority** addressed Robles Park Village residents for the first time Thursday about what they know about a historic cemetery that existed on the complex. They also heard about plans for their relocation from the site.

- **5 Robles Park Village buildings may have been built on top of Zion Cemetery**
- **Ground-penetrating radar revealed anomalies that could be grave sites**
- **Residents will have options for relocation**
- **More Hillsborough County stories**

"My anxiety level was up high when I found out. I was kind of upset, but ain't no sense of being upset, you know what I'm saying?" said Dania Wiles, who's lived in Robles Park for 11 years. "All we need to do is come to a conclusion about the situation, and then we all can move on."

Tampa Housing Authority Senior Vice President and COO Leroy Moore said officials first became aware that five Robles Park buildings may have been built on top of Zion Cemetery, believed to be the city's first African American resting place, through an investigative report in the Tampa Bay Times.

Moore said that although it was thought bodies were removed before the complex was built in the 1950s and re-interred elsewhere, it's possible an undetermined number may remain.

"Now, understanding what was here and what, unfortunately, may still be interred, I think it's incumbent on the housing authority, the city, the private owners that share this two-and-a-half acre site, to make better decisions today," Moore said.

Residents will have relocation options

At Thursday evening's meeting, representatives from Cardno, a professional infrastructure and environmental services company, told residents that ground-penetrating radar has detected anomalies that could be grave sites.

An analysis is being done to determine if remains were detected or if the radar is picking up disturbances left in the ground from when the bodies were moved. Moore said it's important to find out the truth about what's beneath the complex.

"The only way we're going to find that is to analyze this ground-penetrating radar and to eventually start excavating to confirm whether or not coffins and bodies are still interred here. We certainly don't want to do that process with families living among this area," said Moore.

Moore told residents they'll have three choices when it comes to relocation: they can move to one of 30 vacant Robles units or into one of the housing authority's 30 other properties. Those who want to leave the THA system can choose to get a tenant based voucher and move into a privately-owned Section 8 apartment.

Relocation benefits will be available to help with the cost of moving. Counseling services will also be provided for those who are having a hard time coping with the situation, either with the stress of moving or with the knowledge that they've been living on top of a forgotten cemetery.

"I don't think we heard from any of the family members here today that they want to continue to live on this land," Moore said.

Future for site?

Wiles said she was more upset about learning about the cemetery than about the relocation. She said she'd like to see the site turned into a memorial.

Tampa Housing Authority to Relocate Residents of Buildings Built on Historic Cemetery

Tampa Housing Authority Senior Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer Leroy Moore talks to residents at Robles Park Villages in Tampa, Thursday, August 22, 2019. (Sarah Blazonis/Spectrum Bay News 9)
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"It's important to all nationalities, not just black -- Caucasian, Puerto Rican, don't matter. It's a resting place, and a resting place is supposed to be a resting place," Wiles said.

Moore said he has a similar vision.

"Turn it into a place that people can be respectful of the history of this area. Maybe it becomes a memorial site. Maybe it becomes just an active cemetery," he said.

Building-by-building meetings are expected to begin in two weeks to give residents more information about relocation and let them know what their responsibilities are during the process.

How does a cemetery disappear?

In his investigative report for the Tampa Bay Times, reporter Paul Guzzo wrote about what might be the missing first African American cemetery in Tampa - Zion Cemetery.

But just how does a cemetery disappear for 100 years?

In the process of answering that question, Guzzo unearthed a Hillsborough County public record of the map of Zion Cemetery from 1901.

In his reporting, by the 1920s the records had vanished. It's not until 1951 that developers of the Robles Park Apartments discovered three caskets interred on the property.

Tampa Housing Authority records indicate they talked about re-internment, but there was no effort to look for more bodies.

There were also no state laws at the time that would've prevented developers from building on a possible archaeological site.

Those laws are strictly enforced today.

Forgotten? More like ignored, say people who remember stories of bodies at Zion Cemetery

Researchers are trying to learn what happened to the cemetery where as many as 800 African-Americans were buried in the early 1900s.

Tampa Bay Times, **Paul Guzzo**, Published Aug. 23, 2019

TAMPA — The summer of 1953 started out slow for young Barbara Feliciano. Her family was among the first to move into the new Robles Park Village, a public housing project, so most apartments were empty. There were few other children, says Feliciano, now 75.

Then word spread, she recalls, that sets of human remains had been found near an adjacent storefront along the 3700 block of North Florida Avenue. "That broke an otherwise uneventful life," Feliciano said. But the grownups never told her any more about the bones.

Today, Feliciano believes the remains had emerged from Zion Cemetery, an early 20th century African-American burial ground that once occupied 2 ½ acres now split between that storefront land and a section of Robles Park Village.

It appeared the cemetery had been lost or forgotten until it was revealed again with the publication of a special report June 23 in the *Tampa Bay Times*.

But now, with stories surfacing from Feliciano and others, historians and activists are using a different word to describe what happened to Zion Cemetery — ignored.

"People have said for years that we were built on a cemetery," said Clark Simmons, vice president of the Robles Park Village Tenant Council. "I first heard about it around 1978 from my grandmother. But no one has ever done anything."

The discovery Feliciano describes came on the heels of another find in 1951. That's when the **Tampa Housing Authority** was building a whites-only Robles Park complex and workers came upon three caskets. They were identified as the remains of people who had been buried in Zion Cemetery.

But no sign has emerged that in either 1951 or 1953, any effort was made to see whether more bodies remained beneath the ground. An old map the Times found showed there was room for as many as 800 graves at Zion Cemetery when it was founded in 1901.

In its research, the Times also found 382 death certificates listing Zion as the burial place and reached out to churches that are linked to the cemetery through historical records.

Two parishioners from First Mt. Carmel AME Church recalled older friends telling them years ago that Robles Park Village was built on a cemetery. The parishioners dismissed it as an urban legend.

As Tampa grew, as segregation was outlawed, and as housing patterns changed, Robles Park Village changed from an all-white community to one inhabited largely by people of color.

Over the decades, said Simmons with the tenants' council, the Housing Authority must have heard the stories. "Why didn't they check into it?" Simmons said. Today, they are.

The Housing Authority hired archaeologists to investigate its portion of the former Zion Cemetery. And the agency will relocate the people living in the five buildings located atop the former Zion Cemetery land, even if no human remains are found. The land will be turned into a memorial park honoring the African-American pioneers buried there.



Barbara Feliciano, 75, remembers the discovery of human remains in 1953 on the site of the former Zion Cemetery. Feliciano was 8 at the time and lived nearby in the Robles Park Village public housing complex. ["JAMES BORCHUCK | TIMES" | Tampa Bay Times]

Forgotten? More like ignored, say people who remember stories of bodies at Zion Cemetery

Researchers are trying to learn what happened to the cemetery where as many as 800 African-Americans were buried in the early 1900s.

Tampa Bay Times, **Paul Guzzo**, Published Aug. 23, 2019

As Feliciano recalls, the remains found in 1953 were behind the former Lister's Furniture in the now-empty storefront. The property is owned by restaurateur Richard Gonzmart.

Informed by the Times about Zion Cemetery, he said he hadn't known about it when he purchased the property and is now researching the history of the land.

Feliciano's recollections don't give the Tampa Police Department enough detail to search whether a report was filed about the bodies at the time, said police spokesman Steve Hegarty. "We wandered over and asked what was going on," Feliciano said. "An authoritative figure said we needed to go away because they found skulls and bones." She never did get a glimpse of the remains.

News coverage of the three caskets found in 1951 received widespread news coverage. But the Times found no coverage of remains being found in 1953.

Rodney Kite-Powell with the Tampa Bay History Center said it "is very reasonable to assume" that back in the 1950s, the Housing Authority or the city "would want to cover up the fact" that bodies remained.

"Any burials would be a problem," Kite-Powell said, "so it would have been important to them to keep news of the discoveries out of the public view."

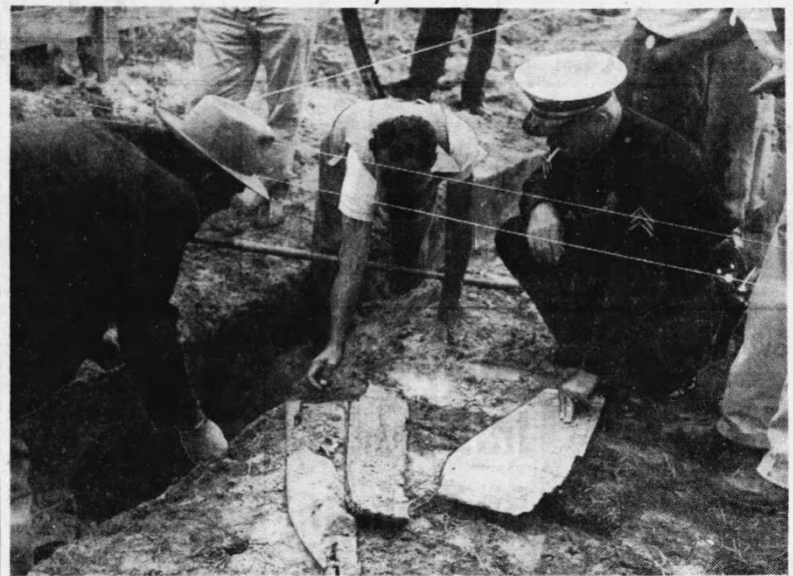
It's clear that concerns raised through the years about bodies on the property went unheeded, said Rebecca O'Sullivan with the Florida Public Archaeology Network at the University of South Florida, part of the archaeological team looking for Zion Cemetery.

"At key points in the past it was ignored by the people who had the evidence to say that there was a cemetery there, but also the power to do something about it," O'Sullivan said.

Zion later "turned into this sort of ghost story that people passed along as a way of remembrance." O'Sullivan heard another story that shows someone in authority knew about Zion through the years, from a woman in her 40s who still lives in Robles Park Village.

