

## The Powell River Peak

### Burial options expand



RESTING PLACE: Shawn Gullette, Powell River Regional District projects' foreman and caretaker at Cranberry Cemetery for almost 20 years, believes a new plan will create a more visually appealing space with more options for burial. One recommendation is to provide historical information about the older graves in the cemetery.

*Cemetery upgrade includes provision for green burials and scattering ashes*

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A new plan for the area's cemeteries provides more options for burials and memorials, as well as creating more pleasing public greenspace. The plan was initiated in response to an increasing trend toward cremation rather than full burials and a growing public interest in a wider range of memorial options.

Powell River Regional District operates two cemeteries, one in the City of Powell River, known as Cranberry Cemetery, and the other on Texada Island, known as Woodlands Cemetery.

The regional district issued a request for proposals in August 2009 and subsequently awarded a contract to LEES + Associates, landscape architects, to prepare a cemeteries development plan. The plan will be used by staff and the board to make site, management and financial decisions for at least the next 10 years.

The plan contains recommendations for both the Cranberry and Texada Island cemeteries. Cranberry Cemetery is located on approximately 4.3 hectares, with about three hectares currently developed. A land-clearing project at the north end of the cemetery, which is the expansion area, took place in 2009.

The objectives of the plan were to look at beautifying the cemeteries and also to look at incorporating some new options for people to inter remains or memorialize people, said Frances Ladret, regional district administrator. "We get lots of compliments on the way the cemetery is maintained, but we do get people saying that it is very stark and sterile," she said. "The directors decided to look at it not just as a business venture, but as a public space."

Shawn Gullette, projects' foreman for the regional district, has been the caretaker at the Cranberry cemetery for almost 20 years. "The most common comment that I've received is that it's a very flat, very sterile, very unfriendly landscape," he said. "Very unspiritual, is a really common term that I get."

The plan will make the cemetery more like a memorial park, Gullette added. "We have so many options for picking a final resting place, which is going to make it a lot more appealing," he said. "I think it will make people a lot happier."

Currently, a large proportion of deaths in Powell River don't lead to interment in Cranberry Cemetery. In recent years, less than 30 per cent have been interred there.

"We know that there are many more deaths in Powell River than there are people using the cemetery," said Ladret. "Lots of people now decide to do something else. But we didn't like to think that people weren't using the cemetery because they didn't find it appealing."

Cranberry Cemetery plan focuses on three areas: the expansion area; a new area around the mausoleum called a columbaria garden; and improvements to the main entry.

Over time, the proposal is that there would be an area for green burials in the expansion area. For a green burial, corpses are not embalmed and if there is a casket, it is biodegradable.

The expansion area would also include provision for two in-ground interment options, one with flat headstones and the other with upright headstones. Currently, there is no provision for upright markers, but there have been many requests for them.

Since not all of the expansion area will be needed, the recommendation is to put some of it in meadow. "There's not much point in developing an area that you are not going to need for a while to a level that you have to maintain it and mow it," said Ladret. "This has been done in a few places, West Vancouver being one of them."

The plan for the area adjacent to the existing mausoleum building includes a columbaria garden. Columbaria are like outdoor niches, a freestanding unit that has provision for several cremated remains. Gardens, with pathways, would be developed around the columbaria.

There is a children and infant's space in the cemetery, but there is nothing that sets it off, said Ladret. The plan recommends creating "a landscape more conducive to the memorialization of these tragic losses."

The consultants also provided a list of trees that could be used as tribute trees and some areas where those would be suitable.

Plans for the entrance area include upgrading the gardens and improving the signage, including some historical information about the cemetery and a map. Gullette managed to obtain the original entrance gate blueprints and the proposal is to reconstruct it.



The oldest plots in the cemetery are in the gently sloping southern section. The plan includes a recommendation to provide interpretive panels that offer historical information. There would also be an information kiosk at the main entry, a display case for maps and section and plot markers.

Plans for the Texada cemetery include: refurbishing the entry gate and adjacent fence; initiating a phased tree planting and establishing a meadow; removing the existing fence and installing new perimeter fencing or a stone wall; and upgrading signage. In the longer term, the plan calls for developing a columbaria garden.

Regional district directors have approved an implementation plan for the cemeteries, part of the 2010-2014 financial plan. The 2010 budget for Cranberry Cemetery is about \$49,000 and for Woodlands, it is \$2,500.