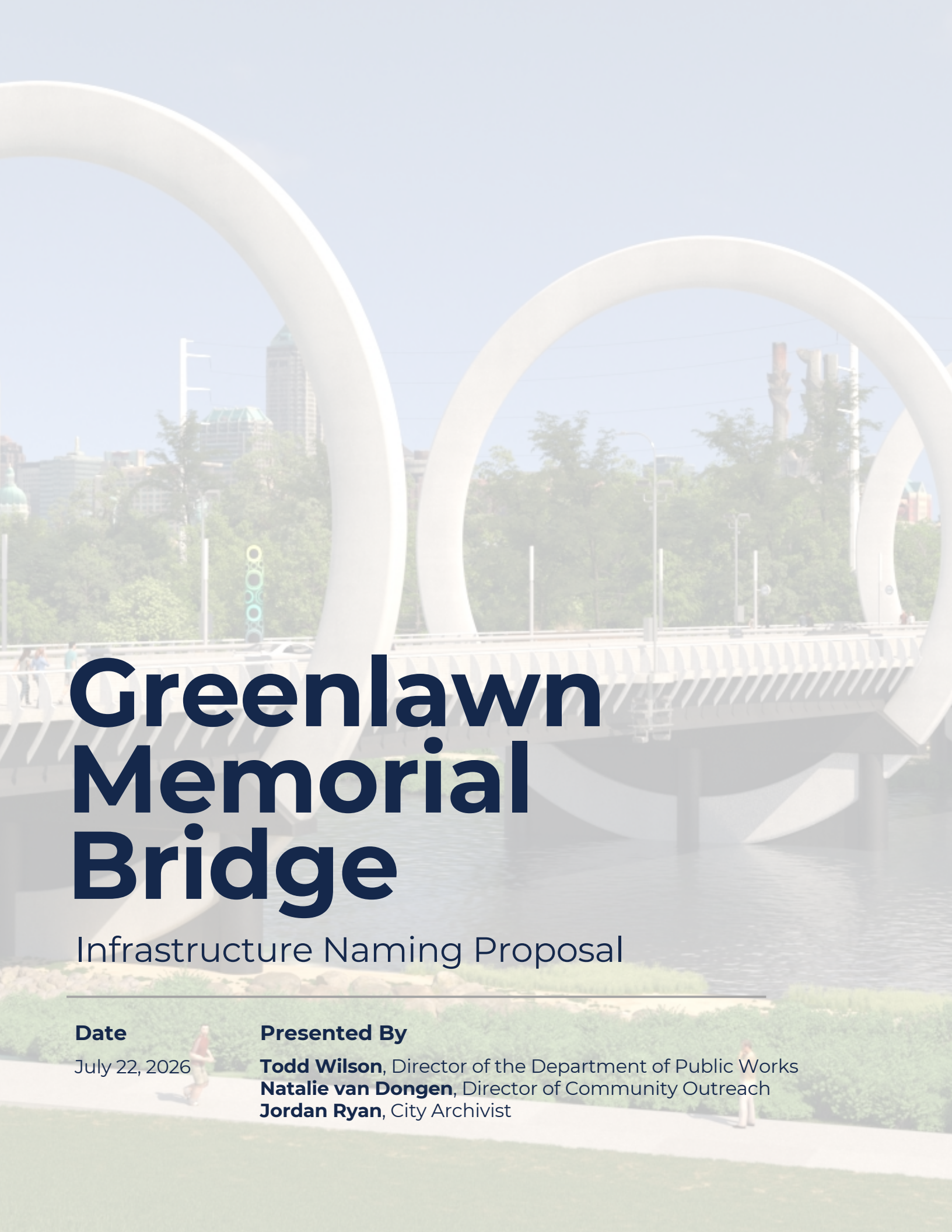




Greenlawn Memorial Bridge

Infrastructure Naming Proposal

Date

July 22, 2026

Presented By

Todd Wilson, Director of the Department of Public Works
Natalie van Dongen, Director of Community Outreach
Jordan Ryan, City Archivist

Overview

Facility

The “Henry Street Bridge” (White River crossing between Washington St. & Oliver St.)

