

DATE: September 7, 2023

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Blake McIntosh, Director, Civic Operations

SUBJECT: Update - Memorial Park Cemetery 2023

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION, the report dated September 7, 2023, from the Director of Civic Operations titled "Update – Memorial Park Cemetery 2023."

PURPOSE:

This report provides Council with an update and information regarding the maintenance and operation of the Memorial Park Cemetery including current operational hours and associated interment fees.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Memorial Park Cemetery operation supports Council's City Government Strategy of commitment to citizen centered service and sustainable fiscal management.

BACKGROUND:

Memorial Park Cemetery is centrally located on 53 acres of park land within the southwest bowl sector of Prince George. The earliest recorded interment was in 1914. The site was used for burials prior to this time, but no records were kept. The property was managed by the provincial government until April 4, 1918, when the municipal government assumed responsibility for the operations of the cemetery, by enacting the first City of Prince George Cemetery Bylaw 62. On July 25, 1941, the provincial government approved the site (now Memorial Park Cemetery) to be classed as cemetery lands in perpetuity. Memorial Park Cemetery is currently the final resting place for over 14,500 remains.

In British Columbia, cemeteries are regulated by the Business Practices & Consumer Protection Authority Act (BPCPA), the Cremation, Interment and Funeral Services Act (CIFSA), and locally under The City of Prince George Cemetery Bylaw No.8046, 2008.

In 2008, changes to the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* required the City of Prince George to conduct an extensive consultation process to receive input respecting revisions to the Cemetery Bylaw. The updated Bylaw allows for more efficient management and maintenance of the cemetery, while continuing to provide the level of service expected by all customers.

The once common method of burying full caskets in ground plots has decreased in recent years. Interment statistics in Prince George would support this trend as Memorial Park Cemetery records show full interments have fallen over the last decade.

Interment Statistics 2013 - 2022

Interments	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Full Interments	79	77	54	70	71	70	48	59	68	61
Cremated Interments	117	102	87	119	106	129	107	113	136	151
Niche Inurnments	28	43	31	25	17	41	20	18	67	61
Crypt Entombments	1	5	3	2		2	6	2		4
Total Interments	225	227	175	216	194	242	181	196	281	287

As the practice of cremation continues to trend upwards, it is important that staff examine the interment services offered for cremated remains at Memorial Park Cemetery. The increasing practice of direct cremation and the spreading of those cremains in public forests and waterways necessitate the development of additional interment options within the cemetery. This provides a vital service by recording deceased persons for historical purposes and is potentially a revenue source to offset costs. It is important to note that cemeteries not only provide the burial services but are essential repositories of historical data.

DISCUSSION:

During the most recent Fees & Charges review, Finance & Audit committee members asked for information regarding the practice of Saturday interments and the background of the additional interment fees charged for services provided outside of regular business hours. City of Prince George Cemetery Bylaw No. 8046, 2008 specifies no person shall inter any human remains or cremated remains in the Cemetery except between the hours of 8:00am and 3:30pm, Monday to Saturday (excluding statutory holidays), unless previous special arrangements have been made with the Authorized Person. The following chart provides a breakdown of interments in 2020 – 2023 (Current) by the day of the week:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
171	200	179	184	173	142	1

The Cemetery Bylaw specifies that no person shall inter any human remains or cremated remains in the Cemetery on Saturdays unless the additional fees and charges are paid. The additional fee for a Saturday interment is designed, like all other fees and charges, to recover the cost of providing the service. The following is a breakdown of the additional interment fees from the Comprehensive Fees & Charges Bylaw No.7557, 2004:

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Adult, Child for Saturday burials	\$699.00	\$720.00	\$742.00	\$764.00
Cremated Remains for Saturday burials	\$183.00	\$188.00	\$194.00	\$200.00
Fee for after 3:30 pm services (Mon – Fri)	\$183.00	\$188.00	\$194.00	\$200.00
Pallbearer assistance (maximum 2 people)	\$143.00	\$147.00	\$151.00	\$156.00
Lowering device rental	\$175.00	\$180.00	\$185.00	\$191.00
Administration Fee	\$74.00	\$76.00	\$78.00	\$80.00

The City of Prince George is a member municipality of the British Columbia Funeral Association, an organization that provides Memorial Park staff the opportunity to be part of a larger community of funeral service professionals in British Columbia. BCFA membership also promotes networking, collaboration, professional development and the benefit of learning best practices in cemetery management, landscaping, and maintenance. The practice of charging additional fees for services provided outside regular business hours is industry standard in British Columbia and across the country. The existing fees and charges reflect Council's priority of sustainable fiscal management and working toward the goal of sustainably funding Cemetery/Mausoleum operations through revenue generation. Expenses are tracked through work orders and the additional fees specified represent average costs for staff to provide the service requested. The following chart provides a comparison of what other municipal cemeteries are charging additionally for Saturday adult interments:

BC Municipal Saturday Interment Fees

1	Port Coquitlam	\$3108.00
2	North Vancouver	\$1600.00
3	Langley	\$1514.00
4	Kamloops	\$1420.97
5	Surrey	\$1420.00
6	Kelowna	\$1206.00
7	Chilliwack	\$838.00
8	Prince George	\$764.00
9	Maple Ridge	\$731.00
10	Nanaimo	\$500.00

Staffing levels at Memorial Park Cemetery are currently limited to a Caretaker, a Cemetery Administrator and 2.5 FTE operational employees who maintain the entire park in addition to providing interment services. All cemetery staff are unionized employees who follow the terms and conditions reflected in the collective agreement, working 5 consecutive days Monday to Friday and receiving overtime pay for any hours they are asked to work outside their regular schedule. Potential scenarios for Saturday interments should be limited to the following:

1. Expand the cemetery's hours of operation to 6 days per week using the existing staffing levels. Many of the interments require multiple staff onsite to facilitate excavating/interring safely and would put additional pressure and scheduling challenges upon the existing employees.
2. Hire a new employee for a Tuesday – Saturday shift that would provide coverage at Memorial Park for the 6th day. This would require a staffing enhancement to allow for the hiring of an additional full-time employee to eliminate the need to pay overtime to staff on Saturdays for interments that only require one employee. There would still be overtime rates paid to any additional staff required to assist the Saturday shift.
3. Amend Comprehensive Fees & Charges Bylaw No.7557, 2004 to remove the additional Saturday fees. Continue to pay overtime to employees working outside their normal work schedule without recovering any of the additional expenses from the customer.
4. Continue with the existing industry standard process for charging a fee for services provided outside regular business hours.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The fees proposed to update the current Comprehensive Fees & Charges bylaw support the cost recovery of cemetery interment services provided by the City of Prince George. The financial cost of adding staff for scenario #2 above reflecting Tuesday through Saturday would be approximately \$92,000.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The Memorial Park Cemetery strives to provide respectful, caring and dignified interment services in a beautiful well-cared for park. Combining a customer service focus and best business practice approach with the goal of being financially self-sustaining in the operation of the cemetery and mausoleum.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Blake McIntosh, Director, Civic Operations

Report prepared by: Sean LeBrun, Manager, Parks and Solid Waste Services

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Council Meeting Date: 2023/10/30