



Date: Wednesday, November 20, 2024

From: Carly Craig, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk

Subject: Cemetery Fee Review & 2025 Recommendations

Report COR2024-048

This document and its attachments are public and available in an accessible format upon request.

Recommendation

That Council receive report COR2024-048 for information; and

That staff be directed to incorporate the proposed 2025 Cemetery Fee Structure in the draft 2025 Fees & Charges By-Law.

Background

At their Special Council meeting on June 17, 2024, Council passed RES2024-134, which included a direction to staff to undertake a review of cemetery fees while considering the draft Fees and Charges Policy. This direction included a request to identify opportunities within the fee structure to remove the existing operating deficit of providing cemetery services, thereby limiting pressures on the annual tax levy.

Analysis

While conducting a cost recovery review for burial fees, staff conducted a small review of interment rights prices from a sample of comparator cemeteries operated by Municipalities to ensure fairness and consistency of available products. Data was collected from the Cemetery Fees and Service By-Laws from the following municipalities:

1. The Township of Chatsworth
2. The City of Owen Sound; and
3. The Municipality of Meaford

Through this brief review, it was established that Georgian Bluffs' sales prices are slightly below the average collected under this sample. While there was some variance, the gap in pricing was not significant enough to undertake a larger analysis of interment rights purchase fees. For example, the Township currently charges a base rate of



\$770.00 for a full adult burial plot, while the average of comparators ranged from \$1,000.00 to \$1,583.43 (an average of \$1,113.36). Based on this review, staff are recommending an increase of \$100 across all services for 2025, with the exception of a \$290 increase for full adult burial plots at Oxenden and Boyd Cemeteries. The lower rate for Boyd and Oxenden Cemeteries was based on having smaller dimensions (3' x 9') than Mount Pleasant (4' x 10'). However, an analysis of lot sizing at comparator municipalities (an average of 3' x 9') suggests the lots should not lose value based on their dimensions. Both 3' x 10' and 4' x 10' lots have the same capacity and do not provide greater value to the purchaser. Additionally, the pricing of cremation lots are the same at all three Township cemeteries, despite sizing differences and therefore for consistency of administration, it is recommended that the pricing for full adult plots be aligned. Even with these increases, Georgian Bluffs remains the lowest purchase fee of the sample.

Staff found through a review of internal fees, that burial services are operating at a deficit – user fees are failing to neutralize costs of providing the service, thereby becoming reliant on annual tax levies. Through this review it was identified that a \$75 locate fee charged by the contractor is not being recovered within the existing pricing structure. In addition, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario licensing fees have increased by 120%, resulting in the Township funding the variance in the absence of increased fees. Based on this analysis, the Township observes a loss of \$105.00 for each burial performed under the 2024 fee structure.

While considering the 2024 Fees and Charges schedule, staff proposed a large increase to cemetery fees from the prior year due to an increase in caretaker fees. At that time, staff's recommendation was to apply a smaller increase of between 10% and 16% in 2024 to reduce impact to consumers. However, the funding gap continues to grow and there remains a need to recover costs directly provided to consumers and not the whole of the tax base (ie. burial fees and interment purchase fees).

Staff are recommending that burial fees be increased by an average of \$127.00 in 2025 to ensure recovery of contractor and licencing costs. For full casket burials, this results in an 18% increase in interment fees and a 37% increase in cremation interment fees. While these increases are large, they are necessary to "break-even" and recover the Township's costs associated with performing burials. Even with this increase, we are still charging below average fees for burial services. The expense of burials is not a benefit provided to the whole community and is a one-time service provided to specific individuals who may not reside in Georgian Bluffs and therefore should not be subsidized by the tax base.

An increase ranging from 10% to 36% for plot purchases is also recommended. While these fees were increased in 3% increments in 2023 and 2024, the Township pays a "locate fee" of \$75 on each sale performed by the cemetery contractor. The Township also incurs an estimated \$120 (two hours) for administrative efforts associated with



preparing documents, meeting with the purchaser to review documentation, reviewing consumer protection materials, and answering questions.

