

Whitecourt Cemetery Master Plan



Date: June 3rd, 2022
Final Report



Figure 1: Whitecourt Cemetery Tree Growth in the Old Section
Source: LEES+Associates

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Executive Summary

Whitecourt Cemetery is approaching an important threshold. There are approximately 10-15 years of sales remaining in the existing developed areas of the cemetery, while the Town of Whitecourt continues to grow in population. As a result, it is expected that Whitecourt Cemetery will face increased demand for cemetery services and burial space over the next 25 years.

The Town of Whitecourt commissioned this Cemetery Master Plan to guide the development of Whitecourt Cemetery to ensure there will be appropriate inventory and cemetery services to serve the needs of the Whitecourt and area residents for the next 25 years and beyond.

There are 2 areas on the eastern side of the cemetery that are yet to be platted out to provide more burial capacity. This physical Master Plan report provides a concept plan and recommendations for the development of these lands.

The Concept Plan addresses key issues including access and circulation, wayfinding, the management of healthy vegetation, visitor amenities and new interment and memorialization options all within the confines of the existing cemetery property boundary.

The cemetery staff were interviewed during the Opportunities and Constraints portion of the Master Plan. Knowledge gained from these interviews was used to inform the final recommendations presented within this Master Plan.

With this Master Plan to guide development, the City is in a strong position to bring forward a series of projects in phased priority order to ensure that the cemetery can serve the needs of Whitecourt and area families for generations to come.

Key Findings

Community Needs and Trends

Over the upcoming 25 year period, it is expected that:

- The population of Whitecourt Cemetery Market Area will grow from 14,958 in 2020 to approximately 23,480 in 2045;
- The number of deaths will total approximately 2,548 between 2021 and 2045; and
- Over the next 25 years, Whitecourt Cemetery will have approximately 222 in-ground casket sales, 147 in-ground cremation sales and 437 columbaria niches sales.

Burial Inventory and Cemetery Capacity Analysis (Demand)

The Burial Inventory and Cemetery Capacity Analysis found that there is approximately:

- 10-15 years of casket lot sales remaining; and
- 1- 2 years of cremation niche sales remaining.



Figure 2: Whitecourt Cemetery Field of Honor
Source: Town of Whitecourt

Burial Inventory and Cemetery Capacity Analysis (Supply)

The additional interment inventory required to meet projected demand for the next 25 years is:

- 117 casket lots;
- 147 in-ground cremation lots; and
- 408 cremation niches.

Summary of Recommendations

Concept Plan

Key areas for cemetery site improvements and future burial area development were identified by the consulting team. Key recommendations include:

- Initial construction and additional burial inventory be focused at the existing columbaria and in Expansion Area A;
- All burial expansion areas should be platted out with a wide range of interment and memorialization options through the development of cremation gardens, casket lots and in-ground cremation lots;
- All burial expansion areas should be platted out in an organized and consistent manner;
- A Green Burial area should be planned for to accommodate the increasing interest in sustainable death practices; and
- The proposed cemetery driveway should be one way with vehicles entering the cemetery at 36th ave and exiting where the existing driveway gate is. The new driveway will be wide enough for one parked vehicle and one passing vehicle.

Cemetery-Wide Enhancement

Recommendations for cemetery-wide enhancements include:

- Relocate the existing maintenance shed to a more discrete and central location;
- Establish a Wayfinding and Circulation strategy;
- Establish a Landscape Management Strategy to ensure over mature trees are replaced with species that are adaptable to the changing climate; and
- Establish a Physical Enhancement Strategy to ensure the cemetery has a holistic aesthetic in planting, site furnishings and signage.

Administration and Operations

It is recommended that the Town of Whitecourt upgrade their existing records management system to a specialized cemetery records management system as a high priority item.

The existing maintenance storage shed should be relocated to a discrete area where it is easily accessible in the expansion areas. Excess materials created by the cemetery including lawn clipping and soil should be stored in the public works yard.

Implementation Plan and Recommended Budget Allowance

It is recommended that cemetery expansions and site wide improvements are divided into phases and developed to meet the immediate demand for new columbaria niches and in-ground casket burial lots and to ensure there are interment options for future demand.

The Phases include:

- Phase 1: High Priority;
- Phase 2: Medium Priority;
- Phase 3: Low Priority; and
- Future Phases.

The estimated budget allowance for the proposed new burial areas and cemetery wide physical enhancement includes:

- Phase 1: \$900,000
- Phase 2: \$950,000
- Phase 3: \$1 million
- Future Phases: \$600,000

Conclusion

This Master Plan will assist the Town of Whitecourt in preparing to effectively meet the future interment and cemetery service needs of the community for the next 25 years and beyond.

Chapter 1: Community Needs and Trends Analysis

This chapter identifies relevant demographic, death, and burial trends that guided recommendations in relation to burial capacity and the range of interment options to be provided at Whitecourt Cemetery.

This chapter is set out under the following headings:

- Communities Served Analysis;
- Demographic and Disposition Trends Analysis; and
- Burial Inventory and Cemetery Capacity Analysis (Supply).

Communities Served Analysis

This section describes the geographic area and communities served by Whitecourt Cemetery, and outlines the demographic variables that have and will continue to affect demand for the cemetery's land and services. These include:

- Catchment area;
- Age distribution;
- Religious and ethnic distribution; and
- Immigration trends.

Catchment Area

The analysis assumes that the primary market served by Whitecourt Cemetery comprises residents within the Town of Whitecourt and Woodlands County (Figure 1). The Town has an estimated population of 10,204 and the County has an estimated population of 4,754 (2020). In this report the Town and the County will be referred to as the communities served.

Age Distribution

Analysis of the communities served demographic data from the 2016 Statistics Canada census finds that:

- 50 to 54 year olds are the largest age cohort in the Town, and the average age is 36.5 years old;
- The Community served is on par with the Province of Alberta's average of 36.7 years old; and
- The population over the age of 60 accounts for 13 % of the total population. This is on par with the rest of the Province, where the population over the age of 60 accounts for 13% of the total population.

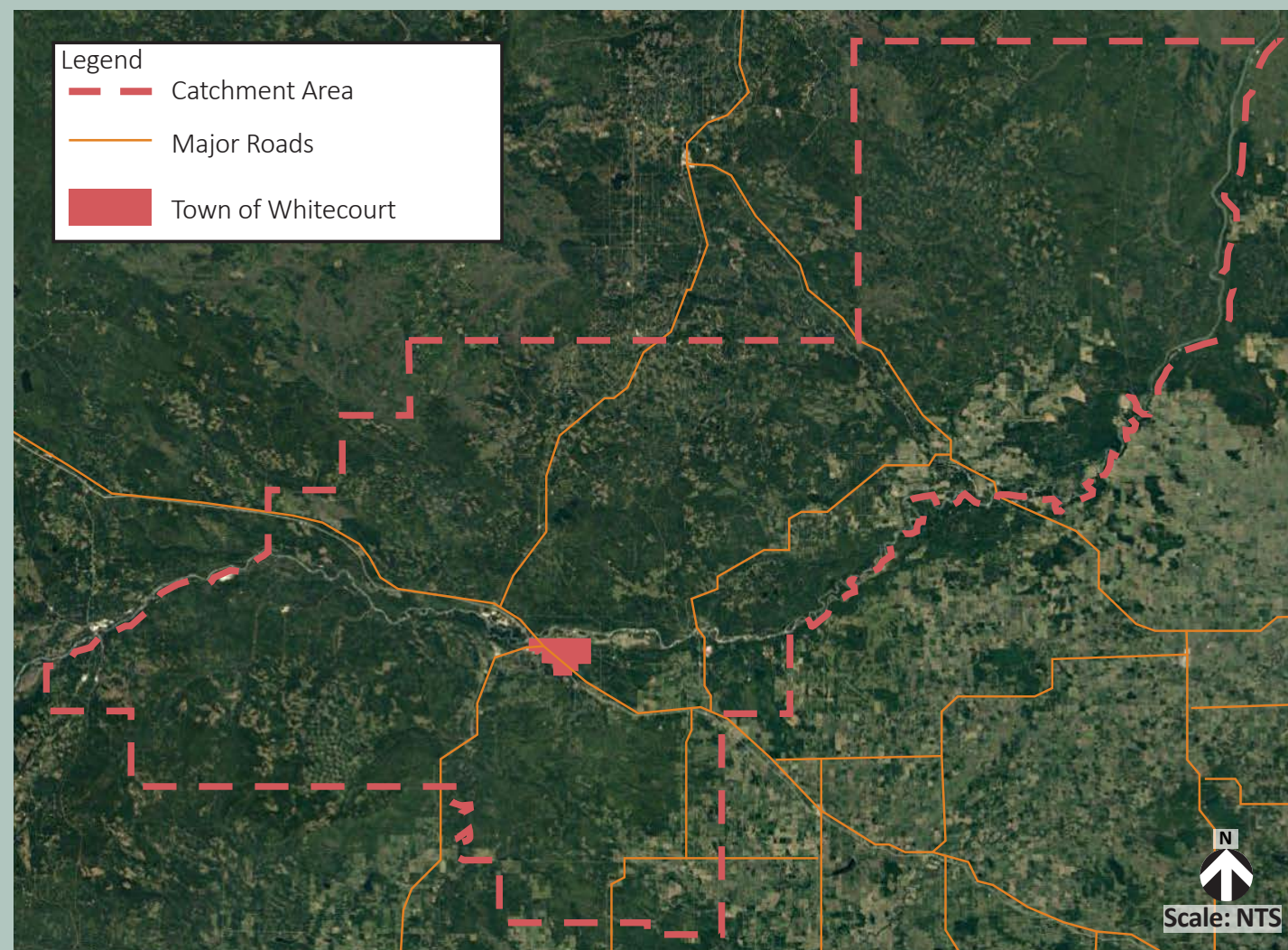


Figure 3: Whitecourt Cemetery Communities Served Area
Source: LEES+Associates and Google Earth

Religious Profile

Religious affiliations have a significant influence on an individual's end-of-life choices. Understanding the religious profile of the communities served is important to help the Town to meet local demand for different types of interment and memorialization. Some religions require specific forms of disposition and interment, such as in-ground casket burial, while others prohibit this option and require cremation. As some groups discourage or even forbid cremation it is expected there will always be a segment of the population that will need in-ground casket burial.

The Muslim faith is one example where a faith or religion forbids cremation as a form of disposition for its members. Muslims believe in physical resurrection and therefore prohibit any acts that are considered a desecration of the body. Since Vatican II in 1962,¹ cremation has been allowed by the Catholic Church, provided the cremated remains are kept together and are not scattered. Some other branches of Christianity oppose cremation, including minority Protestant and Orthodox groups, such as Greek and Serbian Christians.

Analysis of the Town of Whitecourt's religious distribution finds that:

- 60% of Whitecourt residents identify as Christian;
- The largest Christian group that residents identify with is Catholicism, at 28%;
- Residents reporting no religious affiliation account for 39% of the population; and
- Residents identifying as Muslim, Sikh, and Buddhist account for 1% of the population.

Figure 4 illustrates the current religious distribution of residents in Whitecourt.

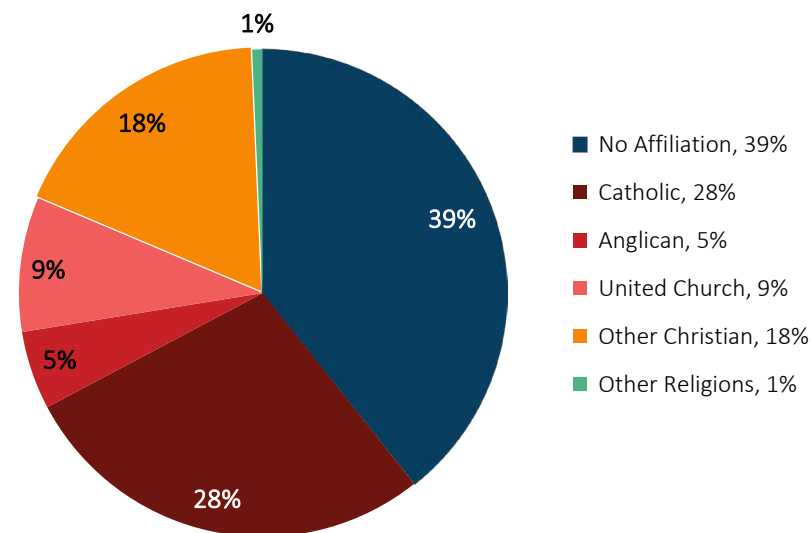


Figure 4: Religious Profile of The Town of Whitecourt Residents, Source: Statistics Canada

¹ Changing Catholic Attitudes about Cremation, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2012/11/03/changing-catholic-atti-des-about-cremation/>

Ethnic Profile

Similar to religious affiliations, ethnic profiles can be a significant influence on an individual's end-of-life burial choices. Understanding the ethnic profile of Whitecourt's residents is important to help the Town to meet local demand for different types of interment and memorialization. An example of ethnic affiliation preference would be how Italian and Portuguese families often favour above ground mausoleums and columbaria over in-ground graves.²

Analysis of Whitecourt's ethnic distribution finds that:

- 80% of the population are of European heritage;
- 17% of the population are of Indigenous heritage, and
- 3% of the population are of Asian heritage (including South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Southeast Asian, and Korean).

Immigration Profile

Understanding the current immigration trends in Whitecourt will inform decisions about interment options and services that should be offered at Whitecourt Cemetery. Analysis of the first-generation immigration population's country of origin finds that:

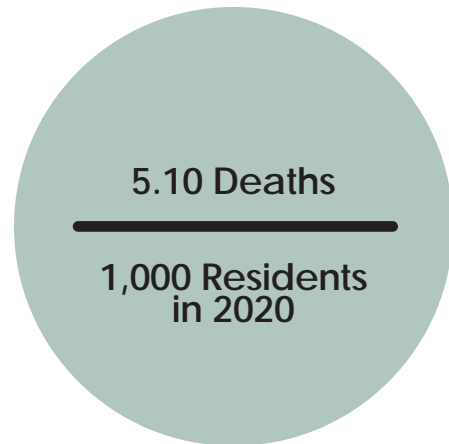
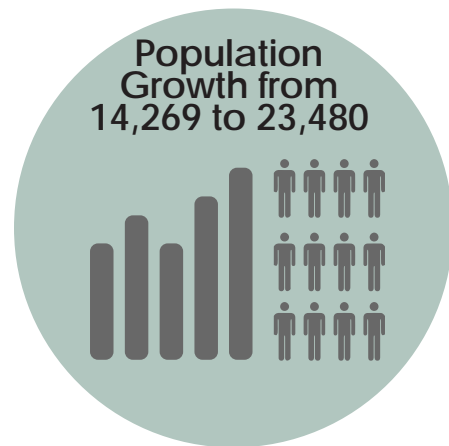
- Between 2011 and 2016 there were approximately 310 first-generation immigrants;
- First-generation immigrants account for approximately 5% of the total Whitecourt population, and
- The largest group of first-generation immigrants in Whitecourt are from the Philippines.

