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# Residents preview plan for new cemetery



By Jordan Thompson, TODAY STAFF  
Monday, January 21, 2013 7:22:28 MST PM



Engineering capital technician with the municipality Lonnie Pilgrim explained various aspects of the proposed Real Martin Drive cemetery to residents who stopped by for the public information session Thursday evening in the Casman Centre amphitheater. JORDAN THOMPSON/TODAY STAFF

In a continued effort to engage McMurrayites on the proposed Real Martin Drive cemetery, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo held a public information session Thursday evening in the Casman Centre amphitheater.

“This is our third engagement for the Real Martin Drive cemetery,” said Lonnie Pilgrim, engineering capital technician with the municipality. “The first engagement discussed with the community the need for a cemetery, informing them of the need. The second engagement determined location with an ‘OK’ from the community, and now that we have the location determined we want to come back and give some visual, preliminary looks of how the cemetery could look, and give the exact location, and just keep gathering feedback from the community, as we did in the prior two when the project started in 2010.”

Residents who attended the information session could take an exclusive first look at illustrations and diagrams of how the cemetery will be laid out, and where exactly it will be situated.

"It's been good, we had a good turnout, I think we're looking at about a dozen people or more, and it's been positive feedback," Pilgrim said. "The community, now that they're aware of the location, specifically Thickwood residents, they seem to like where it is and like the design and how it's going to be laid out. I think most people are very happy with the location."

Pilgrim also said the Real Martin Drive cemetery is only one piece of a larger Wood Buffalo cemetery project that will see each of the existing cemeteries in the municipality upgraded in one way or another.

"The existing cemeteries in Abasand and downtown, as well as the cemeteries in Conklin, Anzac and Fort Chip are all going to undergo either expansion and/or aesthetic renovations," Pilgrim said. "So (the new cemetery) won't offer anything more, because we'll bring them all up to par and all on the same level, modern and any amenities, we'll offer that at all of the locations."

While some residents had a few concerns early on with regards to the cemetery's location, Pilgrim says at this point the municipality isn't hearing any major concerns at all and most residents appear to be happy with the location and proposed design.

"Right now we haven't had any real major concerns, other than I think everyone had the initial concern of, 'Where's the location?' They had just heard through advertising that it was in Thickwood, off Real Martin Drive," Pilgrim said. "But once they are aware of the location, I think they see it as a good spot to have the cemetery, and they thought about, 'Well, is it going to be facing the road, am I going to look out through my back window and see a cemetery?' Which is okay if they did, because it's a beautiful green space. It's going to be well maintained by Parks, there's going to be a trail system there, it's going to be lit. Location was a concern, but once they see where it is, and the design and layout of the cemetery, I think they're okay with it."

The municipality had surveys available at the information session, which residents were able to fill out in order to provide feedback Pilgrim says is crucial in helping to guide a projects like these.

"How you have successful projects is you continue to engage the community and get feedback. So I think what we're looking at is informing the community, we're moving forward with this project, here's the design, and gather as much feedback as we can. Because it's usually very valid, when we get someone to look at it from a different perspective, especially from a resident who doesn't deal with these types of projects everyday."

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