Community Cemetery Engagement

What We Heard Report

Family and Community Services
January 2020

Purpose

Throughout October 2019, Strathcona County Family and Community Services worked with the contractor, Urban Systems, to conduct a community consultation on the need for a community cemetery to serve current and future residents. This document provides an overview of the results from engagement activities.

Acknowledgements

Strathcona County Family and Community Services (FCS) wishes to thank all citizens, community groups and stakeholders who participated in the 2019 Community Cemetery public engagement through the completion of surveys, attendance of public open houses and participation in facilitated workshops.

1.0: Introduction

Throughout October 2019, Strathcona County Family and Community Services worked with the contractor, Urban Systems, to conduct a community consultation on the need for a community cemetery to serve current and future residents. This document provides an overview of the results from public engagement activities.

2.0: Engagement Activities

Methods of Engagement

Community engagement included four components - a public survey, stakeholder workshops, advisory group workshops and public open houses.

Description of engagement method	Engagement period	Performance
Community survey: the public was invited to complete an online survey through SCOOP or Survey Gizmo	The survey was made publicly available between the dates of October 1 to October 21, 2019.	The survey received a total of 534 responses across the two platforms.
Public open houses: two public open houses were held; one open house was held in urban Strathcona County (Sherwood Park Log Cabin) and one was held in rural Strathcona County (South Cooking Lake)	Urban: • October 16, 2019 • 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Rural • October 17, 2019 • 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	• Urban: seven participants • Rural: eight participants
Stakeholder workshops: Targeted stakeholders (cemetery operators, religious leader, funeral directors, funeral home operators, Burial Options Society in Strathcona board members, and Councillors) were invited to participate in a facilitated workshop session.	Urban: • October 16, 2019 • 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Rural • October 17, 2019 • 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	• Urban: 11 stakeholders • Rural: five stakeholders
Advisory group workshops: facilitated workshops were held with three of Strathcona	CLAC • October 10, 2019 • 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	• Community Living Advisory Committee: nine participants

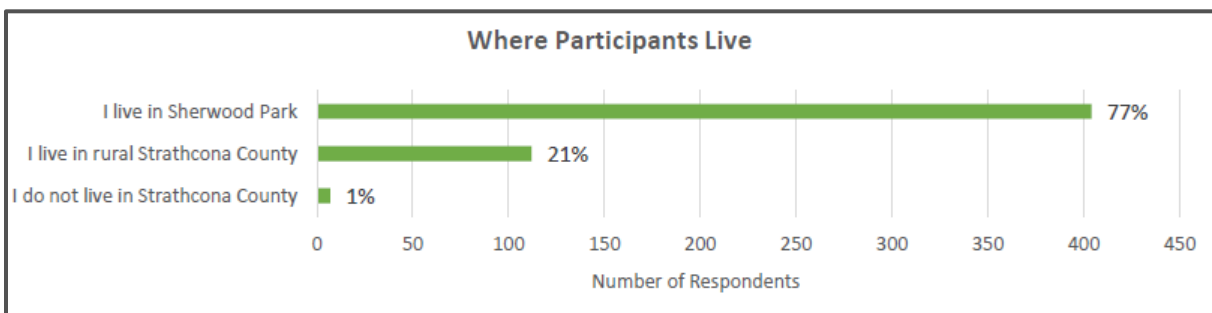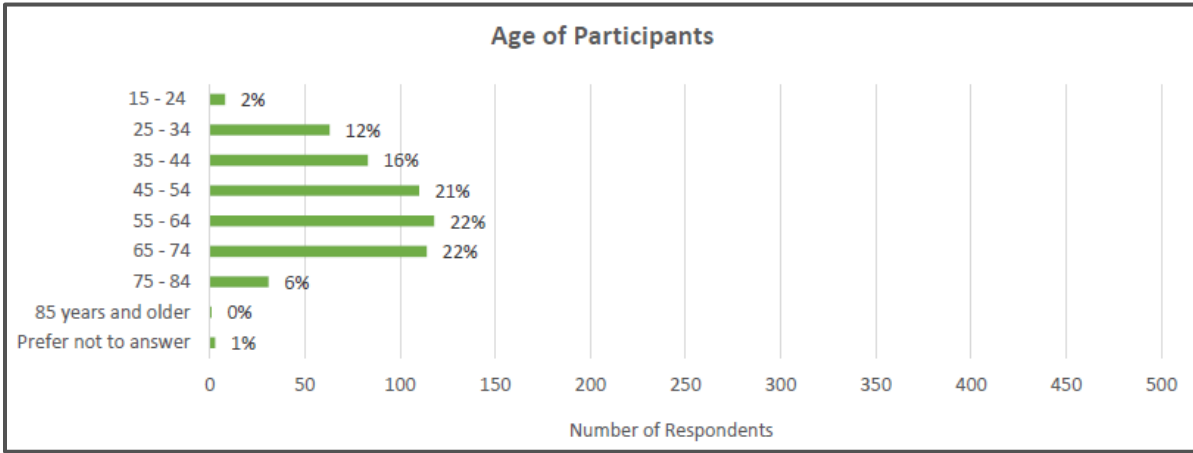| County advisory committees, including the (1) Community Living Advisory Committee, (2) Strathcona County Youth Advisory Committee, and (3) Strathcona County Accessibility Advisory Committee	Youth Advisory Committee • November 4, 2010 • 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Accessibility Advisory Committee • November 25, 2019 • 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	• Youth Advisory Committee: six participants • Accessibility Advisory Committee: six participants

