

# City of Detroit

Janice M. Winfrey  
City Clerk

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

Andre P. Gilbert II  
Deputy City Clerk

## DEPARTMENT PETITION REFERENCE COMMUNICATION

*To: The Department or Commission Listed Below*

*From: Janice M Winfrey, Detroit City Clerk*

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The following petition is herewith referred to you for report and recommendation to the City Council.

In accordance with that body's directive, kindly return the same with your report in duplicate within four (4) weeks.

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Petition No.	2024-159
Name of Petitioner	Silvia Thomas
Description of Petition	Petition to speak before City Council regarding Contract 6006155 for Cemetery Management.
Type of Petition	<b>Hearing Before City Council</b>
Submission Date	05/20/2024
Concerned Departments	City Council
Petitioner Contact	Silvia Thomas Silvia Thomas Redemption Cemetery Services <a href="mailto:siltqueen@gmail.com">siltqueen@gmail.com</a> P: 313-778-2352

**RULES OF ORDER  
FOR THE  
DETROIT CITY COUNCIL**

**Adopted by resolution on  
February 28, 2007; effective September 1, 2007.  
Amended and effective February 5, 2008.  
Amended September 28, 2010; effective December 1, 2010.  
Amended November 22, 2011; effective February 1, 2012  
Amended July 3, 2012; effective October 16, 2012  
Amended June 26, 2018; effective October 15, 2018**

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21.0 VIDEOTAPING OF COUNCIL SESSIONS

Videotaping of Council sessions, committees and meetings shall be from gavel to gavel and shall not be edited for content or length.

Requests for the videotaping of special committees, task forces and other events shall be in writing. The request shall be referred to the President and the City's Media Services at least two (2) weeks prior to the event for scheduling purposes.

Members of the public who wish to take video or still pictures during Council meetings shall not use cameras, recording devices, or lighting devices that are disruptive to Council members, staff, or the general public.

22.0 PROCEDURES FOR PERSONS WISHING TO ADDRESS COUNCIL.

A person shall be permitted to address a meeting of the City Council subject to the following rules:

A brief written notice of a request to address the City Council shall be filed with the City Clerk not later than 2:00 PM of the business day immediately preceding the day of the scheduled meeting to which the request pertains. The Clerk shall provide reasonable assistance in the preparation of such request to any person requesting assistance.

A written notice of a request to address the City Council shall identify the person making the request. Identification shall include: full name, address (both resident and business), phone number, and shall state the subject matter on which such person wishes to address the City Council.

Upon approval of the request by the Body, the Chair of the Standing Committee or Committee of the Whole shall have the discretion as to when during the meeting the person shall be heard and shall also have the discretion to impose a reasonable limitation on the time allotted to hear such person.

This procedure shall not apply to scheduled public hearings or to persons invited by the City Council to participate in discussions before the City Council.

22.1 Vendor Protest Petitions All vendor protest petitions, after having exhausted the Office of Contracting and Procurement protest procedures, shall be presented to the City Clerk in writing and follow the above petition process.

22.2 Translators The Council shall seek to provide translators at each of its Sessions and all meetings of its Standing Committees for each language requested, including the hearing impaired, where the translation is necessary to enable Detroit residents with limited English proficiencies to participate in the proceedings. The service will be provided as long as the request for such translation services is communicated to the Clerk of the Council at least 48 hours before the meeting. For meetings on a Monday or a Tuesday, the request must be made by noon of the

May 19, 2024

To: Hon. Janice Winfrey  
City Clerk  
City of Detroit

RE: **Request to Address City Council for Contract 6006155**

Dear Honorable Clerk:

I am Silvia Thomas, the proprietor of Enduring Memories Headstone Monument Company, and I have proudly served as a business owner in Detroit for over 34 years.

I am writing to request an opportunity to address the full body of the City Council for Contract 6006155 for Cemetery Management, scheduled for a vote on Tuesday, May 21, 2024. I am a vendor who bided on this contract and do not feel that my proposal was fairly assessed. I have appealed to the Procurement Department and my appeal was denied last week. Based on information in the response from the department, I continue my protest of this contract award based on the fact the responses to my appeal were not truthful.

