

## Green Burial Society of Canada Holds Inaugural AGM

By Jennett Jackson



*The Green Burial Society of Canada Interim board members include: Erik Lees, Lees & Associates, Chair; Catriona Hearn, Lees & Associates, Vice Chair and Stephen Olson, Royal Oak Burial Park, Secretary/Treasurer.*

**O**n March 7, 2013 the Green Burial Society of Canada (GBSC) was incorporated as a society. It's first annual general meeting was held in Richmond, BC on April 11, 2013 with 20 charter members in attendance.

The not-for-profit society is not just a trade organization, it is more than that. Other than cemetarian and funeral service members the society will be open to other green and related organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation, Robert Bateman Foundation, environmental groups, networks of death doulas and home funeral guides such as Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives.

The AGM saw an engaged and passionate group come together to share information and ideas as the Society moves forward. Interim officers were voted on and the following individuals were elected. **Erik Lees**, Lees & Associates, Chair; **Catriona Hearn**, Lees & Associates, Vice Chair and **Stephen Olson**, Royal Oak Burial Park, Secretary/Treasurer. The society will operate out of Royal Oak Burial Park in Victoria, BC for the time being and can be contacted via email at: [greenburialcanada@gmail.com](mailto:greenburialcanada@gmail.com).

Royal Oak Burial Park is the first cemetery in Canada to offer a green burial option and their experience and insight bring great value and insight to the Society.

Lees shared with those gathered that he has been in communication with **Joe Sehee**, founder of the Green Burial Council (GBC), headquartered in Ojai, California, who is thrilled with the formation of the Canadian society and GBSC will work with the GBC for issuance of designations, which certifies cemeteries and funeral-related businesses as environmentally conscious, while a Canadian version is developed.

To be considered as green or natural burial two of the following five pillars are required:

- no embalming
- simple covering of the deceased (shroud or simple box)

- no concrete liner
- simple memorialization
- some aspect of habitat enhancement

Advocacy and media opportunities were discussed while additional discussion dealt with education relating to green or natural burial and how to properly and effectively educate the public about their options, educating funeral service providers and cemeteries about the viability of green burials and the demand for alternatives to current offerings. It was suggested the funeral service providers need a shift in mindset when it comes to natural burial and discussion reviewed the possibility of drafting easy to use communication tools about offerings available.

Concern was expressed that some funeral homes see green burials as a threat to their bottom line and status quo business model. Green burial opinions can be made available to families even if cemeteries do not have a designated 'green' section, with offerings of green casket products (which are available from several

Canadian manufactures), no embalming and simple coverings for the deceased. These types of approaches can capture a range of customers including those who are choosing direct cremation and opting out of any sort of memorialization. It can be a win-win for all involved.

There was consensus among the group that the public's value perception in traditional funeral service is on the decline and they are demanding innovation and change in how funeral and death care service is being provided. It was noted that the public's interest and appetite for green burial is reminiscent, if not identical, to that shown in the early days of cremation adoption; which traditional funeral directors of the day tried to ignore, downplay and outright oppose. Today we see some of ... to their detriment and leading to the situation faced today ... a declining value perception from the public. 🍁