3.0 Engagement Findings

Community Survey

The summary below presents the findings of the community survey. Because all questions were optional, the percentages shown in the graphs are based on the number of respondents that answered each question. For some questions, participants were allowed to provide comments. Themes from these comments are summarized and the numbers in parentheses show how many comments were related to each theme.

Survey Findings - Demographics

The following graphs provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of survey participants.

STRATHCONA COUNTY

Length of Time in Living Location

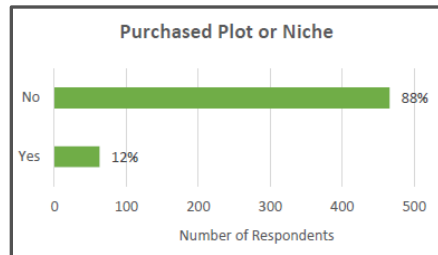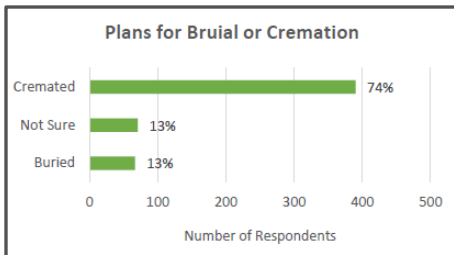| Category	Percentage
More than 40 years	20%
21 to 40 years	37%
5 to 20 years	36%
Less than 5 years	7%

Number of Respondents

■ I do not live in Strathcona County ■ I live in rural Strathcona County ■ I live in Sherwood Park

Age of Participants

Age	Percentage
15 - 24	2%
25 - 34	12%
35 - 44	16%
45 - 54	21%
55 - 64	22%
65 - 74	22%
75 - 84	6%
85 years and older	0%
Prefer not to answer	1%

Number of Respondents

Survey Findings – Plans for Burial or Cremation

Seventy-four percent of participants reported that their remains are more likely to be cremated. The remaining participants were equally split between those who were most likely to be buried or unsure. Around 12 percent of participants have already purchased a burial plot or niche.

Plans for Bruial or Cremation

Cremated	74%
Not Sure	13%
Buried	13%

Number of Respondents

Purchased Plot or Niche

No	88%
Yes	12%

Number of Respondents

STRATHCONA
COUNTY

Survey participants who indicated that they had purchased a burial plot or niche were asked to specify where it was located.