² Spaces and Ethnic Practices put Heavy demands on Cemeteries. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/space-and-ethnic-practices-put-heavy-demands-on-cemeterie>

Religious and Ethnic Profile Assumptions

Note that data for Woodlands County religious profile was not available. This report assumes the religious profile of the total Communities Served is similar to the Town of Whitecourt.

Demographics and Death Rates



Demographics and Disposition Trends Analysis (Demand)

This section outlines the key demographic and disposition variables that will affect the future demand for grave space and services offered at Whitecourt Cemetery. These variables include:

- Historic Cemetery Market Profile;
- Historic and Projected Population Growth Rates;
- Historic and Projected Death Rates, and
- Historic and Projected Disposition Trends.

Historic Profile of the Communities Served

Figure 3 summarizes the demographic and disposition trends that defined the market profile of the communities served by Whitecourt Cemetery from 2016 to 2020. In this graph, population data aligns with the left vertical axis. Death, cremation, and casket burial aligns with the right vertical axis.

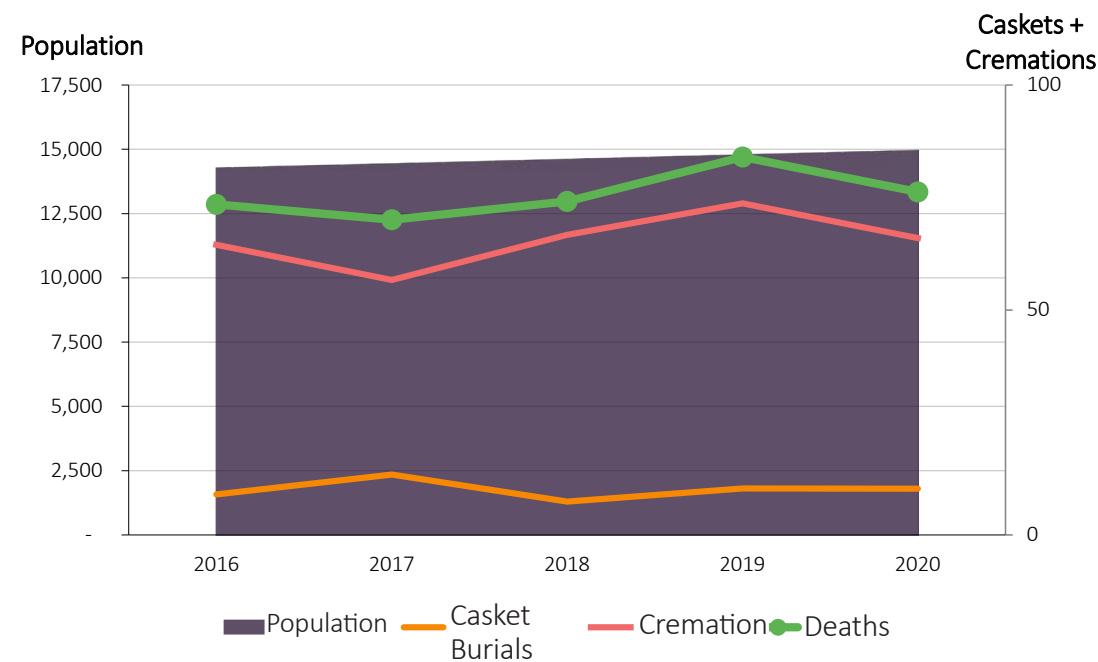


Figure 5: The Market Area's Demographic and Disposition Trends Profile, Source: Statistics Canada

The graph shows that over the last five years in the Market Area, there was a total of:

- 255 deaths, resulting in:
 - 34 in-ground casket burials, and
 - 221 cremations.

The rate of cremation increased slightly and the rate of in-ground casket burials decreased slightly which is consistent with long-term trends.

Not all of these dispositions came to the Whitecourt Cemetery. Refer to Table 3 for the number of casket and cremation interment that took place in the Whitecourt Cemetery.

Historic and Projected Population Growth

The demographic projections used in this plan are based on the Stats Canada 2016 Census data and population numbers supplied by the Town of Whitecourt Staff.

Table 1 summarizes the Market Area's historic and projected population numbers.

Population 2016	Population 2021	Average Growth 2016-2020	Projected Population 2045	Projected Average Growth 2020-2045
14,269	15,530	1.19%	23,480	1.82%

Table 1: The Market Area's Historic and Projected Population Numbers, Source: Statistics Canada and Town of Whitecourt Staff

Population growth over the next 25 years is expected to be modest with an additional 7,900 people expected to live within the communities served by the cemetery.

Historic and Projected Death Rates

Statistics Canada predicts an increasing aging population in the Town of Whitecourt and Woodlands County to cause an increase in the need for cemetery and funeral-related goods and services. This is projected to start in 2026, when the oldest of the Baby Boomer generation reaches the age of 80. The number of deaths is expected to increase towards 2045, when the youngest members of this cohort turn 80.

Analysis of the historic and projected death numbers finds that:

- Over the past 5 years there were 378 deaths within the communities served by the cemetery, averaging 76 per year;
- Over the past 5 years the communities served averaged 5.10 deaths per 1,000 residents per year;
- The death rate will increase to 5.71 deaths per 1,000 residents by 2044, due to the passing Baby Boomer generation, and
- In the upcoming 25 years the number of deaths in the communities served is projected to be 2,584, averaging 103 per year.

Table 2 summarizes the historic and projected death numbers of the communities served.

Annual Deaths 2020	Deaths Per 1,000 in 2021	Projected Annual Deaths in 2045	Projected Deaths Per 1,000 in 2045
79	5.17	134	5.71

Table 2: Market Area's Historic and Projected Death Numbers ,
Source: Alberta Vital Stats and LEES+Associates

Historic and Projected Cremation Rates

Disposition describes the manner in which human remains are handled after death. The most common disposition options in North America are in-ground casket burial and cremation. Cremation is increasingly the preferred disposition option of most Canadians.

The National average cremation rate rose from 58.8% in 2008 to 73.1% in 2019, and is expected to continue to rise across the country. Figure 6 illustrates the preference for cremation in Canadian Provinces and Territories as of 2019.

Provincial Cremation Data

In 2019, there were 26,203 deaths across Alberta, of which 19,595 families chose cremation. The cremation rate in Alberta has increased from 64.0% in 2009 to 74.7 % in 2019. The Cremation Association of North America (CANA) predicts Alberta's cremation rate will rise to 78.7% by 2044.

Communities Served Cremation Rate

In 2020 there were 76 deaths of which 66 resulted in cremation. This means that over the last five years, 80% of all families who lost a family member in the communities served by Whitecourt Cemetery chose cremation. Given the Catchment Area's religious and ethnic demographic profile, this report assumes cremation rate will continue to rise but not beyond 90% of dispositions over the next 25 years.

Summary of Disposition Trends of the Communities Served

Analysis of the historic and projected disposition trends within the communities served found that over the past 5 years:

- There were 328 cremations total, averaging 66 per year; and
- There were 50 in-ground casket burials total, averaging 10 per year.

Over the next 25 years it is projected that:

- There will be 2,313 deaths that result in cremation, averaging 93 cremations per year;
- There will be 271 deaths that result in in-ground casket burial, averaging 11 burials per year;
- The number of families choosing cremation will increase slightly over the next 25 years, capping at 90% around 2031.

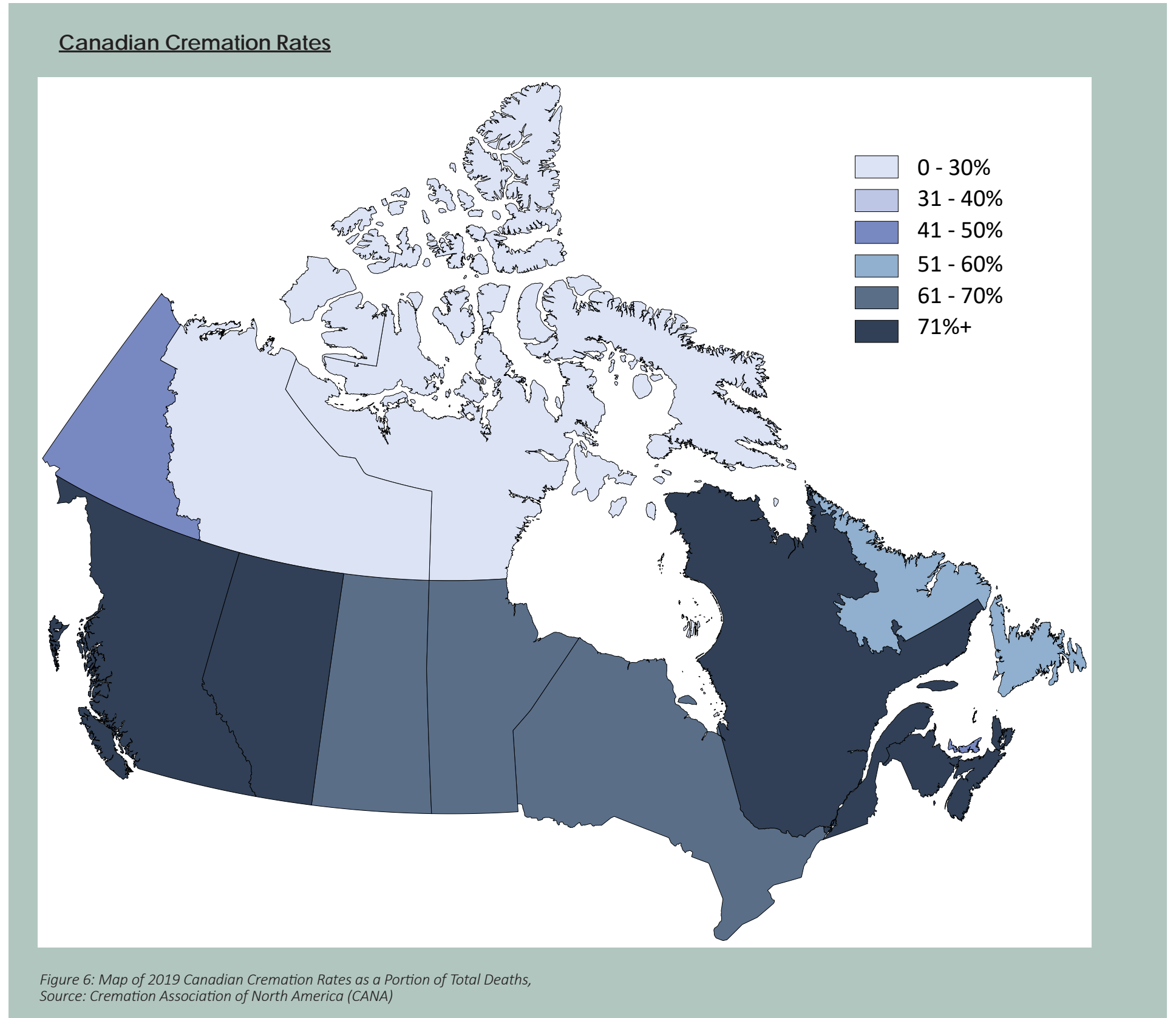
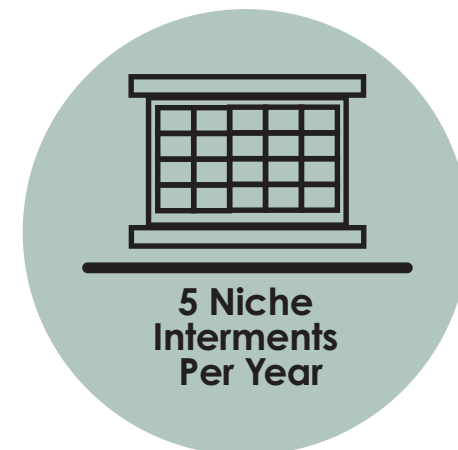
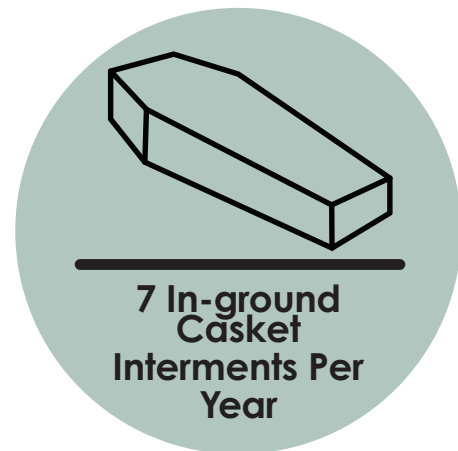


Figure 6: Map of 2019 Canadian Cremation Rates as a Portion of Total Deaths,
Source: Cremation Association of North America (CANA)

Average Interment Numbers at Whitecourt Cemetery over the Last 5 Years



History of Interments and Sales at Whitecourt Cemetery

This section reviews the historic demand by families for the Town’s cemetery services and cemetery space over the last 5 years. Demand is measured in terms of the number of annual sales and interments at Whitecourt Cemetery as a proportion of the number of deaths in the Cemetery’s catchment area (the Town of Whitecourt and Woodlands County) in the same year.

Analysis of historic sales and interment numbers finds that from 2016 to 2020, Whitecourt Cemetery:

- Served on average 52% of Whitecourt families choosing casket burial per year. This is below average for municipal cemeteries in Canada, which typically serve 80%-90% of their community;
- Served on average 20% of Whitecourt residents choosing cremation per year. This is on par for municipal cemeteries in Canada, which typically serve 10-20% of their community;

Table 3 shows the breakdown of cemetery interments and sales over the last five years.

