

June 30, 2017

Office of the Elected Officials  
Community Centre – 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
401 Festival Lane  
Sherwood Park, AB

RE: Council Priority Funds – Application

This letter is a request from the Burial Options Society in Strathcona (the burial society) to receive Council Priority Funds for the purpose of exploring cemetery development in Strathcona County. Included with this letter is the application, a budget and details regarding intended use of funding.

The burial society is requesting \$45,000. to investigate the concept of non-profit, community cemetery development in Strathcona County. Following Strathcona procurement policy, the funds will be used to contract a landscape architect with specialty in cemetery and memorial space design to provide:

1. A **workshop** (Cemeteries 101 + Visioning) with County Council, administration, burial society directors and appropriate volunteers.
2. A **demographics analysis** to include death rates and trends, population growth, cremation/burial rates.
3. A **needs analysis** including site requirements, facilities need, operating costs, community enhancement options.
4. **Business Plan** to include governance model, legals, an operating model, financials, marketing and a site plan.
5. **Summary Report** to provide an executive summary of benefits and risks to all parties involved.

The budget breakdown is as follows:

1. Workshop	\$ 5,000.
2. Demographics analysis	\$ 5,000.
3. Needs analysis	\$10,000.
4. Business plan	\$15,000.
5. Summary report	<u>\$ 5,000.</u>
Total	\$45,000.

It was in April 2015, at the conclusion of a Program Request that Council agreed to form an ad-hoc committee to address the myriad of questions raised. The committee did not come together and the questions remain.

A case can be made that the concept of cemetery development fits within the governance, social, cultural and environment pillars of sustainability. The outcomes of the Social Framework also speak to the need for these community services at life's end.

Attached to this letter is further documentation to support the request. Your considerations are appreciated. Your support would allow for the continued progression of this exploration. Thank you.

Kind Regards,

Bonnie Hoffmann  
Board Chair  
Burial Options Society in Strathcona

## Briefing notes

### RE: Priority Funds Request

## ISSUE

For the current 700 families in Strathcona County who face making death care decisions and final arrangements each year, there are no options available that are affordable, accessible or readily available. Strathcona County needs the social infrastructure of a community cemetery.

## BACKGROUND

In Alberta, provincial legislation regulates cemeteries. The Municipal Government Act provides that a municipal council is authorized to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of Council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality. 90% of Alberta municipalities provide cemetery services to their taxpayers. Section 3 of the Cemeteries Act provides that no new cemetery may be established, except by a religious auxiliary, religious denomination or a municipality. How is it that Strathcona County has not yet developed a cemetery? Understanding is that rural churches were meeting this need, back in the day. Today, these institutions are struggling under the weight of aging volunteer management and declining congregation numbers.

2007: Social Sustainability Framework identifies the growing number of seniors. Recommends that new services for this growing demographic will need to be developed.

2012: Advocacy efforts began with an information presentation to County Council. The information was accepted and filed away.

2014: The first cemetery tour was hosted through the support of a SCIP grant and this fall , continuing on, the fourth tour will be held.

2015: Councillor Botterill introduced a Program Request dealing with at-risk cemeteries within the County. Executive Team presented a cursory overview of the Cemeteries Act and burial space availability. Council discussion produced more questions than answers. It was agreed to form an ad hoc committee to further discussions. The committee never came to be.

2016: A non-profit group, the Burial Options Society in Strathcona (the burial society) is provincially incorporated with two main objectives; to provide public education and to pursue development of a non-profit, community cemetery.

2017: The burial society applies to CRA for Charitable Registration Status. Currently in que. Presentation to Community Living Advisory Committee leads to recommendation to Social Framework Steering Committee. Presentation on green burial at the library draws 50, generates positive media, interest from Muslim and Jewish communities, along with several new Board directors. The IVC Volunteer Week events generated new community presentation requests to the Society.

## CURRENT STATUS

The Burial Options Society in Strathcona has received granting from County Clothes-Line Foundation for a public education table at the Farmers' Market at Festival Place this summer. Such a public engagement opportunity will continue to raise profile to the need for change and supports.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- 700 families deal with death care arrangements in our County each year.
- Glenwood Memorial Gardens and City of Edmonton are the only options. Arbor Memorial (Glenwood parent company) has made national headlines at least twice in the last couple of months for their aggressive, underhanded tactics when dealing with bereaved clients.
- Affordability of death care services are often beyond marginalized groups and the vulnerable.
- Mental health is greatly influenced and challenged when death occurs.
- Across North America, communities are expanding cemetery services, driven by need of an aging population.
- People are seeking services that are more in keeping with their values and culture.
- County seniors are seeking meaningful volunteer work.
- Stakeholders expressing interest include churches, care facilities, PEP, Robin Hood Society, Heartland Housing Foundation and IVC.
- The Edmonton Community Foundation, The Social Enterprise Fund, Community Facilities Enhancement Program, Community Initiatives Program and other granting institutions are interested.
- With funding in place to explore the concept, the burial society will be able to leverage other funders.
- The County of Strathcona is required to be a part of the project – not to take it on. Interested parties above have adopted a “wait and see what the County does” stance.
- There is an uncomfortable sense of urgency as the demand/need for options/supports grows.

## OPTIONS

### *A. No Decision/Do Nothing*

Pros	Cons
easiest choice of options	community left to its own devices
do not have to be involved in the uncomfortableness of death	a crucial part of Strathcona County heritage and culture will be lost
	the environment will continue to suffer at the fate of toxic cemetery operations
	families continue the affordability struggle

### *B. County of Strathcona becomes responsible for cemetery services for taxpayers*

Pros	Cons
residents will have options including	considerable departmental impacts
environmentally appropriate choices	capital expenditure
incorporation of native trees, greenscapes	budget and staffing implications
family conducive space for generations	no internal expertise

*C. Build empowerment into the community to develop*

Pros	Cons
residents will have options	some capital investment
stakeholders willing to step up	
funding and fundraising become available	
outside expertise available	

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Burial Options Society in Strathcona has demonstrated commitment and clarity with regard to lack of cemetery options in our community. Just as the growing senior's population requires additional housing spaces, there is growing awareness for final address options. Affordability of services at time of death is a serious challenge for many. It is reasonable to think that those who have lived, worked, played, volunteered and supported the liveability of Strathcona County would want their final resting place to also be within Strathcona County.

This is a project that will be several years in the making, from whenever the start is made. The need for options in cemetery care will continue to rise as quickly as our population is aging.