Location of Plot or Niche

Location	Percentage
In Glenwood Memorial Gardens	43%
Elsewhere	29%
In a cemetery in Edmonton	17%
In a religious-affiliated cemetery in Strathcona County	11%

Number of Respondents
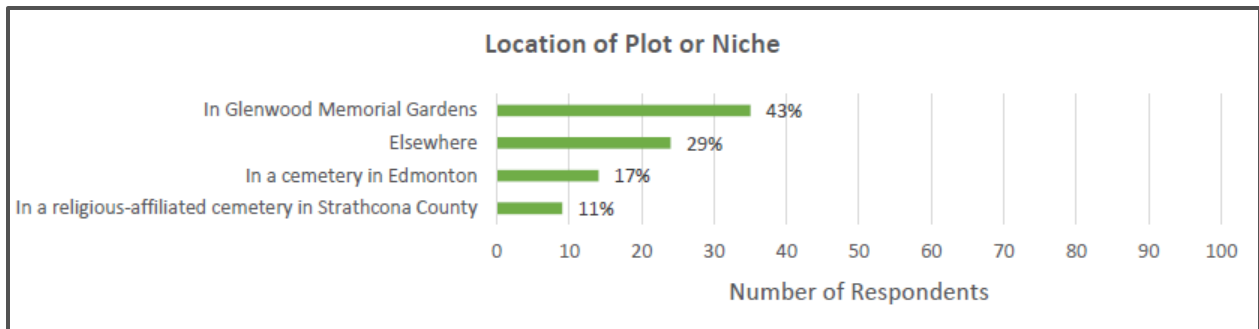
See footnote [1]

When survey participants were asked where their remains are likely to be located, 53 percent of participants said that they were not sure, and 24 percent of participants said that their remains would not be placed in a cemetery. Nine percent said their remains would be located at Glenwood Memorial Gardens, three percent of participants said that their remains would be located in a religious-affiliated cemetery in Strathcona County, and another three percent in Edmonton. Seven percent of participants reported that they were likely to be placed in cemeteries in other locations.

Cemetery Locations

| Location	Percentage
Not sure	53%
My remains will not be placed in a cemetery	24%
In Glenwood Memorial Gardens	9%
In a cemetery elsewhere	7%
In a cemetery in Edmonton	3%
In a religious-affiliated cemetery in Strathcona County	3%

Number of Respondents

---
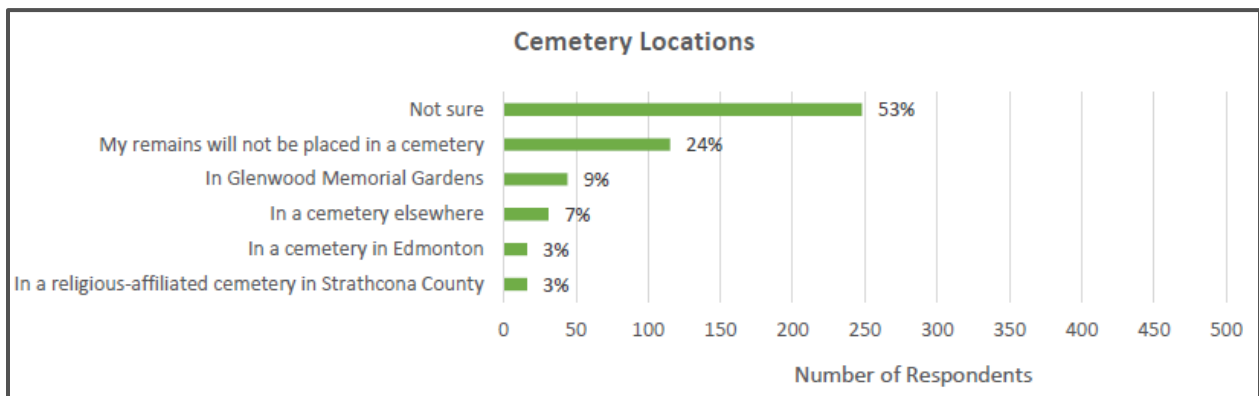
[1] The term "religious-affiliated" was used on the survey to refer to rural cemeteries; it was discovered later that some rural cemeteries do not require a religious affiliation.