Interments	2016 - 2020	Annual Average
Casket	27	7
Cremation	62 <i>(of which 37 were interments in lots and 25 were interred in niches)</i>	12
Sales	2016 - 2020	Annual Average
Casket	62	12
Cremation	61	12

Table 3: Whitecourt Cemetery Interments and Sales over the Last 5 years, Source: Whitecourt Cemetery Records and LEES+Associates

Projected Profile of the Communities Served

Figure 7 summarizes the population growth, deaths and disposition trends that will define the future market profile of the communities served by Whitecourt Cemetery as well as residents’ needs for cemetery space and services over the next 25 years.

The number of families served by the cemetery has remained largely consistent over the past 5 years. This projection of future needs for the cemetery assumes that the proportion of the community served by Whitecourt Cemetery will remain consistent over the next 25 years.

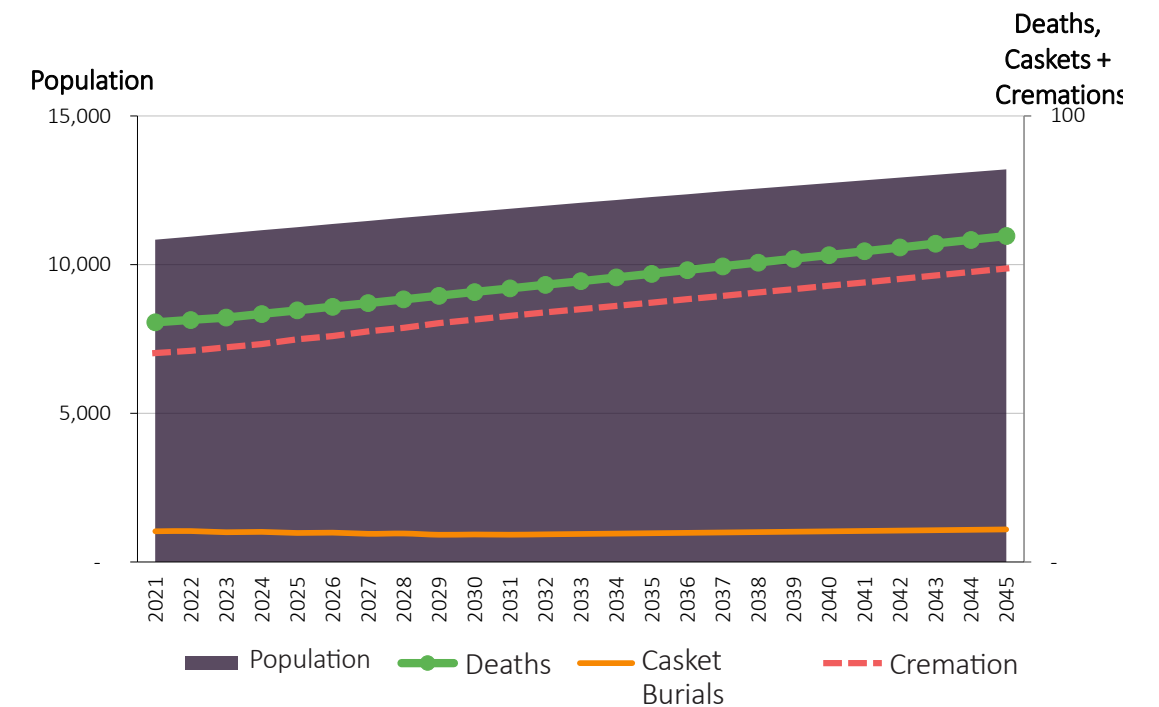


Figure 7: 25-year forecast of population growth, deaths and disposition trends in the Communities Served Source: LEES+Associates

The graph tells us that over the next 25 years in the communities served:

- Casket burials are expected to increase from an average of 10 per year to 11 per year, and
- Cremations are expected to increase from an average of 66 per year to 93 per year.

Trends in Demand for Cemetery Services

The proportion of residents that choose to be buried in a cemetery varies significantly and is influenced by several factors. Some of these factors include:

- Attractiveness of the existing cemetery site;
- Diversity of the product and service options;
- Ability to meet religious/ethnic traditions;
- Level of community engagement;
- Cemetery's proximity to residential areas and residents, and
- Level of universal design and accessibility, pricing of services, and other considerations.

A high cremation rate significantly affects the total number of families choosing to inter at a cemetery. This is because most cremated remains in North America are not interred in cemeteries. Many families choose to scatter a family member's cremated remains in unregulated areas like public parks, private property, lakes, rivers, and other outdoor places of personal meaning. This trend is expected to increase, in correlation with the increasing trend towards cremation as a preferred method of disposition in the Province. In contrast, the majority of families choosing casket burial will inter in their local cemetery.

Figure 8 provides an overview of the entire market that Whitecourt Cemetery will serve compared to the potential percentage of families that the cemetery could be serving over the next 25 years. The graph indicates that the cemetery will serve approximately 23% of the community. This is below average for municipal cemeteries in Canada, which typically serve 80%-90% of their communities' in-ground burial needs.

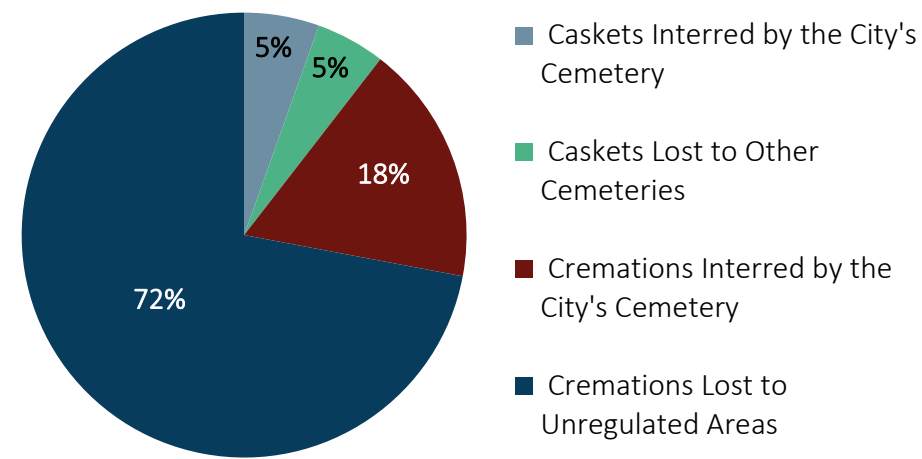


Figure 8: Distribution of Deaths from Town of Whitecourt Residents Over the next 25 years, Source: LEES+Associates

Projected Demand for Interment at Whitecourt Cemetery

This section estimates the projected demand for interment inventory at Whitecourt Cemetery. This analysis assumes historic service rates, interment and sales trends, and average annual growth in the Town of Whitecourt will remain consistent over the next 25 years. It also assumes Whitecourt will continue to develop cemetery inventory similar to its existing offerings to meet demand.

Figure 9 summarizes Whitecourt Cemetery's projected sales and interments over the next 25 years, from 2021 to 2045.

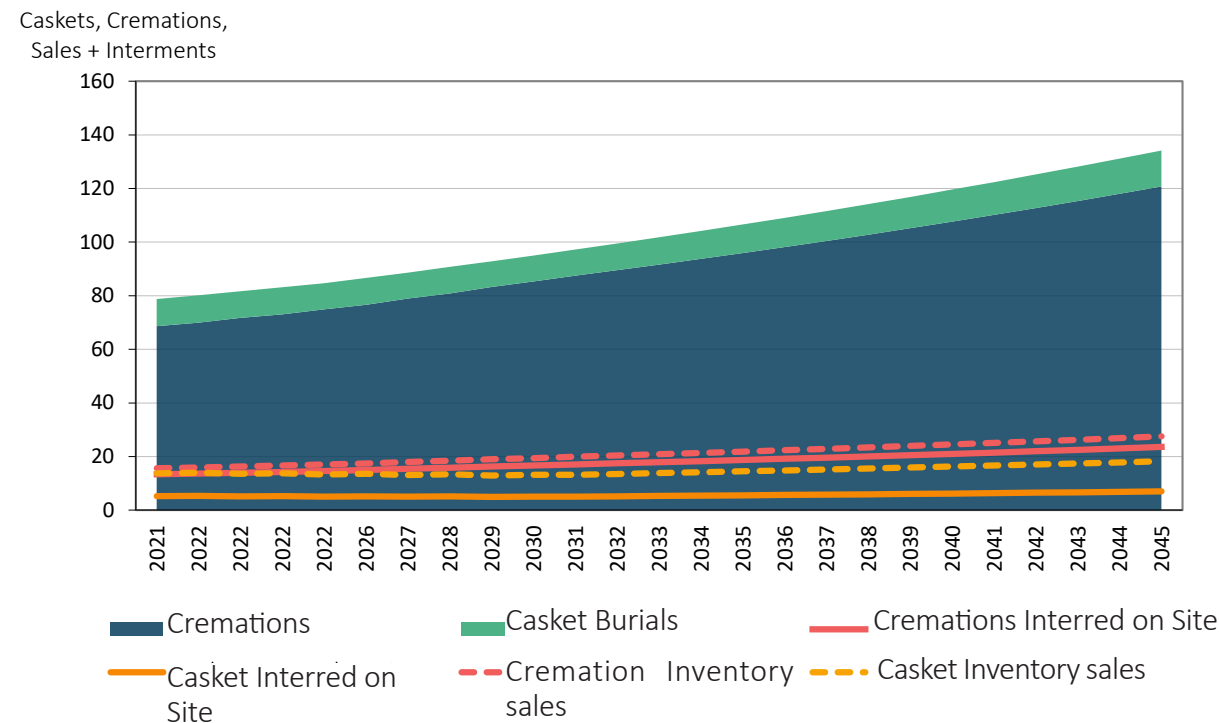


Figure 9: Whitecourt Cemetery 25 Year Market Capture Projections, Source: LEES+Associates

A projection of interment numbers finds that over the next 25 years Whitecourt Cemetery can expect to:

- Inter 141 caskets and 451 cremated remains;
- Intern an average of 6 casket burials and 18 cremation interments per year.
- Of the 451 cremations interred:
 - 269 will be interred in lots, and
 - 182 will be interred within niches,
 - Averaging 11 lots and 7 niche interments per year.

A projection of sales numbers finds that over the next 25 years Whitecourt Cemetery can expect to :

- Sell 222 casket lots, 147 cremation lots, and 527 niches, and
- Sell 9 casket lots, 6 cremation lots, and 21 niches on average each year.

Over the Next 25 Years The Cemetery can Expect to Sell:



Projected Demand Assumptions

Whitecourt Cemetery does not currently offer lots for the burial of cremated remains. We have calculated that approximately 40% of the in-ground casket lots sold are used for cremation.

This analysis assumes that cremated remains lots will be incorporated into the future expansion areas of the cemetery.

This analysis also assumes that the addition of cremated remains burial lots will not alter the number of niche interments and sales.

Key Terms

Key terms used in this section of the report are:

Sales Capacity: In this analysis, the anticipated demand for lots and niches is compared to the number of available lots and niches for sale, and used to estimate the number of years of sales remaining. “Sales” refers to all purchases of a right-of-interment for in-ground burial lot or columbaria niche that can accommodate a casket or an urn at Whitecourt Cemetery. The Town is expected to continue interring family members at Whitecourt Cemetery, long after the final lot is sold due to pre-need sales.

Interment Capacity: Interment capacity is the total space available for interment, including lots and niches that are currently available for sale as well as those lots and niches purchased in advance of need, but are not yet occupied.

Cemetery Inventory: In this plan, “in-ground casket lots” refer to all in-ground lots at Whitecourt Cemetery that could accommodate caskets. “Interment spaces” refers to the capacity of a lot or niche, as defined by the number of caskets and/or urns that could be placed within it.

Burial Inventory and Cemetery Capacity Analysis (Supply)

This section of the report analyzes the current burial and potential inventory capacity at Whitecourt Cemetery, and compares it to the land needed to meet demand over the next 25 years.

Existing Cemetery Inventory

Table 4 summarizes Whitecourt Cemetery’s inventory that is currently available for sale, the projected average number of sales per year (over the next 25 years) and the estimated number of years of sales remaining.

Inventory Type	Available for Sale	Average Sales Per Year	Years of Sales
In-ground Casket Lots	105 Lots	9	10 - 15 years
Cremation Lot	0	6	0 years
Cremation Niche	29 Niches	17	1-2 years
Field of Honour	39 Lots	0.20	100 + years
Total	173 spaces	32.2 sales	

Table 4: Summary of Whitecourt Cemetery Existing Inventory Sales Capacity, Source: Whitecourt Cemetery Records and LEES+Associates

Burial Inventory Required to Meet Future Need

Table 5 summarizes the additional burial inventory needed to meet anticipated need for the next 25 years.

Inventory Type	Available for Sale	Estimated 25- year Demand	Estimated Additional Inventory Required
In-ground Casket Lots	105 Lots	222	117
Cremation Lot	0	147	147
Cremation Niches	29 Niches	437	408
Field of Honour	39 Lots	5	0
Total	173 spaces	811 spaces	672 spaces

Table 5: Additional Inventory Required to Meet Future demand, Source: LEES+Associates

Interment Inventory Expansion Strategy

The purpose of this section is to highlight the potential capacity that could be developed at Whitecourt Cemetery.

Burial Expansion

Currently the Cemetery has two undeveloped sections, shown in Figure 10. Using the basic calculation of 500 lots per acre, we can expect:

- Expansion Area A to accommodate approximately 10-15 years.
- Expansion Area B to accommodate approximately 50- 65 years.

Infill Strategies

Capacity can be increased in the developed areas of the Cemetery through infill strategies, such as:

- Infilling redundant pathways in between casket lots, and
- Infilling along the edges of cemetery driveways, and treed areas.

Unclaimed Lots Reclamation Strategy

Some cemeteries seek to increase their capacity and conserve land through the reuse and resale of unclaimed graves. These are lots where the interment rights holders have not been in contact with the Cemetery for at least 50 years since the time of purchase. The first step in a reclamation strategy would be for the Town to identify and confirm the location of all existing sold, used, and unclaimed lots. Best practices surrounding this strategy include:

- Identifying individuals/families that purchased burial lots more than 50 years ago;
- Attempting to find the last known interment rights holder;
- Advertising in the local media (e.g. newspapers), and
- Where no contact can be established with the interment rights holder or family members, confirm the status of the lot as abandoned.

