

## HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

# Neighbors living on forgotten Tampa cemetery will be relocated

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

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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.

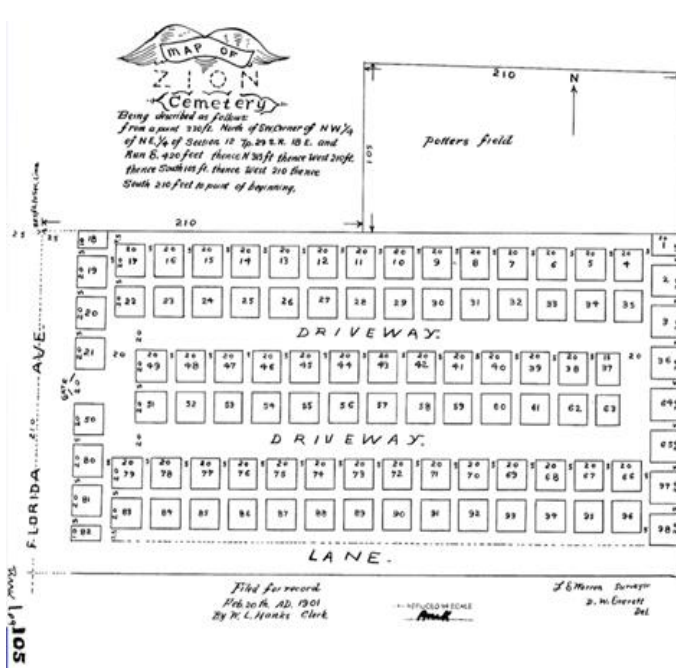
"We explained to them if they still want to stay in Robles Park, they can stay there," Stringer said. "If they wanted to move to other properties where we may have vacancies, they can also do that.

"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