STRATHCONA COUNTY

Respondents were asked if there are specific cultural requirements related to how their remains are treated that are important to them. Comments related to this question are summarized below.
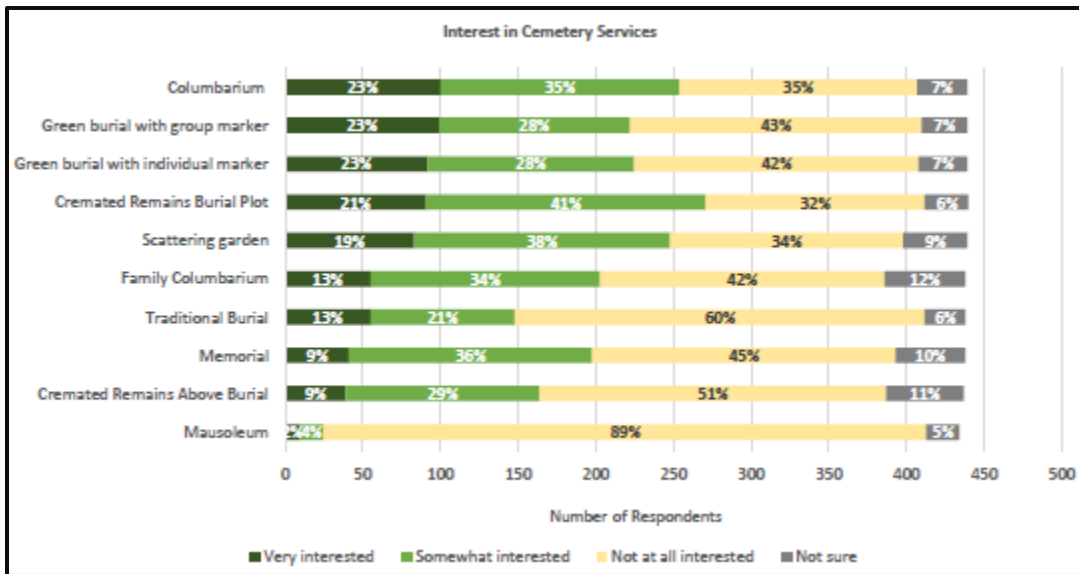
- Green / environmentally friendly burial (13)
- Catholic protocols (6)
- Christian protocols (4)
- Headstone and plot with spouse or family (2)
- Ashes spread
- Jewish protocols
- Baha'i protocols (e.g., east facing plot, buried in proximity to the location of death)
- Viking protocol

Survey Findings – Cemetery Services and Design Features

Most participants (68 percent) think that Strathcona County should have a community cemetery. Sixteen percent of the participants were unsure. If there was a community cemetery in Strathcona County, 56 percent of participants reported that it was highly or somewhat likely that their remains would be placed there.

Support for a Community Cemetery in Strathcona County

Likelihood of Remains Being Placed in Strathcona County Community Cemetery

STRATHCONA COUNTY
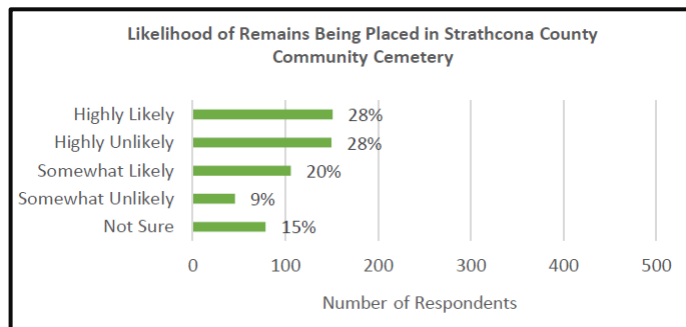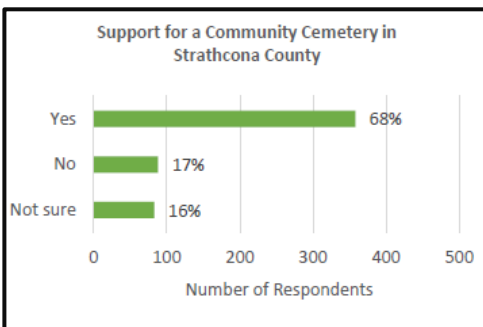
Participants were asked about their level of interest in cemetery services. The graph below shows the responses in order of the highest interest ('very interested' and 'somewhat interested') to the least interest. Participants also had the option of indicating that they were not sure. Overall, participants expressed the most interest in columbaria. Interest in green burial was significantly higher than a traditional burial. Almost all participants reported that they do not have any interest in a mausoleum.

Interest in Cemetery Services

Service	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not at all interested	Not sure
Columbarium	23%	35%	35%	7%
Green burial with group marker	23%	28%	43%	7%
Green burial with individual marker	23%	28%	42%	7%
Cremated Remains Burial Plot	21%	41%	32%	6%
Scattering garden	19%	38%	34%	9%
Family Columbarium	13%	34%	42%	12%
Traditional Burial	13%	21%	60%	6%
Memorial	9%	36%	45%	10%
Cremated Remains Above Burial	9%	29%	51%	11%
Mausoleum	2% 4%	89%		5%

Participants were asked about their level of interest in design features in the cemetery. The graph below shows the responses arranged from the highest interest ('very interested' and 'somewhat interested') to the least interest.

Interest in Cemetery Design Features

Feature	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not at all interested	Don't know/no opinion
Walking Paths	55%	31%	9%	5%
Individual Benches	45%	40%	9%	5%
Outdoor Gathering Space	30%	47%	16%	8%
Covered Shelter	27%	39%	23%	11%
Seating for groups	26%	40%	23%	11%

STRATHCONA COUNTY
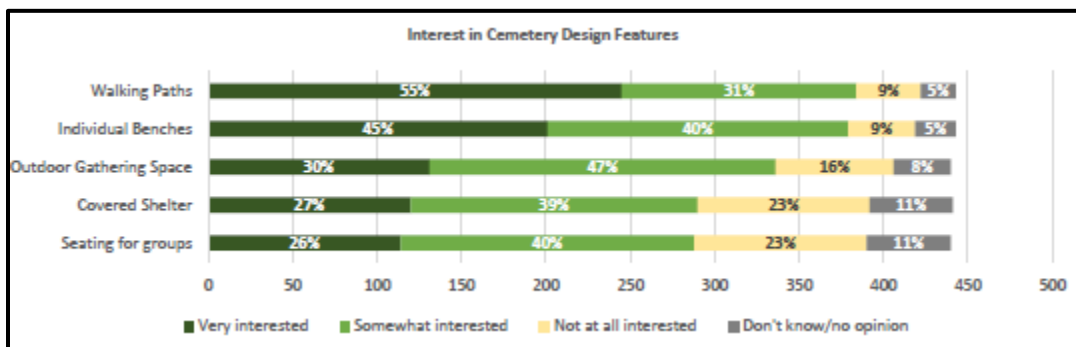
Participants were allowed to suggest other design features. Themes from their suggestions are provided below:

- Green spaces / park / forest / trees (19)
- Flowers / community garden / Indigenous plants (8)
- Water features (e.g., pond) (6)
- Facilities (e.g., chapel, washrooms, garbage cans) (3)
- Directory map (3)
- Flat markers (2)
- Monuments (2)

- Monuments (2)
- Edible orchard
- Memorial trees
- Bird feeders
- Parking spaces
- Play area
- Fire pits
- Outdoor instruments (e.g., piano, chimes)

Survey Findings – Cemetery Services and Design Features

Survey participants were asked to share their thoughts on what they believe should happen with historic cemeteries in Strathcona County that are in poor conditions or no longer used for new burials. It was commonly suggested that cemeteries should be maintained/restored/refurbished (191) by the County (23), community members or volunteers (14), the owners (6), the church (6), or the families of those buried there (3). Some participants also suggested maintaining and preserving the sites as historical landmarks (24) and adding interpretations, plaques, or markers (4) for tourists.

Survey Findings – Final Thoughts

As a final question, participants were allowed to provide any additional thoughts related to the potential establishment of a community cemetery in Strathcona County. The themes from these comments are summarized below.

- Costs for a burial plot should be affordable for families (25)
- Green / environmentally-friendly / non-traditional burial options are needed (21)
- Taxpayers' money should not be allocated to the establishment of a community cemetery (16)
- There is an urgent and growing need for a community cemetery (15)
- The cemetery should be inclusive of different religious needs (10)

STRATHCONA COUNTY

- Adding a cemetery would not demonstrate good use of land in Strathcona County (9)
- More information about the assessment of current existing local/regional options and the potential locations considered for the community cemetery is needed (8)
- The cemetery should be an innovative space that can be multi-purpose and used as a memorial park or green space (7)
- The County should not get involved in cemetery planning (2)
- The cemetery should be located away from main roads (2)
- A specific area should be designated for pets (2) and veterans
- There should be options to add memorial benches, trees (2), or headstones
- Local churches should be consulted
- There should be several smaller burial sites instead of one big one
- The cemetery should be accessible by transit
- Families should be able to purchase/sponsor benches, plaques, or road names to recognize family members

