



## Staff Report

Council Meeting Date: February 10, 2025

Subject: CLKS-2025-05 - Natural Burial Cemetery Grounds

Report from: Julie Hamilton, Deputy Clerk

Attachments: None

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### **Recommendation**

Be It Resolved that Council hereby approves Report CKLS-2025-05 - Natural Burial Cemetery Grounds and confirms that municipal cemetery operations remain unchanged at this time.

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### **Background**

At the May 27, 2024 Council meeting, Council received Report [SRDPCLK.24.05 Municipal Cemetery Overview](#) which provided detailed information regarding municipally owned cemeteries, burial statistics, status of the cemetery digitization project and natural burials.

Council directed staff to further investigate natural burials and bring a report back to a future Council meeting with a recommendation regarding a working group.

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### **Analysis**

The requirements to establish or expand a cemetery are the same and several steps must be undertaken to determine if the land is suitable to permit the burial of remains, regardless of the type of disposition.

As Council is aware, we are currently undergoing the process of expanding the Hillcrest cemetery in Tara. The process requires that a suitability assessment be prepared by an engineer and submitted to the Medical Officer of Health for approval. To provide some context as to what is involved in the assessment, the workplan currently underway for the Hillcrest cemetery is provided below.

The work plan for the Hillcrest cemetery expansion suitability assessment includes the following:

- Excavate an estimated 4 test pits using a backhoe supplied by the Municipality to assess soil conditions. Submit two soil samples for grain size analysis. Geological mapping identified the soils as sand and gravel with some silt.
- Install three, 50-mm diameter PVC monitoring wells in the expansion area to a depth of approximately 4.5 m. The approximate locations for the monitoring wells are shown on the attached plan. Test pit and drilling work will occur in late fall after the crop is off the field. Utility locates will be obtained in advance of the subsurface work.
- Survey the elevations of the wells.
- Measure water levels in the monitoring wells and the existing dug well through the spring to assess the typical high-water table.
- Summarize the findings in a report together with an assessment of the suitability of the site for a cemetery, including the separation depth between graves and the water table, potential for impacts to existing water supply wells and surface water features, and the susceptibility of soils to frost with recommendations for headstone bases to minimize heaving.

The estimated cost for the assessment work is \$17,500 plus HST, including expenses and disbursements. An additional cost estimate of \$5,200 plus HST from London Soil Test out of Dundalk was provided to install the monitoring wells.

The Municipality currently does not perform winter burials due to weather and ground conditions. The use of machinery often has a negative effect on the grounds which can cause extensive damage that requires expensive repairs in the spring. Also, snow removal and winter control measures are not extended into the cemetery. Where unseasonable conditions are present, staff will consider services on a case-by-case basis based on the location of the gravesite, weather and ground conditions. All opening and closing of burial sites are performed by Public Works staff, who also operate our winter maintenance equipment, making their available hours for other duties limited. The current Collective Agreement limits the use of outside contractors to perform these duties in place of Municipal Staff.

The cost associated with winter burials would be significantly higher than regular season burials. It would require additional equipment and additional time to remove snow to the site and prepare the grave opening. In the winter months, our Public Works Staff are typically early in the morning for snow removal so the time preparing for a burial would most likely be at overtime rate. It is estimated that the staff and equipment costs for one burial would be approximately \$1500-\$2000, depending on the conditions at the time.

Staff have considered the proposal to create a working group to investigate the establishment of a natural burial ground on the land adjacent to the Paisley cemetery. Staff involvement would be required since Arran-Elderslie is the licensed cemetery operator. Currently, staff capacity and associated costs are the greatest constraints.

Staff are currently working on several large projects and do not have the capacity to undertake a second expansion project while the Tara project is ongoing, along

with several other large capital projects. Additionally, Arran-Elderslie does not have the staff resources to perform winter burials.

The costs associated with the establishment of a natural burial ground would be similar to the Hillcrest expansion project. The cost of the suitability assessment is estimated to be \$25,000 and additional costs would be associated with the surveying of the graves, mapping, and other development requirements. As permitted by the regulations, monies to fund the Hillcrest expansion are being borrowed from the care and maintenance fund with the requirement that they be repaid through the sale of future plots in the cemetery.

Currently, when a plot is sold, 40% of the price must be deposited into a perpetual care fund. The principal must remain in the account and only the interest income can be used for care and maintenance of municipal cemeteries. In 2024, the total interest income was \$28,098. Net expenses associated with the operation of our municipal cemeteries were \$32,798, which created a shortfall of \$4,700.

Due to the current staff capacity and available funds, staff recommend that Council not pursue the establishment of a natural burial ground at this time.

Staff would like to highlight that the use of a vault and the process of embalming is not a requirement of our current cemetery bylaw, so we do permit natural burials within our cemeteries, with the only limitation being that we do not bury in the winter due to reasons provided earlier in the report.

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## **Link to Strategic/Master Plan**

### 6.4 Leading Financial Management

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## **Financial Impacts/Source of Funding/Link to Procurement Policy**

The cost of the suitability assessment is estimated to be \$25,000 and additional costs would be associated with the surveying of the graves, mapping, and other development requirements. The total cost of this type of project is unknown at this time.

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Approved by: Emily Dance, Chief Administrative Officer