Context

The “Henry Street Bridge” project sits within a historically and culturally sensitive landscape tied to the former Greenlawn Cemetery, Indianapolis’s first public burial ground established in 1821. Archaeological investigations and historical research have confirmed that portions of the cemetery extended into areas now encompassed by the bridge project, prompting the City to adopt a transparent, community-guided approach to redevelopment. In recognition of this responsibility, the City convened a Community Advisory Group (CAG) composed of historians, cultural organizations, neighborhood representatives, and other stakeholders to help shape decisions related to archaeology, memorialization, and site stewardship.

Through this collaborative process, and with ongoing public updates about archaeological findings, the history of Greenlawn became central to how the community understood and evaluated the project. The CAG emphasized the importance of acknowledging the individuals once interred there, including early settlers whose stories are often underrepresented in local narratives. In December, after months of discussion and review, the CAG voted to recommend Greenlawn Memorial Bridge as a name that appropriately honors the site’s significance and reflects the City’s commitment to dignity, education, and remembrance in its infrastructure decisions.

Requestor Information

Natalie van Dongen, Deputy Chief of Staff

Todd Wilson, Director of the Department of Public Works

Jordan Ryan, City-County Archivist

In collaboration with: The Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the Henry Street Bridge Project (membership includes local historians and representatives from Indiana Landmarks, Crown Hill Foundation, and others)

Location

Facility

Bridge over the White River between Washington Street and Oliver Street; includes two vehicular lanes and Cultural Trail multi-use path components.

Site Sensitivity

Portions of the bridge right-of-way overlap the former Greenlawn Cemetery, Indianapolis's first public cemetery (established 1821). This overlap and significant community activism led to the formation of the Community Advisory Group and a multi-year excavation and reburial process that is still ongoing.



Map depicting "Henry Street" right of way and the 4 original cemeteries

Principles

Historic Place

The bridge's eastern approach intersects the historic footprint of Greenlawn Cemetery, a collective of interconnected burying grounds used from 1821, later impacted by industrialization and flooding, and formally closed to burials by 1890. Naming the bridge Greenlawn Memorial Bridge directly acknowledges that history and supports respectful memorialization.

Cultural Significance

Greenlawn Cemetery was established in 1821 on the east bank of the White River and served as the first public burial ground for the city of Indianapolis. It included early settlers and notable Hoosiers such as Governor James Whitcomb and Matthias Nowland. The cemetery was closed to new burials by the City in 1890 due to concerns regarding overcrowding and mismanagement. Over many decades the site deteriorated as a result of industrial development, flooding, grave robbing, and the presence of unmarked burials. As a result, the significance and history of the cemetery had largely been overlooked. This changed when the City's interest in using a portion of the land for a major bridge project sparked controversy among those who understood the importance of honoring the site's history and, more importantly, the individuals buried there. In response, the Community Advisory Group was formed, a plan to excavate and rebury those interred at the site was developed, and the largest archaeological effort in the City's history began.

The current construction and archaeological work in the Henry Street Bridge project area have revealed extensive evidence of the original cemetery. Excavations uncovered 1,709 grave shafts within the former Greenlawn footprint. Excavation teams used careful methods including smooth-edged bucket mechanical removal under supervision, hand digging, soil screening, and detailed mapping to ensure all findings are properly recorded. Recovered remains were then transferred to Indiana University Indianapolis for analysis. Analysis work continues to this day and confirms the historical and cultural importance of Greenlawn Cemetery, reinforcing the need for thoughtful and respectful naming of public infrastructure connected to the site.

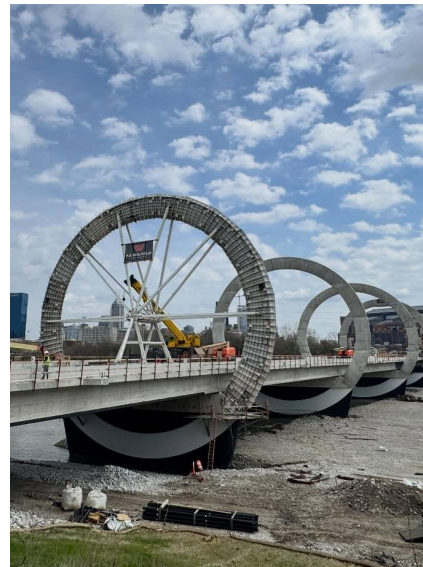
Principles

Message & Identity

The project's own public communications emphasize enhanced archaeology, transparency, and community-guided memorialization. Greenlawn Memorial Bridge complements those city messages and avoids commercialization. This rationale aligns with DPW's General Principles of positive image, appropriateness to location/history, cultural significance, commemoration, and broad support.