The woman remembers finding a small headstone when she was out playing. "She said the city was contacted and that someone came and took the headstone away," O'Sullivan said. "She and her friends tried not to play over there again."

Unmarked Graves Found by Construction Workers



Mystery surrounded the finding today of several unmarked graves on the site of the new 436-unit Robles Park Village housing project which has just been started by Paul Smith Construction Co. Workmen discovered the unidentified graves while digging for foundations on the project at the southeast corner of Ruth and Morgan Sts. Tampa police and detectives were called in to investigate. Shown here are Detective W. R. Bland (left) and Sgt. W. H. Locke (right) as they studied the first of three children's caskets removed by workmen. The most puzzling aspects in the finding of the skeletal remains were: How old is the cemetery? Who knows the identity of those buried there, and what should be done with the remains unearthed by the workmen? —Times Photo.

Newspapers.com This is a clipping from the Tampa Daily Times dated Nov. 16, 1951 which stated that several unmarked graves were mistakingly dug up during the construction of Robles Park Village in Tampa. The article accompanying this photograph states that the bodies were part of Zion Cemetery and that they were supposed to be moved in 1925. [TAMPA DAILY TIMES | Newspapers.com/Tampa Daily Times]

Zion Cemetery is 'holy ground' so Housing Authority will move those living there

After talks with the tenant council and federal housing officials, and as the search for bodies continues, the agency has decided not to wait.

Tampa Bay Times, [Paul Guzzo](#) | Published August 23, 2019

TAMPA — Shaniquia King says her children, 2 and 4, are afraid to sleep knowing their apartment stands on land once occupied by Zion Cemetery — an early 20th century African-American burial ground.

As many as 800 people may have been buried there, but no one knows yet whether they were moved before a storefront, warehouses and part of the Robles Park Village apartments were built there through the years.

King was unnerved, too, when she learned that caskets may lie beneath her floors — not out of a fear of ghosts but concern that a sacred place for the city's black pioneers has been forgotten.

"This just feels wrong," said King, 25. "It makes me sad to be here."

She won't be there much longer.

The **Tampa Housing Authority**, owner of the apartments, announced at a tenants meeting Thursday that relocation will begin within two weeks for the 96 people who live in the five apartments built on Zion Cemetery land.

The *Tampa Bay Times* revealed the existence of the long-forgotten Zion Cemetery in a special report June 23 and the Housing Authority commissioned a search of its property.

Last week, the authority said finding just one casket would trigger relocation. But now, after talks with the Robles Park Tenant Council and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the agency has decided not to wait.



Robles Park resident Clark Simmons listens to a presentation by archaeologists during an informational meeting at Robles Park Village community center. The Tampa Housing Authority held the meeting to discuss Zion Cemetery. "JAMES BORCHUCK | Times" | Tampa Bay Times



Residents listen to a presentation by Senior Archaeologist Eric Prendergast during a meeting for residents at Robles Park Village community center Thursday, Aug. 22, 2019 in Tampa, FL. The housing authority held the meeting to discuss Zion Cemetery. "JAMES BORCHUCK | Times" | Tampa Bay Times

"It was holy ground," Leroy Moore, chief operating officer, told tenants attending the meeting at the Robles community center. "It should still be considered sacred."

The 2½ acres once occupied by the cemetery is split nearly evenly between Robles Park Village and restaurateur Richard Gonzmart, whose property along the 3700 block of N. Florida Ave. contains a warehouse and a vacant storefront.

The Housing Authority's portion will be turned into a memorial park managed by the city of Tampa when Robles Park Village is redeveloped in the coming years. The Housing Authority hopes Gonzmart also turns over his land for the memorial park.

Tenants cheered the announcement Thursday.

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Tampa Bay Times, [Paul Guzzo](#) | Published August 23, 2019

"It is important to Tampa history," Moore told them. "We want to do the right thing and be respectful of that." All told, Robles Park Village now is home to 1,118 people in 483 units across 67 buildings.

Zion Cemetery, established in 1901, had room for some 800 burial plots plus a potters field for people who were indigent or unidentified.

It faded from public consciousness around a century ago and was parceled out for development.

The *Tampa Bay Times* discovered 382 death certificates for Zion. A cemetery historian claims to have found 747.

Three bodies in caskets were unearthed when Robles Park was built in 1951 but there is no sign anyone checked whether others also remained.

"This shouldn't have happened," Housing Authority president Jerome Ryans told tenants at Thursday's meeting. "It is regrettable. But now we have to deal with it. This is a tough situation."

The Housing Authority hired archaeologists to search the cemetery property for graves. Ground penetrating radar has turned up anomalies but determining whether they're graves requires more analysis.



Senior Archaeologist Eric Prendergast points out the boundaries of Zion Cemetery during an informational meeting for residents at Robles Park Village community center. "JAMES BORCHUCK | Times" | Tampa Bay Times

Tenants forced to move from the five buildings — two-thirds of them under 18 — can choose from among other public housing complexes or homes available through federal Section 8 vouchers.

Or they can move to one of the 30 homes that are vacant elsewhere in Robles Park Village.

Option No. 3 drew laughter at Thursday's meetings from those who live in the aging complex.

"We want to get out of here," tenant King said.

Still, she is nervous about a move.

"I don't know what to expect or where I will end up," she said. "It's overwhelming."

The Housing Authority is providing counselors — to those struggling to cope with a move as well as those disturbed at living on a cemetery.

"What bothers me is thinking of the people who were buried here," King said. "They didn't have a voice to stop something terrible."

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Neighbors living on forgotten Tampa cemetery will be relocated

People living in a public housing complex will need to be relocated.

WTSP 10 News, Author: Emerald Morrow, Updated: 7:11 PM EDT August 26, 2019



TAMPA, Fla. — The **Tampa Housing Authority** will relocate close to 100 people living in a public housing complex that sits on top of the city's first black cemetery that was forgotten until now.

"Back in the 1950s, someone just didn't care for the needs or the concerns of African Americans," said Reva Iman, president of the Robles Park Resident Council. "I'm grateful that the people that are stepping forward...to make this right by our ancestors."

Iman has lived in Robles Park Village for three years and was outraged upon learning the housing authority paved over the Zion Cemetery grounds decades ago.

"I just can't tell you how I feel right now that they would do this to the first Black cemetery and our people, my people," she said. "They are definitely doing the right thing by moving those individuals."

Alice Hiraldo lives in one of the five buildings where residents will be displaced. She says she is ready to move from the aging complex but is frustrated that she never knew about the cemetery.

"If they knew about it before they built the building, why didn't they dig more before they built these apartments?" she asked. "I hope they do it fast so we can move..."

An investigation by the Tampa Bay Times sparked renewed urgency in finding out what happened to the cemetery and why it was lost from the city's memory.

The housing authority has vowed to do whatever it takes to find out if bodies remain at the site along N. Florida Ave. The agency has invested in contractors who are using ground-penetrating radar to make that determination. The CEO and COO have both said the site will be turned into a memorial no matter what happens.

"We're going to take it upon ourselves to be very proactive," spokesperson Lillian Stringer said.

The relocation process for residents will begin over the next 30 to 45 days, and neighbors will have three options when moving.

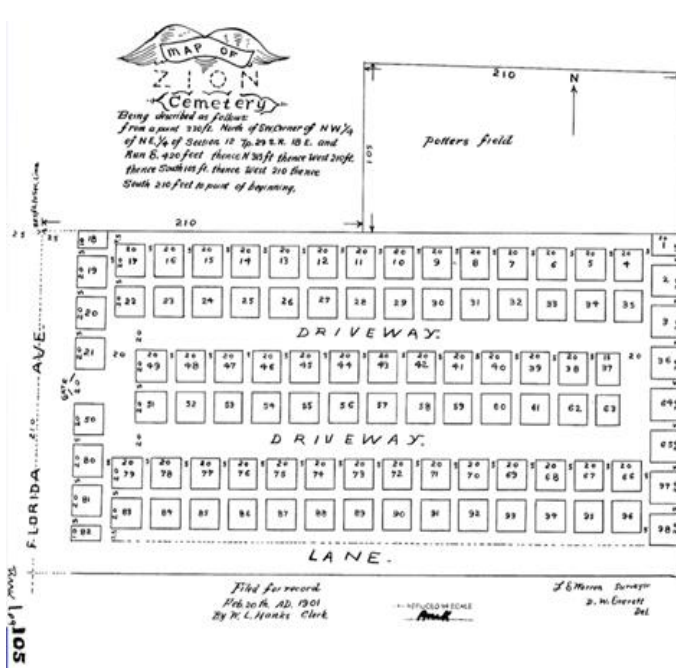
"We explained to them if they still want to stay in Robles Park, they can stay there," Stringer said. "If they wanted to move to other properties where we may have vacancies, they can also do that.

"Or the third option would be to provide them with a Section 8 voucher."

Relocating residents will mean a longer delay for the tens of thousands of people on the THA waitlist, but neighbors and city leaders say it's necessary.

"This is a priority. The dead has spoken, and that's how I see it," said Orlando Gudes, city councilman for District 5. "There was an injustice done, and now it's come alive now and been exposed and we have to move on our situation right now.

"And it's unfortunate some may be pushed back a little bit, but we've got to move on the situation at hand."



Tampa Bay History Center

Tackling Affordable Housing in the Bay

Capital Analytics Associates | Writer: Max Crampton-Thomas | August 29, 2019



2 min read August 2019 — Growth in the Tampa Bay region has been twofold, with a significant boom in the economy and the population. As the population grows so does the need for more affordable housing options in the region. While there has been a notable increase in the development of luxury apartments and multifamily units, which are popping up all over Downtown, there is a notable deficit of affordable housing options. Mayor Jane Castor, her administration and community organizations like the **Tampa Housing Authority** recognize that they must work together to find- a solution for this problem.

Since her election in April, Mayor Castor has identified access to affordable housing solutions as one of her top priorities, as noted when she spoke with *Invest.* “In reality, the most pressing issues in our community are transportation, affordable housing and workforce development.” She has since taken action to address the housing issue with the recent formation of the Affordable Housing Advisory Team as part of her “Transforming Tampa’s Tomorrow” transition. The role of the advisory team will be to ensure home ownership for all residents in Tampa regardless of economic status. It will be one of five advisory teams guiding the mayor’s strategic vision for addressing key issues in Tampa Bay.

One of the members of the Affordable Housing Advisory Team is Leroy Moore, the senior vice resident and chief operating officer for the Tampa Housing Authority. The Authority is not only focused on providing housing assistance to low-income residents. Its role has evolved over the years to better address the affordable housing issue in the region. *Invest.* recently spoke with Moore, who discussed how the Authority is addressing this need. “The Housing Authority has evolved to not only manage affordable housing, but also to redevelop this housing into real estate that functions as more than just a roof over someone’s head. We consistently ask ourselves what else does a community need? A community needs jobs, quality food and transportation accessibility, which brings in the need for collaboration with transportation agencies in the region. We can meet the needs of the community by developing housing, especially affordable and attainable housing, around accessible transit options. Great transit translates into better housing costs.”

The Authority’s actions to tackle affordable housing include the redevelopment of a 28-acre superblock of public housing that will be known as the Encore District. In his discussion with *Invest.*, *Moore spoke* about the Authority’s approach to this development and how it differs from the original construction., “Seventy-five years ago, the Tampa Housing Authority developed a 28-acre superblock of public housing on the doorstep of what is now Downtown. Seventy-five years later, we are redeveloping that site and realizing that its potential today is far greater than what was ever imagined back then. Instead of just having a 28-acre single-use affordable housing community, we now have 12 city blocks of diverse development called the Encore District.” He continued: “Encore will be a LEED Gold neighborhood development community. All the buildings have a commitment to be LEED Silver or higher. We replaced the affordable and workforce housing and increased the number of affordable units on that exact same footprint. We are also adding other uses like hotels, museums, schools, market-rate housing and grocery stores all within the same 28-acre area.”

The need for more affordable housing is not an issue that will resolve itself and will only continue to manifest into a larger challenge as the population in Tampa Bay grows. The solution is not clear-cut, but community leaders like Mayor Castor and Moore are working to find actionable answers.

To learn more about our interviewees, visit:

<https://www.tampagov.net/>

<https://www.thafl.com/>

Images of Forgotten Black Burial Ground Revealed; City to Relocate Tenants

Spectrum Bay News 9, Dave Jordan, Hillsborough County | PUBLISHED 5:23 PM EDT Aug. 30, 2019



TAMPA, Fla. — Archaeologists hired by the city to locate a forgotten African-American burial ground revealed radar images of the site at a **Tampa Housing Authority** meeting on Friday.

The grainy images of an estimated 126 coffins underneath the Robles Park Apartment Complex near Stratford and Moore in Tampa reduced some in the room to tears.

"These people were lost and forgotten purposely, and I don't think anyone in their right mind would want to continue to live on top of these people," said Clark Simmons, vice president of the Robles Park Village Tenants Council.

An investigative report back in June revealed the complex was built over the Zion Cemetery back in the 1950s. The cemetery dates back to 1901. Leroy Moore, senior vice president with the Tampa Housing Authority, said the agency knew nothing about the complex being built on top of the cemetery until that report was published.

The city is now working to relocate 29 families to other units. "We're well underway with getting our families notified and trying to make sure that we are there to meet whatever needs they have," Moore said.

As that happens, others are now wondering how best to honor those forgotten and paved over.

"My voice said it's ways in which dignity can be brought to those who have been buried on the site," said Connie Burton, a community activist.

Tenant relocations could take about two months to begin.

NEWS/TAMPA

More than 120 coffins found buried at forgotten Zion Cemetery, now an apartment complex

Ground-penetrating radar detected the objects at Tampa's Robles Park Village. Could they be something else? "That would be too big of a coincidence."

Tampa Bay Times, Paul Guzzo, Published August 30, 2019

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Ground-penetrating radar has detected what appear to be more than 120 coffins under an apartment complex in Tampa, the remains of the lost cemetery revealed by the *Tampa Bay Times*.

The 2½-acre, segregation-era burial ground, believed to be the city's first for African-Americans, was built in 1901 along the 3700 block of Florida Ave. and extended back around 400 feet.

It disappeared nearly a century ago when the land was parceled off for white developments.

No one could find it until now.

It has been confirmed that Zion is still there, parts of it at least, under ground that today is home to the back of the Robles Park Village public housing complex owned by the **Tampa Housing Authority**.

Archaeologist Eric Prendergast described the find: "Reflections of rectangular objects that are the size and shape of coffins between four and six feet in depth."

Prendergast is principal project investigator for private archaeological assessment company Cardno, hired by the Housing Authority to investigate whether occupied graves remain on its land.

"The reflections are arranged in rows and oriented east-west within boundaries of a former cemetery," Prendergast added.

Asked if the shapes could show something other than caskets, Paul Jones, project manager for Cardno, replied, "That would be too big of a coincidence."

The *Times* published a special report about the forgotten cemetery in June, prompting the Housing Authority to hire the archaeologists.

During a nine-month search, the *Times* pieced together the cemetery's lost history but found no evidence of a mass reburial.

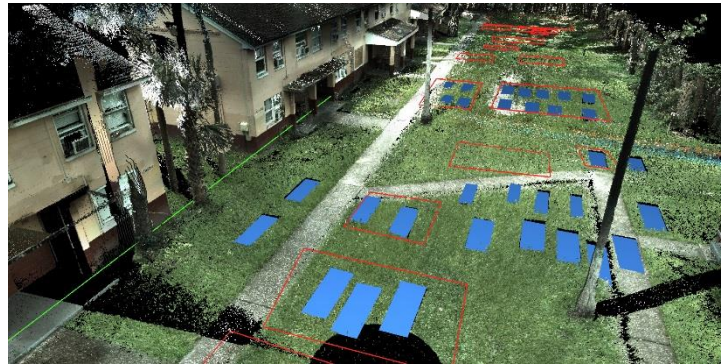
In response to the report, the Housing Authority set up the Zion Cemetery Archaeological Consultation Committee. The committee has members from the authority, the city of Tampa, the NAACP, Florida Public Archaeology Network at the University of South Florida, Robles Park Apartments Residents Council and Cardno.

Cardno informed the committee at its meeting Friday that the caskets had been found. Reva Iman, president of the Robles Park Village Tenants Council, walked out of the meeting room in tears.

Overall, the archaeologists have discovered what they believe to be 126 caskets. There are likely more to be found, they said.

The radar likely missed some. It also cannot detect century-old human remains if they weren't buried in a coffin. It was typical in the early 1900s for poor African-Americans to be buried in fabric shrouds. Old bones would be too deteriorated for the radar to find.

In addition, the portion of Robles Park Village that was once Zion Cemetery has five apartment buildings. Radar cannot scan through their floors.



This image is a 3D laser scan of Robles Park Village showing grave-shaped objects beneath the ground in relation to buildings at the public housing complex. The single image is made from two data sources and aligns with historical maps of the former Zion Cemetery. [CARDNO| Cardno]

NEWS/TAMPA

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Tampa Bay Times, Paul Guzzo, Published August 30, 2019

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What's more, Cardno had access to less than 40 percent of the Zion property — the portion owned by the Housing Authority. The rest is owned by restaurateur Richard Gonzmart, who has said he is conducting his own research into the history of the property.

"Everywhere we have tested that one would assume has a burial ... has proven to have burials," Prendergast said. "Therefore, we can predict the rest of the cemetery has burials, unless they were removed."

Cardno cannot be certain, though, without surveying the rest of the site.

Gonzmart plans to build a culinary school on his property. He aims to train low-income people there for careers that can set them on a path to a better life.

But now that the property is known to be a "previously marked cemetery," Gonzmart will have to have a study done to determine if bodies are there before he can build, said Jeff Moates, regional director for the Florida Public Archaeology Network.

If human remains are found there, too, Gonzmart could still build but not before moving the bodies to a cemetery.

The Housing Authority has said it will not remove any of the bodies.

When the agency redevelops the 67-building Robles Park site in the coming years, the Zion Cemetery land will be turned into a memorial park operated by the city. The park will honor the pioneering African-Americans buried there.

The Housing Authority hopes Gonzmart will add his Zion Cemetery property to the park.

Relocation soon will begin for the people living the five Robles Park Village buildings that occupy the burial ground, all in the 200 block of East Stratford and East Kentucky avenues.

The *Times* discovered death certificates for 382 people who were buried in Zion. A cemetery historian who conducted followup research said he found 747.

Zion had room for some 800 graves plus a potter's field for the indigent and unknown. The potter's field contained 27 of the caskets found by the archaeologists.

In 1951, the Housing Authority unearthed three caskets during construction of Robles Park Village but did not search for more. At the time, the apartment complex was open to whites only.

It is possible, the archaeologists said, that some bodies have been moved through the years and others were left behind.

"It's possible that there are coffins without bodies," Cardno project manager Jones said. "It is possible there are remains of coffins. It is possible that there are completely undisturbed coffins. We won't be able to answer anything definitively until the next step of the process."

The next step would be to dig into the ground in a way that they leave the bodies undisturbed.

The Housing Authority has not yet decided whether that will be done.



The Tampa Housing Authority held a meeting to discuss findings from the archaeological firm Cardno on the location of Zion Cemetery Thursday in Tampa. JAMES BORCHUCK | Times [JAMES BORCHUCK | Times]

Residents forced to move after more than 100 possible coffins found under Tampa apartment complex

ABC Action News, Isabel Rosales | Posted: 11:26 PM, Aug 30, 2019 | Updated: 11:54 PM, Aug 30, 2019



TAMPA, Fla. -- Residents at a Tampa apartment complex are being forced to move after a shocking discovery.

