

I am writing to urge you to prioritize the building and development of Lone Fir cemetery block 14 in remembrance of 1,100 Chinese pioneer railroad workers who were once buried there. Voters across greater Portland have overwhelmingly approved Measure 26-203 in 2019, Metro's parks and nature bond measure. The goal is to renew our parks and nature areas in our neighborhoods, with the requirement to prioritize community engagement, racial equity, and climate resiliency.

Why is this important to me? I am an 8th grader. My mother's side of family is from China. In my Social Studies class, I have learned about the people who built up this great country by which we flourish upon. Figures such as Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. are taught across America to be great heroes who shaped America for the better, however I can't cease to wonder why none of them look like me. This has prompted me to research about my Chinese heritage in the earlier years of US history. I came across the story about the Chinese railroad workers who laid the foundation of American modernization and prosperity by building the Transcontinental railroads in the 1800's. Chinese workers made up 90% of the railroad laborers at that time. Many lost their lives while building the railroads and faced racial segregation and discrimination. They worked under unthinkable and harsh conditions, their income only a fraction of what their white counterparts received. In the ceremony upon the completion of the first trans-continental railway, none of them were allowed to be in the pictures, forgotten and erased from the history.

These Chinese American railroad workers are my ancestors and my heroes who played a quiet yet instrumental role in American history and modernization. But the only trace of their existence lies underground on block 14 in the Lone Fir cemetery. Currently, block 14 sits at the outskirts of the Lone Fir Cemetery, as an empty gravel landscape with no trees or plant life, ready for renovation.

Turning block 14 into a Cultural Heritage Garden will turn this empty and unsightly land into a beautiful gathering place for the residents, providing a memorial for the forgotten souls of our Chinese American ancestral pioneers. Furthermore, as anti-Chinese rhetoric grows louder and the racial divide becomes more intense in the recent years, your support to renovate this Cultural Heritage Garden will offer a peaceful place for education, introspection, and contemplation for many generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration!