

# Restoring Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery

EFFORTS TO STABILIZE A HISTORIC CEMETERY THROUGH LOCAL ACTION AND TARGETED STATE SUPPORT

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**With a successful transition to responsible management and oversight, Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery could serve as a model for leveraging state support and local partnership to create sustainable long-term community assets.**

Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery in San Rafael is a 150-year-old private endowment care cemetery that remains an active burial site for Marin families. Since 2022, the State's Cemetery and Funeral Bureau (CFB) has taken escalating enforcement actions due to **egregious financial mismanagement, operational failures, and neglect**. In 2025, the State revoked the site's license and assumed control of its endowment care fund.

Despite these actions, the site remains in poor condition, with overgrown vegetation and no maintenance – an ongoing distressing situation for families visiting and burying loved ones. Unlike other abandoned cemeteries in California, where operators are absent and burials have not occurred in decades, Mt. Tamalpais continues to operate for hundreds of pre-purchased plots despite the loss of its cemetery license. It is the only private cemetery to have lost its license through court-enforced action while continuing active burials, creating an urgent need for near-term stabilization.

## County and City action

The County of Marin, in partnership with the City of San Rafael, has focused on public safety at the site and supporting affected families:

- 1. Coordinated local response:** County and City staff meet regularly with community stakeholders, faith organizations, and state partners to advance restoration efforts, including a long-term maintenance and landscaping plan.
- 2. Wildfire risk reduction:** San Rafael Fire and the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority have led hazardous fuel reduction on and around the cemetery property to reduce immediate wildfire risk to surrounding neighborhoods.

- 3. State engagement:** Marin serves on the SB 777 (Richardson, 2025) workgroup to advance solutions statewide for abandoned private endowment care fund cemeteries. The County and City engage regularly with the CFB to ensure the cemetery's current management is held accountable.

## State partnership request

The County of Marin is **requesting \$2 million in state funding** in the 2026-27 Budget, to be allocated to the CFB, to support immediate maintenance and stabilization of Mt. Tamalpais. This funding would:

- Restore the site to a basic standard of care and dignity.
- Support ongoing maintenance in areas where active burials continue
- Stabilize conditions during the transition to responsible long-term ownership
- Align with prior state investments in similarly distressed cemetery properties (Lincoln Cemetery)

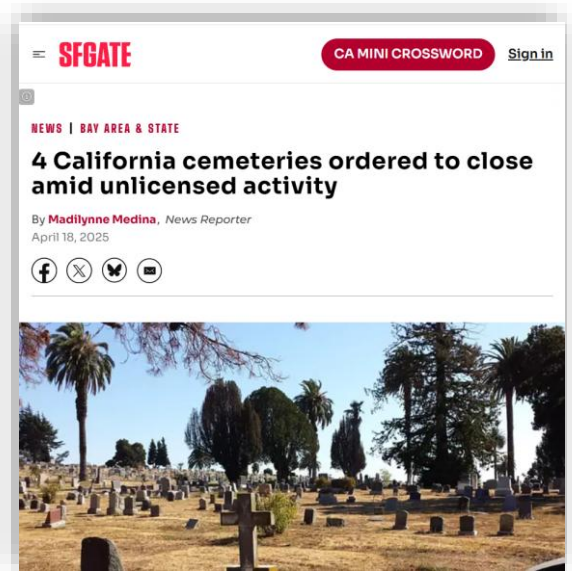
## Serving as a model for a statewide challenge

The situation at Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery represents a **serious gap in California's regulatory framework** for private cemeteries when ownership fail but operations continue. With targeted state support, local government and community groups could establish a replicable model for:

- Stabilizing distressed cemetery properties
- Transitioning from failed private ownership to responsible management
- Protecting endowment care funds and restoring public trust
- Ensuring that burial sites are maintained with dignity, respect, and permanence



Local news coverage has highlighted the decline of all four cemeteries under the same ownership, but Mt. Tamalpais is the only site where active burials continue.



Mt Tamalpais Cemetery lost its cemetery license through court action in 2025.



The Attorney General's office found most of the transactions in the cemetery's care funds were "related to personal expenses" – rather than cemetery operations.



Portions of the cemetery are frequently littered with debris, and gopher damage has left graves in disrepair.



Active sections of the cemetery continue to see approximately 10 burials per quarter for pre-purchased plots, yet families report unresponsive management, canceled services, and unreliable maintenance.



The cemetery has become so overgrown that families report difficulty locating headstones, with nearly all maintenance now carried out by family members and community volunteers on the private property, rather than cemetery staff.