



## CITY OF VANCOUVER

### ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: February 22, 2007  
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Meeting Date: March 13, 2007

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: Manager, Mountain View Cemetery  
SUBJECT: Mountain View Cemetery Staffing Changes

#### RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve the creation of the following full time positions at Mountain View Cemetery at no additional cost to the Operating Budget:

- i. a Cemetery Assistant Manager position; and
- ii. a Cemetery Service Assistant position;

source of funding to be consistent with the *Cemetery Redevelopment Financial Plan* and both positions to be subject to classification by the General Manager of Human Resources

#### GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager notes these recommendations represent some of the final preparations for reopening the cemetery as well as putting in place the staffing to continue to implement many of the other important components of the Master Plan. These changes will enable Mountain View Cemetery to move another step towards becoming the revitalized and invigorated cemetery envisioned for the citizens of Vancouver and the region.

#### COUNCIL POLICY

Council must approve all changes in permanent staffing.

## PURPOSE

The redevelopment of Mountain View Cemetery is currently underway with the construction of three buildings and 2,500 new spaces for interment. This project will result in the cemetery being re-opened to the sale of interment space after 21 years.

The re-opening of the cemetery will result in an influx of new activity related to the sale of interment space. Staffing increases are required in order to accommodate the increased volume at the office. The two new positions requested in this report will provide new skill and support existing resources to enable the cemetery to meet this increased demand.

## BACKGROUND

Mountain View Cemetery has been owned and operated by the City of Vancouver since its first interment in 1887. In the first 100 years, more than 92,000 graves were sold and the remains of more than 130,000 people were interred. In 1986 the cemetery was running out of full size (casket) graves. Council decided to close the cemetery to the sale of new space and on March 27, 1986 the last grave was sold. Since the closure, interments have continued but only in graves purchased from the cemetery prior to the closure.

A proposal was made by a group in 1995 to purchase the cemetery but Council decided to retain the ownership and operation of Mountain View Cemetery. A Vision Plan and Master Plan were then commissioned to evaluate the future potential for reopening and revitalizing this civic space. Council approved the Vision Plan in 1998 and the Master Plan in March 2000.

Schematic plans for the first neighbourhood redevelopment began in August 2002 and were approved by Council in July 2004. Also at this time Council approved the Financial Plan which included a 10-year financial projection including repayment of the capital costs. Construction plans were then completed and the tender to begin construction was awarded by Council in July 2006. Construction is scheduled to be complete on the new interment spaces in September 2007.

## DISCUSSION

### Recent Changes

The transition of Mountain View Cemetery from its semi-active state during the past 20 years to becoming a fully active and modern cemetery is almost complete. The Master Plan focused primarily on the landscape and infrastructure improvements and those plans are currently under construction. While these changes will be most visible, the most dramatic change has taken place in the office.

Manual systems of writing names in ledgers and typing records in index cards were the standard for record keeping for more than 100 years. In 2003 the cemetery began the transition to a computer based model. In 2004 all new records were created and maintained in the new database format. Considerable effort has been taken during this time to begin the conversion of old paper based records to the new electronic format. This effort now has shifted to verifying and completing the information to include ownership and all interment information. It will still be several more years before all of the old records are fully

transcribed but the cemetery is now better positioned to take on the additional workload required for a revitalized cemetery operation.

### **Assistant Manager**

Historically the position of Cemetery Manager focused solely on the field operation (grounds maintenance, interment services, marker installations, etc.) and office functions (processing interments, inquiries, administration, etc.). The implementation of the Master Plan, the planning needs for the ongoing development of the cemetery, and transition of office procedures and field operations to meet the demands of a new and modern cemetery necessitated the creation of a temporary position of Assistant Manager. This position has been integral to managing the many aspects of transitioning the cemetery.

As the new future of the cemetery approaches, it has become apparent that this temporary position is required to continue the growth and planning for the ongoing development of the cemetery. The Assistant Manager will be focused on the operational and field aspects of the cemetery - an area that will see the number of annual interment services more than double - which will allow the Manager to continue to focus on the growth and development of the cemetery as both an important civic asset and a viable business. These concepts are critical to the success of the Master Plan.

