



Staff Report

Community Services

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: August 25, 2025
Report Number: CS.25.041
Title: Increase to budget – Cemetery Natural Burial Area
Prepared by: Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CS.25.041, entitled “Increase to budget – Cemetery Natural Burial Area”;

AND THAT Council approves an increase to the budget for cemetery capacity increase for the natural burial area from \$90,000 to an upset limit of \$130,000 including contingency utilizing the funding sources identified in the financial impacts section of this report.

B. Overview

The purpose of this report is to request that Council approve an increase in the budget allocated for the technical design and landscape architecture work necessary to expand the cemetery's capacity and include a natural burial section, consistent with the standards prescribed under the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act.

C. Background

The Thornbury Clarksburg Union Cemetery has served as a vital community asset since its inception in the mid to late 1800s. Its longstanding role in providing interment services reflects the deep-rooted heritage of the Town of The Blue Mountains. The Town assumed management responsibilities for the cemetery around 2010, marking a commitment to ensuring its preservation and enhancement for future generations.

November 20, 2023, Council approved a comprehensive Cemetery Master Plan:

Cemetery Master Plan, CSOPS.23.045

THAT Council receive Staff Report CSOPS.23.045, entitled “Cemetery Master Plan”;

AND THAT Council approve the Cemetery Master Plan as presented, with any elements requiring funding to be considered through future budgets;

AND THAT Council approves Concept B (Arc Concept) as referenced in Staff Report CSOPS.23.045, and to prioritize green burial in the workplan. CARRIED.

This plan was formulated following an extensive market analysis that scrutinized demographic trends, disposition methods, and interment patterns within the regional cemetery market. The analysis provided insights into service demand projections, aligning them with the cemetery's current site capacity and prospective land requirements.

The Cemetery Master Plan outlines twelve key priorities. Notably, it highlights six high-priority initiatives designed to augment cemetery operations and align them with community needs and environmental policies:

1. **Fast-tracking the Cremation Garden Concept Design:** Completed around the existing columbarium.
2. **Groundwater Assurance:** Completion of test grave excavations confirmed suitability for burial expansions by ensuring groundwater levels are below grave bottoms.
3. **Geometric Access Route Implementation:** Ongoing efforts ensure new interments do not impede proposed access geometries for burial expansion areas.
4. **Signage and Entrance Markers:** Roadway signs have been installed, with additional entrance enhancements considered within landscape design plans.
5. **Development of the Green Burial Area:** Currently identified as incomplete, this phase requires attention to meet the sustainable burial needs outlined in the plan.
6. **Columbarium Expansion:** Completed initial expansion phase, providing increased interment options with new units.

D. Analysis

The recommendation to increase the budget for the Natural Burial section at the Thornbury Clarksburg Union Cemetery requires thorough analysis to ensure alignment with strategic objectives and to mitigate potential risks.

1. **Strategic Alignment:**
 - **Cemetery Master Plan:** Aligns with the high priority recommendations to expand natural burials.
 - **Adherence to Legislative Standards:** Complies with the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, requirements to increase the capacity of the cemetery.

2. Financial Implications:

- **Cost Management:** The project bid exceeds the initially budgeted amount by \$19,206.25. Staff are recommending a 20% contingency bringing the total amount to \$40,000 over the original budget amount.
- **Revenue Generation:** The natural burial area project creates 360 additional interment sites, leading to potential revenue generation. However, this revenue will gradually accrue over 10-20 years and should be carefully managed to offset initial expenditures.

3. Risk Assessment:

- **Project Delays:** Delaying approval and funding could lead to increased costs due to inflation and construction delays. Further delays could result in an impact to the community engagement session planned to be on-site in the proposed natural burial area of the cemetery.
- **Environmental Considerations:** Positive ecological impacts align with community and environmental goals, reducing long-term operational risks associated with less sustainable burial practices.

4. Operational Considerations:

- **Maintenance and Upkeep Costs:** Long-term costs associated with maintaining the natural burial section, including natural plantings and simple markers, must be factored within the operational budget to ensure sustainability.
- **Community Engagement:** Transparent communication and engagement with stakeholders can foster community support and understanding of benefits, which is crucial for successful implementation.

The analysis supports proceeding with the budget increase to address the identified financial shortfall, recommending a strategic allocation of funds which includes cemetery reserve utilization and savings from other projects. This decision will facilitate continuity in project development, ensuring that community and environmental needs are met while maintaining financial responsibility.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

The Town of The Blue Mountains is committed to sustainable burial practices with the introduction of a Natural Burial section in the cemetery. This type of burial, also referred to as "green burial," "country burial," or "woodland burial," adheres to specific environmentally conscious methodologies including but not limited to:

1. No Embalming:

- The Green Burial process prohibits the use of embalming chemicals, thereby reducing the risk of chemical leachates entering the soil and local water systems.

2. Biodegradable Caskets or Shrouds:

- Burials are conducted using only caskets or shrouds made from materials that decompose naturally. This ensures that the entirety of the burial artifact is returned to the earth, contributing to natural resource cycles.

3. Elimination of Grave Liners and Concrete Vaults:

- The practice excludes the use of non-biodegradable grave liners and concrete vaults, which can impede the natural breakdown of organic matter.

4. Habitat Restoration:

- Post-interment areas are restored with indigenous plant species to enhance local ecosystem functions. This practice not only fosters biodiversity but also plays a role in habitat conservation efforts.

5. Markers Made from Local, Natural Materials:

- Grave markers are either communal or individually crafted from local and natural materials. This practice is designed to maintain the aesthetic integrity of the natural environment.

The Natural Burial section will be designed as part of a comprehensive effort to uphold ecological principles, facilitating a more sustainable form of interment that benefits local wildlife and ecosystem stability. This initiative aligns with the Town's environmental goals and addresses an increasing public demand for sustainable end-of-life options.

G. Financial Impacts

The natural burial area is estimated to create 360 additional interment sites which will create potential for revenue. The current fees and charges by-law identifies natural burial lots to be sold for the same amount as traditional interment lots. The total additional revenue produced by the natural burial area based on 2025 fees is \$412,000. All of this revenue will not be realized in 2025 and is likely to be spread out over 10 – 20 years.

There will be additional costs associated with the natural burial area including communal memorial(s), gathering location(s), pathways, GPS equipment, and natural plantings. The communal memorial(s) will include fees to offset the cost of it but the remaining elements should be funded by the revenue produced by this area. These will be included in future fees and charges considerations when exact costs are known.

Staff are recommending that the \$40,000 be funded from:

- 1) Cemetery Reserve - \$15,000 (noting that this will wholly deplete the reserve);
- 2) Using the Parks and Trails project Crestview Court Fencing which had a \$20,000 surplus;
- 3) Year over Year Roll Over - \$5,000 – noting that this reserve will be \$465,000 following this and;
- 4) Fee increases and additional sales are being considered through the 2026 budget process that may offset some of the cost depending on demand for the new natural burial sites.

H. In Consultation With

Monica Quinlan, Director of Corporate and Financial Services

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required.

However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services directorcs@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. Natural Burial Area Map

Respectfully submitted,

Ryan Gibbons
Director of Community Services

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	CS.25.041 Increase to budget - Cemetery Natural Burial Area.docx
Attachments:	- Att-1-Natural-Burial-Area-Map.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Aug 18, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Ryan Gibbons - Aug 18, 2025 - 1:53 PM