It turns out, they were living on top of a long-lost African American cemetery.

"This grassy area has the bulk of remains," said Connie Burton, who lived at the **Robles Park Village** on Florida Avenue for about 20 years.

In that grassy area, an archaeologist used a radar to discover more than 120 possible coffins.

The Tampa Bay Times linked the forgotten 1900s Zion cemetery, likely the first in Tampa for African American, to this current-day public housing complex. The report prompted the housing authority to investigate.

"As a child, we had heard that this used to be a memorial site but we paid little attention to it because you know, at the time we needed housing," Burton said.

Yvette Lewis, the president of Hillsborough County's NAACP said she was shocked about the discovery.

"It's time for the city to right its wrong," Lewis said.

Lewis said for these black pioneers who died in a still-fledgling city, there is no rest.

"People's resting place are where they are supposed to rest," Lewis said. "And the souls can't even rest because it has been disturbed."

Burton commended the housing authority for the way they handled this revelation. She said she was pleased the housing authority is turning the cemetery site into a memorial.

The housing authority will relocate nearly 30 families living at the complex.

'The souls can't rest:' Apartment complex residents forced to move after 120+ possible coffins found

FOX 6 NOW | POSTED 1:57 PM, AUGUST 31, 2019, BY CNN WIRE SERVICE



TAMPA, Fla. — Residents at a Tampa apartment complex were being forced to move after a shocking discovery. As it turned out, they were living on top of an African-American cemetery.

"This grassy area has the bulk of remains," said Connie Burton, who lived at the Robles Park Village on Florida Avenue for about 20 years.

In that grassy area, an archaeologist used a radar to discover more than 120 possible coffins.

The Tampa Bay Times linked the forgotten 1900s Zion Cemetery, likely the first in Tampa for African-Americans, to the current public housing complex. The report prompted the **Tampa Housing Authority** to investigate.

"As a child, we had heard that this used to be a memorial site, but we paid little attention to it because, you know, at the time, we needed housing," Burton said.

Yvette Lewis, the president of Hillsborough County's NAACP, said she was shocked by the discovery.

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Burton commended the Tampa Housing Authority for the way they handled this revelation. She said she was pleased the Housing Authority was turning the cemetery site into a memorial.

The Housing Authority was set to relocate nearly 30 families living at the complex.

FLORIDA

Forgotten cemetery with over 120 coffins found buried beneath Tampa apartment complex

Fox News, David Aaro | September 1, 2019

Ground-penetrating radar has uncovered what is believed to be more than 120 coffins under an apartment complex in Tampa, Florida.

The remains appear to be part of the lost Zion Cemetery, Tampa's first segregation-era burial ground, established in 1901 at the 3700 block of Florida Ave.

The 2 1/2-acre burial ground disappeared nearly 100 years ago when the land was divided up and sold for white developments, according to the Tampa Bay Times.

Residents at the Robles Park Village public housing complex began to understand on Friday they had been living above a forgotten cemetery *with upwards of 100 bodies underneath them*.

"Those people are still there," vice president of the tenant council, Clark Simmons, told the Tampa Bay Times.

The cemetery was discovered by Cardno, a private archaeological assessment company hired by the owner of the housing complex, the Tampa Bay Housing Authority, following a report by the Tampa Bay Times about the lost Zion Cemetery back in June. Images from the radar uncovered rectangular objects in the ground organized in rows.

"Reflections of rectangular objects that are the size and shape of coffins between 4 and 6 feet in depth," said Eric Prendergast, the principal project investigator for Cardno. "The reflections are arranged in rows and oriented east-west within boundaries of a former cemetery."

Benefits of the Multi-Channel Ground Penetrating Radar developed by Cardno (MCGPR) include: "Finding unknown utilities, determining underground non-utility anomalies -- like construction rubble, voids in the soil, presence of rebar, and so on."

The Housing Authority says Zion Cemetery land will be transformed into a memorial park honoring the African-Americans buried there when they redevelop Robles Park Village in the following years. The agency says they will not remove any of the bodies currently resting there.

For those who live in the five Robles Park Village buildings, residents will be forced to relocate soon. The complex consists of 1,118 people living in 483 units.

"As a child, we had heard that this used to be a memorial site, but we paid little attention to it because, you know, at the time, we needed housing," Connie Burton, who has lived at Robles Park Village for roughly 20 years, told WFTS.

No one appeared to try and find it until now. The next process will be determining how many bodies are still buried.

"It's possible that there are coffins without bodies," said Paul Jones, the project manager for Cardno. "It is possible there are remains of coffins. It is possible that there are completely undisturbed coffins. We won't be able to answer anything definitively until the next step of the process."



Ground-penetrating radar has uncovered what is believed to be over 120 coffins under an apartment complex in Tampa, Florida. It is part of the lost Zion Cemetery, Tampa's first segregated-era burial ground established in 1901. (Tampa Housing Authority)

NATION-WORLD

Housing authority believes it found nearly 130 coffins from Tampa's first Black cemetery

A large portion of the cemetery was paved over in the 1950s when the housing authority built the Robles Park public housing complex.

11ALIVE.COM, Emerald Morrow | Published: 2:30 PM EDT August 30, 2019 | Updated: 2:26 PM EDT September 2, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The **Tampa Housing Authority** believes it has close to 130 coffins from Zion Cemetery, which was the first black cemetery for the city.

A large portion of the cemetery was paved over in the 1950s when the housing authority built the Robles Park public housing complex along North Florida Avenue.

Construction crews unearthed three caskets, but work continued anyway.

Leroy Moore, chief operating officer for the housing authority, said about 130 anomalies were reported from archaeologists who conducted a ground-penetrating radar search of the section of Robles Park that overlaps with historical maps of Zion Cemetery.

He said the GPR only covered about 30 percent of the Zion site, so it's still possible there are other graves that exist off-site from Robles Park.

The housing authority recently announced its plans to move 96 residents from five buildings at Robles Park that sit on top of the old cemetery grounds. The story came to THA's attention initially through an investigation by the Tampa Bay Times.

"Certainly, no one today can justify the activities that occurred back in the late 40s and 50s, but the people around today are the people that can right that wrong," Moore said in June.

"Black lives mattered back in 1941, just like they matter today," said Moore. "And if a cemetery is not respected and the process back then, we would never redevelop a cemetery today. And with all the EPA and environmental processes that are in place today, for good reason, this could never happen."

"But this did happen 60 and 70 years ago. We can't account for the decisions they made. We can look back at it and say they were wrong decisions, and we can right that wrong today. And I think all the parties today are working to right that wrong. But why should it matter? Because it's history. It's Tampa's history. It's black history. it's just the dignified, appropriate thing to do at any period of time."

MONEY > CONSUMER ALERTS > TAKING ACTION FOR YOU

Tampa woman with disability takes housing authority to federal court for discrimination

She accused the agency of handicap discrimination

ABC Action News, Jackie Callaway | Posted: 3:28 PM, Sep 03, 2019 | Updated: 6:15 PM, Sep 03, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. -- A tenant with a disability accused the **Tampa Housing Authority** of discrimination in a federal lawsuit filed last month.

The case started with a knee injury, which prevents Rhonda Torres from walking without the use of a leg brace or crutch.

"When it gets too painful, I just lean on my crutch," Torres told ABC Action News.

Torres relies on a disability paycheck and Section 8 housing vouchers to get by.

She said she also relies on her daughter Ashley, who helps with everything -- from groceries and laundry to picking up her up when she falls.

"My bones are going outward and sometimes I slip and fall," said Torres.

But the Tampa Housing Authority does not consider her daughter a live-in caregiver and the agency told Torres she would lose her housing subsidy if Ashley does not move out.

"I don't know what else to do," said Torres. "I just think it is unfair."



Rhonda relies on her daughter to help her with everyday tasks like getting groceries, doing the laundry and picking her up when she falls. But Rhonda tells ABC Action News the housing authority is telling her she would lose her housing subsidy if her daughter does not move out.



Taking Action Reporter Jackie Callaway was in federal court on Wednesday as Torres' attorney made her case.

Torres federal lawsuit accused the housing authority of "handicap discrimination."

During an hour-long hearing in federal court last Wednesday, an attorney for the housing authority argued because Torres' daughter helps her pay rent, she cannot be designated as a caregiver under federal housing rules.

But Martin Lawyer, the Bay Area Legal Services attorney representing Torres, said the law is on his side, telling ABC Action News, "That rule does not apply to my client's situation."

Late Tuesday the federal judge dismissed Torres' lawsuit, saying her request was out of line with housing authority policy. Her lawyer has not decided yet whether to appeal.

LOCAL

These people have coffins under their yards. Now they have to move.

Archaeologists from USF searched through part of Robles Park Village with ground-penetrating radar.
10News, Emerald Morrow | Published: 6:20 PM EDT September 2, 2019 | Updated: 2:05 PM EDT September 3, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The 96 residents at a public housing development who learned last week that close to 130 coffins from Tampa's first Black cemetery still existed in their yards are preparing to move.

The **Tampa Housing Authority** plans to move the residents out of five buildings at Robles Park Village so that more archaeological work can be done and so the site of the forgotten Zion Cemetery can be turned into a memorial.

"I think whenever you got to move, you got that anxiety because you got to uplift, you have to move and then you have to worry about where you going to move to," said Michael Randolph, who currently lives in Robles Park Village. "So those are the things I think are going consistently through residents: 'Wow, I got to go and where do I go?'"

The Tampa Bay Times first reported in June that hundreds of graves from the old Zion Cemetery of the early 1900s along North Florida Avenue were unaccounted for, and could still be underneath part of the housing development. The investigation also prompted immediate action from the housing authority, including relocations and an archaeological search of the site.

