



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Grave Shafts and Human Remains Discovered While Preparing for Henry Street Bridge Construction

INDIANAPOLIS, IN – Today, the Indianapolis Department of Public Works (Indy DPW) announced that human remains and grave shafts were discovered late last month as crews prepare to relocate utilities and begin excavation for the Henry Street Bridge project. The discoveries were shared with the Henry Street Community Advisory Group (CAG) last week.

DPW's Archaeological Excavation

Stantec, Indy DPW's archaeology consultant, discovered 15 grave shafts at approximately three to four feet deep while preparing to begin archaeological excavation east of the White River. They also identified a possible footstone, as well as a headstone base for a total of seven monument pieces.

Stantec received approval for its Archaeological Investigation Workplan for the Henry Street Bridge Project in September 2024. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) approved the work plan, which identifies the process of excavating, documenting, and removing human remains and artifacts within the Henry Street right of way.

According to the work plan, the construction team is using a trench stabilization shoring system to safely excavate within the Henry Street right of way. The team was in the process of installing the shoring stabilization system when the grave shafts were identified. Since the grave shafts were identified at a shallow depth, the shoring work was stopped to allow for exhumation of the identified remains.

Trained bioarchaeologists and archaeologists will carefully remove the area above and around each grave shaft by hand. Once all human remains are exposed, photographs and data documentation will be completed and remains will be exhumed and sent to Dr. Jeremy Wilson's lab at Indiana University – Indianapolis for analysis. The discovery of the grave shafts and artifacts will inform the community more about those buried there. "One of the many goals of the archaeological team and the CAG is to restore the identities of the individuals interred in this cemetery and to start understanding their place in the city's history. Uncovering objects like footstones with initials are vital to these efforts as they provide us with a starting point for genealogical research. This research, coupled with archaeological and osteological data, will bring us closer to realizing this goal," says Dr. Brooke Drew, an archaeologist on the Stantec team. *Below a footstone recovered with M.E.B. is photographed.*

Throughout the excavation process, which is expected to last until spring of 2025, tents will cover the work areas. This not only protects the remains and artifacts being excavated but also preserves the integrity and honors those who were interred in the area.

AES Utility Relocation

AES Indiana was preparing to install a subsurface utility line when their crews discovered human remains. In preparation of horizontal directional drilling, crews opened two pits north and south of the Henry Street right of way.

While excavating the north launch pit, archaeologists from Weintraut & Associates, working in conjunction with Arcadis US and Robinson Trenching, identified at least two grave shafts, including skeletal remains, buttons, a coffin, and coffin hardware. Three graves were also identified in the south receiver pit. While analysis is ongoing, bone and bone fragments, and one coffin nail have been identified.

Per its approved work plan, Weintraut and Associates notified the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology of each discovery. All five burials were discovered approximately four feet below the ground surface. Dr. Wilson will also conduct the analysis on the human remains for AES.

"AES Indiana is committed to working in partnership with the City of Indianapolis to ensure a proper and respectful excavation process throughout the project," said Roderick Conwell, AES Indiana Senior Director of Transmission & Distribution Operations.

The Henry Street Bridge's Impact on Greenlawn Cemetery

For more than a year, city officials have been meeting with concerned community members regarding the site of the Henry Street Bridge and its approaches. The Henry Street right of way east of the river occupies a portion of the city's first cemetery, a collection of four long-abandoned cemeteries often referred to collectively as Greenlawn Cemetery.

To learn more about the Henry Street Bridge project, visit wridinfrastructure.com/

To learn more about Indy DPW construction projects, visit indy.gov/DPWprojects

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