

The City of Independence Parks & Recreation Department is spearheading a vital project to restore Oakwood Cemetery, a historic community landmark. This initiative, titled "Restoring Oakwood's Legacy: A Community Revitalization, Storm Resilience, and Heritage Tourism Initiative," aims to bring the cemetery back to its former glory and transform it into both a cherished community space and a potential heritage tourism destination.

Why Oakwood Cemetery Needs Help

Established in 1864, Oakwood Cemetery is more than just a burial ground; it's a living part of Independence's history, holding the stories of generations who shaped the town. However, years of neglect, natural weathering, and severe storms have taken their toll.

We're seeing:

- * **Deterioration:** Headstones are cracked, leaning, or have fallen over. Pathways are eroded and uneven, and some areas are overgrown.
- * **Storm Damage:** Past severe weather, like the strong winds in June 2011 and heavy rainfall in July 2017, caused significant damage. Trees fell, damaging headstones, and pathways eroded further.

Despite these challenges, our community is stepping up! The Oakwood Cemetery Restoration Brigade, a dedicated group of 24 volunteers, has already put in over 1,450 hours since April 2024. They've been clearing debris, making initial repairs, and tidying up the grounds. But the damage is extensive and requires professional help and additional resources to truly make a difference.

What We're Going to Do

This project involves several key activities to bring Oakwood Cemetery back to life:

- * **Headstone Restoration:** We'll bring in professional conservators to repair and reset severely damaged headstones. Our volunteers will continue cleaning and stabilizing less damaged stones, with a special focus on veterans' graves.
- * **Pathway Repair:** We'll fix and resurface eroded pathways to improve accessibility for everyone and prevent future erosion, especially during heavy rains. We'll also add better drainage solutions.
- * **Landscaping Improvements:** This includes removing damaged trees and planting new, storm-resistant varieties. We'll also regrade and stabilize the soil to improve drainage and make the cemetery more beautiful.
- * **Visitor Amenities:** We'll install benches in accessible spots and place weatherproof information kiosks throughout the cemetery. These kiosks will share the cemetery's history, highlight notable figures, and offer self-guided tour information.
- * **Long-Term Care:** We're establishing a long-term maintenance plan that includes regular volunteer work every Saturday morning. We'll also implement measures to prepare for future storms, ensuring the cemetery's long-term preservation and appeal.

How This Project Will Benefit Our Community

Restoring Oakwood Cemetery offers numerous benefits for Independence:

- * **Preserving History:** We'll protect a vital link to our town's past and make the cemetery more resilient to future storms.
- * **Enhanced Community Space:** A revitalized cemetery will be a more respectful, peaceful, and accessible place for residents to honor loved ones and connect with local history.
- * **Increased Community Pride:** Building on the amazing work of our volunteers, this project will foster a stronger sense of community ownership and pride.
- * **Heritage Tourism Potential:** A beautifully maintained and historically interpreted Oakwood Cemetery can become a significant attraction for heritage tourists, genealogical researchers, and history enthusiasts, boosting our local economy.

Our Partners

This project is a true community effort, with several key partners:

- * **City of Independence Parks & Recreation Department:** Leading the project, overseeing activities, and managing long-term maintenance.
- * **Buchanan County Historical Society:** Providing valuable historical research and content for the informational kiosks.
- * **Oakwood Cemetery Restoration Brigade:** This dedicated group of volunteers is crucial to the project's success, providing ongoing labor, local knowledge, and unwavering commitment.
- * **Independence Chamber of Commerce/Local Tourism Initiative:** Potential partners in promoting the restored cemetery as a visitor destination.
- * **Local Businesses:** We're hoping for in-kind donations of supplies or financial contributions.

Our Confidence in Success

We're confident this project will be a success because:

- * **Strong Leadership:** The City of Independence Parks & Recreation Department has a proven track record of managing public spaces.
- * **Ready to Go:** The volunteer brigade's initial assessments have clearly identified our priority needs. We'll work with professional contractors to develop detailed plans and budget estimates.
- * **Sustainable Effort:** The consistent Saturday morning work of the Oakwood Cemetery Restoration Brigade ensures ongoing maintenance and monitoring.
- * **Prepared for the Future:** Our plan includes measures to mitigate future storm damage and ensure accessible pathways for all visitors.

Show Your Support!

We're seeking letters of support from key community leaders to emphasize the widespread backing for this project. These letters will come from:

- * **The Mayor of Independence,** highlighting the project's importance to our town's heritage, resilience, and tourism potential.
- * **A representative from the Buchanan County Historical Society,** detailing their commitment to historical expertise and educational goals.
- * **A leader from the Oakwood Cemetery Restoration Brigade,** outlining their past and ongoing work, volunteer commitment, and strong support for the restoration.

* A representative from the Independence Chamber of Commerce or local tourism initiative, emphasizing the revitalized cemetery's potential to attract visitors and boost the local economy.