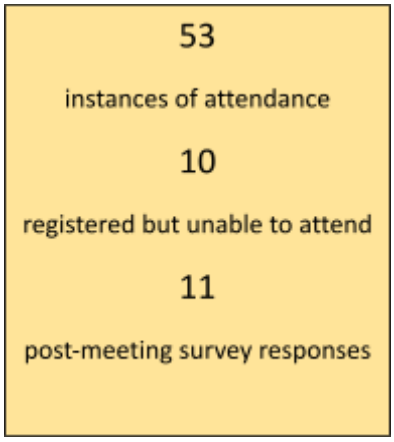
HOLT CEMETERY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Meeting Findings & Summary

Phase I: What We Heard | September 2026

In September 2026, two community engagement meetings brought together descendants, community members, preservation professionals, historians, City representatives, project partners, and others who care about Holt Cemetery. Participants shared memories and experiences, discussed current concerns, and helped envision the cemetery's future.



What We Heard

Participants described Holt Cemetery as more than a burial ground. It is a place connected to family, memory, tradition, African American history, cultural identity, and continued remembrance. Across the engagement activities, recurring concerns and priorities included:

Protect existing graves and burial sites and minimize further disturbance.

Improve maintenance and access, including concerns about high grass, flooding, pathways, and families' ability to reach graves.

Preserve headstones, grave markers, oak trees, family decorations, historic features, and the cemetery's cultural landscape.

Address flooding and drainage while considering impacts on graves, trees, and surrounding conditions.

Improve burial records, mapping, signage, and access to cemetery information.

Strengthen transparency and communication about maintenance, cemetery operations, finances, and future plans.

Document family histories, genealogy, memories, and stories connected to people buried at Holt.

Continue involving descendants and families as planning moves forward.

Three Priorities for Holt's Future

During the Holt 2036 visioning exercise, participants identified three priorities to carry forward:

1. Maintenance and access to burial grounds - particularly challenges associated with flooding and high grass.

2. Preservation of headstones and grave markers.

3. Limiting future burials at Holt Cemetery while considering a new cemetery or alternative location for future burial needs.

The Community Wants to Stay Involved

All 11 post-meeting survey respondents said they had an opportunity to share their thoughts, and all 11 expressed interests in future discussions. Participants identified email updates, community and descendant meetings, volunteer activities, genealogy, oral histories, and one-on-one conversations as ways they would like to remain involved.

Moving Forward

Phase I represents the beginning of an ongoing preservation process. The findings can inform continued conversations about preservation, flooding and drainage, access, documentation, future burial capacity, and long-term stewardship. Future planning should continue to recognize Holt Cemetery as both a historic resource and a living family landscape whose meaning is carried by the people connected to it.

These findings reflect the perspectives of Phase I participants and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive representation of all descendants, families, or community members connected to Holt Cemetery.

Project Overview

Context:

Wake is leading this initiative as a result of being awarded Greater New Orleans Foundation's Community Led Green Infrastructure Grant to facilitate the creation of a plan for flooding mitigation at Holt Cemetery. The grant requires that the plan be complete by December 2026 and that the planning process should be led by the community of stakeholders of Holt. If the planning grant goes well there is an opportunity to apply for follow-on funding to implement the green infrastructure next year.

Situation:

Heavy rainfall creates standing water that causes flooding issues at Holt. The following factors exacerbate flooding:

- Designated Flood Zone X with an elevation of 0' - 3.8' with changes throughout.
- High water table
- Long-term overuse - dating back to 1879
- No grave liners or underground vaults used in graves
- Overuse has resulted in soil compaction
- Development and paving around the perimeter restrict water absorption.

Proposed Solutions:

William Kraus, Professional Landscape Architect at the City of New Orleans Department of Parks & Parkways presented ideas for interventions to reduce standing water in order to:

- Allow for easier grave use and maintenance
- Improve ability for families to visit graves
- Improve ability for maintenance team to cut grass
- Support long-term preservation
- Intervention 1: Clear drains and cut back vegetation around the main outflow of the culvert.
- Intervention 2: Deepen culvert

- Intervention 3: Install drainage pipe in the culvert
- Intervention 4: Plant “thirsty” plants like cardinal flower and blue flag iris in the areas that tend to flood
- Intervention 5: Add landscape edging along sides of culvert to help trap trash that otherwise falls in and clogs drains

The community was invited to consider this project as the first step in a long-term plan to preserve Holt Cemetery. The vision is that a team of community stakeholders could partner with institutions over the next year to implement this green infrastructure, and begin a long-term preservation plan for Holt. The institutions that have committed to working together towards this goal at this time are Wake, Save Our Cemeteries/Preservation Resource Center, and Our Mammy's.

Next Steps:

- Engage more Holt descendant community members to form a group
- Have the group decide on final drainage project plan and collaborate on long-term preservation plan with Save Our Cemeteries
- Price out drainage project components
- Apply for implementation funding
- Meet again this winter to make decisions

Action Items:

- Stay Involved
- Help Spread the Word
- Possible Volunteer Clean Up Day at Holt Cemetery