10News was there when archaeologists from USF and Cardno searched through part of Robles Park Village with ground-penetrating radar. On Friday, archaeologists released the findings of their research, confirming close to 130 coffin-shaped anomalies underground at the housing complex.

"I think everyone felt emotional," said THA COO Leroy Moore. "There's still that, you know, in many of our stomachs about actually seeing these radar images reflective of people that were laid to rest still there."

In the early 1950s when the Tampa Housing Authority was building Robles Park Village, construction crews paved over the Zion Cemetery graves. This is despite finding three caskets on the site.

"Looking at the time period, an attitude toward black lives in general back then, I'm not surprised they...built something over here, because as you know, we was considered to be trash, objects. Things that's not important. So, I'm frustrated because of that," said Randolph. "And to add insult to injury, to say this is the first Black cemetery and that these units were built over top of it with no respect, so that frustrated me as well. So that's why I'm glad the housing authority is moving on this..."

On Monday, Moore said his agency will hold meetings Tuesday and Wednesday to present a draft of the relocation plan to the 96 affected residents. Those residents will be allowed to give input on the plan, and will ultimately be given three options: move to another unit in Robles, move to another public housing complex or receive a Section 8 voucher.

Relocations are expected to start in the next 30-60 days.

INFLUENCE

Janet Cruz calls for state task force to identify remains at forgotten Zion Cemetery

The site contains the graves of at least 120 African Americans.

Florida Politics, By Janelle Irwin Taylor on September 5, 2019

State Sen. Janet Cruz is taking action on behalf of hundreds of African Americans who died in Tampa more than a century ago.

Following a Tampa Bay Times investigation this summer, the Tampa Democrat filed a bill Wednesday to create a task force to study unmarked and long-forgotten graves at the former Zion Cemetery that now serves as a backyard to **Robles Park Village public housing** in Tampa Heights.

Her bill (SB 220) would allocate \$500,000 to study the remains at the 2.5-acre segregation-era burial ground. Of that money, \$50,000 would pay for a historical monument to honor the deceased buried there — and then lost for a century. The rest would cover funeral and reinternment costs for next of kin of those buried at the site.

The Times investigation in June found death certificates for 382 people buried at the site between 1913 and 1920, but because record-keeping during that time was not as thorough as it was for white burials, there could be even more.

Radar images taken last month identified 120 coffins at the site.

Cruz's bill references the "millions" of slaves throughout the U.S. until the end of the Civil War as well as ongoing discrimination that included segregating burial sites for African Americans.

"Unlike predominantly white cemeteries and burial grounds, African American cemeteries and burial grounds were not subject to regulations and record-keeping necessary to protect the dignity of the deceased," her bill reads. "As a result, many abandoned African American cemeteries and burial grounds have been inadvertently discovered following years of disrepair and neglect when land is being redeveloped or has been sold."

The prescribed task force studying abandoned African American cemeteries would work under the purview of the Department of State. It would include the Secretary of State (or their designee) as well as representatives from the Bureau of Archaeological Research, the Florida NAACP, the Florida Council of Churches, the Florida African American Heritage Preservation Network, the Florida Public Archaeology Network and one representative from the cemetery industry.

"Creating a task force to identify cemeteries in Florida that were abandoned or built over, like Zion Cemetery, is an important step to make sure all those who made Florida what it is today are honored and respected," Cruz said. "All human remains are afforded equal protection under Florida law. Equal protection and respect were not a reality experienced by those buried at Zion Cemetery and so many other African American Floridians. I am proud to sponsor this important legislation to make sure those who shaped the history of our state are honored and memorialized properly."

The group would meet for the first time Aug. 1, 2020 and continue meeting as many times as necessary to accomplish its goals.

Those goals include identifying remains and forming suggestions for finding relatives who can then reintern and memorialize their lost family members.

The task force would work with the University of South Florida to identify remains. Exhumed bodies would remain in USF's custody until family members were identified and notified.

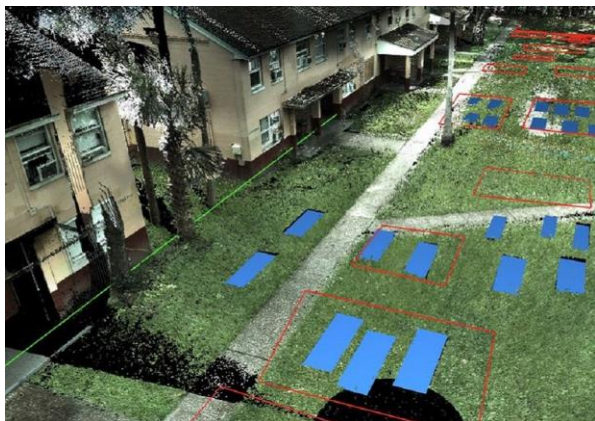
Family members could be reimbursed up to \$7,500 for funeral, burial and grave marker expenses. That amount can also be payable directly to a funeral provider. Charitable contributions for reburial and funeral-related services are not reimbursable.

Cruz's bill does not yet have a companion in the House.



Lost African American cemetery with over 120 coffins found under apartment complex in Florida

FACE 2 FACE AFRICA, THEODORA AIDOO | Contributor | September 05, 2019 at 10:29 am | [HISTORY, NEWS](#)



A 3D laser scan of Robles Park Village showing grave-shaped objects beneath the ground in relation to buildings at the public housing complex. Pic credit: Tampa Bay Times

Authorities in Florida, U.S., have discovered a long-lost cemetery with over 120 coffins beneath a public housing complex along North Florida Avenue in Tampa's black community.

The cemetery, known as 'Zion Cemetery', was established in 1901 and believed to be the city's first cemetery for African Americans. Reports say a portion of Robles Park Village, which is owned by the [Tampa Bay Housing Authority](#), was built on top of the cemetery in the 1950s.

For many years, there were little details about the burial ground and the people buried there until *Tampa Bay Times'* special report published in June indicated that five Robles Park village apartment complexes were built on rows of caskets.

In June, *Tampa Bay Times*, upon seeing death certificates of 382 people, published names of people believed to be buried at the 2½-acre cemetery that disappeared a century ago.

Following the report, a survey commissioned by the Housing Authority using ground-penetrating radar identified 126 caskets with more properties yet to be studied.

Reacting to the discovery, Archaeologist Eric Prendergast, who was hired by the Housing Authority to investigate whether occupied graves remain on its land, described finding reflections of rectangular objects that are the size and shape of coffins between four and six feet in depth.

"The reflections are oriented east-west within boundaries of a former cemetery and arranged in rows", Prendergast told reporters.

This discovery came as a shock to many people whose families have lived for generations in Tampa but knew nothing about the graves.

A local historian, who led a downtown walking tour, said: "Their story needs to be told". "African-American history is American history."

Even though there are likely more, the archaeologists have discovered what they believe to be 126 caskets. This is because they only had access to the cemetery property portion owned by the Housing Authority.

The rest is reportedly owned by restaurateur Richard Gonzmart who had plans to build a culinary school on the property.

However, regional director for the Florida Public Archaeology Network, Jeff Moates, said Gonzmart will have to determine whether there are bodies there before he can build the culinary school.

According to the Housing Authority, the park will honor the pioneering African-Americans buried there and relocation will begin soon for the people living the five Robles Park Village buildings that occupy the burial ground.

There are 67 buildings with 1,118 people living in Robles Park village.



A 1901 map of the forgotten Zion Cemetery. Photo Credit: Tampa Bay Times

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

New bill calls for bodies at Zion Cemetery to be dug up, not everyone is supportive

Tampa Housing Authority are not totally supportive of the bill that would take a deeper look at Zion Cemetery.
10 News, WTSP, Author: Emerald Morrow | Published: 7:13 PM EDT September 5, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The discovery of close to 130 coffins from Tampa's first black cemetery has prompted action from a local state legislator who wants to see a state task force formed, bodies exhumed and reimbursements to descendants of those buried at the site.

Sen. Janet Cruz filed SB 220 this week after a Tampa Bay Times investigation helped lead the Tampa Housing Authority to find the coffins from the forgotten Zion Cemetery.

The coffins are underneath the Robles Park Village public housing development, which overlaps with the cemetery. During the construction of Robles Park Village in the 1950s, construction crews found three caskets on-site, but historical records provided no evidence of any further investigation. Crews continued on with construction over the cemetery site.



The bill calls for a partnership with the University of South Florida for a deeper investigation of the Zion Cemetery that would include exhuming bodies and offering financial support to descendants of those interred at the cemetery for costs related to reinterment, grave markers and funerals.

When they learned about the cemetery, the **Tampa Housing Authority** immediately brought in archaeologists who used ground-penetrating radar to search the site. The agency also decided to start the relocation process for 96 residents living within the cemetery boundaries where bodies were found.

Despite expressing disappointment at previous administrations' lack of concern for the Zion site, and despite immediate action taken upon discovery of a cemetery, housing authority officials are not totally supportive of the new bill.

Tampa Housing Authority COO Leroy Moore said in a statement to 10News:

THA was not consulted on this but we appreciate and respect our elected officials wanting to create a process for identifying statewide such "lost" African American cemeteries. We however don't agree that in the case of ZION the cemetery should be moved as it seems to suggest in the Bill. This seems to be an intact cemetery, furthermore the site itself, even without human remains, is of historical importance to Tampa being the City's first such cemetery. The expressed belief that... "once a cemetery, always a cemetery" we think stands for Zion. We have no desire to want to remove and reinter people who were laid to rest over 100 years ago. This site is best suitable in our opinion for re-assembly under one ownership and preserved as historic Zion cemetery. And we hope that the owners can all come to agreement on that goal and work to achieve that result. We will be offering to Janet Cruz some suggestions now that we know about this proposed Bill. And hope that the language can be revised to recognize that in some instances it should allow for the preservation of such cemeteries or former cemeteries. Perhaps by creating a reacquisition vehicle which can reacquire such lands for preservation and memorialization of Zion and similar such found cemeteries.

