

## **Green Burial Society of Canada and Municipal Scan**

### **Green Burial Society of Canada**

The Green Burial Society of Canada (Society) was formed in 2013 to provide Canadians with credible information about green burials and green funerals. The mandate of the organization includes advocating for the adoption of environmentally responsible interments and assisting organizations with implementing green burial standards and best practices.

The Society also certifies cemeteries that meet their standards as green burial cemeteries. Currently, five cemeteries in British Columbia, four cemeteries in Alberta, two cemeteries in Ontario, and one cemetery in Nova Scotia are approved by the Society as green burial providers. To receive certification, providers must adhere to the following five principles of green burial, as set out on the Society's [website](#):

1. No Embalming
  - Bodies can be prepared in a dignified way for burial and viewing without the use of embalming through the use of environmentally sensitive soaps, lotions and disinfectants.
2. Direct Earth Burial
  - Un-embalmed bodies may be wrapped in a shroud made of natural, biodegradable fibers and then buried directly in a grave, or placed in a casket made of sustainable and biodegradable materials, preferably made of locally sourced materials.
  - No outside grave liner or protective vault is used.
3. Ecological Restoration and Conservation
  - Protection of the ecosystem is essential.
  - Visitation to individual graves is discouraged or prohibited.
  - Surfaces of graves are planted with locally indigenous plants.
  - Site preservation and perpetual protection is a key component of green burial.
4. Communal Memorialization
  - The use of individual memorials is discouraged.
  - Communal memorials that use naturally sourced materials, with simple, basic inscriptions, is promoted.
5. Optimized Land Use
  - Design elements should include minimal installation of infrastructure and temporary roads that can be removed and converted to interment lots.
  - Re-use of graves is promoted.

## **Municipal Scan**

The following municipalities were identified as offering green burials; their green burial procedures are summarized below:

### **City of Calgary**

The City of Calgary's Cemeteries Rules and Guidelines (Rules) define "green burial" as "the interment of the body of a dead person in the earth in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition". The Rules state that the aim of green burials is to minimize negative environmental impacts and present a natural appearance in and around green burial areas.

The main provisions respecting green burials are pasted in full below:

#### **All Burials Shall:**

- Have only one interment per designated burial plot;
- Take place in the next available burial plot, as determined by the operational requirements and at the discretion of the Cemeteries Lead/Administrator (no pre-selection or reservation of burial plots);
- Use only biodegradable caskets/containers or suitable burial shrouds;
- Meet ecological minimums - all clothing items used for burial purposes must be of natural fibers such as (cotton, linen, hemp wool) with the removal of all non-biodegradable metal or plastic items such as (clasps, zippers, buttons); and
- If so desired, memorialize in the designated communal areas found within the boundaries of the Green burial section. (see restrictions below)

#### **No Person shall:**

- Inter human remains that have been embalmed. Any treatment of the body prior to interment must reflect environmentally friendly practices;
- Place or install a burial vault of any composition into the Burial Lot;
- Place memorialization, decorative railings, ornamental lamps, vases or personal items on or around the Burial Lot;
- Plant trees, decorative shrubs, flowers or any plant materials on or around the Burial Lot; or
- Scatter or bury cremated remains on, in or around the designated burial plot.

### **City of Edmonton**

The City of Edmonton's Municipal Cemeteries – Regulations and General Information document has a section respecting "Green Burial Plots", which is pasted in full below:

For interment of human remains in a 4'x 9' full size plot:

- The depth of the grave must be sufficient to allow for a minimum of 3' of earth between the upper surface of the casket and the level of the ground;
- The body must be prepared for Green Burial without embalming and buried in a biodegradable shroud, simple container or casket made from natural fibre, wicker or sustainably harvested wood. Please see your funeral home for more information;
- No concrete liners or vaults permitted in this area; and
- Only one full size interment permitted per plot.

