

Cemetery Master Plan

ISSUE

In early 2020, the City of Saskatoon commissioned a Cemetery Master Plan to provide an overall vision to guide the future development, operations, and long-term sustainability of the City's cemeteries. This report presents the Cemetery Master Plan and the recommended course of action for consideration and approval in principle.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That this report be forwarded to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee for information; and
2. that the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council that the Cemetery Master Plan be approved, in principle.

BACKGROUND

The City of Saskatoon (City) has two cemeteries under its jurisdiction: Nutana Pioneer Cemetery, Saskatoon's inactive historic cemetery site; and Woodlawn Cemetery. Woodlawn Cemetery has been owned and operated by the City since 1905. The 96-acre (32 hectare) site is the final resting place for more than 65,000 individuals. Originally started as two separate cemeteries; one for Catholic and the other non-denominational, these distinctions quickly became sections within the overall cemetery. Additional, smaller sections were established over time for military Fields of Honour, Ukrainian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox. More recently, additional sections have been established to accommodate some Jewish and Muslim communities within Saskatoon. Of note, Next of Kin Memorial Avenue is classified as a National Historic Site by Parks Canada as one of the last such intact memorials in Canada.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

In early 2020, Lees + Associates was engaged to lead consultation and development of the Cemetery Master Plan (see Appendix 1). Work began with a community needs and trends analysis, including a detailed examination and projection of casket burials and cremation rates. Interviews with staff, stakeholders, community groups, and Indigenous and Métis leaders took place in June 2020 through a series of small-group discussions by online video conference. Through this process, it became clear that the City's cemeteries are highly valued by many groups with various interests, including Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TCR) Calls to Action and as a result, TCR Call to Actions Numbers 57 and 79 were incorporated into the project scope. Also included in the Cemetery Master Plan (Master Plan) is an examination of the Cemetery's site, operations, finances, and future development. For additional detail and background on the recommendations included in the Master Plan, see Appendix 2.

Cemetery Master Plan

Based on current sales and land use figures, Woodlawn Cemetery is within 20 to 30 years of its remaining capacity for casket interments. The cemetery is surrounded by a combination of railway, a major roadway, and a residential neighborhood, which limits future expansion, specifically for casket interments. For the City to properly consider and plan for the provision of cemetery space for the next 125 to 150 years, the Parks Department initiated work on the Master Plan to optimize current remaining cemetery space and to begin planning for and developing future cemetery capacity.

Remaining Burial Inventory, Projected Annual Burials, and Sales

Currently, at Woodlawn Cemetery there is two to three years of traditional in-ground (casket) burial lots available for sale and one to two years of cremation lots and columbaria niches available for sale. As described in the recommendations within the Master Plan, additional inventory will be developed on the current Woodlawn Cemetery site to ensure a consistent supply.

In the upcoming 25-year period, Woodlawn Cemetery can expect an average of 664 burials per year. It is estimated that of those burials, approximately:

- 144 (22%) will be traditional in-ground burial (casket) interments; and
- 520 (78%) will be interments of cremated remains.

In the upcoming 25-year period, Woodlawn Cemetery can expect to sell 247 rights of interments per year. It is estimated that of those sales, approximately:

- 110 will be traditional in-ground burial (casket) interments;
- 92 will be cremation lot sales; and
- 45 will be columbaria niche (cremation) sales.

Expansion of Burial Inventory and Active Life of Woodlawn Cemetery

It is estimated that an additional 25 years of traditional in-ground burials can be developed in the northern area of Woodlawn Cemetery. The Master Plan also identified an opportunity to deploy an infill strategy that could extend the in-ground burial capacity to 34 years. The addition of areas for cremated remains will mean that Woodlawn Cemetery will be active and operational for at least 60+ years.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Over the last five years, Woodlawn Cemetery required approximately \$170,000 per year in tax dollar support; however, Woodlawn Cemetery is expected to break even within the next six years. Progress could be accelerated by implementing a marketing strategy, adding non-resident premiums and continuing to increase prices at 3% per year. The care and maintenance fund is currently sufficient to cover 90% of maintenance costs when it becomes an inactive site; this will grow to cover 100% of costs in the next seven years.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

One potential consideration or implication is that the City could exit the active cemetery business in the near future or after Woodlawn Cemetery is fully developed, and then just continue the perpetual care/maintenance of the existing site. The Master Plan

Cemetery Master Plan

suggests the benefits to citizens of a municipally operated cemetery outweigh the risks involved. To note, a 2005 cemetery audit confirmed the City should remain in the cemetery business due to the beneficial public outcomes and obligation the City has to take over any abandoned cemetery and for the burial of the impoverished.

NEXT STEPS

If the Master Plan is approved in principle, Administration will begin work on a more detailed implementation and financial plan for the recommendations.

APPENDICES

1. City of Saskatoon Cemetery Master Plan
2. Cemetery Master Plan – Additional Background & Recommendations

REPORT APPROVAL

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Admin Report - Cemetery Master Plan.docx