

Cemetery upgrades need now

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Penticton is in need of \$1.3-million in basic upgrades and expansion to its cemeteries.

LEES and Associates, a landscape architectural firm based in Vancouver and Toronto, which specializes in public service cemeteries, parks and the environment, completed the Penticton Cemeteries Master Plan, which was approved this week by Penticton City Council.

Erik Lees, principal of the firm, met privately with council members, Monday and then made a full report later in the evening at the public meeting. He outlined numerous options plus funding models which include increasing taxes, user fees and a combination of both.

Council will defer the decision until budget time which happens early next year.

In a phone interview with The Herald, Wednesday, Lees was asked what he considers to be at the top of the wish list.

"There's an urgent need to increase the inground, traditional burial capacity because Lakeview Cemetery will be out of space by 2017 and that capacity is urgent," he said.

"We're looking at basic site upgrades which includes increasing capacity and expansion. The cost of the entire project would be paid for over an extended period of time and not all in one go."

Lees also suggests the project be done in stages.

Some of the ideas for an enhanced cemetery include a garden for children and infants, a memorial wall, upright markers, green burial, and a burial area for Muslims.

His recommendations included phasing in fee increases over a five-year period, which would still be slightly cheaper than Kelowna by 2019.

Coun. John Vassilaki said increasing costs over five years "would be out of line" for grieving families who have to deal with all kinds of other funeral expenses. He'd prefer seeing the costs spread out to 10 to 15 years.

Lees said many families want to see a monument for those who are cremated. He said 82 per cent of British Columbians choose to be cremated and one in five Canadians who are cremated have their remains at a cemetery. That figure is double in Penticton, with two-in-five wishing to have their ashes at a cemetery.

Lees told council that some upgrades are as easy as "tender loving care" such as a fresh coat of paint and improved signage. He said there's many things that impressed him about Penticton's cemeteries.



Erik Lees

"I really like the way Fairview reflects the beginning of the city and its very first origins," he said.

"Tom Ellis built St. Saviour's Church and the footprint of the church still remains and many founding fathers and mothers of the city, as well as First Nation, are buried there. It's a quintessential example of a cultural landscape.

"Lakeview has some of that same integrity and interest further enhanced by the view of the region and the lake.

With the KVR, wineries and parks, the cemetery should be considered one of the jewels in an open space framework."