Who's accountable for the tragedy of Zion Cemetery? Chasing a century-old mystery.

The discovery of caskets under a public housing project raises questions about how it happened: 'They did something wrong and need be charged publicly.'

Tampa Bay Times, By Paul Guzzo | Published: Thursday, September 05, 2019



The Kennedy family plot is among the most elaborate at historic Oaklawn Cemetery in downtown Tampa. Henry P. Kennedy, who is buried at the site, was the last recorded owner of Zion Cemetery, a segregation-era burial ground for African-Americans that disappeared from view. [OCTAVIO JONES | TIMES | Times]

TAMPA — Henry P. Kennedy was laid to rest in the family plot at historic Oaklawn Cemetery, a burial ground renowned as the rare place where blacks and whites were interred together during an era of segregation.

But Kennedy figures into a darker chapter from that era, too.

He and partner Hewitt Walker are the last people on record to own Zion Cemetery, just two miles to the north, where hundreds of African-Americans buried their dead during the early 1900s.

Last month, archaeologists acting on reporting by the *Tampa Bay Times* announced they had found more than 120 caskets buried on the property — even after storefronts, warehouses and a public housing project were built there through the years.

The revelation has saddened and angered many people with a stake in Tampa's African-American history. They want to know who allowed Zion Cemetery to vanish through time, leaving the 2½ acres along North Florida Avenue open to development.

"It's important," said Reva Iman, tenant representative at the housing project, **Robles Park Village**. "They did something wrong and need to be charged publicly."

Jeff Moates, who as regional director for the Florida Public Archaeology Network is part of the team that found the caskets, said there isn't enough evidence yet to "point a finger at anybody in particular."

Still, Moates added, "It's incumbent on us to define how it occurred and litigate the case."

Kennedy may be a starting point.

Descended from a pioneer Tampa family and a member of the City Council for eight years, Kennedy purchased the Zion Cemetery land in 1926 and got busy with it three years later. First, he sought property tax relief from the city of Tampa on the grounds that cemeteries are exempt, and later, he built a storefront along part of the property.

After 1929, Zion Cemetery — established in 1901 with room for more than 800 graves — disappeared from the public record.

A map from 1931 shows the storefront but not the cemetery. A year later, according to news archives, the Blue Moon Poultry Shop opened in a second storefront on the same block. In 1937, the owners of the poultry shop, Herman and Mary Jane Pleus, purchased the shop property from Kennedy.

Sharon Shepherdson, 75, the couple's granddaughter, told the *Times* that she lived with them for a while, in a house behind the store. But she knew nothing about a cemetery there.

Who's accountable for the tragedy of Zion Cemetery? Chasing a century-old mystery.

The discovery of caskets under a public housing project raises questions about how it happened: 'They did something wrong and need be charged publicly.'

Tampa Bay Times, By **Paul Guzzo** | Published: Thursday, September 05, 2019

Descendants of Kennedy still live in the Tampa area but did not return calls. The *Times* could not locate descendants of Walker.

Zion Cemetery re-emerged in 1951, when construction crews building Robles Park Village unearthed caskets holding the remains of three children.

Officials from the city assured reporters at the time that other bodies buried at Zion had been relocated. But there are no records indicating this actually occurred, or that anyone looked into these claims.

The *Times* located death certificates for 382 people buried at Zion. A cemetery historian who conducted followup research said he found 747.

Research by the archaeological team continues. They're surveying whether there are more bodies on the property and who is responsible for the cemetery's disappearance.

Racism might provide an answer, said Fred Hearn, who chronicles Tampa's African-American history.

African-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s were considered second class citizens, Hearn said. He wouldn't be surprised to learn that people interested in developing the land simply had the grave markers removed.

"Who would have stopped them?" he said. "African-Americans had no political power and it would have taken an unusually brave white person to stand up and say something."

Even those with loved ones buried at Zion would have been hesitant to protest, archaeologist Moates said.

"Racism was prevalent in Florida," he said.

Maybe they did speak up at some point, he added, and no one in a position of power cared.

It's also possible that Kennedy and partner Walker meant to do the right thing, but people they hired to move the graves failed to do their job, said Rodney Kite-Powell with the Tampa Bay History Center.

Or perhaps some graves were moved, but only those with grave markers of some kind, Kite-Powell said.

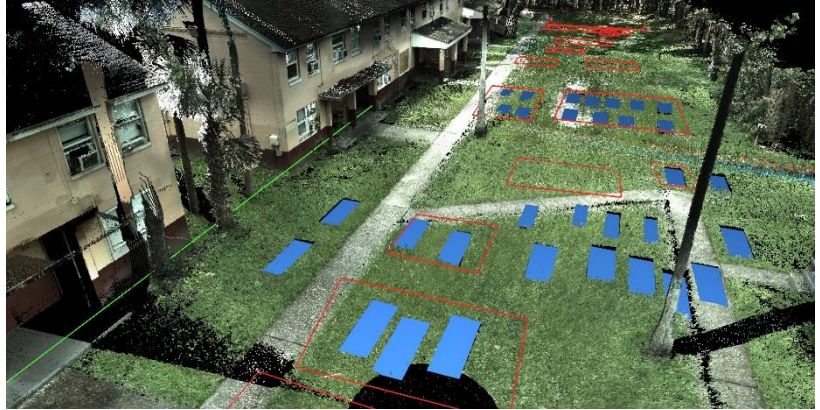
Eunive Massey, 96, used to live near the cemetery and recalled to the *Times* that she saw a few bodies removed around 1933.

"It's possible she saw people moving only those with headstones," Kite-Powell said. "Other headstones could have been lost or maybe not every grave had one. Without the markers, maybe the owners didn't know where the others were."

Archaeologist Moates is especially upset that nothing was done after the three caskets were found in November 1951.

He sees it as part of a decades-long "institutional effort" that erased Zion.

The city, led at the time by Mayor Curtis Hixon, told reporters the graves had been moved in 1925, even though City Council minutes from 1929 had recorded Kennedy's claim for a cemetery tax exemption.



This image is a 3D laser scan of Robles Park Village showing grave-shaped objects beneath the ground in relation to buildings at the public housing complex. The single image is made from two data sources and aligns with historical maps of the former Zion Cemetery. [CARDNO | Cardno]

Who's accountable for the tragedy of Zion Cemetery? Chasing a century-old mystery.

The discovery of caskets under a public housing project raises questions about how it happened: 'They did something wrong and need be charged publicly.'

Tampa Bay Times, By **Paul Guzzo** | Published: Thursday, September 05, 2019

"The city should have done something," said Iman of Robles Park Village. "They are just as guilty for not doing their job to protect that cemetery when it was there and when it was found in the '50s."

Kennedy was still alive in 1951 and might have corrected the record. And at the time, his former partner Walker was working as chief deputy tax assessor for Hillsborough County.

A search of news archives and meeting minutes shows no sign that anyone checked on the relocation claim.

In fact, another false claim surfaced during an authority meeting that was held right after the discovery of the caskets — that Zion's graves had been moved way back in 1909.

It would be nearly 70 years after that meeting before Zion Cemetery was discovered again, with the publication of the *Times* report June 23.

Now, the Housing Authority has hired the archaeological team, moved to relocate residents of Robles Park Village, and pledged to establish a memorial park.

Hearns wants to see more research conducted to determine who let Zion Cemetery disappear: "We don't know who knew what."

But one thing is clear, said archaeologist Moates.

"Our job moving forward is to make sure that Zion is never again erased and lives on in perpetuity."

Should bodies remain at Zion Cemetery? Bill aims to bring descendants into debate.

Leaving bodies in place at the forgotten Africa-American burial ground may not be a decision for the Housing Authority to make, Cruz said.

Tampa Bay Times, [Paul Guzzo](#) | Published September 5, 2019

TAMPA — The **Tampa Housing Authority** acted quickly to deal with the possibility that one of its apartment complexes was built on land where the city's African-American community once buried its dead.

The authority hired an archaeology team, more than 120 caskets have been detected so far, and plans have been announced to relocate apartment residents and turn the property into a memorial park.

But now, state Sen. Janet Cruz is saying: Not so fast.

Leaving the bodies in place at forgotten Zion Cemetery may not be a decision for the Housing Authority to make, Cruz said Thursday.

"They haven't reached out to any next of kin," she said. "It's their decision."

If relatives are found, the prospect of moving bodies promises to be a costly one, according to the team that used ground-penetrating radar to detect the caskets. They were located 4 to 6 feet underground at the Robles Park Village apartment complex on North Florida Avenue.

An early map of Zion shows room for more than 800 bodies. Moving anywhere near that number would cost millions of dollars, said the team's leader, Eric Prendergast, with archaeological assessment company Cardno.

Still, Cruz filed a bill this week to help pay for the job with state funds and to create a task force to identify and protect other neglected or abandoned African-American cemeteries across the state.

The bill, and a planned House companion sponsored by Cruz' fellow Tampa Democrat Fentrice Driskell, would set aside \$450,000 to search for next of kin of those whose bodies remain at Zion Cemetery and to provide each family with up to \$7,500 for a funeral, re-interment and grave marker.

The bill also provides \$50,000 for a historic marker at the Zion site.

The 2½-acre cemetery was established in 1901 and stretches across the 3700 block of N Florida Ave., land that today is home to Robles Park Village and to warehouses and an old storefront owned by restaurateur Richard Gonzmart. Grave markers disappeared nearly a century ago.

The text of the Cruz bill says it was written in response to a series of reports by the *Tampa Bay Times* revealing the existence of Zion Cemetery and raising questions about whether the bodies were ever moved.

The reports also spurred the ground survey that revealed images of the caskets.

Under Florida law, "reasonable efforts" must be made to find people "who can establish connections" to an abandoned human burial.

