

Cemetery fees on rise in Niagara Falls

By [Ray Spiteri](#), Niagara Falls Review
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Anna Racine and her son, Ryan, plant some flowers and clean up the area the headstone where her parents are buried at Fairview Cemetery in Niagara Falls. (TONY RICCIUTO/Niagara Falls Review)

NIAGARA FALLS - Cemetery fees will increase, just not as quickly as staff had recommended.

Lot and niche sales will jump by 30%, while interment fees will climb by 54%. But instead of the increases being phased in over 12 months — between July 2013 and July 2014, the incremental hikes will happen over 24 months between July 2013 and July 2015.

During Tuesday night's council meeting, politicians approved the suggestion to help ease the burden on families that was made by Ernie Morgan, a Niagara Falls funeral director.

A report prepared on cemetery services says a survey conducted this year has found that the City of Niagara Falls has fallen behind the regional industry standard by about 30%. Other municipalities like St. Catharines, Grimsby and Wainfleet increased their fees substantially over the past two years.

In Niagara Falls, the cost for an adult single lot is currently \$1,070. The 30% increase would raise it to \$1,424.

Interment services for an adult casket burial is now \$930. With the 54% increase that would jump to \$1,528.

An internal service-delivery review was recently done for all municipal cemeteries in the city.

Cemetery services operate at an average annual deficit of \$600,000, according to staff.

The review, conducted by E. Lees & Associates Consulting Ltd., identifies opportunities staff believes could reduce or eliminate the deficit.

The increased fees is one option, as well as a marketing strategy to reach all demographic population groups, enhanced customer service standards, improved operation efficiencies and redevelopment of existing cemetery properties.

The city administers, maintains and operates 20 cemeteries, including an indoor columbarium.

ray.spiteri@sunmedia.ca