Public Open House Trends and Responses

Members of the public were invited to participate in drop-in style open house sessions to provide feedback related to the community cemetery project. Participants were invited to leave feedback, using post-it notes, to a series of questions displayed on easels around the room. The following are themes from each of the questions:

Tell us your current plans and experiences of cemeteries in Strathcona County

- Cemeteries in Strathcona County are nice and well serviced
- Cemeteries in Strathcona County can be expensive
- Cemeteries in Strathcona County reflect special interest groups

Do you notice changing trends or are your interest changing in terms of cemetery services?

- Private cemetery services in the County are perceived as being expensive
- Perception that municipally run cemeteries would have lower price points
- A desire for non-traditional and non-denominational cemetery services

STRATHCONA COUNTY

- A desire for cemeteries to be positive, community-oriented spaces

Does the community have needs and interests related to cemeteries that are not being addressed?

- Strathcona County has a need for a municipally run cemetery
- Strathcona County residents need options for more affordable and welcoming cemetery services
- Strathcona County residents need a cemetery option that provides a space for grief, celebration and recreation

If there is to be a community cemetery in Strathcona County, what would you like to see?

- Full burial
- Non-denominational burial
- Natural burials
- Cremated remains plot/niches
- Cremated remains plot/niches
- Scattering garden
- Green burial

Stakeholder Workshops

Two workshops were hosted to solicit feedback from key stakeholders. The following themes were observed through stakeholder feedback:

Existing cemeteries

- There are several undocumented orphan cemeteries in Strathcona County, but no participating stakeholders were privy to the geographic location of these cemeteries

Current practices

- There are several volunteer-run cemeteries throughout Strathcona County – the number of interments per year differs between cemeteries
- In Alberta, you are not allowed to start a new for-profit cemetery
- It was perceived that most individuals in Strathcona County use private cemetery services

STRATHCONA COUNTY

- The majority of volunteer-run cemeteries welcomed anyone to be buried in the cemetery, but most individuals buried in volunteer-run cemeteries had a connection to the community
- The various volunteer-run cemeteries in the County set their bylaws and policies with regards to what kind of services are offered in their cemetery
- Burial practices varied between cemeteries (i.e., green burial vs. no green burial, scattering vs. no scattering, etc.)
- Most cemeteries observed a higher incidence of cremation in the County when compared to other interment options
- Economics realities and environmental impact seem to have an influence on people's decisions
- People in Strathcona County lack a central resource to support them with burial and funeral options

Trends

- Volunteer-run cemeteries that are better run have better community support and buy-in
- Issues of vandalism at one volunteer-run cemetery
- People seem to be curious about green burial options, but they are not necessarily embracing green burial options
- There is a perceived increase in demand for cremation services – however, people are sometimes unsure of what to do with cremated remains

Needs

- Need options for individuals who come from diverse cultures and religious backgrounds
- There is no need for a municipal-run cemetery as this will put a burden on tax-payers
- A municipal-run cemetery would need to financially self-sustaining
- The County has an obligation to fund and support existing volunteer-run cemeteries
- Participants identified that there was a lack of information related to burial and burial options in the County
- There is an identified need for dedicated volunteers and compensation for volunteer contributions

- A municipal-run cemetery gives people the peace of mind that the cemetery will always be maintained (ensuring that history and documentation is maintained)
- There needs to be consideration around who defines what affordable cemetery services look like
- Strathcona County residents need basic cradle to grave services for its citizens, especially as the County grows and matures
- There is a need for affordable, accessible, inclusive and environmentally friendly burial options
- There is a need for a wide variety of affordable burial options that respect the cultural and religious backgrounds of County residents
- Need for a central database that directs people to various burial options in the County

Design principles

- Inclusive to individuals from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds
- Accommodating for current and future community needs and wishes
- Inviting, comfortable and friendly – somewhere that people can go to find peace and comfort (park-like, walking trails, etc.)
- Provide a variety of spaces that individuals can go to connect around grief
- Acknowledgment of traditional and ancestral lands (i.e., something to signify that the cemetery is on Treaty Six territory)
- Universal design that is accessible to all individuals
- Centrally located so that people can access and use the cemetery (i.e., not in an industrial area)

Advisory Group Workshops

Workshops were held with three of Strathcona County's Advisory Committees. The following themes were observed through advisory group feedback:

What do you know about existing cemeteries in Strathcona County/what are the practices in Strathcona County concerning cemetery services?