The circumstances for reclamation and expiry date of a right-of-interment in an unclaimed lot should be fully delineated in the Cemetery Bylaw. Unclaimed lots that are determined to be abandoned can then be resold, typically at the current fair market value. It is important to note that just because a lot was sold 50 or more years ago, it may not necessarily indicate a lack of family interest. Significant staff time may be required to fully investigate and determine if unclaimed lots are in fact abandoned and therefore available.

Conclusion

Cemeteries are unique in that their land use designation is legislated to remain unchanged in perpetuity. For this reason, it is prudent for municipalities like Town of Whitecourt to plan to have enough cemetery capacity to meet community needs for at least 100 years.

This cemetery community needs and trends analysis finds that Whitecourt Cemetery presently meets the best practices for planned inventory. The Town will need to develop the land that has been set aside for cemetery expansion beginning in the next 2 years to ensure it does not run out of inventory for sale. In the next 50 years, the Town will need to start planning for further expansion of the cemetery into Town owned lands, such as the Public Works yard, or procure a location for a new cemetery to maintain the recommend best practices for planned cemetery inventory.



Figure 10: Whitecourt Cemetery Potential Interment Expansion Areas,
Source: LEES+Associates and Town of Whitecourt

Chapter 2: Current Cemetery Trends

This chapter introduces an assessment of current cemetery product and services that Whitecourt Cemetery offers and proposes a range of products and services that are based on industry trends and focus on providing a community service that is accessible to all residents.

This chapter is set out in the following sections:

- Current Offerings;
- Operations and Administration Opportunities;
- New Interment and Memorialization Options, and
- Recommendations.

Current Offerings

Product and Service Variety

Existing Interment Options

Whitecourt Cemetery currently offers the following in-ground interment services for full-body and cremated remains:

In-ground Casket Plots:

- In-ground Casket Plots are approximately 1.5 m x 3 m. The Cemetery currently allows the following interment combinations in a grave plot:
 - One in-ground casket burial, and
 - Up to three cremated remains.
 - A casket burial is not allowed in a plot once an urn has been interred in that plot.

Columbarium Niches

- Whitecourt Cemetery currently has two columbaria.
 - Each niche allows up to two cremated remains to be interred.



Figure 11: Whitecourt Cemetery Columbaria Niches
Source: Town of Whitecourt

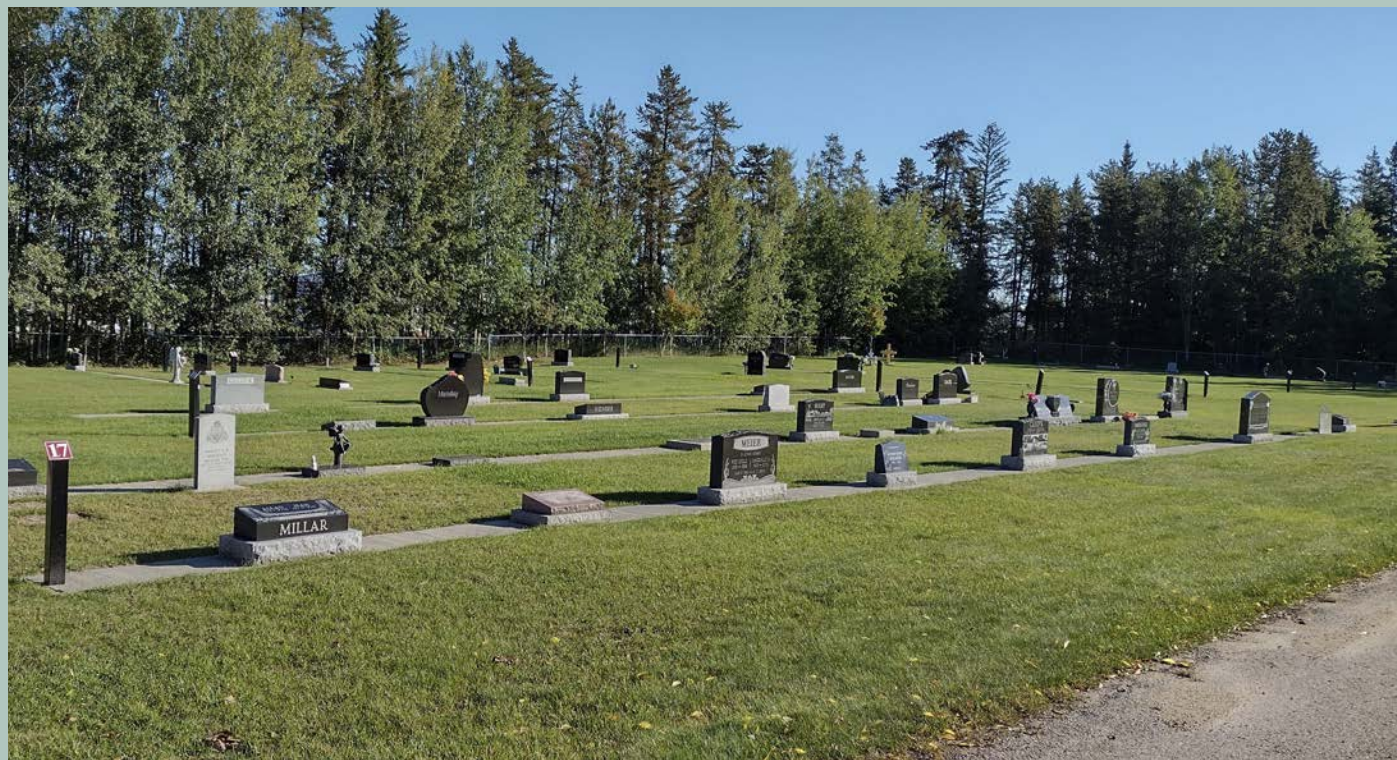


Figure 12: Whitecourt Cemetery Grave Plots
Source: LEES+Associates

Interment and Memorialization Opportunities

The range of interment options currently offered at Whitecourt Cemetery is below average compared with most municipal cemeteries within Canada. Diversifying offerings will assist the Cemetery in continuing to meet the growing need for different interment and memorialization options, and will create an attractive spectrum of price points. This will provide greater access to services for families with different budgets.

Cemetery products and services provided by other Canadian municipal cemeteries that are not currently offered at Whitecourt Cemetery include:

- In-ground Cremation Plots;
- Family Vessels;
- Ossuaries and Scattering services;
- Memorialization without Interment such as memorial walls and plaques;
- Companion Lots, and
- Green Burial

The purpose of this section is to describe the products and services that are offered at similar Canadian municipal cemeteries and the current trends in Interment and Memorialization. Recommendations on products and services that should be offered at Whitecourt Cemetery are at the end of this Chapter.

In-ground Cremation Plots

In-ground cremation plots vary from 0.76m x 0.76m for a standard cremation lot size with a flat marker and up to 2 cremated remains, to 0.90m x 0.90m for a cremation family estate lot, that will fit up to 4 cremated remains and a choice of upright or flat markers. These plots are typically sold at a lower cost than the in-ground casket lots. The benefit of offering cremation-specific plots allows for multiple price points for families to choose from.

Columbaria Units

Columbaria niches are growing in popularity with the rising cremation rate in Canada, which gives Whitecourt Cemetery an opportunity to expand its range of columbaria offerings. Columbaria are available in a wide range of styles. Their costs vary widely depending on size, design details and associated amenities placed in the adjacent landscape. Installations typically have a high return on investment, from 2:1 up to 4:1. This interment option can be profitable for the Cemetery due to the rising demand for niches and have a relatively low cost of interment.

An added benefit to columbaria is that they conserve cemetery land use and can often be placed in areas unsuitable for other types of interment.

Cremation Garden

Cremation rates continue to increase nation-wide which is significantly affecting the number of families choosing to inter at a cemetery. Many families are choosing to scatter cremated remains in outdoor spaces of personal meaning or store the cremated remains at home.

A cremation garden offers a full spectrum of cremation interment and memorialization options, including columbaria niches, in-ground cremation burial, scattering gardens, family vessels and memorial walls. Cremation gardens do not need to include all of these interment options, however it is best practice to offer a range of interment options when possible. This allows the cemetery to serve families who may otherwise choose to scatter cremated remains elsewhere.

Amenities and features included in cremation gardens typically include seating, ornamental planting and special features such a water feature, dolmen table or alter. Creating beautiful, tranquil places with a variety of interment options can encourage families to use the cemetery for cremated remains.



Figure 13: Cremation Garden, Boundary Bay Cemetery, Delta, BC
Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 14: Columbaria, Family Vessel and Memorial Wall, Woodbuffalo Cemetery, Fort McMurray, AB, Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 18: Family Vessel and Scattering Garden, Sushwap Memorial Cemetery, Salmon Arm, BC, Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 17: Memorial Wall, Lake View Cemetery, Cold Lake, AB (under construction), Source: LEES+Associates

Family Vessels

Family vessels are a relatively new interment option that provides an opportunity to diversify cremated remains offerings. The granite urns are about 30” tall with interior capacity of about 14 cubic feet. Each vessel securely accommodates up to 3 nested urns, 8 soft urns, or 10 to 15 sets of commingled remains. Like a columbaria unit, each vessel is owned by the cemetery, which sells families a right-of-interment for its use.

Typically, the fee for a family vessel includes one opening and closing and one memorial plaque when purchased. For subsequent interments, the family is charged an additional opening and closing fee, and a fee for additional memorial plaques or engravings. Cemetery operators approve the size, design, and content of the plaques’ inscriptions.

Family vessels are intended as a premium cremation option and have been placed in several cemeteries in Canada, including at Royal Oak Burial Park in Victoria, BC; Kelowna Memorial Park in Kelowna, BC; and in the Town of Slave Lake Cemetery in Slave Lake, AB.

Since these vessels are a relatively new offering in North America, the introduction of family vessels would require marketing to increase awareness. As such, family vessels should be installed in phases, beginning with one or two display units placed in the Cemetery.

Ossuaries + Scattering Services

An ossuary is a container used to hold the co-mingled cremated remains of community members. Ossuaries can be above or below-ground.

It is common for an in-ground ossuary to be installed in a scattering garden, allowing for a portion of the cremated remains to be scattered and the remainder to be placed in the ossuary. Ossuaries and scattering gardens often include associated memorial walls.

Memorialization without Interment

With an increasingly mobile population, many families are choosing not to inter cremated remains of a family member in a local cemetery. This memorialization option enables a person to be memorialized at their community’s cemetery, while their remains may be interred or scattered elsewhere.

Companion Burial Lots

There are two principle types of Companion Burial lots:

- Companion Lot for in-ground casket burial, and
- Companion Lots for in-ground cremation.

Companion Lots for casket burial typically include between 2 and 4 lots side-by-side. Companion lots for in-ground cremation could be grouped in a square or rectangular configuration. Companion Lots are often defined by flowering shrubs and trees, and a bench is often sited close by for family and friends who visit the Lot. Flat or upright markers can be placed on each individual Lot, or a single larger marker can be used to memorialize family members.

This interment type is a premium option and likely to appeal to a limited number of families. Nonetheless, it is in an important part of the wide spectrum of interment and memorialization options offered to families.

Secular and Denominational Burial

Some municipal cemeteries provide burial sections based on faith where historically there has been sufficient need from families in the community. Religious and ethic groups who may require designated burial sections based on their faith and beliefs, include, but are not limited to:

- Muslim;
- Chinese;
- Russian Orthodox, and
- Roman Catholic.

Municipal cemeteries are by their nature open to all and therefore tend not to create new faith based burial areas. This combined with a more secular society means that new burial sections in municipal cemeteries are often named to reflect the local landscape. For example.

- Birch Section;
- Maple Section, or
- Aspen Section.

Alternatives to naming sections after features of the local and landscape, are to simply name sections alphabetically.

Green Burial

The Green Burial movement began in the UK in the 1900's and now there are over 300 sites. Also known as "natural burial," "country burial," or "woodland burial," Green Burial is attracting increasing interest from families across North America. The five key principles of Green Burial are:

- No embalming;
- A fully biodegradable casket or shroud;
- No use of plastic grave liners or concrete vaults;
- Some form of habitat restoration of the grave site, such a planting with native species, and
- A communal marker made of locally sourced and natural materials.

Jewish and Muslim communities have traditionally interred the deceased according to Green Burial practices, and most recently, the Catholic Church has begun to actively embrace Green Burial as well.

Families across North America are increasingly seeking environmentally sustainable products and services, including within the bereavement sector. Green Burial often appeals to those that would otherwise not choose to be interred in a conventional cemetery. An increasing number of cemeteries are now offering Green Burial interment options, either in a dedicated section with full habitat restoration, or within the cemetery without the on-site habitat restoration component.

Many people have heard of Green Burial and are interested in this form of interment. Marketing and promotion of a Green Burial service can be used to raise the profile of the cemetery in the community. Media and social network sites are especially attuned to stories about Natural Burial. The Green Burial Society of Canada or GBSC (<http://www.greenburialcanada.ca/>) is a non-profit organization who offers a certification program to qualifying service providers and lists the Canadian cemeteries currently offering Green Burial.



