

## Grave relocations needed for Tuscaloosa road project

**By Jason Morton / Staff Writer**

Posted May 21, 2018 at 6:37 PM

Updated May 22, 2018 at 8:06 PM

Before the Alabama Department of Transportation can proceed with a project to add lanes, eliminate median crossovers and optimize traffic flow along the McFarland Boulevard corridor, it must first deal with the relocation of some unmarked graves.

David Kemp, preconstruction engineer for ALDOT's West Central region, told the Tuscaloosa County Road Improvement Commission on Monday that officials now were working to relocate the graves next to the former Bryce Hospital.

"We will do that as part of the process, but it doesn't stop us from (proceeding) with our design," Kemp said.

Last year, ALDOT contracted with the University of Alabama's Office of Archeological Research to survey the property along the McFarland Boulevard corridor and identify any potential locations of gravesites.

Using ground-penetrating radar, the UA crew located several graves in the old Bryce Hospital cemetery north of Jack Warner Parkway.

It wasn't clear Monday where the relocated graves would go, as the ALDOT officials in Montgomery who had those answers were not available, said ALDOT West Central Region spokesman John D. McWilliams.

But some graves from this cemetery, the oldest of the four on the mental health department property with graves dating to the 1860s, were moved to other cemeteries on grounds owned by the Alabama Department of Mental Health when it was disturbed in the 1960s by the construction of Jack Warner Parkway, known then as River Road.

And on the southern side of Jack Warner Parkway is another cemetery with more than 2,000 graves.

The overall McFarland Boulevard Corridor project will upgrade the roadway between Rose Boulevard in Northport and Jug Factory Road in Tuscaloosa.

Kemp said these upgrades are meant to build on the traffic-streamlining project that began last year to upgrade intersections and traffic signals, close certain median cut-throughs and extend turn lanes to add capacity.

This latest project is part of a statewide effort to eliminate unnecessary median cut-throughs, Kemp said. The McFarland Boulevard corridor alone has 75 median crossovers within an 11-mile span.

“That is a lot,” Kemp said, noting these crossovers are considered “conflict points” by transportation engineers.

“When you can eliminate conflict points, you can reduce the possibility of accidents,” Kemp said.

The project also will add lanes and a bike and pedestrian pathway to the Woolsey Finnell Bridge. This work will add one traffic lane in each direction by building two new spans on either side of the existing bridge that was named for Woolsey Finnell, a World War I veteran who served as Tuscaloosa County’s probate judge, the city of Tuscaloosa’s engineer and the state director of highways.

Finnell died in 1955, and the bridge was named in his honor when it opened in 1961.

*Reach Jason Morton at [jason.morton@tuscaloosaneews.com](mailto:jason.morton@tuscaloosaneews.com) or 205-722-0200.*