In 2020, following the departure of the previous management company, Tocco Co., from overseeing the cemeteries, I was approached by the city to temporarily manage the sites until a permanent vendor could be secured. Out of my care and love for the city in its time of need, I temporarily closed my headstone business to come to the aid of the city. Initially intended for a three-month assignment, my tenure extended to a year due to my prior experience at Elmwood Cemetery and my extensive background in the industry. Despite my successful interim management, the subsequent bidding process seemed biased against my company. While I diligently responded to the bid, the contract was awarded to another vendor, PGA, despite their lack of expertise in cemetery management. PGA has never managed a cemetery to my knowledge. PGA was asked at the time to bid on the contract by a staff member in the General Services Department because no other company beside mine was interested, and certain individuals in the department did not want to work with me. At the time, a manager at PGA stated to me that they didn't want the contract.

Fast forward to the fall of 2023, when the city once again solicited bids for cemetery management. Redemption Cemetery Services, my company, submitted a comprehensive proposal outlining our plans to revitalize the neglected cemeteries. Despite our detailed plans, over 30 years of experience, and commitment to improving the conditions of the cemeteries, the contract was inexplicably awarded to the current vendor PGA, who has failed to meet the terms of their previous contractual obligations and has allowed the cemeteries to deteriorate further.

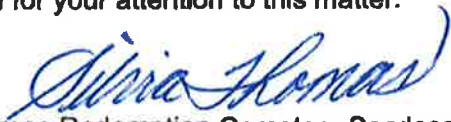
In the evaluation process, PGA received a score of 80 points, and my company received a score of 52.50. If my company's score is 52.50 and my experience counts for nothing, why did the Procurement Department reach out to my company in March to submit a best and final offer because as stated by the representatives "they were impressed by my proposal and experience." I provided an explanation as to why our price was higher because we were attempting to create a better future state for the cemeteries, where families in Detroit could finally feel a sense of pride and dignity about the final resting place of their loved ones like people do in the suburbs. Families deserve better. So, we lowered the price and kept our commitment to do as much on the list as we could considering the resources available. After reviewing the notes from the contract review from LPD, our price was \$2,083 a month more than PGA, who keep in mind did not provide the services outlined in their last contract from 2021.

I am protesting this decision on the grounds of fairness and accountability. It is disheartening to see my experience and dedication overlooked, particularly when the chosen vendor has demonstrated a lack of competence and commitment. I urge a review of the proposals and past performance of both entities to ensure transparency and uphold the best interests of our community.

Included with this email is a copy of our plan for your review and pictures to support my position.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Silvia Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style.

siltquzen@gmail.com

Silvia Thomas Redemption Cemetery Services LLC 313-778-2352

Redemption Cemetery Services Responses are in RED

The Office of Contracts and Procurement received your bid protest on behalf of Redemption Cemetery Services, L.L.C. After review of the submitted proposals and evaluation, OCP confirms the original award to Premier Group Associates.

In particular, your protest of bid 184321 alleges that:

1. Your company **“was not afforded a fair chance or consideration in the evaluation process.”**

i. Response:

1. The cemetery management bid 184321 was open from January 16 to February 12 of 2024, and all received responses, including that of Redemption Cemetery Services, were evaluated. Redemption Cemetery Services scored 52.50 points, compared to the highest ranked vendor, Premier Group Associates (PGA), which scored 80 points. Both proposals received equalization credits for CRIO certifications. PGA is Detroit Based, Detroit Headquartered, Detroit Resident, Detroit Small Business certified, and Redemption’s joint venture partner is also Detroit Based, Detroit Headquartered, Detroit Resident and Detroit Small Business certified.

2. **“Despite our detailed plans and commitment to improving the conditions of the sites, the contract was inexplicably awarded to the current vendor, who has failed to meet previous contractual obligations and has allowed the cemeteries to deteriorate further. I am protesting this decision on the grounds of fairness and accountability. It is disheartening to see my experience and dedication overlooked, particularly when the chosen vendor has demonstrated a lack of competence and commitment. I urge a review of the proposals and past performance of both entities to ensure transparency and uphold the best interests of our community.”**

i. Response:

1. Proposals were scored on the following criteria: vendor experience (30 points), vendor capability (10 points), operational plan (15 points), and management fee (10 points). With two proposals received, the highest ranked vendor for each criterion receives maximum points for the criterion and the second bidder receives half the points.

a. Vendor experience/organization - ability to handle scope of work (30 points):

- i. Redemption Cemetery Services was registered in LARA on January 26, 2024, roughly three weeks prior to the bid due date. Although its proprietor had one year of experience in emergency management of the City’s three cemeteries, the company is a new company without cemetery management experience. The Joint Venture partner Payne Landscaping has 30 years of landscaping experience and provided landscaping services during part of the one-year emergency management term in 2020-2021. Redemption listed 6 staff for the project. (15 points)

Redemption Cemetery Services, although recently established, draws its strength from the expertise and extensive background of Silvia Thomas in the mortuary sector, spanning over 35 years. Notably, Ms. Thomas demonstrated exceptional leadership during her tenure as Emergency Manager of the city’s facilities, overseeing the transition from chaos to order left by the abrupt departure of the Tocco organization in 2020. Enduring Memories Cemetery Management Company, (EMCMC) under Ms. Thomas’s guidance, tackled a myriad of challenges, including the urgent need to update burial records, address deferred maintenance issues, and restore essential facilities for families. Despite the daunting circumstances, EMCMC not only met but exceeded all required metrics, including preparing over 5 years of records to begin the digitizing process after both the city and EMCMC identified the same company, Cemify. The city was supposed to

put out a bid for the web-based system but that never happened. In addition, Ms. Thomas/EMCMC successfully restored functionality to critical areas and mitigated the aftermath of previous disruptions. Ms. Thomas's hands-on experience, coupled with her tenure at Elmwood Cemetery, where she managed operations and sales (pre-need and at-need) and handled all funeral home request for burial for over 12 years, underscores her ability to navigate complex tasks and deliver results of the highest standard. This track record sets Redemption Cemetery Services apart, positioning it as a reliable and capable partner for the city's needs.

**PGA has three years of experience providing cemetery management services for the City's three cemeteries from 2021-2024 and has 16 years of experience in full-service facility maintenance including landscaping, property maintenance and construction. PGA listed 9 staff for the project and has 60-70 employees on staff in total. (30 points)**

PGA's performance fell short of expectations and, if evaluated objectively, would likely be found to constitute a significant breach of its contractual obligations. **Exhibit A**, which is attached herewith, provides a visual depiction of the current deplorable conditions of the cemeteries as of last week. Despite PGA purportedly having ample manpower and on-site staff, the evident state of disrepair raises questions about the effectiveness of their services, especially considering the substantial compensation they received, **exceeding \$1 million**. It is evident that PGA's presence and the experience of their 9 employees did not yield tangible benefits for the lot owners, the city and its residents. Moreover, their claimed 16 years of experience in facility maintenance is of limited relevance to the specialized requirements of cemetery management. Additionally, the size of PGA's on-site team, comprising nine staff members, is comparable to that of Redemption Cemetery Services, further highlighting the inadequacy of their performance.

**b. Vendor capability – key personnel & equipment (10 points):**

- i. Redemption listed key personnel with experience in cemetery sales, headstone/monument sales, cemetery/mortuary/crematory operations, burial services, groundskeeping, customer service and project management. Redemption's proposal did not include the required list of equipment that would be used to perform the services, but only included three photos of equipment. (5 points)**

Redemption Cemetery Services opted not to list an extensive inventory of equipment because it procures the necessary equipment through leasing arrangements to fulfill its operational requirements. Additionally, the team comprises members with diverse skill sets, including extensive experience—over 10 years, in some cases—in burial and grounds maintenance at Gethsemane. The three pieces of equipment displayed represent the essential tools needed for daily operations.

