

Scattering of Cremated Remains Update

ISSUE

This report responds to an inquiry requesting information on opportunities and potential locations for the scattering of Cremated Remains, specifically “That work continue respecting the possibility of identifying and constructing a permanent, dedicated location for the scattering of cremated remains.”

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning Development and Community Services recommend to City Council that a Capital Project, to plan and construct a dedicated scattering location at Meewasin Park for the scattering of cremated remains as outlined in this report, be brought forward for consideration in the 2024/25 Multi-Year Business Plan and budget deliberation.

BACKGROUND

In the Sikh and Hindu faith, releasing cremated remains into running water symbolizes the circle of life. The Sikh and Hindu Societies of Saskatchewan approached the City of Saskatoon in April 2021 to create a policy associated with scattering cremated remains in the South Saskatchewan River and to discuss the potential to implement a dedicated location to perform ceremonies.

At its April 26, 2021 Regular Business Meeting, City Council resolved:

“That the Administration engage the Hindu Society of Saskatchewan and report back on the possibility of approving a location in the Saskatoon area for the release of cremated remains into the river.”

The Sikh Society was also consulted as a direct stakeholder. Upon completion of engagement, at its July 26, 2021 meeting, City Council considered the report of the General Manager, Community Services Division dated July 19, 2021 and resolved:

1. that the scattering of remains into the South Saskatchewan River, be permitted;
2. that the Community Services Division be requested to draft guidelines respecting the scattering of cremated remains into the river; and
3. that work continue respecting the possibility of identifying and constructing a permanent, dedicated location for the scattering of cremated remains.

Administration has subsequently developed the guidelines for release of cremated remains, which are now posted on the City’s website (see Appendix 1).

This report addresses recommendation 3, the possibility of identifying and constructing a permanent, dedicated location for scattering cremated remains.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Permanent Dedicated Scattering Location Examples

Investigation into the provision of a Permanent Dedicated Scattering Location (Scattering Location) indicates there are some municipal facilities that have been developed in Oakville, ON; Mississauga, ON; and Toronto, ON to support scattering of cremated remains in moving water; however, these types of facilities are rare. If the City of Saskatoon approves the development of a Scattering Location, it would be considered a leader in the provision of this service.

Potential Location, Amenity Level and Operation of a Dedicated Scattering Location

The Parks Department has engaged with representatives from the Hindu and Sikh Societies, Meewasin Valley Authority and the City's Community Development and Indigenous Initiatives staff regarding the potential development and location of a Scattering Location. Stakeholders were supportive of such a site and felt the development of a Scattering Location would be a logical next step in terms of further formalizing and supporting the guidelines that have been developed regarding the release of cremated remains in Saskatoon. As such, even after the development of a dedicated Scattering Location, cremated remains would still be permitted to be scattered at other locations as long as they are in compliance with the guidelines.

A riverbank area south of Meewasin Park (see Appendix 2) has been identified by stakeholders as a suitable and preferred location for a Scattering Location due to its proximity to the Meewasin trail and the presence of a pathway with a gentle slope leading to a river access point with generally shallow water levels. This area is also isolated from nearby traffic and noise, while still close to existing parking and restroom facilities. The site would be able to accommodate anticipated amenities and there are opportunities to incorporate naturalized plantings, including trees into a potential design. To note, a Scattering Location would be open to anyone who wishes to use it, regardless of faith, belief, culture, etc; the site would provide a designated, landscaped space to perform scattering activities/ceremonies separated from other park users. At this time, a booking process is not envisioned.

Based on preliminary stakeholder feedback, high-level Scattering Location conceptual plans (see Appendix 3) envision a ceremonial gathering site in a relatively private location connected to the main trail in Meewasin Park and a yet to be determined structure that provides proximity to the South Saskatchewan River necessary to scatter cremated remains safely and effectively. Additional planning would need to address safety of users and others and any time the City builds a structure(s) near/within the river there are additional approvals required and there is a certain level of risk that goes with this venture; however, if the Scattering Location is properly constructed and the site selected will be where the water remains relatively shallow, which is the expectation, the risks of liability can be mitigated. Other planning activities as the Scattering Location project progresses would consider and identify requirements for the following:

- Design of Scattering Location would aim to provide appropriate sightlines to maintain safety, respecting that ceremonies will be personal in nature;

- Appropriate signage would be placed in prominent locations at the site to communicate, safe use of the site and its amenities, to patrons;
- CPTED reviews will be completed to ensure design meets appropriate standards;
- Monitor river water level and flow rate increases; it may be necessary to limit or curtail access to the Scattering Location during high flow periods; and
- An annual inspection program would be implemented, ensuring continued safety of structure(s) near/within the river.

It is important to note the current scattering remains guidelines (see Appendix 1) would remain in place if a Scattering Location were to be developed.

Potential Permanent Dedicated Scattering Location Capital Project

Preliminary stakeholder engagement has identified that a Scattering Location is feasible; however, given the sensitive nature of ceremonies and the act of scattering remains, as well the environmental complexities associated with constructing structures in close proximity to the river, planning and engagement with other cities, faith groups, environmental experts, and the public will be required.

A phased approach to the Scattering Location project is outlined in Table 1. The first phase of the project would include community and stakeholder engagement and development of a detailed design. The second phase would include the Scattering Location construction and warranty periods. The estimate provided for the Construction Phase is a Class D estimate based upon a preliminary project scope that was established through limited stakeholder engagement. Scattering Location amenity and funding requirements would be confirmed upon completion of the Engagement and Detailed Design Phase.

Table 1:

Phases	Year	Estimated Total
Phase 1 – Engagement and Design	2024	\$55,000
Phase 2 – Construction Phase	2025	\$246,000

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Scattering Location is in the jurisdiction of the Meewasin Valley Authority and will require approval from their Board of Directors. In addition, as the structure will be adjacent to a Federally regulated waterway, the City may be required to complete the necessary application and seek the approval of Transport Canada, Ocean and Fisheries, and the Province of Saskatchewan.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of the report recommendation, a Scattering Location capital project that identifies total estimated costs and potential funding source(s), including the identification of known operating impacts would be brought forward for consideration within the City's 2024/25 Business Plan and Budget Review process. External funding opportunities, such as stakeholder fundraising and Federal grant opportunities, will continue to be explored.

APPENDICES

1. City of Saskatoon Scattering Remains Guidelines
2. Permanent Dedicated Scattering Location
3. Permanent Dedicated Scattering Location Draft Conceptual Plan

Report Approval

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