- Most individuals are familiar with full burial and cremation burial (growing trend towards cremation

- Private burial options can be pricy for families
- Funeral homes are in Edmonton and frequently have a connection with certain cemeteries
- Many cemeteries use concrete liners which add to the cost of burial
- Many County families use Edmonton cemeteries due to lack of options in the County
- Some volunteer-run cemeteries in the County are faith-based or location-based
- There are existing cemeteries in Strathcona County – not sure if there is a need for a service that is already being provided
- Not sure if the County should be getting into a business that they know little about

Are current practices and interests changing?

- People are choosing cremation over traditional burial plots because they are more mobile
- There is an increased interest in green burials
- People are becoming more interested in having a place to remember a loved one – it doesn't necessarily need to be a plot
- There are changing faiths, traditions and demographics in the province
- Costs can drive decisions
- Different age cohorts have different preferences for burial
- Green burials are intriguing

What are your perceptions about cemeteries in Strathcona County or elsewhere?

- There is a stigma around the topics of death and cemeteries
- Perception that cemeteries are an ugly and inefficient use of land
- Would be nice to have a cemetery that focuses on the celebration of life (create a positive space around death
- Cemeteries should have features like walking paths, scattering gardens, spaces for events, etc.
- There is interest in having green spaces incorporated into cemeteries
- Perception that cemeteries are unaffordable

STRATHCONA COUNTY

- Would be nice to have a cemetery that is centrally located and geographically accessible so that it becomes a feature of a community
- Cemeteries are expensive and not affordable to everyone
- Lack of awareness regarding where Strathcona County Cemeteries are located

What cemetery services are important?

- A variety of burial options (i.e., traditional green burial, scattering gardens, etc.)
- Cemeteries that reflect the shift towards increasing secular thinking
- Cemeteries that are inclusive to a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds
- Inviting spaces that people want to visit
- A meaningful space to place loved ones to rest

Do you think Strathcona County should have a community cemetery/does the community have needs and interests that are not being addressed?

- Strathcona county needs a public cemetery that is inclusive to people from different religious and cultural backgrounds
- People need affordable options for burial
- Private cemeteries can exert pressure on families
- Yes, we need a cemetery – having a community cemetery that is inclusive, affordable and has longevity is important
- People who are newer to the community may not have ties to other cemeteries
- Would like to know if there is enough capacity for burials in Strathcona County to serve our future needs?

If there was to be a community cemetery, what design principles would be important?

STRATHCONA COUNTY

- It is important to consider the maintenance involved and space should be designed to be low maintenance
- Spaces to serve a variety of needs (i.e., a chapel for ceremonies, community gathering space for when there is inclement weather, etc.)
- A space that is park-like, welcoming and celebratory (i.e., paths, places to hang out)
- A variety of burial options (green burials, cremations, etc.)
- Accessibility (universal design – suitable walking paths, washrooms, places for people to sit, etc.)
- Sustainability
- Space should be designed for the needs and desires of multiple generations

STRATHCONA
COUNTY

4.0 What's Next?

Input received through the survey and workshops will form the foundation of a Community Cemetery Assessment Report scheduled for Council presentation in January 2020.

More Information

Family and Community Services
Phone: 780.464.4044
Website: www.strathcona.ca/CommunityCemetery

Appendix I: Community Cemetery Survey

Strathcona County Community Cemetery Assessment

Community Survey

Strathcona County does not own or operate a municipal community cemetery. Cemetery services are currently provided within the County by private companies and faith-based non-profit organizations. The Cemeteries Act in Alberta states that "no new cemetery may be established except by a religious auxiliary, religious denomination, or municipality."

A municipal community cemetery would be open to all and would offer a range of options at different price points.

Please complete this survey by October 21, 2019. Your answers will be anonymous and will not be linked to your identity.