Marker memorializing original site of Greenlawn Cemetery



Bridge construction underway over the White River



Union Cemetery taken in 1906, Indiana Historical Society

Compliance

A. Geographic/Natural Features

“Greenlawn” is the historic place name immediately adjacent to the bridge alignment along the White River, connecting the facility to its geographic and historic context.

B. Places/Occurrences of Historic, Social, or Cultural Significance

Documented research by the CAG members, City-County Archives team, and consultant's principal investigator confirms Greenlawn's historic significance and the presence of burials in the project area, meeting DPW's requirement for thorough documentation.

C. Community Support

Community Advisory Group (CAG) Vote: The CAG, which meets monthly and includes local historians and stakeholder organizations, voted at its December 2025 meeting to recommend Greenlawn Memorial Bridge as the official name.

Public Engagement: The City and DPW have hosted public meetings and maintained an open call for research contributions about Greenlawn, demonstrating ongoing two-way engagement and transparency around the site's memorialization.

Ongoing Archaeology Updates: Regular public updates signal broad awareness and acceptance that the project should appropriately honor Greenlawn.



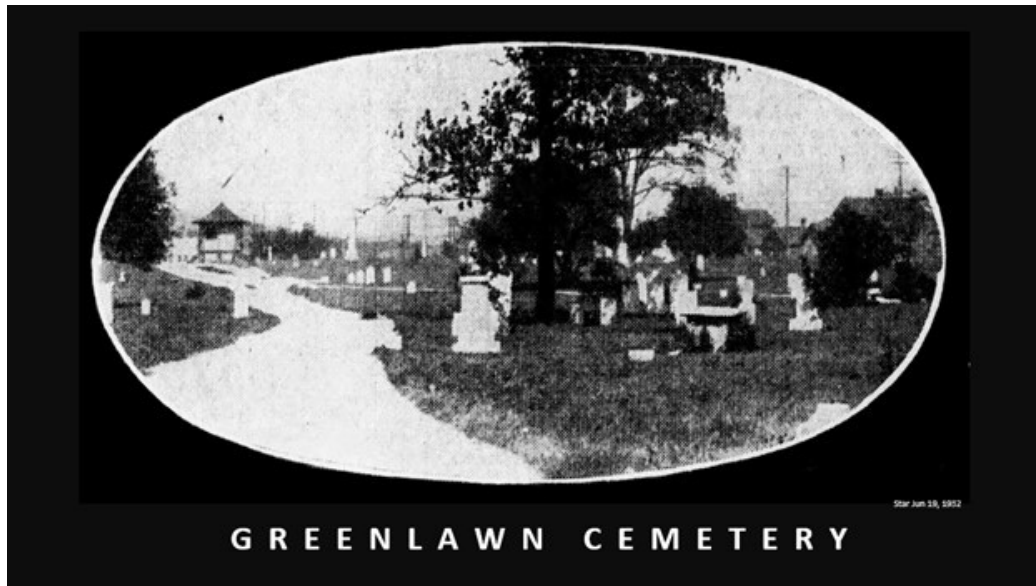
Requested Action

We respectfully request that the Department of Public Works review and approve the proposed naming of the Henry Street Bridge as the Greenlawn Memorial Bridge, in accordance with the procedures outlined in Section 7 of the DPW Infrastructure Naming Policy. This proposal satisfies the required submission elements, demonstrates alignment with the Basic Principles and Naming Guidelines, and reflects clear, documented community support through the recommendation of the Community Advisory Group (CAG). Approval of this name would formalize the City's commitment to acknowledging the historic significance of the former Greenlawn Cemetery and ensuring that new infrastructure honors the cultural and memorial landscape in which it sits.

If DPW determines that the proposed name meets the standards of appropriateness and justification, we request that the naming be placed on the agenda for consideration at the next available meeting of the Board of Public Works, where it would proceed to public hearing and final decision. Upon approval by the Board, we ask that DPW move forward with the placement of standard-compliant naming signage and the integration of "Greenlawn Memorial Bridge" into project communications, wayfinding materials, and public-facing documentation. This action will reinforce transparency, support ongoing public education, and affirm the City's dedication to respectful stewardship of historically sensitive sites.

