



INFORMATION ONLY COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

Date: September 10, 2024

From: Ron Bowles, CAO

Subject: **Westbank Cemetery Update**

Report Prepared by: Mark Roberts, Parks Manager

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Invest in Infrastructure – We will invest in building, improving and maintaining infrastructure to meet the needs of, and to provide a high quality of life for, current and future generations.

Pursue Economic Growth and Prosperity – We will work with stakeholders throughout the region to advocate for and support efforts aimed at helping West Kelowna businesses prosper. With a focus on the future, we will advance opportunities to expand our economy, increase employment, and develop the community in ways that contribute towards prosperity for all.

Foster Safety and Well-Being – We will pursue through direct action, advocacy, and collaboration with local and regional service providers, investments in community health, needs-based housing, emergency preparedness, policing, and other services that foster safety and well-being in West Kelowna.

BACKGROUND

Market Trends

In 2023, Lee's and Associates was hired to complete a review of the Westbank Cemetery, located at 3200 Elliott Rd in West Kelowna's Westbank Neighbourhood. As part of that review they have identified some general trends for the West Kelowna Area, including:

- Based on BC Stats 2023 estimated population, there is an average of 480 deaths per year within the community
- This death rate is anticipated to increase in the coming years

- It is estimated that the projected sales over the next 5 years will increase substantially. These meetings generally take 2+ hours per sale to select burial type, location, memorialization, inscription, administrative paperwork, consoling grieving loved ones, etc.
- Cremation is increasingly the preferred form of burial for most Canadians, and is being reflected in a slowdown of casket internment sales at the Westbank Cemetery

These increases are likely a result of the increasing growth within the city and the aging baby boomer population who are now between the ages of 58-78 years old. As a result, it is anticipated that the cemetery will become busier in the coming years, especially as cemeteries in adjacent communities have higher prices for plots and burial services. This has positioned the Westbank Cemetery as an attractive and affordable option for non-residents and is reducing the inventory at faster rates than anticipated.

Cemetery Inventory and Capacity

Lee's and Associates completed a burial inventory and capacity study, and based on recent sales and internments, found that the inventory remaining in the Westbank Cemetery is approximately:

- 2-3 years of in ground cremation lot sales
- 4-5 years of niche (columbarium or above ground) cremation sales*
- 10-12 years of casket lot sales
- 30+ years of mausoleum crypt sales

* note that the City is completing a niche expansion to the Cemetery in 2024, which will add an additional 140 niche cremation spaces.

Cemetery Operations

Since 2010, the City has continued to make significant improvements to its Cemetery, including expanding the total number of casket and cremation columbarium, ossuary and mausoleum plots, construction of a workshop, extensive landscaping and irrigation works, drainage improvements, paving access roads and parking lots, and installation of row markers.

With these improvements, levels of service have not kept pace due to increasing demands across the City, and the increasing number of internments annually. In 2023 the Parks Department spent approximately 0.7 (1,400 hours) of a Full Time Employee's (FTE) annual work load maintaining the Cemetery. Generally speaking this maintenance work includes mowing once a week, weeding 3 times a year, pruning and maintaining the tree canopy, irrigation maintenance, snow removal, internments and burials. This does not include the approximately \$21,000 in additional contracted services to help maintain

additional the weeding and pruning that is required annually. If the City had the capacity to take this contracted work on in house, it would equate to approximately 0.2 of an FTE.

Even with all the work that accounts for approximately 0.9 of an FTE, the Cemetery is subject to regular complaints from the public on its lack of maintenance.

Additional work is required on the day to day coordination of service delivery including, day to day coordination of services to the public, business customers, partners and contractors, selling and marketing cemetery products and services, meeting with families to assist with burial and internment decisions, and ensuring that internment activities comply with bylaws policies and the Cemetery Act. In the last few years, there has been an increase in number of cemetery plot sale meetings, bookings, administrative coordination and available staffing resources. This may not be convenient for some grieving families, but because of the increased demand on administrative support, family meetings and sales have been limited to Tuesday and Thursday, between 9am and 1pm. Historically this service was offered 5 days a week.

Based on current budgets and fees associated with Cemetery plots and burials, there is 0.15 FTE (312 hours/year) allocated towards the maintenance and operations of the Cemetery and 0.35 of an FTE (728 hours/year) allocated towards its administrative functions. All other work completed at the Cemetery is funded and resourced from the Parks Department which is funded from general taxation annually and is not resourced to accommodate this extra work.

As part of this Cemetery Review, staff are seeking direction from Council on the levels of service that they want to provide at the Cemetery, as this will have direct impact on the upcoming Bylaw recommendations and fee schedules.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the background, staff have identified three different levels of service options.

1. Cut back service levels to maintain the cemetery based on current funding mechanisms, resulting in approx. 728 hours of administrative support and 312 hours maintenance for cemetery related work.
2. Adding more staff to maintain the existing levels of service. This would require allocating 1.0 FTE for administrative work and 1.0 FTE's operational work. While more financial analysis is required, it is estimated that this option could mean substantial increases to cemetery fees and/or funding supplementing some funding from property tax revenue. According to Lees and Associates, supplementing cemetery funding from tax revenue is typical across many municipalities in BC.

3. Adding more staff to increase the levels of service. This could include adding 1.5 FTE for administrative work and 2.0 FTE's for operational work. While more financial analysis is required, it is estimated that this option could mean substantial increases to cemetery fees and/or funding supplementing some funding from property tax revenue. The additional work proposed could include:
 - Improved operational maintenance to reduce amount of weeds and improve the overall aesthetic of the cemetery
 - Improved planning and design with wayfinding, regularly updated maps, etc.
 - Improved levels of service for meeting the needs of the clients purchasing plots during difficult times
 - Accommodate the increased number of annual burials and internments that we are seeing over the last few years.

Once levels of service have been determined, then staff can present the financial options summarizing:

- Operating Financials Break-even Point; and,
- Perpetual Care Fund Stability Point

And options for:

- Increasing taxation to supplement operations;
- Increasing internment fees to be more competitive with surrounding communities; and,
- Future growth and inventory investment and planning

REVIEWED BY

Lisa Siavashi, Financial Services Manager / Deputy CFO

Allen Fillion, Director of Engineering & Operations

Warren Everton, Director of Finance/CFO

APPROVED FOR THE AGENDA BY

Trevor Seibel, Deputy CAO

PowerPoint: Yes No

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Cemetery Photos