

Community Cemetery Assessment**Report Purpose**

To provide an update on the Community Cemetery Assessment and determine next steps.

Recommendation

None

Our Prioritized Strategic Goals

Goal 1 - Build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents

Goal 6 - Provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents

Goal 7 - Provide opportunities for public engagement and communication

ReportBackground

Strathcona County is exploring the need for a community cemetery that would serve current and future residents. Municipal cemeteries offer services open to all residents with a range of options and spectrum of price points. The Cemeteries Act was recently changed to reflect that "no new cemetery may be established except by a religious auxiliary, religious denomination, or municipality."

Strathcona County is unique in that, for the size, it does not have a municipal cemetery. Cemetery services are provided within the County by a private corporation, religious-affiliated organizations and volunteer-based community groups. The cemetery services currently available through faith-based organizations may not be inclusive of the entire population and services through the private corporation may be unaffordable for some residents.

Project Summary

In July 2018, Council approved that \$60,000 be provided to support an external review and report on the viability and desirability of a community cemetery in Strathcona County. Urban Systems was procured in early 2019 as the consultant to lead this work. The Community Cemetery Assessment was designed with four distinct phases, two of which are completed and the last two are pending approval from Council to move forward. The phases included:

Phase 1: Assessment of cemetery needs (completed in 2019)

Phase 2: Review of the current market, the potential services and form of a new community cemetery (completed in 2019)

Phase 3: Analysis of financial feasibility and operational structure (pending Council direction)

Phase 4: Evaluation of potential sites (pending Council direction)

Community Engagement

Community engagement was conducted via online survey through SCOOP and Survey Gizmo, stakeholder workshops and public open houses. The community survey received a total of 534 responses with 68% of participants supporting the idea of a community cemetery. The main reasons to support a community cemetery cited through engagement were: a more affordable option, inclusive of all people and religious beliefs, accessible and offering environmentally friendly services such as green burial.

Project Findings

According to the analysis, currently there are 12 cemeteries in Strathcona County. Of these, seven are still taking interments. In total, these cemeteries have enough space for approximately 19,500 more interments with 17,500 of these plots at Glenwood Memorial Gardens. As per the projections, there is sufficient burial space for the County for the next 30 years.

A municipal cemetery could provide a lower-cost option, depending on the funding structure established by the County, and would be accessible to those of all religious beliefs. Urban Systems identified two scenarios for a municipal cemetery: Scenario 1 is a full-service community cemetery and Scenario 2 is a cemetery offering only green burial and scattering, to complement services available at Glenwood Memorial Gardens. These two scenarios will be explored if continuing with Phase 3 and 4 is approved by Council.

Residents also noted the importance of maintaining and caring for historic cemeteries that are no longer in operation. Smaller cemeteries in the County indicated they have significant challenges maintaining their cemeteries and would like the County to consider supporting their maintenance. Possibilities to maintain historic and small cemeteries will also be explored if Council decides to continue the work.

Potential Next Steps

Administration was directed to report back to Council on the viability and desirability of a community cemetery and this report attempts to address that question. Should Council wish to have the Community Cemetery project proceed to Phase 3, then a Council motion directing Administration to include funding up to \$60,000 in the 2021 budget process would be the next step to advance this project. This would mean that Phase 3 would not start until 2021 and would be pending budget approval.

Council and Committee History

July 16, 2019	Administration presented to Priorities Committee on the status of the Community Cemetery Assessment which included introduction of the successful proponent, Urban Systems, and the outline for Phase 1 and 2 of the project.
July 3, 2018	Council approved "THAT the 2019 budget include funds, up to \$60,000, to support an external review and report on the viability and desirability of a community cemetery in Strathcona County; and that this report be provided to Council for consideration by the end of 2019."
September 12, 2017	Council approved "THAT an expenditure of \$16,500 from Council Priority Funds be provided to BOSS for costs associated with pursuing professional exploration of the cemetery needs of Strathcona County residents and developing a plan to service those needs."

Other Impacts**Policy:** N/A**Legislative/Legal:** N/A**Interdepartmental:** N/A**Master Plan/Framework:** Social Framework**Communication Plan**

A communication plan has been developed.

Enclosure(s)

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| 1 | Community Cemetery Assessment Report |
| 2 | Community Cemetery Assessment Presentation |