Attachment Appendix

A Pictorial History of the Site

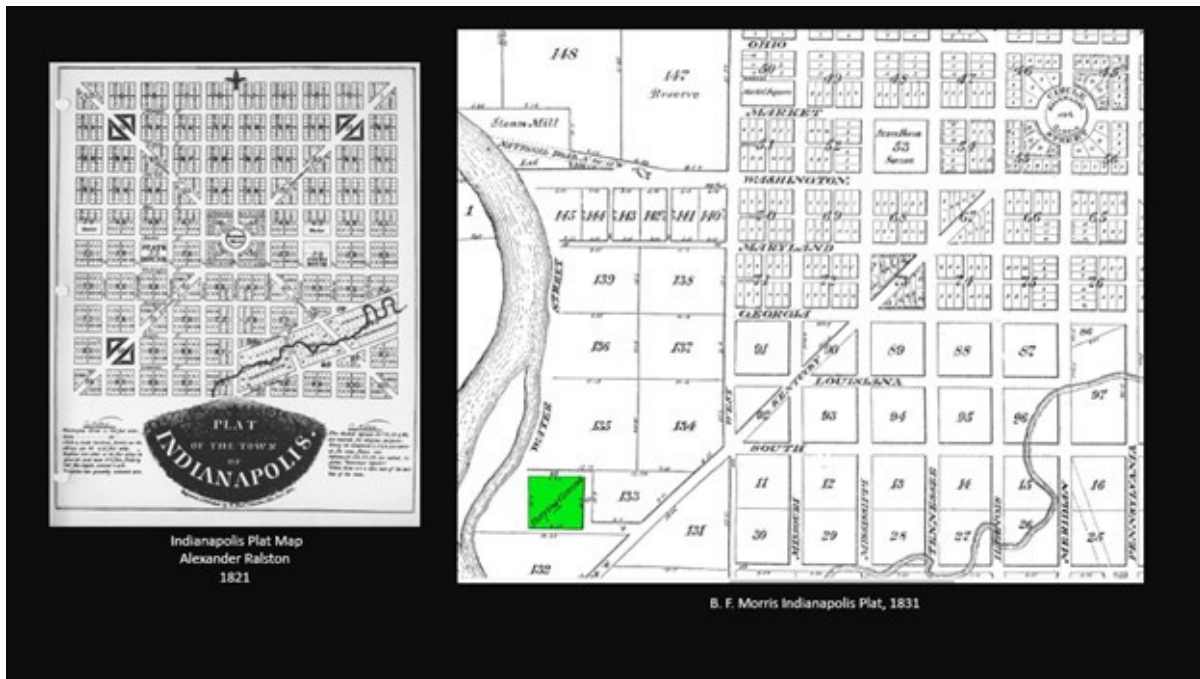


Photograph of the cemetery from the Indianapolis Star, June 19, 1932



Historic Map of the 4 cemetery sections

Attachment Appendix



Indianapolis was platted in 1821; the Original Burying Ground selected in 1821 outside of city limits

1834: New Burying Ground or Union Cemetery

1836 William Sullivan Map, Indiana State Library

NEW GRAVE-YARD.

MR. HIRAM DEVINNEY having been appointed Sexton of the New Grave-yard, those who may wish graves dug therein, will please to call on him at his residence, corner of New York and Missouri streets, north-west of the State House.

The remainder of the unsold lots in the Grave-yard which are inclosed, may be entered by application to the agent—and places for single graves may be had in the large lot No. 3.

ISAAC COE, Agent.

August 9, 1834. 616

Indiana Journal, August 23, 1834

J. G. Brown. This is the most beautifully laid out ground in this, and perhaps in any of the Western states—a large space is enclosed and laid out in regular squares, with sufficient room between them for carriages, and these squares are subdivided into family lots, which are deeded to the purchasers.