- ii. PGA listed key personnel with experience in onsite supervision and delivery of cemetery operations and burial services, snow and grounds maintenance, property maintenance and blight removal, construction, and project management. PGA's equipment list included 155 pieces of equipment and the proposal noted \$5M bonding capacity. (10 points)**

Since Gethsemane is largely filled to burial capacity, there will be few burials going forward. Since ground maintenance will be handled by Payne

Comercial Landscaping (with over 30 year of experience) our joint venture partner its capability to perform all necessary snow and ground maintenance far exceeds that of PGA. The equipment list amounts to gilding the Lily because the actual equipment needed amounts to a backhoe, golf carts, probe, hoist for the mausoleum and some power tools. The equipment shown by Redemption Cemetery Services is adequate to the bid. There is no need for a lot of heavy equipment listed by PGA. Internal cleaning would have been handled by specialized cleaning contractors. The three photos of equipment was an accurate reflection of the basic equipment needed to perform the bid. Anything additional could be leased for specific needs. Any bonding requirements could have been met once the bid was awarded because Redemption Cemetery Services had established a relationship with insurance providers. **Through the response provided by the city there are a lot of validations for PGA that are stated however, were not required in the bid response and therefore are irrelevant, cases in point bonding capacity was not required in the response, yet it was considered in the evaluation based off your response.**

c. Operational Plan (15 points):

- i. Redemption's proposal listed 12 initial activities to begin the performance of the contract, five of which included defined start and end dates, and outlined a list of capital improvements at Gethsemane Cemetery, with minimal recommendations for Forest Hill and Mt. Hazel. Redemption's proposal mentioned digitization but offered no plan, details, or price. When asked for clarification, Redemption was not able to provide further detail regarding the cost and effort required for digitization of records. Redemption also proposed sales of expanded burial services and recommended expanding cemetery space. (7.5 points)

Redemption's proposal provided a realistic overview of the activities to be performed, including necessary start and end dates where applicable. However, it was not feasible for Redemption Cemetery Services to offer a concrete schedule with specific dates without a comprehensive assessment of the current cemetery conditions. Additionally, Redemption presented a list of capital improvement recommendations, highlighting the city's responsibility in addressing these long-overdue upgrades. Forest Hill and Mt. Hazel, having reached burial capacity and lacking office facilities, require minimal improvements compared to Gethsemane. The absence of a price for digitization in Redemption's proposal was justified as it was categorized as a capital improvement item due to its associated costs. Moreover, PGA should have completed this task as outlined in the 2021 RFP, which they failed to do under their previous contract despite receiving over \$1 million in funding. In addition, Redemption recommended way to increase revenues for the cemeteries to offset the management fee and the city had no interest.

PGA's proposal included staffing (manager, assistant manager and office administration) for five days/week + second and last Saturdays, as well as Memorial Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day and President's Day. It also included a schedule for mowing, hedge trimming, weed & feed applications, and the number of burials per year. PGA's proposal also detailed a 33-week digitization plan with price proposal, and listed recommendations for capital improvements at each of the three cemeteries. (15 points)

It was not required to provide a schedule in the RFP, however, the schedule that was submitted by PGA is the same schedule that Ms. Thomas created and had installed on the grounds of the cemetery back in 2020 and the lack of a schedule in Redemption's bid proposal should not automatically warrant full points to PGA. Additionally, PGA's inclusion of a mowing schedule does not justify full points, especially considering the evident neglect of the hedges, weed control, and grass maintenance, as depicted in **Exhibit A** photos taken last week. **Despite PGA's expertise in lawn care and their three-year tenure under a \$1 million contract, the lack of grass and weed control**

raises questions about their performance. While our proposal also outlined capital improvements, it is important to note that these responsibilities ultimately fall on the city and should not contribute to PGA receiving full points.