The input received through the engagement will inform the planning process and next phases of work. For further information on the next stage and the engagement process please follow this link: Strathcona.ca/communitycemetery

1. Where do you live?
    a. Sherwood Park
    b. Rural Strathcona County
    c. Edmonton (disqualified)
    d. Other_____ (disqualified)

2. How long have you lived there?
    a. Less than 5 years
    b. 5 to 20 years
    c. 21 to 40 years
    d. More than 40 years

3. What is your age range?
    a. 15 – 24
    b. 25 - 34
    c. 35 - 44
    d. 45 - 54
    e. 55 – 64
    f. 65 – 74
    g. 75 – 84
    h. 85 years and older
    i. Prefer not to say

STRATHCONA COUNTY

4. When you die, are your remains more likely to be cremated or buried?
   a. Cremated
   b. Buried
   c. Not sure

5. At this time, have you purchased a burial plot or niche for cremated remains for yourself? (If Yes, go to Q 6; if No, go to Q7)
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. Where is the plot or niche located?
   a. In Glenwood Memorial Gardens (Go to Q8)
   b. In a religious-affiliated cemetery in Strathcona County (Go to Q8)
   c. In a cemetery in Edmonton (Go to Q8)
   d. Elsewhere _____ (Go to Q8)

7. If your remains are to be placed in a cemetery, where will that likely be located?
   a. In Glenwood Memorial Gardens
   b. In a religious-affiliated cemetery in Strathcona County
   c. In a cemetery in Edmonton
   d. In a cemetery elsewhere _____
   e. My remains will not be placed in a cemetery
   f. Not sure

8. Are there any cultural requirements related to how your remains will be treated? (please describe)
   _____

9. If there was a community cemetery in Strathcona County, how likely is it that your remains would be placed there?
   a. Highly likely
   b. Somewhat likely
   c. Somewhat unlikely
   d. Highly unlikely
   e. Not sure

10. Do you think that Strathcona County should have a community cemetery? (If yes or not sure, go to Q11)
    a. Yes
    b. No (Go to Q13)
    c. Not sure

STRATHCONA COUNTY

Community cemeteries can offer different types of services and features. They can also have varied landscape characteristics. In the next two questions, we are seeking your perspective on the potential characteristics and features you would like to see if there is to be a community cemetery in Strathcona County.

11. What is your level of interest in the following cemetery services?

	1 - not at all interested	2 – somewhat interested	3 – very interested (I would choose this for myself or a family member)	Not Sure
Columbarium - placement of cremated remains in a niche (a securely locked enclosure within a wall) with a plaque on the outside				
Family Columbarium - placement of cremated remains in a small family monument that includes niches				
Traditional burial – placement of a full casket in the ground, with mowed grass and a monument on the surface				
Cremated remains burial plot – placement of cremated remains in an urn or container in the ground, with mowed grass and a monument on the surface				
Cremated remains above burial – placement of cremated remains in an urn or container in the ground above a burial in the same plot				
Mausoleum– placement of a full casket in a constructed stone vault above the ground				
Green burial with group marker – placement of un-embalmed remains in a biodegradable shroud or box in the ground; surface is planted and allowed to				

STRATHCONA COUNTY

naturalize, name is inscribed on a communal monument				
Green burial with individual marker – same as above but each plot has a monument				
Scattering garden - cremated remains are placed directly in the ground (not contained) in a specific area of the cemetery, name is inscribed on a communal monument				
Memorial - name is placed on a memorial wall or monument with no placement of remains				

12. What is your level of interest in the following cemetery design features?

	1 - not at all interested	3 – somewhat interested	3 – very interested	Don't know/ no opinion
Walking paths				
Seating for groups				
Individual benches				
Outdoor gathering space				
Covered shelter				
Other (please specify)				

13. There are some historic cemeteries in Strathcona County that are in poor conditions and no longer used for new burials. Please share your thoughts on what you believe should happen with these historic cemeteries.

14. Do you have any other comments regarding the potential establishment of a community cemetery in Strathcona County?

_____

Thank you very much for your input! Once a summary of the input is available, it will be shared on the County's engagement results page here (https://www.strathcona.ca/council-county/public-engagement/completed-consultations/**)**

STRATHCONA COUNTY