Figure 19: Green Burial Grave Side Service Demo, Royal Oak Cemetery, Victoria, BC, Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 20: Communal Marker at Woodlawn Green Burial Section, Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC. Source: Wayne Worden



Figure 21: Woodlawn Green Burial Section, Royal Oak Burial Park, Victoria, BC Source: Wayne Worden



Figure 22: Ossuary, Source: LEES+Associates

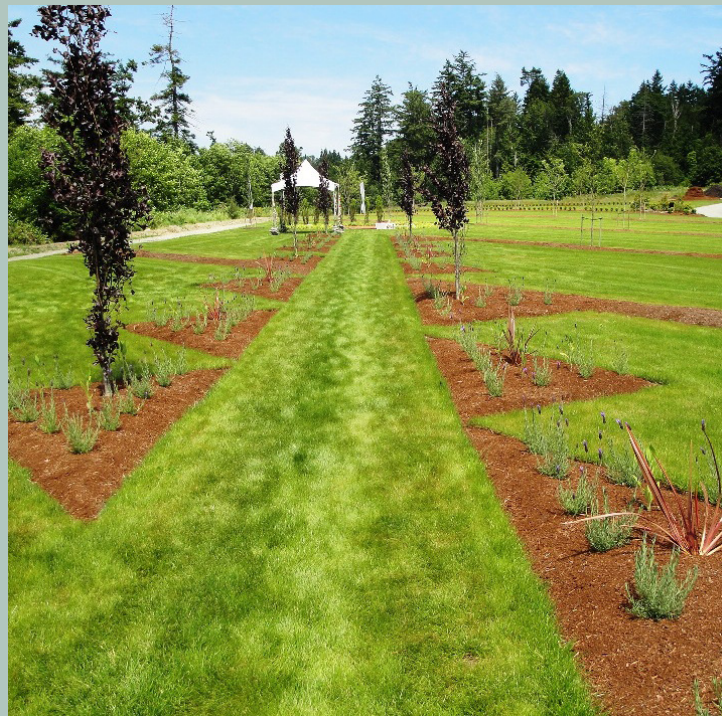


Figure 23: Muslim Section, Royal Oak Cemetery, Victoria, BC. Source: LEES+Associates

Operations and Administration Opportunities

The best practice for a municipality is to use a specialized, integrated cemetery records management system, with a user-friendly interface to track and provide comprehensive reporting for all of its customer and inventory data, as well as its interment and sales activity. It should also include a convenient link to the municipality's cemetery financial records.

Software that is commonly used by municipalities to manage cemetery records and financial include:

- Pontem Software;
- MuniSight;
- Stone Orchard Software, and
- Opus Xenta.

Recommendations

To align Whitecourt Cemetery with best practices in cemetery services and communicate the Town's commitment to providing a cemetery service that meets the needs of Whitecourt and area families into the future it is recommended that the Town:

- Increase the range of available products and services, and
- Improve cemetery administration and operations.

Increase Products and Services Diversity

Given the site's characteristics, standard regional offerings and current market trends, Whitecourt should prioritize developing and adding the following products and services:

- Establish a memorial wall;
- Establish in-ground cremation lots;
- Additional in-ground casket burial lots;
- Additional columbaria niches;
- Establish a Green Burial section, and
- Establish cremation gardens.

At this time there is not evidence that Whitecourt Cemetery needs to establish any denominational burial sections. However, with the rise in New Canadian population, Whitecourt should be aware that sections that cater to specific religions may be needed in the future.

Improve Cemetery Administration and Operations

To align with best practices, it is recommend that the Town of Whitecourt prioritize adding the cemetery module offered to MuniSight to their operations practices. One of the main benefits of using a records management system is the ease of updating the interment records and being able to share them with the operations staff.

Staff are recommend to undergo additional training following the implementation of new records management and additional services.

It is recommended that a bylaw review and update be carried out prior to the addition of new interment and memorialization options at Whitecourt Cemetery.

To keep the cemetery free of excess material it is recommended that items specific to the cemetery be kept in the on site maintenance shed. Other items and excess material such as lawn clippings and soil should be stored in the Public Works Yard.

”Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”

-Sir William Ewart Gladstone

Chapter 3: Opportunities and Constraints

This chapter is an overview of the opportunities and constraints of the existing interment areas and expansion areas of Whitecourt Cemetery. Opportunities and constraints were identified through a desktop study, a pre-project site visit, site photos, and interviews with staff.

Figure 31 summarizes the opportunities and constraints.

Interment and Memorialization Options

- Opportunity to develop new burial areas that will provide the inventory and capacity to meet the need of Whitecourt and area's families for at least 60 years.
- Opportunity to expand the cemetery interment and memorialization offerings by including in-ground cremation lots, scattering gardens, additional columbaria, memorialization without interment, and natural burial.
- Opportunity to establish a Green Burial section and utilize the existing vegetation.
- Opportunity to establish cremation gardens that offer the full breadth of cremation interment options.
- Opportunity to enhance the existing columbaria area and expand to the south side of the cemetery driveway.

Landscape Character

- Need to develop a Tree Management Strategy to address the over mature trees in the cemetery.
- Opportunity to enhance the tree canopy by planting an allée of trees along the cemetery driveway and on top of existing graves.
- Need to maintain and enhance the existing perimeter buffer of vegetation to protect the cemetery from the incompatible programming in the neighbouring parcels of land.

Access and Circulation

- Opportunity to expand the cemetery limits by expanding the cemetery fence line to the outer limits of the north and south easements.
- Opportunity to improve access and circulation for visitors, funeral processions and the operations team, by creating a one-way cemetery driveway loop.
- Opportunity to realign the connection between the cemetery and the operations yard.



Figure 24: Opportunity to enhance the cemetery entrance and sign
Source: Town of Whitecourt



Figure 25: Opportunity to enhance the cemetery wayfinding with an updated map and information kiosk
Source: Town of Whitecourt

Signage and Wayfinding

- Opportunity to enhance the cemetery entrance with a larger sign.
- Opportunity to enhance the cemetery wayfinding with an updated map and information kiosk.
- Opportunity to enhance the wayfinding with upgraded section markers and a consistent plot layout.

Infrastructure

- Opportunity to relocate the storage shed to the operations yard, or a location in the cemetery that is not as visible from the central gathering space.
- Opportunity to implement a structure that offers shade and shelter for small group gatherings.

Site Furnishings

- Opportunity to replace metal benches with wood slat benches with arm rests to offer more comfort to visitors.
- Need to supply seating throughout the cemetery.
- Opportunity to supply discrete waste bins.
- Opportunity to remove redundant lighting and establish dark sky compliant lighting at the entrance only.

Fencing

- Opportunity to enhance the appearance of the existing silver chain-link fence by replacing it with a black chain-link fence.



Figure 26: Opportunity to replace existing silver chain link fence with a black chain link fence to match the entrance fencing.



Figure 27: Opportunity to enhance the cemetery aesthetic by created a formal location for grass clippings to be dumped.



Figure 28: Opportunity to enhance the cemetery edge conditions with weed mitigation and layered planting to screen neighbouring lots.



Figure 29: Opportunity to enhance cemetery aesthetic with cohesive section signage and more robust ornamental planting.



Figure 30: Test Digs in Expansion Areas
Source: Town of Whitecourt

What We Heard: Staff Interview Key Takeaways

To identify key issues, opportunities, and constraints related to the Cemetery system, Town Staff were interviewed about what works and what doesn't work at the cemetery. Information gathered from the interview process was used to inform the site analysis and the Cemetery Development Plan and Recommendations. Refer to the Appendix for the complete list of staff who attended the interview and the full notes from the interview.

Key findings arising from the interviews include:

Operations

- The current plot layout in the cemetery offers a number of challenges for operations, including:
 - Plots throughout the cemetery have various orientations, making it difficult to locate them.
 - Spacing between plots is inconsistent and the lack of space in some areas makes it challenging for operations staff to open and close graves.
 - Staff expressed the need for clearer section markers.
- The shed located in the cemetery stores smaller equipment for daily maintenance of the site as well as equipment used during interments, including decorative shovels. This shed can be relocated, but should remain in the cemetery. The new location should be able to accommodate an expansion to the shed so it can store more equipment, such as a shoring box.
- Grave soils are stored in the neighbouring Public Works yard.
- Snow removal and grass clippings are stored on site.

Records Management and Sales

- Families are able to purchase plots and niches directly from the Town or through the Funeral Homes.
- Cemetery records management is done through a process of updating a Microsoft Access Database and an AutoCAD map. The map is updated quarterly and operations receives a hard copy of the map to use.
 - Operations staff expressed that aerial shots of the cemetery would be helpful for their work.
 - The current system of records keeping has led to near misses with opening the wrong grave.

Amenities and Events

- There has been a request for lighting in the cemetery. Currently, light stands are powered by solar due to lack of utilities to the cemetery. These lights no longer work.
- There have been requests for locations to put ornamentation and flowers at Columbaria. Current Bylaws do not allow ornamentation.
- The Cemetery is not used by the neighbouring workers for recreation purposes. However, the Cemetery does have a number of families visiting daily.
- There is a candle vigil during Christmas. Candles are left along the road on Christmas Eve.

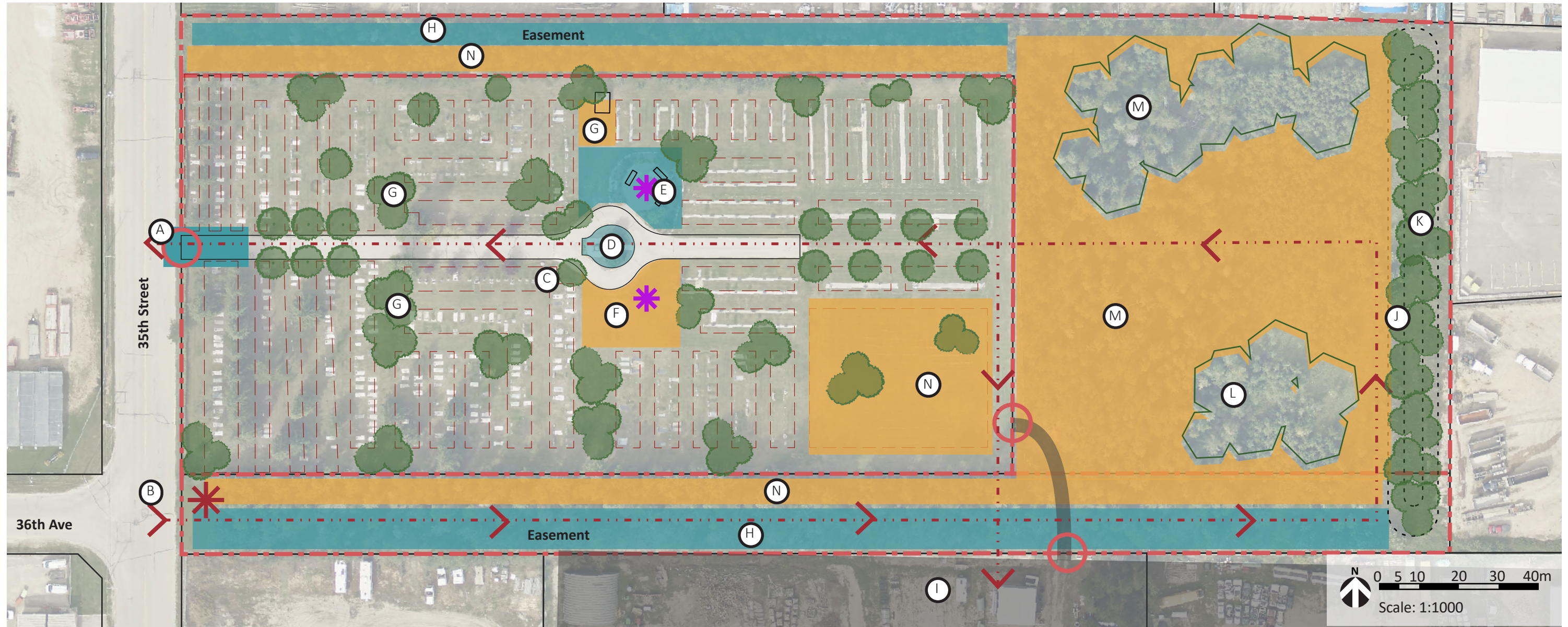
Interment and Memorialization

- The Town has received requests for scattering gardens, memorial walls, and more affordable interment options.
- There has been one inquiry about natural burial.
- Upright and flat markers are offered. The demand is equally distributed between the two options.
- The bylaw allows for granite markers only. The Town has received requests for steel markers.
- The Town would like to continue to use grade beams.
- Columbaria:
 - There is not a preferred side to the columbaria units. Both sides are equally popular.
 - The bottom two rows are the last to sell.

Access and Circulation

- Ceremony/Processional Route:
 - Funeral coaches and immediate family park along the cemetery driveway during an interment. Others will park outside the cemetery along the road.

Opportunities and Constraints Diagram



Legend

- Existing**
- Fence
 - Entrance
 - Public Works Yard
- Proposed**
- ✱ Entrance Feature
 - ✱ Feature/Gathering Space
 - Area to Enhance
 - Expansion Area
 - Circulation

Opportunities

- (A)** Opportunity to enhance the entrance by:
 - Upgrading the sign.
 - Upgrading the cemetery map by including an information kiosk.
- (B)** Opportunity to improve circulation with new entrance and exit.
- (C)** Opportunity to improve Field of Honour with a upgraded sign.
- (D)** Opportunity to enhance area around flag.
- (E)** Opportunity to enhance columbaria area to a cremation garden by adding scattering gardens, more columbaria, family vessels and in-ground cremation interment options.
- (F)** Opportunity to develop a cremation garden with additional cremation interment options, plantings and feature such as memorial wall or fountain.
- (G)** Opportunity to plant more shade, ornamental and parkland trees across the developed burial areas.
- (H)** Opportunity to enhance the perimeter by:
 - Replacing existing chain link fence with black chain link
 - Phase out over mature trees and plant new trees, shrubs and meadow grasses.
- (I)** Opportunity to enhance the Operations Yard by:
 - Formalizing the connection between cemetery and Public Works yard.
 - Add lock-blocks for bulk material storage.
 - Opportunity to expand cemetery into ops yard when capacity in the exiting cemetery has been exhausted.
- (J)** Possibility to establish a forest walk with columbaria, and other cremation interment options and small gladed burial areas.
- (K)** Opportunity to screen the eastern end of the cemetery by planting a buffer of trees on the berm.
- (L)** Opportunity to create gladed burial pods to offer a mix of interment options, such as a natural burial and amenity with forest walking loops.
- (M)** Opportunity to expand burial sections on this undeveloped part of the cemetery providing a range of interment options.
- (N)** Opportunity to expand the cemetery into the adjacent easements.

Figure 31: Whitecourt Cemetery Opportunities and Constraints Diagram Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 32: Expansion Area A, Source: Town of Whitecourt

Chapter 4: Development Plan

The Town of Whitecourt Cemetery currently has 10-15 years of full-body interment inventory, and 1-2 years of cremation niches left to sell. The Development Plan and recommendations have been created primarily in response to the need to provide:

- Additional interment inventory via the development of new burial areas, and
- A holistic site wide approach that will be able to accommodate future trends and needs.