**Annual Management Fee (10 points):**

- ii. Redemption/Payne's Best and Final Offer totaled \$40,295/month or \$483,540/year for a total of \$1,450,620 over three years. This final offer involved reducing summer labor and providing 15 cuts per year at each of the three cemeteries. (5 points)
- iii. PGA's Best and Final offer totaled \$37,916.67/month or \$455,000/year for a total of \$1,365,000 for three years. This final offer included 26 cuts per year at each of the three cemeteries, and also included staffing for the required hours of operation, snow removal, hedge trimming, tree removals, and 30 burials per year. PGA's proposal specified staffing for five days/week + 2 Saturdays/month + Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Labor Day and President's Day. (10 points)

Once again, it is misleading to assert that PGA should receive full points simply for listing staffing hours. Moreover, the claim of requiring 26 cuts per year seems excessive, considering the grass growth rate, which Redemption addressed by proposing weekly cuts for all 43 acres during the rainy season. Our proposed price also encompassed snow removal, hedge trimming, and tree removal services. Despite PGA's three-year tenure, their decision to hire an experienced individual who was subsequently terminated raises doubts about their actual expertise, especially when considering the current condition of the cemeteries. It is concerning that the city is considering a \$315,000 raise for PGA, given their failure to fulfill the terms of the initial contract, for which they were paid over \$1 million.

**Phase 2 criteria for certifications of prime:**

- iv. PGA received 15 points

**d. Phase 3 criteria for certifications of sub:**

- i. Redemption/Payne joint venture received 20 points

Full points were award because this section was not subjected to the bias opinion of representatives from the department that do not care for Ms. Thomas. Derrick Gray reminded us of his dislike for Ms. Thomas when he walked into the bid walkthrough, saw Ms. Thomas and took the representatives from Procurement Department into a separate room and when they returned the entire mood of the walk through changed. At that point we knew it was going to be an uphill battle.

**2. Regarding past performance of each vendor:**

The Department states that the current vendor PGA has been very responsive and has fulfilled contract obligations, particularly in enhancing the overall appearance and improving the service level dramatically from the previous operators. The proposal from PGA also included positive testimonials from a local funeral home and individuals who had received services over the last three years.

Please review Exhibit A and assess whether the images taken last week reflect a standard that the department should endorse and imply that PGA is fulfilling its contractual obligations. It is distressing that the city permits such mismanagement of the cemeteries, especially considering PGA's sizable workforce of over 70 people. Families entrust the final resting places of their loved ones to be maintained with dignity and respect. These recent images depict a lack of care and dedication to both the families and the terms of the contract. During Ms. Thomas's tenure operating the cemeteries, she garnered praise from families and funeral homes alike.

- a. In contrast, the Department states that during Ms. Thomas' emergency management term via Enduring Memories in 2020-2021, the Department had to identify an additional vendor for groundskeeping and supplement Enduring Memories with



**City staff to help manage the cemeteries. Communication failures and unauthorized activities such as running Enduring Memories' private headstone sales business out of Gethsemane Cemetery and proceeding with disinterment of a grave without City approvals led to additional challenges during this emergency contract.**