Considerable time has been spent over the past 4 years to plan, organize and develop the cemetery to the point where it can be ready to re-open. Once the construction is complete the dramatic increase in customer volume and cemetery services will further burden the management demands. Work has already begun on planning and preparation for improvement projects in the military areas of the cemetery and work will need to begin shortly for the next phase of cemetery neighbourhood redevelopment. As well, there are many other opportunities for the cemetery to become more active and connected to the surrounding communities and region. This has been shown with the success of our Night for All Souls event.

These broader goals of the cemetery and concepts from the Master Plan will require a shift in the focus of the manager position from operational to growth, planning and development. In order to facilitate this shift the support of a permanent full time Assistant Manager is required.

### **Cemetery Service Assistant**

The major administrative and office activities at the cemetery for most of the past 20 years have been related to making arrangements for interment in existing grave spaces. These functions are routine and involve limited interaction with the family. Many of the decisions have been made previously, when the interment space was purchased, and it is only the final interment options and payment that need to be confirmed. This activity has been adequately accommodated within the present staffing level of two clerks.

In addition to this primary purpose, the two clerical staff also handles a variety of other functions including reception, general inquiries, marker installations, record keeping and various payroll and accounting tasks. Considerable effort has also been made in the last couple of years to convert and verify the transfer of our paper based information and records to an electronic cemetery database.

The re-opening of the cemetery to the sale of new interment space will result in a stream of service that has not been required by the cemetery staff for more than 20 years. Much has changed since the last space was sold at Mountain View. Up to 1986, the transaction to purchase a space took place over the counter and was basically limited to the choice of a casket grave or a cremation grave.

With the revitalization of Mountain View Cemetery, people will have a variety of options available to them. These options include several different columbaria choices, niche locations, in-ground interment opportunities as well as a number of memorialization options. There will also be two distinct situations where people will be making these choices - pre-need and at-need. The pre-need client will be making these choices for use some time in the future while the at-need client will be making these decisions often within a day or only a few hours of experiencing the loss of a loved one.

The type of service and the volume of new clients expected to choose Mountain View for their final resting place demands that a new skilled position be created. The Financial Plan estimates that the cemetery will sell more than 500 new spaces per year and that our annual interments will more than double from 334 in 2006 to close to 800.

The new position requested in this report will be created specifically to possess the unique skills and abilities to be the lead provider of this service to the families. This position will also provide leadership and guidance to the other office staff to enable them to improve their service skills and provide support to this new office function. This position represents a new classification and will be reviewed and categorized by Human Resources prior to posting.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

When the Financial Plan was created, a number of staffing changes were anticipated in order to address the plan and provide required public services. The exact nature of those changes was not known but in order to project the long term financial performance of the plan an allowance was made. The Financial Plan approved by Council in 2004 included \$50,000 for increased staffing costs with any additional changes to be funded from reorganizing the cemetery operating budget or from new revenues.

In the more than two years since the Financial Plan was approved the staffing requirements at the cemetery have been evaluated and refined. The two positions requested in this report represent two new permanent positions and approximately \$140,000 in annual salary and benefit costs. These costs will be funded through reassignment of two funded but vacant positions at the cemetery (\$136,300) and from anticipated new revenues generated from the reopening of interment space sales at the cemetery.

## **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

The Assistant Manager position will be filled by the current incumbent who has been in this position temporarily for the last two years. If council approves this permanent placement it will create a vacancy in the Foreman 1A position at the cemetery which will follow the appropriate posting and filling process with the Vancouver Foreman's Association.

The Cemetery Service Assistant position represents a new position that will be classified, posted and filled as per the appropriate collective agreement between the representative association and the City.

No occupied staffing positions or personnel will be eliminated

## CONCLUSION

Mountain View Cemetery is about to begin its second 100 years of active service to the citizens of Vancouver and surrounding areas. Significant time and investment has been made to enable the cemetery and the City of Vancouver to reach this important milestone. These staffing changes were anticipated within the Financial Plan and are integral to the future success of the cemetery.

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