Indianapolis Locomotive, May 27, 1848

In 1834, the second cemetery, the New Burying Ground or the Union Cemetery, was established

Attachment Appendix

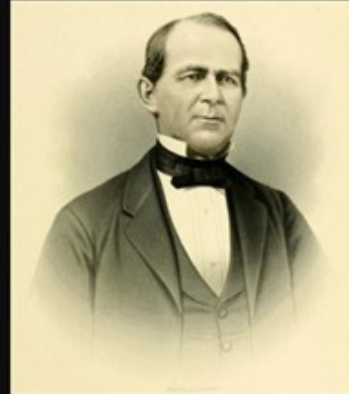
1852: New Burying Ground or North Burying Ground

New Burying Ground.—Persons wishing to procure lots in the new burying ground can be accommodated by applying to Messrs. Weaver & Williams, (Undertakers) where the plan of the ground can be seen. aug 21-2m 11

Indianapolis Locomotive, September 18, 1852



Indianapolis 1852, Dr. Luke Munsell publisher C.R. Milne, Indiana State Library



Edwin J. Peck
President of Terre Haute & Indianapolis
(Later Vandalia) Railroad

In 1852, a third cemetery to the north of the New Burying Ground, called the North Burying Ground or Peck's Ground, was established



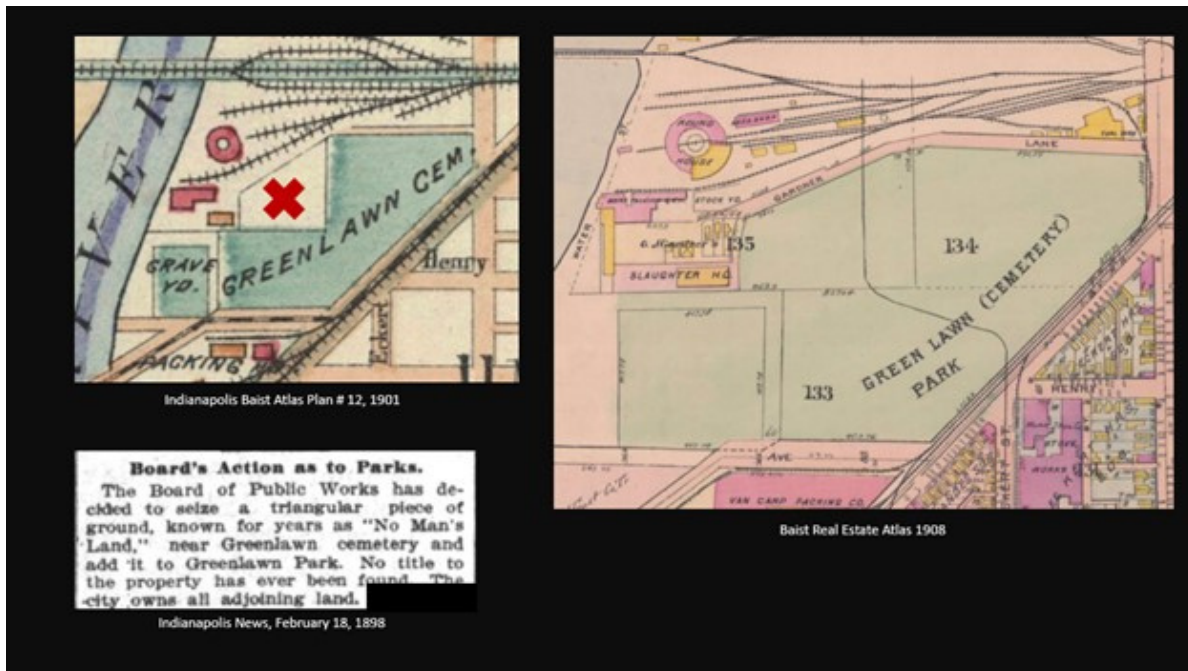
Marion County Recorder Plat Book 2 p. 56, Indiana State Archives

1860: Greenlawn Cemetery

Developed by
Siter, Price & Co.
Philadelphia

In 1860, a fourth cemetery to the west of the North Burying Ground and north of the Original Burying Ground, called Greenlawn Cemetery, was established. The four cemeteries are often collectively referred to as Greenlawn Cemetery

Attachment Appendix



Railroads and industry encroached upon the cemetery grounds. From 1888 to 1890, the cemetery was ordered to be closed to new burials. In 1898, the cemetery transitioned into a city park



By 1911, remnants of the cemetery remain despite some relocation efforts as described in this Indianapolis News article from November 18, 1911. The New Burying Ground was redeveloped into a federal league baseball stadium. The Original Burying Ground was redeveloped into a railroad freight terminal. Diamond Chain Company built upon the North Burying Ground and later expanded onto the New Burying Ground.