Upon an analysis of administration fees from the sample of municipalities, it was determined that our fees are relatively low. Most notably, the Township’s approved 2024 replacement interment rights certificate fee is \$35.00, with the average fee from the sample being \$88.95. These fees ranged from \$81.85 to \$150.00; therefore staff are recommending this fee be increased to \$90 (157% increase). Staff are recommending a new fee be introduced for the replacement of interment rights certificates where no documentation is provided an interment rights search is required. Additionally, it is recommended that the \$200 interment rights search fee be amended to an hourly fee of \$60 to allow for more flexibility in working through complex interment rights matters.

Prior to 2023/24 increases, the Township’s interment rights purchase fees remained consistent with 2015/16 charges when the Township assumed administration of the cemeteries. This likely contributed to the draw on the tax base, in addition to the increased contractor costs associated with operating the cemetery and increase to licencing fees outlined above.

Table 1 summarizes the proposed increases from 2024 fees.

Table 1. Fee Types and Percentage Increases in 2025 from 2024 Fees

Fee Type	2025 Percentage Increase from 2024
Burial Fees	
Cremation Burial	37%
Full Casket Burial	18%
Interment Rights	
Full Adult Plot – Mount Pleasant	13%
Full Adult Plot – Oxenden & Boyd	35%
Regular Cremation	36%
Premium Cremation	21%
Top Row Columbarium – Mount Pleasant & Oxenden	10%
Middle Row(s) Columbarium – Mount Pleasant & Oxenden	11%
Bottom Row Columbarium – Mount Pleasant & Oxenden	12%
Administration Fees	
Plot Transfer Fee – With Documentation	0%
Plot Transfer Fee – Without Documentation (New)	100%
Care & Maintenance Previously Not Paid (Pre-1955)	8%
Replacement Interment Rights Certificate	157%



Interment Rights Search	Amended to Hourly Rate
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Due to the nature of cemetery customer service, the administrative expense to the Township when legislated requirements are considered, is equal to one full-time position in the Legislative Services Team from April 1st to December 1st of each year. Many of these services are provided without a fee (general inquiries, maintenance requests, records administration). Staff apply an attentive approach to these services, given the sensitivity of death care service administration. While sales revenue may offset expenses to the Township, the number of sales generated per year varies and cannot be estimated or forecasted with accuracy.

The fee increases recommended above will improve the burden on the tax base however, it is not anticipated that cemeteries will be 100% self-funded each year, particularly in years where sales revenue is low. Cemetery maintenance costs are also part of the Township's tax funded operating budget. The projected tax levy impact for 2024 is \$47,953.

Increasing cemetery revenue as recommended in this report would result in an estimated \$46,650 tax levy impact in 2025, while not increasing the revenue is projected to have an \$66,350 impact.

It is recommended that beyond 2025, the fees be routinely reviewed and updated to reflect the costs incurred by the Township to provide the service. Staff will continue to evaluate opportunities to generate revenue and recover Township expenses where possible.

Financial Impact

The proposed 2025 Cemetery Fee Schedule corrects the loss experienced by the Township in performing burial fees and covers licensing and contractor fees. Additionally, increasing the interment rights purchase fee increases the potential revenue generated by the Township where sales are made.

Strategic Priorities

Deliver cost-effective services.

Conclusion

Staff recommend that the fees be increased based on the comparator analysis and internal cost recovery analysis.

Respectfully Submitted:
Carly Craig, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk



Report Approval Details

Document Title:	COR2024-048 - Cemetery Fee Review and 2025 Recommendations .docx
Attachments:	- Copy of 2024 to 2025 Cost Recovery.xlsx
Final Approval Date:	Nov 7, 2024

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

Brittany Drury, Deputy CAO/Director of Corporate Services

Samantha Buchanan, Treasurer

Niall Loble, Chief Administrative Officer