To fulfill this requirement, the Housing Authority created the Zion Cemetery Archaeological Consultation Committee. Members are city officials, civil rights activists and residents of Robles Park Village.

The new bill adds to this requirement for Zion Cemetery, calling for the Florida Department of State to work with the University of South Florida on the best ways to find next of kin.



This image is a 3D laser scan of Robles Park Village showing grave-shaped objects beneath the ground in relation to buildings at the public housing complex. The single image is made from two data sources and aligns with historical maps of the former Zion Cemetery. [Cardno]

Should bodies remain at Zion Cemetery? Bill aims to bring descendants into debate.

Leaving bodies in place at the forgotten Africa-American burial ground may not be a decision for the Housing Authority to make, Cruz said.

Tampa Bay Times, [Paul Guzzo](#) | Published September 5, 2019

Among the options for accomplishing this: Exhuming bodies to collect DNA for testing and leaving bodies in the ground while conducting genealogical research.

“There is no need to excavate any burials in order to identify next of kin,” said Rebecca O’Sullivan of the Florida Public Archaeology Network at USF, which is helping in the search for the Zion graves. “We have a list of burial records that can be used to identify next of kin through genealogy.”

In its research, the *Times* discovered 382 death certificates for people buried at Zion Cemetery and published the names in late June on the Internet and in print. Since then, no one has come forward to claim a relationship with them.

In followup research, cemetery historian Ray Reed said he found about 750 people reported to have been buried at Zion. He published the names on the Find A Grave website, and said no one has reached out to him, either.

Informed of the Cruz bill, the Housing Authority’s chief operating officer Leroy Moore said the agency has “no desire” to relocate people buried over 100 years ago.

“This site is best suitable in our opinion for re-assemblage under one ownership and preservation as historic Zion Cemetery,” Moore said.

He suggested, instead, that the state pay for the purchase of the former cemetery land so it can be turned into a memorial park.

After the announcement Aug. 30 that caskets had been discovered, Gonzmart told the *Times* he would confer with those conducting the survey for the Housing Authority before deciding his next steps.

On Thursday, Jeffrey Shannon, attorney for Gonzmart’s Columbia Restaurant Group, welcomed news that the bill had been introduced.

“It’s great that the state has taken an interest in this matter,” Shannon said. “This might provide assistance and perhaps some closure to descendants of those buried at Zion.”

Gonzmart purchased his share of the Zion land in 2016 for \$690,000 with the idea of building a culinary school there for people with low incomes. He did not know at the time that it was once a burial ground.

One suggestion raised during discussions before the Housing Authority was having the city of Tampa buy the former cemetery land.

Contacted Thursday, Ashley Bauman, spokeswoman for Mayor Jane Castor, dismissed that idea.

“We don’t think it’s appropriate for Zion Cemetery to be operated as a city park,” Bauman said. “The city of Tampa would support the formation of a non-profit to control and operate the memorial grounds.”

If descendants of those buried in Zion are located, and they signal overwhelmingly that they want their ancestors to remain on the site, Cruz would consider this option, she said.

The families weren’t presented any options when developers built on top the graves of their relatives, Cruz said.

“My intent,” she added, “is to make sure the families not respected then get their respect today.”

126 Possible Graves Found At Robles Park

BY IRIS B. HOLTON
Sentinel City Editor

Earlier this summer, it became public knowledge that a portion of the Robles Park Public Housing Complex was built on top of a long forgotten African American cemetery. After hearing about this, the Tampa Housing Authority hired Cardno Archaeology, to use ground penetrating radar to determine if there is a cemetery on the premises. The company is working in conjunction with the USF Archaeology Department.

Recently **Mrs. Lillian Stringer**, Communications Manager for the Tampa Housing Authority said, "We are calling them anomalies be-



ZION CEMETERY

cause we don't know that they are graves. Nothing has been confirmed yet, but there are 126 objects that are grave-like in nature, and an additional 17 discovered under the road.

"Cardno will submit their findings to the State and they

will make a decision on what to do from there. We are going to memorialize the site. We are not going to tear down any buildings because that would disturb what is under them and we don't want to do that."

Mrs. Stringer further

stated that the Housing Authority has established a trauma team for any of the residents who would like to talk about what is going on. They have also had two meetings with the 29 families who are affected to keep them abreast

of facts and not rumors.

"If it is determined that the anomalies are graves, we are going to relocate those families. We are going to obtain a bus and take them around to our other properties and if they don't want to move there, then we will issue them a Housing Choice Voucher."

According to records, the Zion Cemetery, located at the corner of Florida Avenue and Virginia, came into existence in 1901 as a burial site for African Americans. The last known burials took place on the property between 1913 and 1920.

Mrs. Stringer said research has shown that some of the graves were relocated. She has learned so far that the property was purchased by **Richard Doby**, a wealthy African American Tampa resident, and founder of Dobyville, which is located in the present day Hyde Park area.

It is unclear when the ownership of the property changed hands.

When the construction began in 1951, three caskets were unearthed. The board at that time decided to continue construction and the Robles Park Public Housing Complex opened in 1954 as the 7th oldest public housing complex in Tampa.

Work begins to identify relatives of those buried at Zion Cemetery

FOX 13 News, Evan Axelbank | Video Posted Sep 07 2019 12:08AM EDT | Updated Sep 07 2019 12:10AM EDT



TAMPA, Fla. (FOX 13) - It could be years, or even decades before we know exactly who was buried at Tampa's first Black cemetery, or we may never know at all. But the work starts now.

Archeologists determined there are more than 130 gravesites under part of the Robles Park apartment complex. Before the apartments were built in the '50s, the land was Zion Cemetery.

Hundreds of death certificates, possibly belonging to those buried at Zion, have already been found. Now researchers have to identify and track down every living family member of each person possibly buried at the site.

Only then can the next steps be determined.

Residents of Robles Park, meanwhile, held a vigil Friday night on Tampa's forgotten black cemetery, many praying the bodies interred at Zion Cemetery would remain so.

"It could have been my grandmother," said Clark Simmons, a member of the Robles Park Resident Council. "To respect them, you should leave them there, to make a memorial, a sanctuary, to where we can honor the dead."

State Sen. Janet Cruz filed a bill Wednesday that would allow the University of South Florida to identify next-of-kin of those buried. Once all living relatives have been located, Florida law requires each and every one of them to agree to the graves being unearthed, which is the only way the remains can be positively identified.

"My perfect world is that that family member would say, 'We want my great, great grandfather to stay exactly where he is,'" said Cruz.

In the short-term, her bill would provide \$50,000 for a memorial with the names of those who are believed to be in Robles Park and \$500,000 for the formation of a task force that would delve further into forgotten black cemeteries, which were often established as Jim Crow took a stranglehold on Florida.

"Who is where across the state? This happened in many, many cities across Florida," Cruz wondered.

Although her bill provides for re-interment and grave marker costs if the remains are moved, those we spoke to in Robles Park Friday were not particularly interested in disturbing the bodies.

Let them finally rest in peace, they said.

"Those were people. Black people. They were purposely forgotten. Purposely," said Simmons. "To have them forgotten the way they were forgotten, it was heinous. It was a heinous crime to me."

The **Tampa Housing Authority** is in the process of relocating residents who live above the burial site.

Tampa Bay Lightning is giving a decades-old hockey rink a facelift

Lightning to refurbish 20-year-old hockey rink | FOX 13 News, Charley Belcher | Sep. 10, 2019



TAMPA, Fla. (FOX 13) - The hockey rink on Florida Avenue is all about street hockey, and has been around for a long time -- but has seen better days. It's in need of refurbishing -- and the Tampa Bay Lightning is here to help.

Last season, the team won the President's Trophy for having the best record during the regular season, and that came with a \$100,000 prize. The team's owner, Jeff Vinik, wanted to use that to give back to the community.

On Tuesday, throughout 40 different locations, each player and staff member is helping the community with that money through, what they call, "Random Strikes of Kindness." One of those good deeds include renovating the outdoor hockey rink, which has been around since 1999, and controlled by the **Tampa Housing Authority**.

"We're just following the footsteps of our amazing owner and his family. Since day one, when he took over as owner of this team, he made it one of his top priorities to give back to the community," Tampa Bay Lightning captain Steve Stamkos explained to FOX 13. "He makes it easy for us as players to give back to this community."

There will be another 10 rinks that will be built around Tampa Bay.

"I think it's a great way for kids to play sports without having to go on the ice," said Nikita Kucherov, right wing for the team.

Preseason games for the Tampa Bay Lightning begin this month, while the regular season kicks off in October.

"We're excited. It's been a long off-season," Stamkos said. "We are a motivated group this year."

Their ancestors were forgotten as Zion Cemetery faded from view. Now, they want answers.

Some of Tampa's most prominent African-American families buried their dead at Zion. Still, apartments and businesses were built on top of them.

Tampa Bay Times, By Paul Guzzo, Published September 13, 2019

TAMPA — Samuel Oscar Sheehy was a fixer for Tampa's black community in the early 1900s.

His fluent Spanish helped connect him with the region's growing Cuban population and his father owned a successful West Tampa butcher shop that also "hooked him into the political establishment," nephew Ronald Sheehy said.

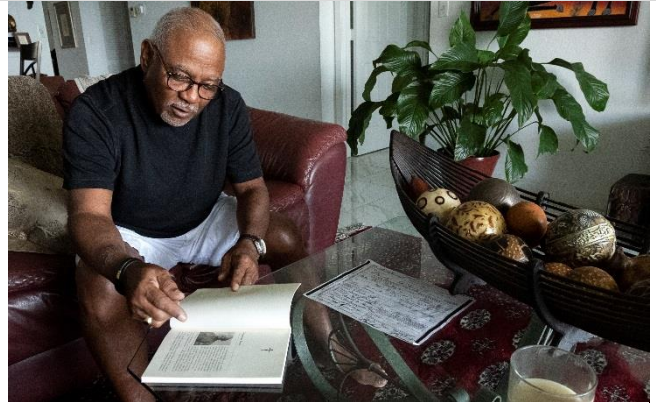
"When people lost jobs or had a problem, they went to him."

