




To: Parks, Recreational and Cultural Services Committee
From: Dave Semple
Director Parks Operations
Re: **Memorial Garden Feasibility Study**

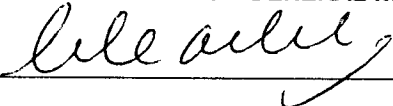
Date: February 14, 2003
File: 2345-01

Staff Recommendation

1. That Staff undertake a phased feasibility study examining the issues and options around the potential of locating a memorial garden in Richmond.



Dave Semple
Director Parks Operations

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Staff Report

Origin

Interest in locating a memorial garden in Richmond has been expressed by members of the community in the past; unsolicited proposals have been received, as well a private attempt to locate a memorial garden in the agricultural land reserve. In addition, the success of the memorial bench program indicates the desire of Richmond residents for memorialisation within their community.

While the notion of a cemetery in Richmond has never been feasible because of the high water table, the increasing preference for cremation (approximately 60% of BC residents currently choose cremation) and the variety of service options now available, the memorial garden concept warrants consideration.

Preliminary research by staff shows that there is potential demand for a memorial garden but there is no local precedent for the development of a new facility. Many municipalities in the lower mainland are providing a wider range of service options to address the increasing demand for cremation and forms of memorialisation other than traditional graves but are building on existing cemeteries.

Analysis

The Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General under the Cemeteries and Funeral Services Act regulates the designation and operation of cemeteries. An application of public interest must be made to satisfy the following criteria:

- Demonstration of need
- The effect on local inhabitants
- Financial resources of the applicant
- Site suitability

If a municipality owns or operates a cemetery it must incorporate a company or establish a board of trustees. It must also adopt a bylaw describing the administration and operation, rates and charges, and the type of memorials and materials used.

Siting a cemetery or memorial park is a sensitive issue especially with regard to proximity to residential areas. To be well integrated into the community, the location must be easily accessible yet still provide tranquility. Safety and monitoring are also issues that will have a bearing on the location.

Options for Consideration:

Option 1- Phased Feasibility Assessment

The feasibility study would address requirements of the Cemeteries and Funeral Services Act and explore the relevant economic, social and environmental issues. The proposed study would be conducted in three phases, each phase dependent on the conclusions of the previous phase at the end of each phase a formal report to Committee would be made.

Phase 1 Background Research

Background research would examine the industry as a whole and aspects of particular relevance to Richmond;

- Identification of current demand and projections for future demand which has a bearing on the size of the facility.
- Current trends in memorialisation in North America
- Analysis of revenues and expenditures including design and development costs, annual operations, financing scenarios, and perpetual care framework.
- Exploration of operational models.
- Analysis of service options with reference to cultural sensitivities and infrastructure requirements.
- Development of site selection criteria that identifies both social and environmental considerations.

If there is demonstrable demand for a memorial garden in Richmond and the potential revenues and expenditures prove financial sustainability, then the study would continue to the next phase.

Phase 2 Evaluation of Options

From the results of the background research, a number of scenarios will be developed that will explore the financing, operations, and service options as well as potential sites within the city. The scenarios would examine development costs and phasing, the City's role in financing development as well as in operating the facility, and the potential for partnerships with the private sector. Further study will be conducted only if there is demonstrable financial feasibility. A preferred option accompanied by a business case will be submitted for Council approval.

Phase 3 Detailed Study of Preferred Option

The final phase would look at a particular site and apply the preferred financial, development, and operations models in detail. At this point, consultation with stakeholders and the public would be critical in determining the most appropriate solution for Richmond. Meetings with stakeholders such as local funeral homes, churches and temples, and heritage groups will provide

input on the suitability of the preferred option. Public comment, especially regarding the location, would be solicited in an open house format. The results of these consultations would be included in the final report submitted to Council.

Option 2 Take no Action at This Time.

Do not undertake a feasibility study at this time, and allow the private sector to fill the demand.

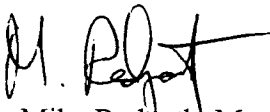
Staff do not recommend Option 2 at this time. A consequence of not proceeding will be the continuation of current clandestine practises for memorial ash spreading, excessive demand for the memorial bench program, and the need for residents to travel away from Richmond for memorial or cemetery services.

Financial Impact

The feasibility study would entail staff time for an internal steering committee and the services of a consultant team with expertise in this field. Estimated costs for Phases 1 are estimated at \$6,000 and Phase 2 at \$6,000 for a total of \$12,000. If approved, it is proposed that the Parks 2003 Capital Advanced Planning & Design Fund be utilised for the study. Phase 3 will only proceed if feasibility of a memorial garden is proven, and will be the subject of a separate report to Council.

Conclusion

The cost of development and operation of a memorial park in Richmond is not yet well understood and, in addition, demand has not been quantifiably established. Detailed study is required to satisfy the requirements of the Cemetery and Funeral Services Act and to develop a model that is relevant to the citizens of Richmond. Conducting a feasibility study that is phased will allow Council and the citizens of Richmond to demonstrate the viability of a memorial park and the optimum development and operation models. The feasibility study will assist staff in determining the level of community need as well as outline the greatest opportunities for future potential memorial park/garden land-use in Richmond.



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