



# CITY OF MOUNT DORA

LEISURE SERVICES

---

## City Hall

510 N. Baker St.  
Mount Dora, FL 32757

Office of the City Manager  
352-735-7126  
Fax: 352-383-4801

Customer Service  
352-735-7105  
Fax: 352-735-2892

Finance Department  
352-735-7118  
Fax: 352-735-1406

Human Resources  
352-735-7106  
Fax: 352-735-9457

Planning and Development  
352-735-7112  
Fax: 352-735-7191

**City Hall Annex**  
900 N. Donnelly St.  
Mount Dora, FL 32757

Parks and Recreation  
352-735-7183  
Fax: 352-735-3681

**Public Safety Complex**  
1300 N. Donnelly St.  
Mount Dora, FL 32757

Police Department  
352-735-7130  
Fax: 352-383-4623

Fire Department  
352-735-7140  
Fax: 352-383-0881

**Public Works Complex**  
1501 Robie Ave.  
Mount Dora, FL 32757  
352-735-7151  
Fax: 352-735-1539

**W. T. Bland Public Library**  
1995 N. Donnelly St.  
Mount Dora, FL 32757  
352-735-7180  
Fax: 352-735-0074

**Website:**  
[www.cityofmountdora.com](http://www.cityofmountdora.com)

Monday, February 24, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

Recently, the City has received several complaints from citizens regarding the removal of damaged concrete coping at Pine Forest Cemetery. I want to take this opportunity to address the situation and answer some of the questions and concerns that have been brought to my attention.

Although coping has not been permitted in the Cemetery by City Ordinance since at least 1969, unfortunately such a policy was not always enforced. On September 16, 2019, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board voted 6-0 to advise City Council to adopt a Policy that provides greater detail and reaffirms the prohibition on coping. On September 19, 2019, City Council adopted the Policy 6-0 as part of its annual review of Policies and Procedures, and it was signed into effect by the City Manager on October 18, 2019.

The prohibition on coping protects visitors from tripping hazards and ensures that City staff members are able to effectively maintain the landscape of the pristine and beautiful Cemetery. While some may find the coping an appealing historical feature to preserve, the current Ordinance and Policy prioritize the ability to maintain a safe and scenic facility.

In early 2020, City staff members were directed to remove certain coping that was damaged, cracked, or crumbling, thus, posing a clear risk to visitors. These deteriorating conditions are most often the result of concrete coping being installed, which lacks the long-term integrity of more durable materials such as granite or marble. In addition, such coping has often been installed improperly without a foundation, which results in it sinking into the ground over time. Staff members were *not* directed to remove all coping throughout the Cemetery.

On February 10, 2020, I began to receive citizen complaints regarding the excessive removal and discarding of coping due to the overzealous approach of a past supervisor who is no longer employed by the City. It is important to note that neither negative feedback nor complaints have been received from the family members whose grave sites were affected. I immediately directed staff members to halt the removal of any coping until the issue could be researched further. Staff members did *not* remove any coping after February 10, 2020, but remain on site trimming trees and performing other regular maintenance.

The Cemetery is owned by the City, and only interment or burial rights are sold to individuals and families. As such, safety and grounds maintenance are the responsibility of the City, and it is the responsibility of the loved ones to maintain the headstone or grave marker.

---

---

Given these circumstances, City staff members are making every effort to reach out to the family members and heirs of those buried at sites with damaged and dangerous coping. This can be a challenging task, as most of the sites in question are old and finding a living relative is difficult. City staff members appreciate your patience while going through this process. Further removal of coping will take place in coordination with family members and loved ones, as they are identified. Only coping that is causing a hazard will be identified for future removal. However, damaged coping will not be replaced with new coping, in accordance with City Policy.

Although the Cemetery reflects the rich history of Mount Dora, it is not within the Historic District nor under the jurisdiction of the Historic Preservation Board, and coping is not a historic appurtenance (as such, it is not eligible for historic preservation grants). However, City staff members understand the sacred nature of each and every grave site. In their daily work, they seek to honor the deceased and protect visitors by providing a well-maintained, safe, and dignified facility.

Finally, regarding landscaping, 34 trees have been marked for permanent removal due to disease and the risk of falling on visitors. Many of these trees are Laurel Oaks which have an expected lifespan of only 50-70 years and have reached the end of that expected life. Other plants have been removed that were encroaching upon, obstructing, or damaging headstones. To ensure that suitable plant species are selected and placed at an appropriate distance from headstones, the October 2019 Policy assigns permanent planting to City staff members only. The City recently hired a Horticulturalist Foreman with expertise on Florida-friendly and native plants to guide landscaping decisions. A plan to replace removed plants and improve existing landscaping will be created as soon as possible.

My final recommendation remains to only remove coping as it becomes broken, buried, or a tripping hazard. If the coping is in good standing, it will remain until the abovementioned circumstances occur. Thank you for respecting the wishes of the families and for supporting City staff members as they maintain the facility for future generations.

Sincerely,

Ms. Amy Jewell  
Leisure Services Director  
City of Mount Dora

*Attachments: 5*



*Attachment 1. An example of damaged and hazardous coping (circled).*



*Attachment 2. An example of damaged and hazardous coping (circled).*



*Attachment 3. An example of damaged and hazardous coping (circled).*



*Attachment 4.* An example of landscaping before removal. The shrubs had completely overgrown and obscured a headstone (circled).



*Attachment 5.* An example of landscaping after removal. The previously obscured headstone (circled) is now visible.