Still, Samuel Sheehy couldn't fix it when the tragedy of his baby son's death from pneumonia was compounded by the disappearance of the cemetery where the 18-month-old boy was buried.

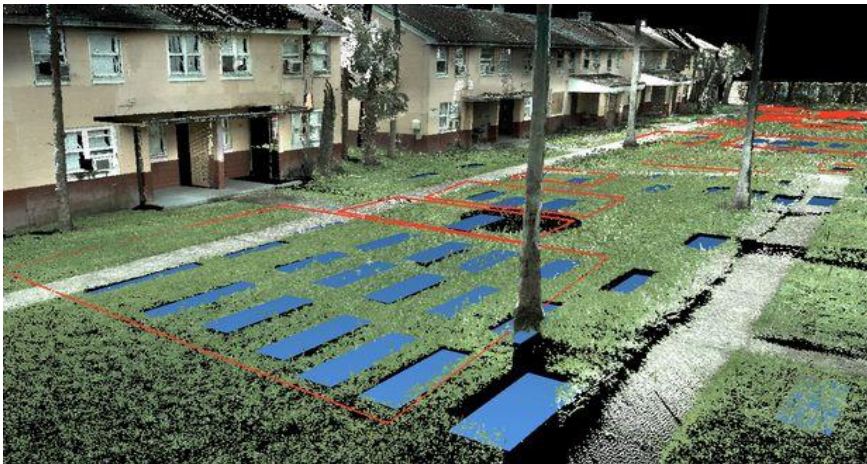
"If it was in his power, he would have done something," said Ronald Sheehy, 74, of St. Petersburg.

The sentiment is shared by descendants of two other people buried at Zion Cemetery. They're convinced that racism played a role in the disappearance of what is believed to be Tampa's first African-American burial ground.

Now, they wonder whether the bodies of their loved ones will turn up among the caskets detected during an ongoing survey of the property that once was Zion Cemetery. Nearly 130 have been found so far, beneath land on North Florida Avenue where a public housing project, warehouses and an old storefront were later built.



Ronald Sheehy of St. Petersburg knew about his uncle, Samuel Oscar Sheehy, a well known "fixer" in Tampa's minority communities of the early 1900s. But he didn't know his uncle had a son who died at 18 months and was buried in the long-forgotten Zion Cemetery. [JAMES BORCHUCK | Times]



This image is a 3D laser scan of Robles Park Village showing grave-shaped objects beneath the ground in relation to buildings at the public housing complex. The single image is made from two data sources and aligns with historical maps of the former Zion Cemetery. [Cardno]

Even Richard Doby, the prominent African-American developer who founded Zion in 1901, buried his son at the cemetery, in 1923.

"He's still there somewhere," said descendant Booker Doby, 87, of Tampa. "Terrible."

Delores Brooks of Riverview said her great-great grandmother Tawsie Lacoïn-Mobley was a well-known midwife who delivered babies in the Robles Pond community where Zion was established. Yet, no final resting place has been preserved for her brother-in-law Charley Mobley, who died of pulmonary tuberculosis and was buried at Zion in 1913.

"Who could have done anything?" said Brooks, 49. "Who would have helped them in that era when Jim Crow laws were written to keep white people in power?"

Their ancestors were forgotten as Zion Cemetery faded from view. Now, they want answers.

Some of Tampa's most prominent African-American families buried their dead at Zion. Still, apartments and businesses were built on top of them.

Tampa Bay Times, By Paul Guzzo, Published September 13, 2019

The survey now underway was prompted by a special report June 23 in the *Tampa Bay Times*, revealing that the property once was a cemetery where at least 370 people were buried and that no records indicate they had ever been moved.

Using ground penetrating radar, archaeologists found caskets last month beneath the Robles Park Village public housing complex. Zion had room for more than 800 graves, so the archaeologists say they may find more.

The *Times* informed Doby and Sheehy that they had ancestors buried at Zion. Neither had heard of these particular relatives until they were shown the death certificates.

They wonder if their families were ashamed that they had no power to preserve the cemetery and kept the story of the dead to themselves.

Brooks reached out to the *Times* after the June 23 report to share her connection.

As a child, she was told of an Uncle Charley Mobley who, in the early 1900s, moved to Robles Pond from Hernando County.

But she had never heard of Zion Cemetery before. The *Times* report included a list of death certificates with Zion as the burial place and her uncle's name was on it.

African-Americans from that era, Brooks said, "have less of a tendency to talk about certain things they couldn't stop."

Like many, she wonders who is responsible for leaving the caskets behind and allowing development on the Zion property.

The Zion Cemetery death certificate for Samuel Oscar Sheehy Jr. [FAMILYSEARCH.ORG]

"What was done in the dark will come to light," Brooks said. "You cannot hide secrets, you cannot hide lies. At some point, all is revealed."

The survey team hopes its research will turn up the answers.

Zion's last owners of record were Henry P. Kennedy and partner Hewitt Walker. In 1929, Kennedy sought a property tax break for Zion on the grounds it was a cemetery, then later that year, he built a storefront along a portion of the land, according to records uncovered by the Times.

The **Tampa Housing Authority** is relocating residents of the five buildings erected on the cemetery and plans to demolish the buildings soon then turn the property into a memorial park. The authority hopes that the owner of the rest of the land, restaurateur Richard Gonzmart, will contribute his property to a memorial park, as well.

State Sen. Janet Cruz has introduced a bill that would create a task force to search for descendants of those buried in Zion so they can decide whether caskets should be moved to other cemeteries.

Their ancestors were forgotten as Zion Cemetery faded from view. Now, they want answers.
Some of Tampa's most prominent African-American families buried their dead at Zion. Still, apartments and businesses were built on top of them.

Tampa Bay Times, By Paul Guzzo, Published September 13, 2019

Doby, Brooks and Sheehy prefer the Housing Authority's plan.

"I don't see any reason to dig up bones," Sheehy said, "and put them somewhere else."

Doby hopes the park mentions that his great grandfather founded the cemetery.

In 1951, three caskets containing the remains of children were discovered during construction of Robles Park Village.

But there's no indication that a broader search was considered, judging from a review of Housing Authority records.

By then, Samuel Sheehy was an instructor at Blake High School and his wife Juanita Sheehy was an English teacher at Middleton High School.

Another of Ronald Sheehy's uncles, Paul Sheehy Sr., was one of Tampa's first African-American physicians and an elementary school is named for him today.

"They were all well-thought of," Ronald Sheehy said.

Perhaps when the caskets were unearthed in 1951, the family did speak up, he said. Or perhaps they said nothing.

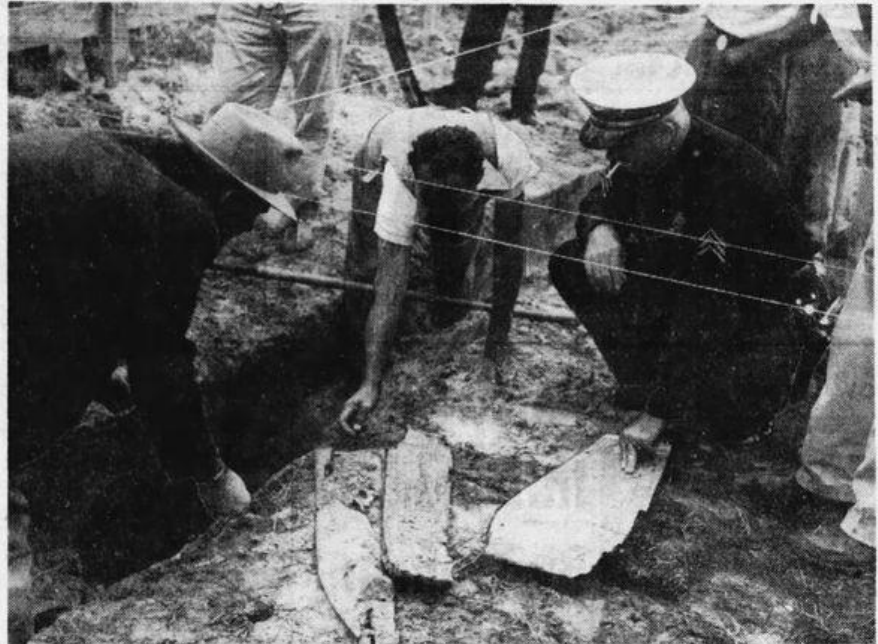
"If they didn't, I don't think I'll ever have the answer why."

Housing Authority minutes say the "child-sized" remains were reburied somewhere else but not where.

Perhaps one was the 18-month-old son of Ronald Sheehy's uncle.

"This is a revelation," Sheehy said. "This is sad."

Unmarked Graves Found by Construction Workers



Mystery surrounded the finding today of several unmarked graves on the site of the new 436-unit Robles Park Village housing project which has just been started by Paul Smith Construction Co. Workmen discovered the unidentified graves while digging for foundations on the project at the southeast corner of Ruth and Morgan Sts. Tampa police and detectives were called in to investigate. Shown here are Detective W. R. Bland (left) and Sgt. W. H. Locke (right) as they studied the first of three children's caskets removed by workmen. The most puzzling aspects in the finding of the skeletal remains were: How old is the cemetery? Who knows the identity of those buried there, and what should be done with the remains unearthed by the workmen?
—Times Photo.

Newspapers.com This report in the Tampa Daily Times on Nov. 16, 1951, said that several unmarked graves were mistakenly dug up during the construction of Robles Park Village along North Florida Avenue. [TAMPA DAILY TIMES | Newspapers.com/Tampa Daily Time



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