The document also states that individual markers are not permitted in the Green Burial Area, and that there is a communal marker for commemoration in that area.

### **City of Lethbridge**

The City of Lethbridge does not appear to include provisions respecting green burials in its cemetery bylaw, but lists information on its [website](#).

Lethbridge's brochure on green burials lists the five principles of green burial that are described on the Society's website (see above: Green Burial Society of Canada).

### **City of Salmon Arm**

The City of Salmon Arm's Cemetery Management Bylaw No. 4280 includes detailed provisions respecting green burials, which is defined to mean "a natural form of interment where the interment satisfies criteria set out in this Bylaw for green burial".

The following provisions are included in Salmon Arm's Bylaw:

- The City may designate certain areas of the cemetery where green burials may take place;
- Interment rights in the green burial area may be purchased on an at-need or reserve basis;
- Lot assignment in a green burial area shall only be made at the time a lot is required for an interment of remains;
- The green burial area is subject to the City's lot use, planting and eco-system management plan;
- Remains in a green burial area are considered non-recoverable, and no disinterments are permitted except where legally required;
- Remains in green burial lots must:
  - Be in a natural state and not embalmed;

- Be clothed, wrapped or shrouded in a natural, biodegradable fiber or material;
  - Be enclosed in a shroud, casket or alternative container that is approved by the City for use in a green burial lot; and
  - Be enclosed in a shroud, casket or alternative container with a rigid base that permits the dignified transport and safe handling of the human remains by all persons so charged.
- Shrouds, caskets or alternative containers must:
  - Be approved by the City;
  - Be primarily constructed of fully biodegradable and environmentally sustainable materials;
  - Have interior finishing primarily fabricated of fully biodegradable and environmentally sustainable materials and natural fibers;
  - Have, as a function of their design, a safe and secure means with which to facilitate the dignified transfer of the human remains to the interment site;
  - Not have a high gloss or polish finish achieved through the application of any synthetic or environmentally hazardous, toxic or non-biodegradable chemical or agent; and
  - Not have any non-biodegradable personal item, memento or article placed inside the space occupied by the human remains;
- Human remains must be buried at a depth deemed sufficient by the City to achieve effective natural decomposition of the human remains interred while also ensuring the human remains will not be disturbed by wildlife;
- No form of exterior grave liner is permitted in a green burial interment lot;
- The City makes no warranty of protection nor bears any liability for the aesthetic, structural or physical impacts made to a casket or other container;
- Cremated human remains must be enclosed in an urn or container that is approved by the City;
- The City may limit the number of witnesses at interments, and witnesses must comply with the instructions of the City;
- Only communal markers are permitted; no decorations or adornments are permitted, apart from floral arrangements, which are permitted for up to 2 weeks after the date of interment;
- Only locally indigenous plants are permitted, and all planting must be approved by the City; and
- To protect the health and integrity of green burial area plantings, the City reserves the right to limit, restrict or prohibit visitation as well as vehicle access to the green burial area.

### **Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries By-laws**

The “Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries By-laws” (By-law) (Mount Pleasant Group operates ten cemeteries in the Greater Toronto Area) has a section relating to “Natural Burial Areas”, which is defined to mean “an area within a cemetery which is specifically designed to permit human remains to be returned to the earth as naturally as possible”.

The By-law includes the following provisions:

- Caskets, shrouds, containers or urns must be made from materials that are non-toxic and readily biodegradable, such as wood, wicker, recycled cardboard or natural fiber;
- Outer containers are not permitted;
- Scattering of cremated remains is permitted provided that it is performed in a shallow excavation under the direction of the cemetery; surface scattering is not permitted;
- Interments are considered permanent and irreversible;
- Embalming is not permitted;
- In order to preserve the natural setting, grass cutting and weeding are not permitted;
- No articles of any kind, such as artificial plants, are permitted; and
- Individual memorials are not permitted; families may place the name and birth/death dates of their loved ones on a communal memorial.