

Florida House of Representatives

Representative Danny Alvarez

District 69

District Office:

PO Box 1159
Riverview, FL 33568-1159
(813) 768-0940
Danny.Alvarez@FLHouse.gov



Tallahassee Office:

412 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
(850) 717-5069

June 1, 2026

Scott I. Steady
City Attorney, City of Tampa
315 E. Kennedy Blvd., 5th Floor
Tampa, FL 33602

RE: Marti-Colon Cemetery — 3203 W. St. John St.

Dear Mr. Steady,

I am writing regarding concerns that have been brought to my office related to development activity adjacent to the historic Marti-Colon Cemetery at 3203 W. St. John St.

My office has been contacted by concerned stakeholders regarding a parcel historically tied to the cemetery that is currently the subject of a lot split application and building permits. Documentation shared with my office indicates that a 2024 ground-penetrating radar survey of the site identified multiple subsurface anomalies described as consistent with grave-like patterns. I have also reviewed correspondence between Representative Fentrice Driskell's office and the City Attorney's office from March of this year, which provided helpful context on the City's legal position and the permit condition that was added in response to those concerns.

Marti-Colon Cemetery is one of Tampa's oldest and most historically significant burial grounds, serving as the final resting place of many of West Tampa's earliest and most prominent residents since the late 19th century. It represents an irreplaceable piece of Tampa's cultural and civic heritage, and its significance has been publicly recognized by the City through historical markers and arts and heritage programming. Once disturbed, that heritage cannot be restored. Notably, the City's own historical marker erected at the site in 2025 acknowledges that the cemetery's complex histories and undefined boundaries have given rise to concerns about burials located outside its currently defined borders.

The families connected to this cemetery have endured more than a century of missteps and neglect regarding the care of their loved ones' remains. Another chapter of failure at Marti-Colon would be a serious disservice to the families it has served and to the City's broader obligation to protect its historic places.

My concern is that if those anomalies represent unmarked human remains, development that disturbs them is not merely a regulatory matter, but also a legal and moral one with consequences that cannot be undone. A permit condition that requires the cessation of construction if any human remains are found during construction

*2026 Areas of Service:
Judiciary Committee*

*Criminal Justice Subcommittee, Chair • Insurance & Banking Subcommittee • Justice Budget Subcommittee
Transportation & Economic Development Budget Subcommittee
Special Committees - Security & Threat Assessment Committee, Vice Chair*

depends entirely on voluntary disclosure by the permit holder, the same party with the greatest financial incentive to continue construction. This provides little meaningful protection if there is no independent mechanism to verify compliance. The City should consider what oversight, if any, ensures that the condition is more than an acknowledgment on paper.

I recognize the City believes Section 553.79(2), Florida Statutes, left it no choice but to approve FDN25-181 and the associated building permits once the plans were found to be code-compliant. If that is the case, I respectfully encourage the City to pursue any legal mechanism available to pause construction while the burial question remains open. That could include engagement with the Division of Historical Resources, coordination with the State Archaeologist, consultation with the Medical Examiner regarding Section 872.05 obligations, or exploration of whether the permit condition can be strengthened to require a professional archaeological assessment before any further ground disturbance proceeds.

The City has rightfully recognized Marti-Colon Cemetery as a site of historic and cultural significance. That recognition carries an obligation to take the community's concerns seriously. I urge you to take additional measures to safeguard this historic location.

I am happy to discuss further and welcome any update on steps the City may be taking.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danny Alvarez".

Danny Alvarez
State Representative
District 69