



Staff Report

Report To: Dan Best, Chief Administrative Officer
From: **Rebekah Msuya-Collison, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk**
Date: October 7 2019
Report: CL#21-2019
Subject: Winter Burials Follow Up Report

Recommendations:

That South Huron Council receives the report from R. Msuya-Collison, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk re: Winter Burials Follow Up Report for information only.

Purpose:

For information

Background and Analysis:

At the August 12, 2019 Regular Council meeting, South Huron Council passed resolution 413-2019 authorizing the discontinuation of winter burials from November 15-April 15. The change with regards to no winter burials impact both consumers and licensees alike and approval of a new Cemetery By-Law must proceed through an approval process with the Cemeteries Regulation Unit.

South Huron Council proceeded with 1st and 2nd reading of By-Law No. 74-2019 - Exeter Public Cemetery at the September 16, 2019 Regular Council meeting. Council discussed no winter burials and directed a report that provides information on financial implications for the municipality for no winter burials, additional costs to public, cemetery access in the winter and information on whether other Huron County municipalities provide for winter burials.

South Huron staff work very closely with funeral directors to ensure each service meets the needs of grieving families. This begins when families acquire plots sometimes years before a burial, and includes preparing the gravesite for interment, providing for stone placement and restoration, and maintaining the plot in perpetuity.

Exeter Public Cemetery started to provide for winter interment in 1995. The municipality has accommodated winter interments since that time. The proposed changes to no winter burials in By-Law 74-2019 is as follows:

"No winter burials shall occur between November 15th and April 15th unless weather permitting at the discretion of the caretaker or on a medical order. Interments in a Columbarium shall occur year round."

The intent of the change for the South Huron By-law is to allow the caretaker some leeway on the dates in the winter, spring and fall to allow for safety, weather and ground conditions. Attached to this report is a brief overview of winter burial practices of Huron County municipalities as requested by Council. North Huron did state that for the most part they don't do winter burials unless required by medical order. Central Huron noted that they won't do winter burials if there is a lot of snow on the ground or ground is frozen from December 1 through to sometime in April.

As noted above, in special circumstances and where there is reasonable and safe access that does not damage nearby headstones, winter burials may be provided for. With early spring or late fall interment the potential for damage to adjoining plots is high. When these services are requested there is added cost to the municipality which is not at this time passed on to the families. Staff works with funeral providers and families to determine if circumstances allow an early/late season burial.

Almost all issues arise with cemeteries after a burial. This can include soil disruption to the gravesite during grass cutting, grass that does not grow properly, delayed maintenance after spring settlement occurs, or poor grass cutting or trimming particularly during the spring growing season. Winter interments often require regrading of the grave site the following May as there is general settling after the interment is complete and this is an additional maintenance cost to the municipality.

Snow clearance of the roads will have to be continued from the entrance to the mausoleum and to the columbariums at a minimum. There is damage each spring noted to gravesites, monuments and footstones as these are not always visible when clearing the roads within the cemetery. Vehicle access will be restricted during the winter months due to weather effect on the

condition of the internal roads. Passage over such roads shall be at the peril of the persons using the internal roads.

From a logistical standpoint, winter burial is only a small complication as the remains of a loved one can stay in storage for months without creating problems. However, delaying a burial because you want to be present at the time of the body being lowered can provide an additional emotional trauma and perhaps two separate mourning periods (the initial loss and the second to say your final farewells) might prove difficult on the family.

South Huron is challenged to maintain the grounds at the Exeter Public Cemetery from an increasingly attentive public while striving to meet public interest.

Options for Council Consideration:

1. Status Quo – Continue with Winter Burials and consider moving fees to a more cost recovery model.
2. Discontinuation of Winter Burials between November 15 to April 15, at the discretion of the Caretaker or on medical order.

Operational Considerations:

The following is a list of the number of interments provided the last three years between November 15 and April 15:

- Nov 15, 2016 – Apr 15, 2017
13 Regular Interments; 7 Cremation Interments (6 cremation burials, 1 in niche)
- Nov 15, 2017 – Apr 15, 2018
15 Regular Interments; 7 Cremation Interments (4 cremation burials, 3 in niche)
- Nov 15, 2018 – Apr 15, 2019
9 Regular Interments, 5 Cremation Interments (3 cremation burials, 2 in niche)

The mausoleum currently provides up to 60 spaces and is generally empty by June. The last three years have averaged storage for between 6 to 9.

The number of interments will continue to be the same whether the interments are spread out between November and April or interred in the spring, however it may take some time in spring to arrange for all of the interments. Funeral Homes and families will decide on possible dates and contact the municipality for interment.

The interment process in the spring will also depend on weather and ground conditions as the municipality cannot always accommodate burials depending on plot location, wetness, snow depth and other factors. The ground can be extremely wet and require pumping out of water in the early spring. This reduces the available number of interment lots and also affects the funeral experience when there is standing water on and near the grave sites.

The Approved By-Law will come back to Council for 3rd and Final Reading pending approval from Beareavement Authority Ontario.

A tender process will be initiated for a contractor once Council has confirmed the scope of services.

South Huron's Strategic Plan:

Section 6.2.2 of the Municipality of South Huron 2015- 2019 Strategic Plan identifies key priorities and strategic directions. The following elements are supported by the actions outlined in this report:

- ✓ Administrative Efficiency and Fiscal Responsibility
- ✓ Transparent, Accountable, and Collaborative Governance

Financial Impact:

The current Cemetery Fees and Charges By-law provides for Winter Storage in the Mausoleum at \$150.00. If the By-Law is passed, the fees and charges by-law could be amended to provide for a separate cost for storage of cremated remains.

The contractor that currently provides interment surcharges on a pilot basis has a winter burial surcharge of \$200.00. This fee is currently not provided for in the Exeter Public Cemetery Fees and Charges By-Law and cannot currently be passed on to the consumer. If the By-Law is passed, the fees and charges by-law will be amended accordingly taking into the account any winter burial surcharges due the awarded contractor.

The municipality had in the previous Cemetery By-laws established fees for snow removal for winter burials and/or a winter maintenance burial and this charge was removed in the 2014 Cemetery Rates By-law. The current Fees and Charges By-law was passed in 2016 and is attached to this report.

The Cemetery Budget for 2020 includes a line item for the Cemetery Master Plan for Council consideration and if approved, there may be

recommendations from that plan. Staff will undertake a review of Cemetery Fees and bring a report to Council.

Legal Impact:

No Cemetery By-law or By-law amendment is effective until the registrar has approved it.

Staffing Impact:

Administration and Operations will be busier in the spring to accommodate any interments that have been delayed.

Policies/Legislation:

Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002
Draft By-Law 74-2019

Consultation:

M. Goss, Acting Manager
D. Best, CAO/Deputy Clerk

Related Documents:

Graph outlining Huron County Municipal Winter Burials
Current Exeter Public Cemetery Fees and Charges By-law

Respectfully submitted,

Rebekah Msuya-Collison, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk