

**CITY OF IQALUIT  
CEMETERY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #02  
OCTOBER 21, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**PRESENT**

Joanasie Akumalik, Councillor, City of Iqaluit  
Jodi Durdle-Awa, Director of Policy Services, Department of Family Services – via  
Teleconference  
Father Daniel Perreault, Roman Catholic Church  
Reverend Methusalah Kunuk, Dean, Anglican Church Cathedral

**ABSENT**

Mathew Akavak, Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA)  
Ross Paterson, Manager of Infrastructure Programs, Community & Government  
Services  
Martha Nowdlak, Health Systems Navigator, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI)  
Jason Harasimo, Project Officer, City of Iqaluit

**PRESENT FROM ADMINISTRATION**

Amy Elgersma, Chief Administrative Officer  
Tammy Ernst-Doiron, City Clerk  
Lisa Milosavljevic, Communications and Customer Service Manager  
Jeanie Eeseemailee, Senior Interpreter/Translator  
Joe Brown, Superintendent of Operations – via Teleconference  
Rod Mugford, Municipal Enforcement Chief  
Shane Turner, Superintendent Water/Sewer – via Teleconference

Councillor Akumalik opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**Motion CA #20-03**

Moved by: Father Daniel Perreault  
Seconded by: Reverend Methusalah Kunuk

Adoption of agenda as presented.

**Unanimously Carried**

**1. MINUTES**

- a. Cemetery Advisory Committee Meeting #01 Minutes dated May 28, 2020**

**Motion CA #20-04**

Moved by: Jodi Durdle-Awa  
Seconded by: Father Daniel Perreault

Cemetery Advisory Committee Meeting #01 Minutes dated May 28, 2020.

**Unanimously Carried**

**2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

None

**3. NEW BUSINESS**

**a. Cemetery Remediation Project Update – Verbal**

Amy Elgersma, Chief Administrative Officer, provided an update on the Cemetery Remediation Project that the City is undertaking. She noted that as discussed at the previous meeting, there are two main site issues at the Apex Cemetery:

- Lack of surface drainage – this causes water to pool around and on the graves.
- Water in the graves – this is visible in open graves during the summer months and is caused by melting permafrost.

Ms. Elgersma advised that City Council approved a Cemetery Remediation Project in the 2020 capital budget. A design was developed to remediate the site and part of the design is to raise the cemetery site with material to allow for better surface drainage, but also to eliminate digging into the ground and disturbing the permafrost. The burial boxes would be placed in the material.

The project has been awarded to Dillon Consulting and Phase 1 includes:

- Gathering various information
- Surveying the site
- Drainage design
- Updating the Cemetery Operational Procedures for staff
- Grave and row marker design and cost estimates
- Public Consultation will be held to review the design with the public
- Final design of Phase 1 to be completed at the end of January 2021
- Pending Council approval, the project will then move into procurement and construction

Councillor Akumalik explained that having the burial sites above ground will only require digging three to four feet into the ground, which will eliminate digging six feet into the permafrost.

Reverend Kunuk felt that ditching would help the drainage problem, as well as having two feet of soil above the ground. He commented that even though the wooden boxes are now placed in a shallow hole, there is still water in the graves. He asked if the by-law requires the graves to be dug at a specific depth.

Reverend Kunuk pointed out that the wooden boxes are quite wide. He understands that the wooden boxes are made to fit anyone, but most of the time, a narrower box is required.

Ms. Elgersma explained that if the by-law has stipulations that are problematic, they should be brought up to the committee so that a recommendation to Council can be made to rectify the problem and change the by-law.

Ms. Elgersma thanked Reverend Kunuk for his suggestions for grave improvements. She explained that as part of Phase 1, ditching will be carried out around the exterior of the site which will help the drainage. There is also some permafrost melting that is causing the graves to sink, which creates more drainage problems. She explained that the permafrost layer is three feet below the ground, and once the air hits the permafrost, it heats up quickly creating melting and the graves fill with water.

Ms. Elgersma explained that the graves are dug in order and burial boxes are installed to shore up the ground around them. If the grave width is changed to accommodate narrow burial boxes, a different section would have to be used to dig and install wider burial boxes. If the residents are not concerned with the possibility of having a different location for wider burial boxes, this can be considered.

Rod Mugford, Municipal Enforcement Chief, advised that there is no requirement in the by-law regarding the depth of a grave.

Joe Brown, Superintendent of Operations, advised that currently the graves are three feet wide, which is the standard for the wooden boxes.

Ms. Elgersma noted that the funeral director is now using a different coffin that costs more and asked if it is the same width as previous coffins.

Reverend Kunuk advised that the new coffin might be a little wider than the previous coffin, but not much, and still leaves about a foot on each side of the box.

#### **b. Funeral Fees and Charges, with an Update from Recent Council Meeting**

Ms. Elgersma explained that the City does not charge for burials in Iqaluit. The City absorbs the cost to open the grave and maintain the cemetery. She advised that there have been concerns regarding the cost being charged by the funeral service company. In May, the cost for an average funeral was \$4,635 and this has increased to \$7,155 in September. This does not include the Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit of \$2,500. The biggest increase is the casket cost, which has increased from \$2,000 to \$3,500.

Ms. Elgersma commented that she was asked if funeral costs were covered for people on income support by the government or another agency. She advised that funeral costs are not covered and are the responsibility of the family, which is a concern when families cannot afford the burial costs.

Reverend Kunuk expressed concern that not all Inuit are aware they are able to apply for the Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit. He noted that in the south, the funeral director receives the death benefit and deducts it from the funeral costs and perhaps the same procedure could be considered in Iqaluit.

Ms. Elgersma explained that in the south, the funeral director assists with the application process and often the family would sign the money over to the funeral director towards the cost. Ms. Elgersma is not aware if this practice is done on a regular basis in Iqaluit. She noted that the City Clerk has been in contact with the funeral service provider to make sure they are aware of the death benefit.

Tammy Ernst-Doiron, City Clerk, advised that she has met with some families in the past few months and has assisted them to make application for the Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit.

Ms. Durdle-Awa noted that from past experience, the funeral service provider wants the money up-front and is not willing to wait for the Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit.

Ms. Durdle-Awa explained that the Department of Family Services does not pay for funeral costs for people on income support. The Department of Family Services does cover funeral costs for clients who are under public guardianship, a youth that is in care or an adult who has been in care since they were a youth.

Ms. Durdle-Awa advised that under income assistance, consideration is being given to extend seniors' benefits to include funeral costs for seniors in the territory.

Ms. Elgersma noted that the committee could provide a letter of support for the senior citizen funeral cost benefit being considered by the Government of Nunavut.

Ms. Elgersma noted that government employers have benefits that cover up to \$10,000 towards funeral costs. She noted that there are gaps in funding by those on income support, seniors and others that have hardship cases, such as infant and suicide deaths.

Father Perreault pointed out that there is a big difference between Iqaluit and the other hamlets in Nunavut regarding funeral costs. He noted that people are fundraising to pay for funeral costs, which shows there is a problem.

Councillor Akumalik explained that Iqaluit is a taxed based community and must pay for services, whereas the hamlets are fully funded by the Government of Nunavut.

Ms. Elgersma explained that funeral services were funded directly by the government several years ago through a contract with the funeral director, but then it changed so that the funeral service provider became a private business.

Father Perreault thanked the speakers for their explanation, but he felt it was unfair for those who do not have the financial ability to pay for funerals.

Councillor Akumalik agreed with Father Perreault's comments. He also noted that the City has a Communications and Customer Service Manager who could prepare a public service announcement regarding the Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit so residents are aware of the benefit.

### **c. Engaging Partners to Support Funeral Expenses**

Councillor Akumalik advised that Council passed a motion directing staff to draft a policy for Iqaluit burials to be implemented in the 2021 budget and to explore a cost sharing model with other levels of government, Inuit organizations and any potential partners.

Ms. Elgersma asked the committee members for their thoughts and ideas on the cost sharing model and who should be approached.

Ms. Durdle-Awa suggested that a letter be sent to the Government of Nunavut - Minister of Finance and Minister of Community and Government Services regarding the matter, as these two departments have the authority to make the change.

Ms. Elgersma asked if a one-third cost sharing model should be suggested for those on income support.

Reverend Kunuk did not have any suggestions on a cost sharing model. He did note that he performs approximately 30 funerals a year at no charge.

Ms. Elgersma commented that based on the number of burials during the past two years, staff are estimating 50 burials a year for the next couple of years.

Councillor Akumalik advised that Administration will draft a letter regarding a cost sharing model to send to potential partners.

Ms. Elgersma asked which stakeholders should be approached.

Councillor Akumalik suggested Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut and Inuit organizations.

**d. Elder Representative**

Joanasie Akumalik, City Councillor, noted that he and Martha Nowdlak were tasked with finding an elder to serve on the committee. Councillor Akumalik advised that the person they approached declined, so efforts are continuing to find an elder representative. He noted in this instance, the representative should be an Inuk elder who has resided in Iqaluit for a considerable amount of time.

**4. CORRESPONDENCE**

**a. Cemetery CBC Radio Call-in Show**

Councillor Akumalik advised that he, Martha Nowdlak, NTI and Amy Elgersma participated in a CBC Radio call-in show that was held on September 17, 2020. The call-in show allowed residents to share their personal experiences or concerns about the Apex Cemetery and to provide strategic direction and future improvements to the existing site and services. He noted that there were a number of callers and the majority of the comments pertained to the drainage problem and burial cost. The comments are being compiled in order to make a recommendation to the committee.

Reverend Kunuk explained that the church keeps records of burials including names, ages, date deceased and the cemetery location.

Ms. Elgersma commented that options for grave markers and crosses should be discussed further at a future meeting. The information on the current grave markers and crosses are fading in the weather.

Father Perreault noted that a cross was supposed to be installed between the two whale bones, and he asked when this will be carried out. He suggested that the cross be simple and large so it can be seen from far away.

Reverend Kunuk commented that the funeral service provider is an expensive service, but he felt they provide a good service. He also was thankful that the graves are being dug by the City.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion CA #20-05**

Moved by: Father Daniel Perreault

Seconded by: Reverend Methusalah Kunuk

Committee adjourns 4:54 p.m.

**Unanimously Carried**



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Joanasie Akumalik  
Chair

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Tammy Ernst-Doiron  
City Clerk

Approved by City Council on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2021.

