



Legislation Text

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TITLE:

Cemetery Plot Sales, Fee Structure, and Improvements

PURPOSE: The purpose of this agenda item is to provide the Town Council with the information requested at the October 11, 2022, Council Work Session regarding prioritizing cemetery plot sales, a sliding scale fee structure for conventional cemetery plots, and funding for improvements at Old Carrboro Cemetery and Westwood Cemetery.

DEPARTMENT: Public Works

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INFORMATION: The Town owns and maintains two public cemeteries, the Old Carrboro Cemetery and Westwood Cemetery. The Old Carrboro Cemetery is located at 110 Old Cemetery Rd. and dates to 1910. In October 2018, the Town began selling plots in the Old Carrboro Cemetery designated for green or natural burials; since then, approximately half of the burials have been green burials with the demand increasing considerably in 2021. As of January 2022, the Old Carrboro Cemetery has sold out of plots.

The Westwood Cemetery, located at 401 Davie Rd., has been an active Town Cemetery since 1948. This cemetery is divided into sections with approximately half of the space currently undeveloped and un-plotted. Green burials are not permitted in the Westwood Cemetery.

The sales rate for plots at both cemeteries has been increasing over the last several years. As of January 1, 2023, Westwood had 102 plots left for purchase and is expected to sell out within the next two to three years at the current rate of sales. Neighboring municipalities have sold out of traditional burial plots.

In response to the diminishing availability of plots at Westwood Cemetery, Public Works procured the services of landscape architect, Carter van Dyke and Associates (CVDA), to analyze the undeveloped area of Westwood Cemetery and provide a concept plan for cemetery improvements. Public Works brought this concept plan to the Council on March 16, 2021. The concept plan includes designated areas for green burials, a memorial garden, walking paths, and options for cremains including columbarium walls, an ossuary, and a scattering garden.

As the number of remaining available plots in Carrboro decreases and discussion about the use of the undeveloped area of Westwood continues, the following matters are offered for the Council's consideration:

1. Prioritize Sale of Plots

Carrboro Town Code Chapter 13 - the Town does not restrict the sale of cemetery plots to individuals, regardless of residency (see Attachment A - Town Code for Cemetery Use). An analysis of cemetery plot sales over the past 20 years shows approximately 14% of the plots sold are to non-residents. To slow the sale of remaining cemetery plots, any combination of the following options, provided by Councilmembers and others, are offered for consideration:

- a. Revise Town Code to limit sales of cemetery plots to “at-need” only.

Note: “At-need” is considered a plot sale for a deceased individual in need of burial. At-need burials accounts for approximately half of plot sales.

- b. Revise Town Code to limit number of cemetery plots sold per person.
- c. Revise Town Code to limit cemetery plots to Carrboro residents only.

Note: 86% of plot sales over the last 20 years have been to residents.

- d. Revise Town Code to limit cemetery plots to individuals located within a specific radius of Westwood Cemetery.
- e. Revise Town Code to limit cemetery plots to those with family members already interred at Westwood Cemetery.

Note: Staff do not recommend this option as it would be difficult to confirm and/or enforce. Additionally, “family” is an indefinable relationship.

2. Consider Sliding Scale Fee Structure

Carrboro Town Code Chapter 13 requires cemetery plot fees be charged according to the “Miscellaneous Fees and Charges Schedule maintained in the office of the Town Clerk” and “differential fees shall be charged according to whether the person intended to be buried in the space with respect to which a burial right is purchased is a bona fide resident of or owner of real property within the Town of Carrboro at the time such right is purchased.” Carrboro currently charges \$750 per conventional cemetery plot for Carrboro residents and \$1,500 per conventional cemetery plot for non-residents. A cemetery fee comparison of municipal and private cemeteries was conducted. See Attachment B - Cemetery Fees Comparison. Research did not reveal that any other cemeteries offer a sliding scale fee structure. To meet this request, a sliding scale fee structure was developed utilizing the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development income limits for Durham-Chapel Hill, NC HUD Metro FMR Area (Orange County). See Attachment C - Cemetery Sliding Scale Fee Structure.

3. Cemetery Improvements

Old Carrboro Cemetery and Westwood Cemetery need the following improvements listed in order of priority:

- Replacement of the fence at Old Carrboro Cemetery, the existing fence is damaged and in disrepair (estimated at \$35,000).
- Drainage improvements including the installation of a rain garden at Westwood Cemetery (estimated at \$25,000).

Note: To address the stormwater runoff that has been impacting the remaining gravesites, staff performed some grading and seeding of the area. In addition, staff engaged the services of a soil engineer who determined that the soil is suitable for burials and offered additional instructions for funeral homes to follow when preparing gravesites.

- Replacement of the 40 Bradford Pear Trees at Westwood Cemetery with native species (estimated at \$60,000).
- Hardscape improvements at Westwood Cemetery such as benches, planter, and decorative lighting (estimated at \$15,000).

The total estimated cost for the cemetery improvements is \$135,000.

FISCAL & STAFF IMPACT: Prioritizing plot sales according to the listed criteria would require greater staff involvement in the plot sale process as staff would have to collect and verify more information pertaining to those criteria.

Implementing the improvements at Old Carrboro and Westwood Cemeteries would incur monetary costs and require staff time to perform labor and procure the materials and services necessary to the improvements. The total estimated costs for all improvements at both Old Carrboro Cemetery and Westwood Cemetery are \$135,000.

Implementation of a Sliding Scale Fee Structure would reduce the amount of revenue generated by the sale of cemetery plots, but the exact fiscal impact has not been evaluated at this time. Similar to the plot sale prioritization, additional staff involvement would be required to collect and verify information-in this case, the income of those purchasing cemetery plots.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that the Council discuss the options provided and give direction to staff on next steps as they relate to cemetery plot sales to be brought back as a Town Code amendment and approve proposed improvements.