



INFORMATION ONLY COUNCIL REPORT
Engineering / Public Works
For the October 8, 2019 Council Meeting

DATE: October 3, 2019
TO: Paul Gipps, CAO
FROM: Stacey Harding, Parks & Fleet Operations Manager
RE: Cemetery Marker Theft Update

BACKGROUND:

During the evening hours of September 14/15 the locks to the entrance of the Westbank Cemetery were cut. Thieves entered the west, cremation plot area where some of the earliest burials are located. On the morning of September 16, RCMP notified staff that approximately 60 markers were stolen over the weekend. Staff's assessment determined that 57 bronze markers were removed from their pillows. Thankfully, two of the 57 were left behind leaving 55 unaccounted for.

Rather than make a general public announcement, staff made the decision to immediately conduct an inventory to identify the families effected by this criminal act and contact them directly.

Concurrently, staff were contacting bronze and granite marker manufactures to advise them of the theft with a gentle suggestion that the usual retail cost be softened respecting the financial and emotional impact this would have on the families. Staff also calculated the cost and impact on the City for re-installation and determined it prudent that staff utilize new highly adhesive products and conduct the work free of charge for our clients. The Cemetery Bylaw defines that markers and headstones be bought by the client and remain the possession of the client should repairs or replacement be necessary.

Late afternoon of September 23rd, staff received an uplifting call from the local RCMP that many of the markers had been found through their excellent police work and local tips. On the morning of September 24th staff obtained the markers from the RCMP and went to work determining how many of the 55 were returned in good condition and how many were either missing or damaged beyond repair. The condition assessment concluded:

| Returned in Good Condition | Damaged and Unrepairable | Total |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| 36 | 19 | 55 |

Staff again reached out to the families. The clients whose markers were in good condition were informed their markers would be reinstalled free of charge. Those with damaged markers were provided with supplier contact information, anticipated price points and installation free of charge. Staff also suggested that granite be considered, as it is not recyclable for profit.

Between then and now, clients and families have been coming in with their decisions and arrangements are being made. To a large extent, our clients are disappointed at the act of this brazen theft but in the same light thankful on the position and assistance the City has taken on this matter. The City's Parks & Fleet Operations clerk, Darlene Alexander, has done an outstanding job reaching out to families and relatives regarding the markers that, in some instances, were placed over 50 years prior.

Immediately after the theft, staff met to determine security and prevention options. This included,

- An increased Security presence,
- Upgraded chains and locks, and
- Security Camera pricing.

To date, the security and lock upgrades have been completed. Camera costs have been received and staff is considering the camera installation feasibility.

Council and staff understand members of the public have reached out to the City with compassionate support to offer fundraising assistance. On September 25th, Council resolved the following:

THAT Council consider and direct staff to establish an account to accept donations towards the replacement of the stolen cemetery plaques at the Westbank Cemetery; and,

THAT Council rise and report on this resolution through a media release.

Based on Council's desire, staff met on October 3rd to discuss the logistics of setting up a donation and financial assistance program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Based on Council's direction, a trust account be set up to receive donations that would provide financial assistance to the 23 families whose markers were damaged beyond repair. This account would be closed on December 6, 2019 or earlier if the account donation cap (see below) has been reached.

The maximum amount a family could receive is \$448. Families would be required to submit receipts for reimbursement from the fund. If the fund does not reach the account donation cap, the funds collected would be divided between those who submitted a receipt to a maximum amount of \$448. Donors are entitled to a tax receipt for donations exceeding \$20.

| Replacement Items | Cost | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 19 – Granite markers | \$ 448 (included taxes) | \$ 8,512 |
| 4 – bronze name plates | \$ 252 (includes taxes) | \$ 1,008 |
| | Account Donation Cap | \$ 9,412 |

Damaged beyond Repair



Returned Markers



Site before Theft



REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:

Allen Fillion, Director of Engineering and Public Works
Tracey Batten, Deputy CAO/Corporate Officer
Paul Gipps, CAO

Powerpoint: Yes ☐ No ☒