This statement contains falsehoods. Let's set the record straight. When Ms. Thomas assumed the role of emergency manager, she received a call at 11:53 pm on Sunday May 19, 2020, the next morning at 8:30 am she was on a conference call with (GSD management) and promptly closed her business, and reported to the cemetery for what was initially intended as a 3-month assignment. However, due to the city's inability to find an alternative manager, her tenure extended to 6 months and eventually 1 year. It's important to note that the General Services Department (GSD) specifically invited another vendor, PGA, to bid against Ms. Thomas. The only vendors the city added was the HVAC contractor. Payne Landscaping was already maintaining the grounds upon Ms. Thomas's arrival, and she retained their services. During her management, no city staff were assigned to the cemeteries aside from a librarian tasked with historical research for families. Ms. Thomas did not conduct her private headstone business at the cemetery without permission; Jamal Harrison, a GSD manager at the time actually extended an invitation to Ms. Thomas to sale her headstone at the cemetery just as the previous operate. At least 12 headstones that were ordered by families from ST Enterprises were never made/delivered, and those damaged by the flood cause by ST Enterprises were replaced by Ms. Thomas at no cost to the families nor the city; in addition to the pre-need headstones that the city was responsible for through the perpetual care fund and was never made at the time of the burial. It's crucial to clarify that the City does not possess the authority to control disinterments; this right lies with the family owning the plot. Throughout Ms. Thomas's tenure, she only handled one disinterment that was handled in the legal proper manner. The funeral home called to confirm the burial, they requested the disinterment. The family supplied the deed for the plot, identifying the person buried, the funeral home also supplied the Burial Transit Permit, then the disinterment was allowed. The other burials that were exhumed were done at the request of the city, due the mismanagement of ST Enterprise (Also a vendor selected by Derrick Gray of GSD) Our position is supported by documented emails and communications from/between department representatives and recorded in the ledgers of the cemeteries.

**After review of the issues raised by your protest, the award to Premier Group Associates is confirmed as appropriate and your protest is hereby denied.**

Based on the factual information discovered and provided in our response, we respectfully appeal your denial and urge the City Council to reconsider the selection of PGA as the awarded contractor for this bid. We still maintain that our proposal was not fairly assessed. In addition, if our score is truly a 52.50 and our proposal was insufficient, why did the procurement department reach out to us for a best and final offer, as they praised our presentation and proposal and asked us to "sharpen our pencil". It's evident that certain individuals within the General Services Department (GSD) harbor personal biases against Ms. Thomas, leading to efforts to discredit her and hinder her fair consideration for a role she is well-qualified to fulfill. **Exhibit B** contains visual evidence showcasing the condition of the cemeteries upon Ms. Thomas's arrival and the remarkable improvements achieved within just one year under her management. Furthermore, while PGA may excel in ground maintenance, and it must be stated that this protest is not personal or against PGA as a company, however they lack the requisite experience and expertise in cemetery management. The people of Detroit have endured enough disappointment with past vendors who lacked the dedication and commitment to uphold the dignity of the final resting place for countless families. We urge the City Council to prioritize the interests of lot owner, and Detroit residents by selecting a contractor truly capable of fulfilling this crucial responsibility.

**Exhibit A**

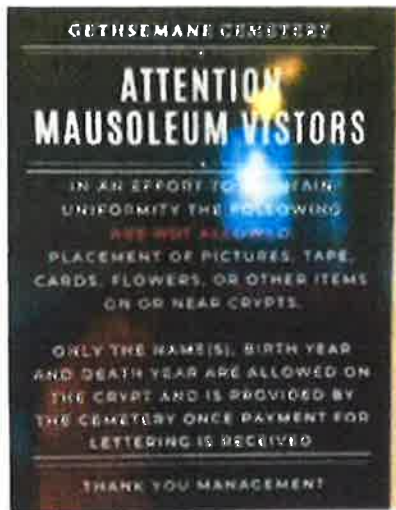
**(Pictures Taken on May 8-11, 2024, except the snow picture)**



3 year  
contracted;  
no seeding of  
the grass  
picture taken  
5/8/24



**Exhibit A Continues**



**Pictures taken 5/11/24**

**Rules are posted, no one is enforcing the rules**



**Pictures taken 5/11/24**



**Letters missing**



**Flower room**



**Pictures taken 5/11/24**



**Mausoleum ceiling**

**Exhibit B**

**State of Cemeteries 2020**



Signage was Dilapidated





Headstones and Grave Sites Were NOT Cared For Properly



Office Area Was Filthy and Not Inviting to Guest

**Improvement During the 2020-21 Emergency Manager Period**



**Bethsemane**  
Cemetery • Mausoleum • Crematory

**Mt. Hazel**  
CEMETERY  
EST. 1855

Signage Has Been Dramatically Improved



Headstones Have Been Stored Properly





Office & Other Buildings Are Clean and Inviting (ramp added)



Inside Gethsemane Office

