

Native Remains to Be Laid to Final Rest

After 13 years, Playa Vista agrees to begin re-entering remains by this June.

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In a meeting with the California Native American Heritage Commission at the UCLA Law School this past Friday, representatives of Playa Vista and the Gabrielino-Tongva tribe came to a verbal agreement on a timeline for a reburial of human remains, some of which have been exhumed since 1995.



According to Robert F. Dorame, the most likely descendent of the Gabrielino-Tongva tribe, there are over 400 complete sets of human remains and hundreds of other artifacts in Playa Vista's possession. In what Dorame called "an unexpected gesture," Playa Vista hopes to begin reburying the artifacts by this June.

When human remains were first discovered on the Playa Vista development in 1995, it marked the beginning of what would become an intense struggle over the future of the Native American burial site.

As the most likely descendent, California state law mandates that Dorame be consulted about the remains by the developers, but the consultation is not binding-the developer determines whether the descendant's requests are granted.

What started as the removal of only a few bodies in 1995 developed into a tug-of-war between Playa Vista and the Gabrielino-Tongvas. Playa Vista wanted to move forward with its development on the southern border of its property while Dorame asked for construction to be halted. Currently, Playa Vista has stored the artifacts in boxes as the remains await undergoing research and analysis.

The burial ground in question lies directly below Loyola Marymount University's northern bluff.

Representatives of Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI), the firm hired by Playa Vista to oversee the archaeological project, were also present at the meeting.

Anthony Morales, another representative of the tribe, said, "These were at one time living, breathing people who would never believe that their remains would be treated this way."

George Milstein, legal counsel for Playa Vista, said original plans to replace the remains set a target date for 2011. Those plans have now changed significantly. After consulting with SRI, Playa Vista has determined that the process can begin this summer.

Milstein did call the plan "ambitious," and reiterated that it would require full cooperation from both sides in order to become a reality.

Lawrence Minch from the Army Corps of Engineers, who is also involved in the project, said, "We are committed to the fastest possible reburial in concordance with the law. We will do everything we can to try to hold [Playa Vista] to that schedule."

Those associated with the developers were criticized by several members of the Commission, including its Chairman Bill Mungary, for delaying in the process.

Los Angeles City Councilman Bill Rosendahl, in whose district the property exists, said, "The living descendants should be consulted every step of the way, so that all the remains can be properly returned."

Dorame said he would approach other members of his tribe, and discuss the recent developments in the situation. The most important thing to Dorame, is "that my ancestors get treated with the respect they deserve. Hopefully, that time is near," he said.