This chapter of the report is organized under the following headings:

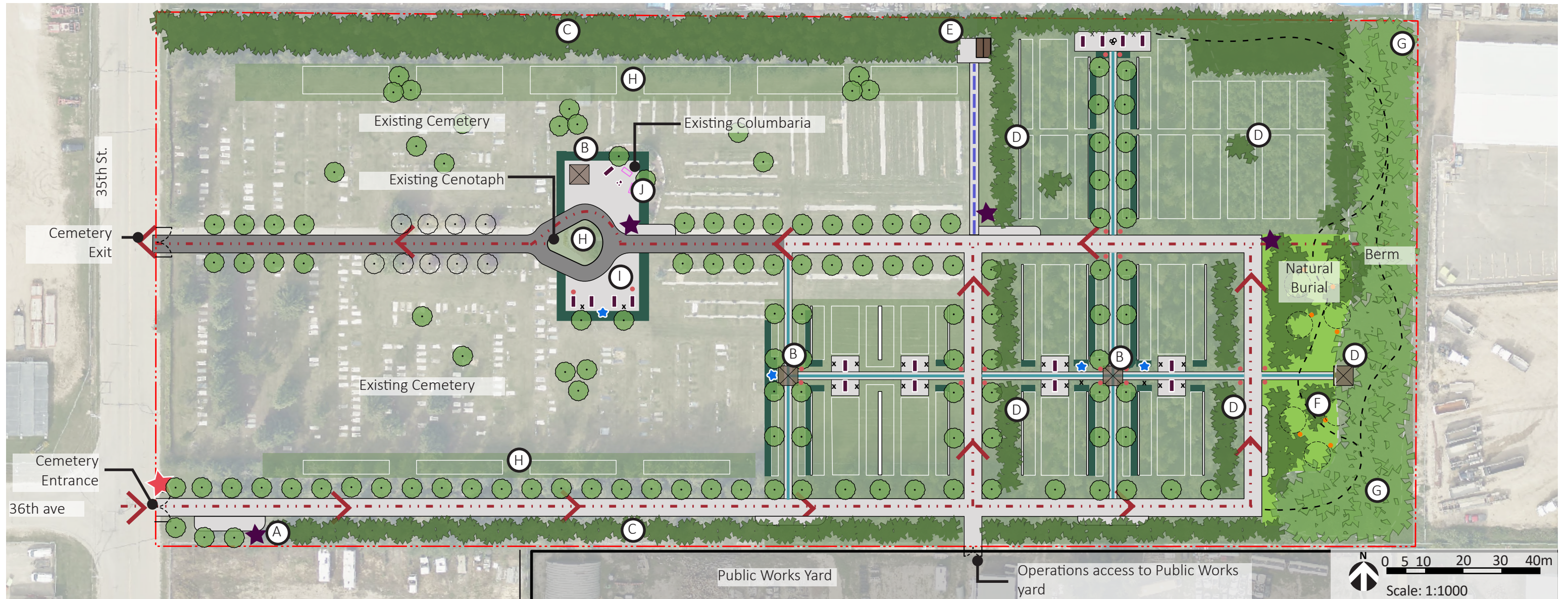
- Cemetery Development Plan;
- New Burial Areas;
- Infill Strategy, and
- Cemetery-Wide Improvements.

Cemetery Development Plan

Key objectives of the Concept Development Plan are:

- To ensure that the Town can provide cemetery services to Whitecourt and Woodlands County residents for decades to come;
- To integrate future burial expansion areas as part of the holistic cemetery experience;
- To create a memorial parkland that can be implemented in phases, while minimizing disruption to the existing cemetery during the process;
- To create an interment and memorialization plan that is adaptable to meet the future needs of families as they change over upcoming decades;
- To maintain and enhance the landscape buffer to protect the Cemetery and visiting families from incompatible neighboring land uses;
- To enable greater diversity in events and programming including celebrations of life, Mother's Day events, etc., and
- To create a space with park-like amenities so families can comfortably visit the cemetery.

Cemetery Development Plan



Legend

Existing

- - - Cemetery Limits/Fence line
- Cemetery Driveway
- Buffer Planting
- Specimen Tree
- Columbaria

Proposed

- - - Cemetery Driveway
- Pedestrian Route
- - - Informal Pathway
- - - Maintenance Route
- ★ Entrance Sign
- ★ Cemetery Information
- Woodland/Buffer Planting
- Specimen Tree
- Planting
- Pergola
- ★ Memorial Wall
- Columbarium
- x Seating

Design Features

- A Cemetery Info Kiosk
- B Gathering Space / Pergola
- C Existing woodland enhanced for cemetery buffer
- D Existing woodland to remain to enhance the Memorial Parkland aesthetic
- E Storage shed and maintenance area
- F Green Burial Pods
- G Existing berm to be enhanced with woodland buffer
- H Existing Cenotaph to be enhanced
- I Cremation Garden with columbaria
- J Existing Columbaria to be enhanced with more additional columbaria, scattering gardens, family vessels and memorial walls
- H Areas for future interment infill

Estimated Capacity

Expansion Area A:

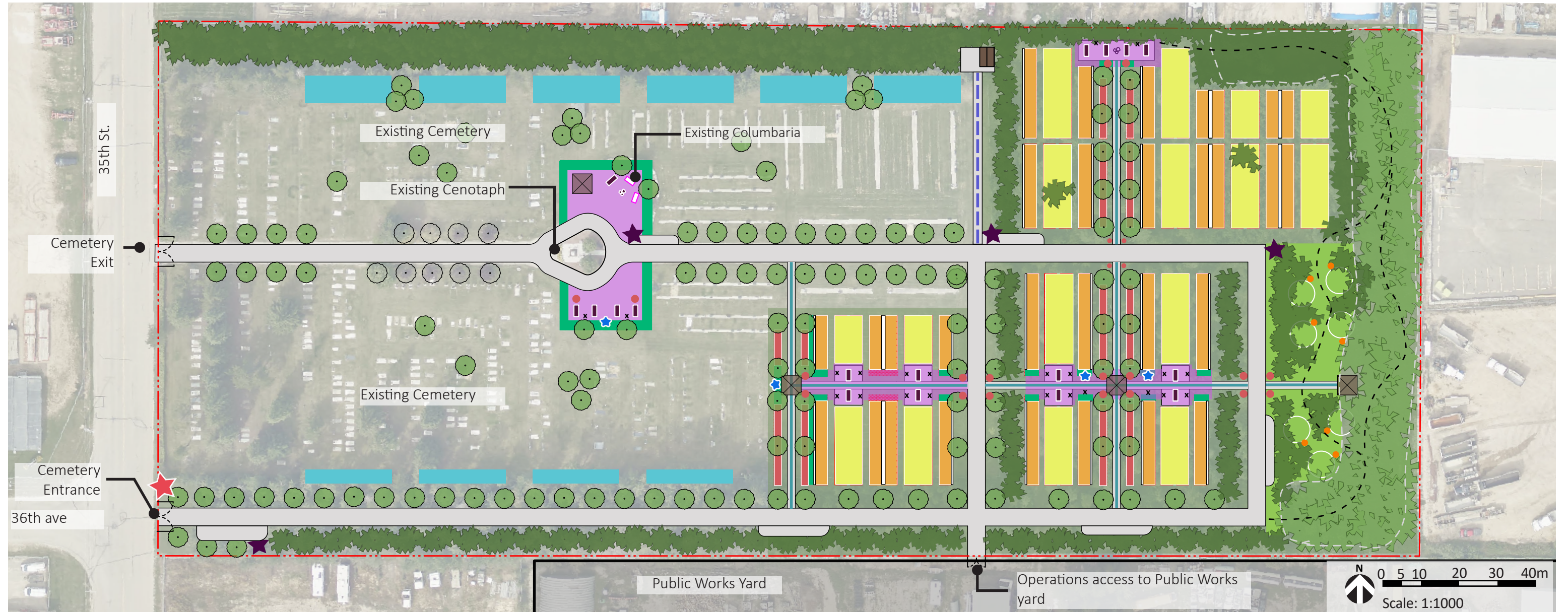
- In-ground Casket interment: 30 years
- In-ground Cremation interment: 20 years
- Columbaria Niche interment: 15 years

Expansion Area B:

- In-ground Casket interment: 68 years
- In-ground Cremation interment: 65 years
- Columbaria Niche interment: 35 years

Figure 33: Whitecourt Cemetery Concept Development Plan Source: LEES+Associates

Cemetery Interment and Memorialization Diagram



Legend












- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  Columbarium |  Cremation Garden |  Family Vessel / Ossuary |
|  Memorial Wall |  In-ground Full Casket- Upright Markers |  Communal Marker |
|  Scattering Garden |  In-ground Full Casket- Flat Markers |  Green Burial |
|  In-ground Cremation | |  Future Infill |

Figure 34: Whitecourt Cemetery Interment and Memorialization Diagram Source: LEES+Associates

New Burial Areas

There are two undeveloped areas identified for potential expansion:

- Expansion Area A: Land that is currently cleared and leveled, but has not yet been used for interment, and
- Expansion Area B: Land to the east of the property that is yet to be cleared and leveled.

This Interment and Memorialization Plan has been informed by the findings from the previous chapters to determine the types of interment and memorialization that will likely meet the needs of Whitecourt and area families. The Interment and Memorialization Plan is a flexible plan that will enable the Cemetery Team to adapt to the changing preferences of families over the upcoming decades.

Burial Expansion Area A

Design Concept

The Burial Expansion Area A is in direct response to the immediate need to provide additional columbaria niches and in-ground cremation burial.

Expansion Area A is projected to serve the community demand for the following amount of time:

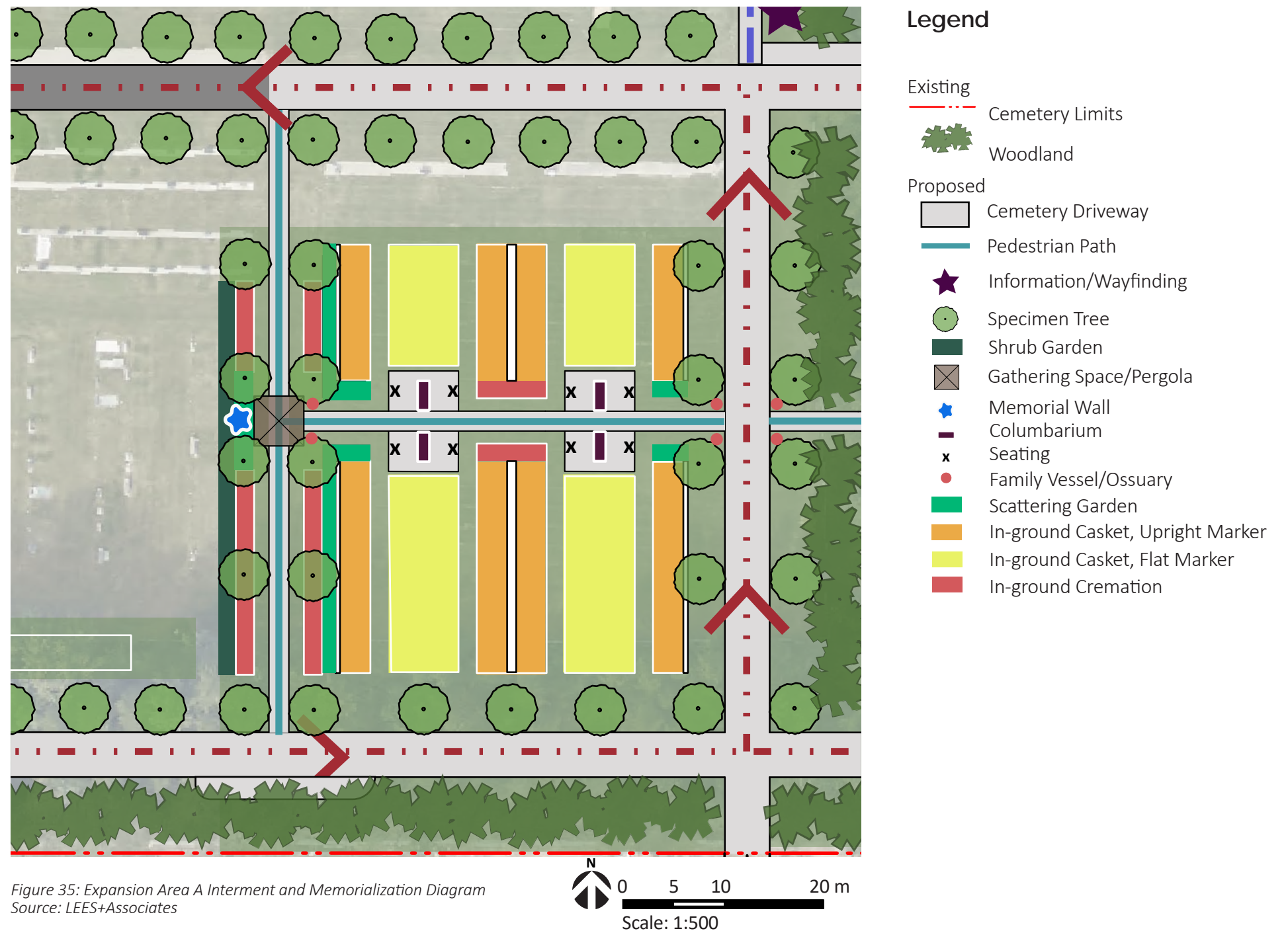
- Cremation in-ground interment demand over the next 30 years,
- In-ground casket interment demand over the next 20 years, and
- Cremation niche demand over the next 15 years based on the columbarium units having 70 niches each.

Note: This report uses common columbarium unit niche counts that are proven to offer a high return on investment for columbaria niche projections. Design of the columbaria's specificities, including their size and material qualities, will need to be determined.

The concept for Burial Expansion Area A offers an immediate solution to the need for more columbaria niches, in-ground cremation lots, in-ground casket lots, and the need for more interment and memorization options.

The design concept includes:

- A mix of in-ground casket and in-ground cremation interment;
- A Cremation Garden that offers a mix of interment options for cremated remains including:
 - Columbaria niches;
 - Memorial walls;
 - Family vessels, and
 - Scattering gardens with an ossuary.



In-ground Interment Layout -Typical Section

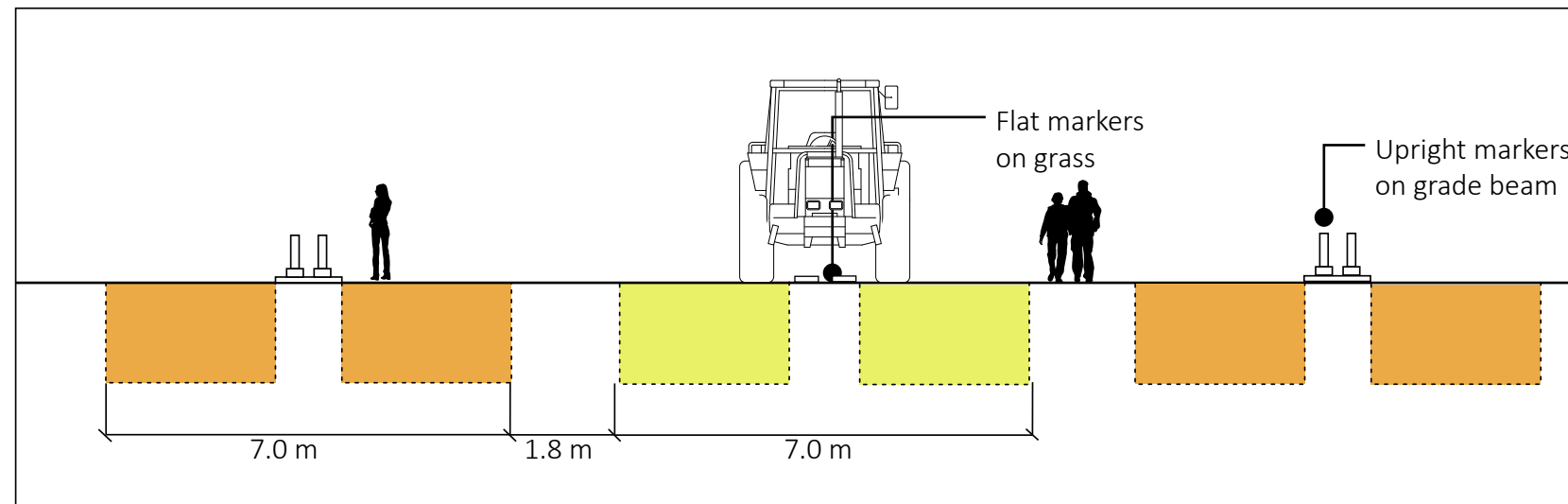
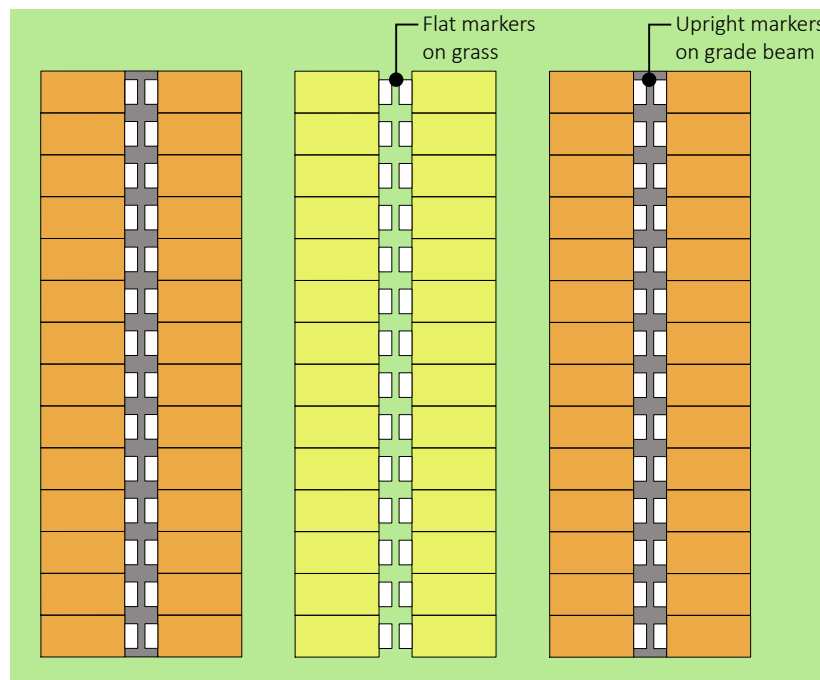


Figure 36: Expansion Area, Typical Interment Layout - Section
Source: LEES+Associates

In-ground Interment Layout -Typical Plan



- Legend
- Full Body Burial Lot w/ Upright or Flat Marker on grade beam (premium option) 1.5m x 3.0m
 - Full Body Burial Lot w/ Flat Marker 1.5m x 3.0m

Figure 37: Expansion Areas, Typical Interment Layout - Plan
Source: LEES+Associates

In-ground Interment

The layout of the in-ground interment area is designed to accommodate a range of interment options, allowing family members to be buried in close proximity to each other no matter what method they favour.

To optimize the space in Expansion Area A, lots are organized to maximize layout while taking operations into consideration. The in-ground lot layout alternates between upright and flat markers, to allow large equipment to access all the areas. Grade beams should be installed for upright markers. In areas with flat markers, grade beams should not be used to allow for operations machines ease of access. The spaces left between the blocks offer pathways for families to stand and walk. These areas are dimensioned to allow for future infill to prolong the life of the Cemetery. Figure 36 shows a typical layout for in-ground interment.

Cremation Garden

Additional columbaria units added to the Cemetery should be incorporated as part of the cremation gardens, and should not be stand alone units. Each new cremation garden will have its own unit design that is location specific and based on the current market demand. However, the cremation gardens throughout the Cemetery should follow the recommended design principles including:

- Offer a diverse range of interment and memorialization options, including Columbaria Niches, Scattering Gardens, Family Vessels and Memorial Walls;
- Accessible pathways;
- Ample seating;
- Appropriate vegetation, including plants tolerant of cremated remains in scattering beds;
- Gathering spaces for celebrations of life;
- Columbaria, memorial wall, and family vessel materials and colours that are complemented by Whitecourt Cemetery landscape and are consistent throughout the Cemetery;
- Columbaria units should face east-west where possible, to allow both sides to receive some direct sunlight, and
- Columbaria units should all be two-sided.

Whitecourt Cemetery will need a new columbaria in the next 1-2 years. Installing a cremation garden with columbaria units should be top priority. The proposed cremation garden in Expansion Area A includes four columbaria units; however, these do not need to be installed simultaneously, rather can be installed on an as-needed basis.

Expansion Area B

Design Concept

The concept for Burial Expansion Area B is to establish a flexible interment and memorialization plan that can be developed in phases so it can adapt to the needs of Whitecourt and area residents over the upcoming decades.

Expansion Area B is projected to serve the community demand for the following amount of time:

- Cremation in-ground interment demand over the next 65 years,
- In-ground casket interment demand over the next 68 years, and
- Cremation niche demand over the next 35 years based on the columbarium units having 70 niches each.

Green Burial will be a new offering for the Whitecourt Cemetery. Therefore we do not have the data to estimate how many years of interment the Green Burial section will accommodate, but it will last for several decades. At first it will likely be one or two burials per year, but as the cemetery team promotes the option, it is likely to become increasingly popular with families.

Interment and Memorialization

It is proposed that a range of interment options are provided as part of each phase of development. With cremation rates continuing to rise towards 90% of all deaths, it will be important to include a variety of cremation options. The mix of options proposed includes:

- In-ground casket burial;
- Cremation gardens that include a breadth of offerings, and
- Green Burial areas.

In addition, the following elements are recommended to support families visiting the Cemetery:

- Decompression areas;
- Gathering areas, and
- Gathering areas that offer shelter.

It is recommended that Area B is develop in phases as Area A is nearing capacity. Once Area B is under development, an infill plan should be considered and new cemetery lands should be procured.

In-ground Interment

Similar to the key characteristics of the in-ground interment in Expansion Area A, this section will host in-ground interment that is designed to accommodate a range of interment options, and burial sections that alternate between upright and flat markers. Refer to Figure 36 for typical interment layout options.

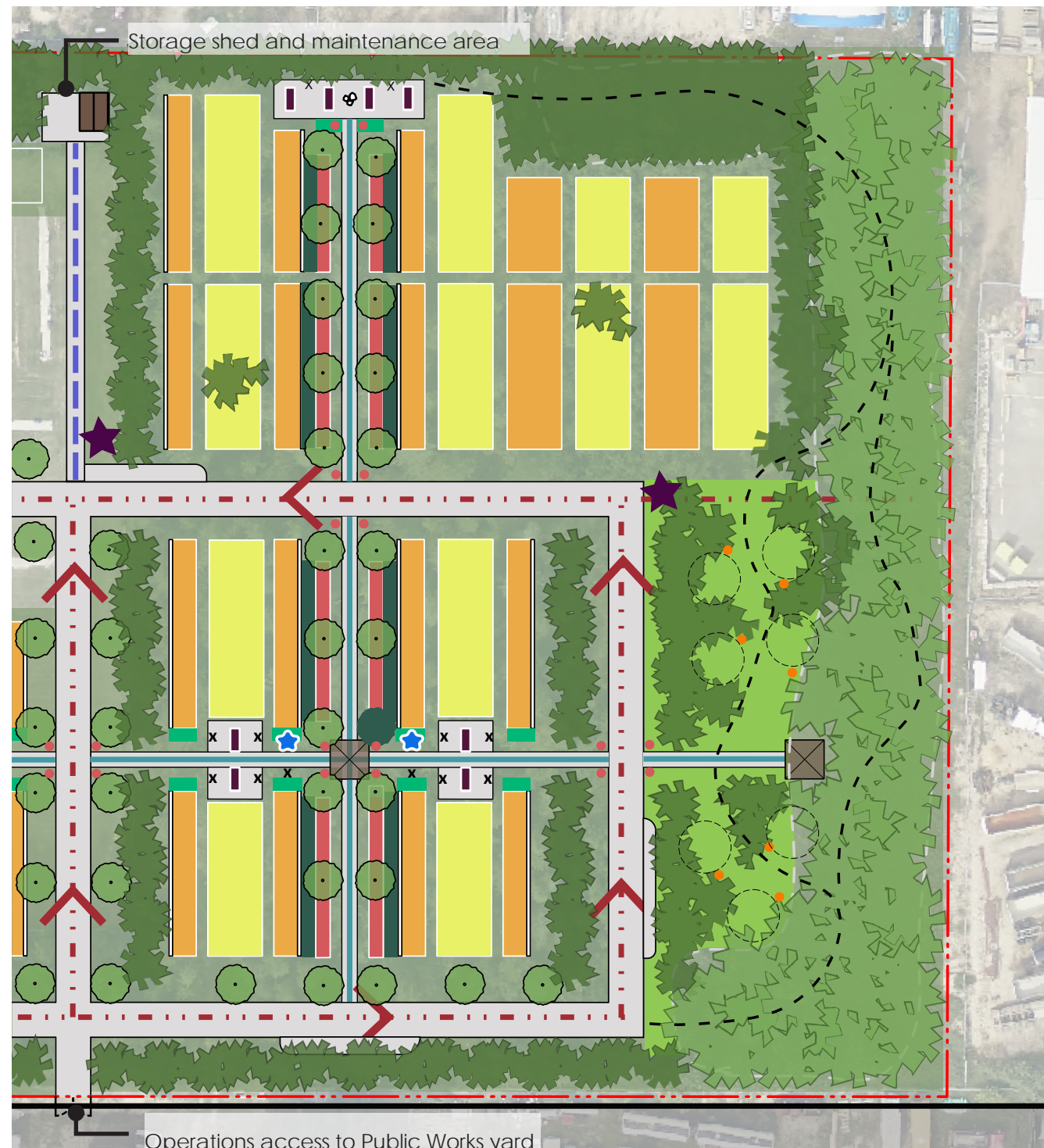
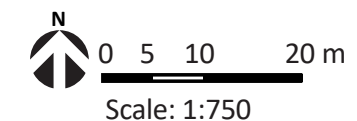


Figure 38: Expansion Area B Interment and Memorialization Diagram
Source: LEES+Associates



Legend

- Existing**
- Cemetery Limits
 - Woodland
- Proposed**
- Cemetery Driveway
 - Pedestrian Path
 - Informal Path/Decompression walk
 - Operations Route
 - Information/Wayfinding
 - Woodland
 - Specimen Tree
 - Shrub Garden
 - Gathering Space
 - Memorial Wall
 - Columbarium
 - Seating
 - Communal Marker
 - Family Vessel/Ossuary
 - Scattering Garden
 - Green Burial
 - In-ground Casket, Upright Marker
 - In-ground Casket, Flat Marker
 - In-ground Cremation

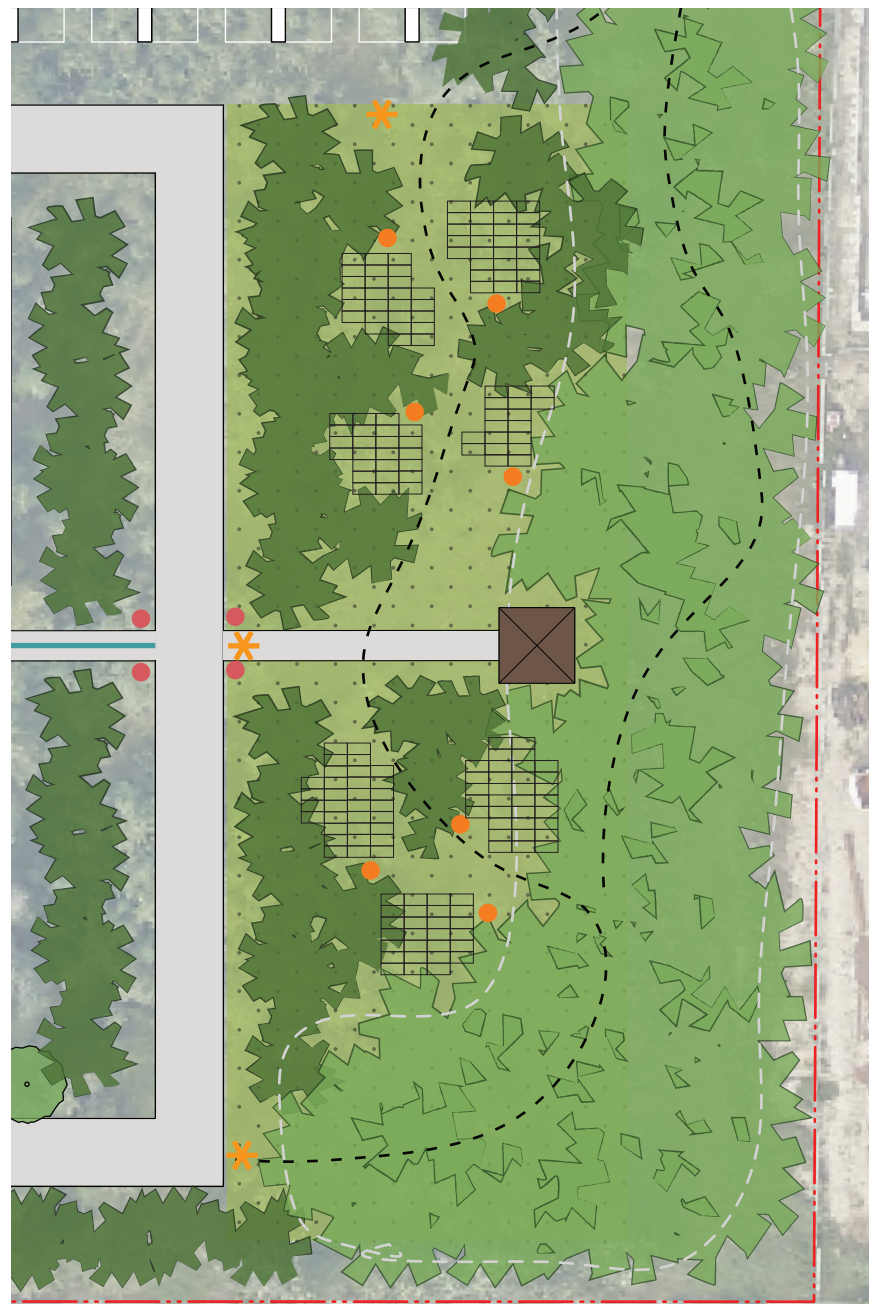


Figure 39: Green Burial Interment Diagram, Source: LEES+Associates

N
Scale: NTS

- Legend
- Celebration of Life Gathering Space
 - Place of Interest / Information Node
 - Formal Path
 - Informal Mowed Path
 - Communal Marker
 - Burial Lot
 - Meadow
 - Existing Trees Enhanced with New Structure Planting
 - Existing Mound Enhanced with Proposed Woodland Planting



Figure 40: Green Burial Meadow: Mowed Pathway, Source: Unknown



Figure 41: Green Burial Welcome Figures, Denman Island Green Burial Cemetery, British Columbia, Source: Unknown

Green Burial

The proposed Green Burial Section is in response to the emerging need to provide sustainable methods of interment. The concept design of the Green Burial Section is to create a distinct and beautiful native landscape character consisting of gladed meadow burial areas set within the surrounding trees.

A formal gravel pathway meanders through the Green Burial Section, supported by informal pathways mown through the meadow. A central space with seating and shelter provides families with the opportunity to visit regularly and remember.

The Green Burial Section will offer single depth, full-body interment in a simple biodegradable casket or burial shroud, and a communal marker for each burial area for names of those interred in the area.

It is recommended that the first phase of approximately 30 Green Burial lots are developed. Depending on the update of this option, additional phases of Green Burial can be developed. If this interment option does not gain traction in Whitecourt, the allotted area can be used as traditional in-ground burial or as a decompression zone or amenity space.

As this will be a new offering, it is recommended that staff undergo a workshop on best practices for Green Burial sections.

Cremation Gardens

Cremation Gardens in Expansion Area B should follow the same design principles as the cremation gardens in Expansion Area A. This includes:

- Site-specific design to optimize use of existing trees;
- Offer a diverse range of interment and memorialization options, including Columbaria Niches, Scattering Gardens, Family Vessels and Memorial Walls;
- Accessible pathways;
- Ample seating;
- Appropriate vegetation, including plants tolerant of cremated remains in scattering beds;
- Gathering spaces for celebrations of life;
- Columbaria, memorial wall, and family vessel materials and colours that are complemented by Whitecourt Cemetery landscape and are consistent throughout the Cemetery;
- Columbaria units should face east-west where possible, to allow both sides to receive some direct sunlight, and
- Columbaria units should all be two-sided.

Decompression Areas

Cemeteries are as much a space for the living as they are for the dead. Families visit the Cemetery long after a loved one has passed away. The design concept for the Decompression Zones is to offer spaces without interment and memorialization, to reflect without reminders of death. The Decompression Areas in Expansion Area B includes a meandering pathway at the base and the crest of the mound and several gathering spaces that offer shelter and seating.

Infill Strategy

The goal of the Infill Strategy is to prolong the life of the Cemetery as much as possible. There is enough space at Whitecourt Cemetery for at least 80 years.

Therefore, it will not be necessary to establish an infill strategy until the burial expansion areas are nearly sold out, or if it has not been possible to develop the burial expansion areas as planned. Areas identified for future infill are noted on the Interment and Memorialization Diagram on page 26.

Cemetery-Wide Improvements

It is recommended that the cemetery-wide improvements are developed through the following strategies:

- Site Furnishings;
- Landscape Management Plan;
- Existing Columbaria Upgrades;
- Existing Cenotaph Upgrades, and
- A Wayfinding and Signage Strategy;

Site Furnishings

A guide for site furnishings should be established to ensure overall coordination of the style across the cemetery. The guide should include the existing developed sections of the Cemetery and the future expansion areas.

Landscape Management Strategy

Whitecourt Cemetery boasts a memorial parkland landscape with areas of mature trees separated by groomed lawn areas. It is recommended that a Landscape Management Strategy be developed to ensure the Memorial Parkland characteristics are maintained in the design of the Expansion Areas and enhanced in the existing cemetery.

The Landscape Management Strategy should include but not be limited to:

- A holistic Tree Management Strategy to ensure that the Memorial Parkland landscape character continues as aging and dying trees are replaced. The strategy should consider which species of trees will be able to adapt to the changing conditions on the site, e.g., climate adaptation and threats from pests and disease;
- A plant and lawn management and maintenance plan, and
- Standard Operating Procedures to set the standard of care and maintenance of the Cemetery Landscape.

Vegetation

It is recommended that the following vegetation upgrades are made in order to enhance the overall aesthetic appeal of the Cemetery.

- Introduce more specimen parkland trees that offer definition and shade over developed parts of the Cemetery to break up large expanses of burial lawn and enhance the character of the memorial parkland landscape as shown in Figure 34.
- New trees and plantings should align with the Parkland Landscape Character in the cemetery. Choice of species are to be determined based on the local climatic factors, and the dominating landscape character of the cemetery.
- A mix of coniferous and deciduous trees should be planted on the berm to buffer the cemetery from the industrial and commercial activities taking place on adjacent properties.



Figure 42: Town of Okotoks Cremation Garden, Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 43: Example of Informal Pathway/ Decompression Walk, Render from Town of Cochrane Memorial Park, Cochrane, AB Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 44: Existing Cremation Garden to be Enhanced Source: Town of Whitecourt + LEES+Associates

Existing Cremation Garden Upgrades

It is recommended that the following upgrades are implemented for the existing columbaria area:

- Adjust the grading on the west side of the columbaria and transform into a cremation garden. Expansion should include a shelter and seating to host small gatherings.
- Enhance the planting with vegetation of various heights, including small trees/large shrubs, ornamental grasses, and shrubs and ground cover that offer year-round interest.
- Add signage with Cremation Garden name.
- Add areas to be used as a scattering garden.
- Add an ossuary and family vessels.
- Add a dolmen table or feature to the central concrete pad.
- Upgrade benches to wood slat benches to increase the year-round comfort.

A columbaria should be added to the third concrete pad in this space—the next area to be established with columbaria to the south of the cemetery driveway in the Cremation Garden Expansion Area. Refer to the Concept Development Plan on page 25.

Existing Cenotaph Upgrades

It is recommended that the following upgrades are implemented for the existing Cenotaph area:

- Enhance the planting with vegetation of various heights, seasonal interest and colour.
- Enhance the overall appearance of the space by upgrading the edging.
- Remove/relocate the benches.



Figure 45: Existing Cenotaph to be Enhanced Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 46: Dolmen Table, Grand Centre Cemetery, Cold Lake, AB Source: LEES+Associates

Wayfinding and Signage Strategy

In order to improve the experience of visitors to the cemetery, and to assist others including Operations Staff and Funeral Directors to undertake their duties more easily, it is recommended that a wayfinding and signage strategy is developed.

Entrance and Circulation Routes

The current vehicle circulation does not flow or allow access to the proposed expansion areas. The proposed vehicle circulation includes:

- A new entrance that aligns with 36th Avenue. The entrance delineates a transition into a sacred space with a decorative and lockable gate, an entrance sign, and planting. An information kiosk should be located near the entrance.
- The proposed vehicle circulation includes a one-way system that flows through the cemetery. This route should be paved with concrete curbs to formalize the edge.
- Wayfinding cues along the main cemetery driveway route such as an allée of trees should be established. Formal wayfinding, including cemetery maps, should be located in various locations throughout the cemetery.
- A more direct access to the Public Works Yard should be established. This connection can be used for construction access when establishing the expansion areas to minimize the impact on the cemetery users during construction.

Pedestrian routes

The existing cemetery layout does not accommodate defined pedestrian routes. To elevate the status of the cemetery and provide accessible routes between the interment sections, the cemetery expansion should include accessible pedestrian routes as well as formalized processional routes to key features such as the cremation gardens and gathering spaces. The formal pathways are also used as organizational elements in the burial expansion area design.

Information Signs and Row Markers

Informational signage, including a map of the cemetery, should be located at the main entrance and other key junctions. As the Cemetery expands, it will be important for information to be readily available to visitors in all areas of the cemetery. Information signs should enable visitors to navigate the cemetery, find key amenities and burial areas, and provide key contact details for cemetery sales and operational information such as opening and closing times.

The second layer to improving information signs is to add corresponding section markers. Section markers will allow visitors and operations staff to easily locate specific sections and rows. The section markers should be designed to match the cemetery aesthetic and be visible when there is snow cover.



Figure 47: Example of a section marker, Shuswap Cemetery, Salmon Arm, BC
Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 48: Cemetery Entry with vehicle and pedestrian gates, Elk Falls Cemetery, BC.
Source: LEES+Associates

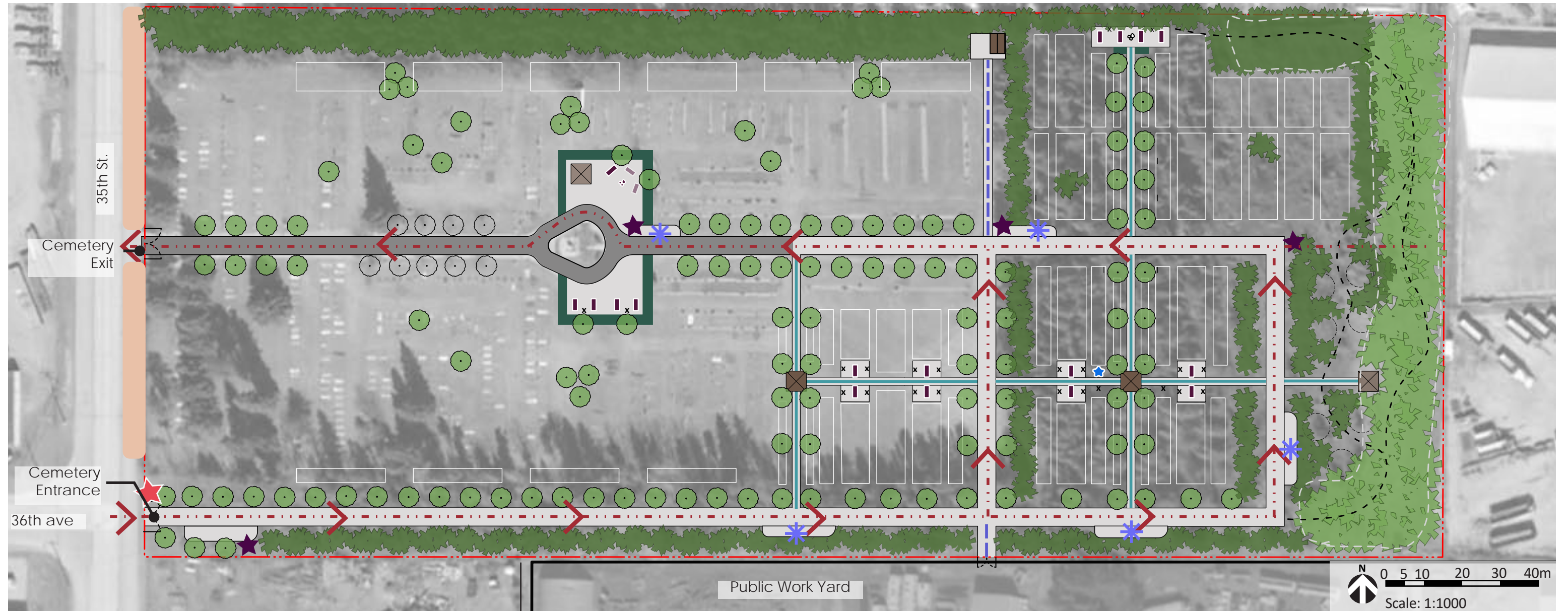


Figure 49: Example of Information Kiosk, Lakeview Cemetery, Cold Lake, AB
Source: LEES+Associates



Figure 50: Elk Falls Cemetery, BC, one-way cemetery driveway
Source: LEES+Associates

Cemetery Circulation Diagram



Legend

- | Existing | Proposed |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Cemetery Limits/Fence line | Cemetery Driveway |
| Cemetery Driveway | Pedestrian Path |
| Woodland | Informal Path |
| | Operations Route |
| | Entrance Sign |
| | Information Sign/Map |
| | Overflow Parking |
| | Layby / Snow Storage |

Figure 51: Whitecourt Cemetery Circulation Diagram Source: LEES+Associates

Typical Cemetery Circulation Sections

Cemetery Driveway - Typical Driveway

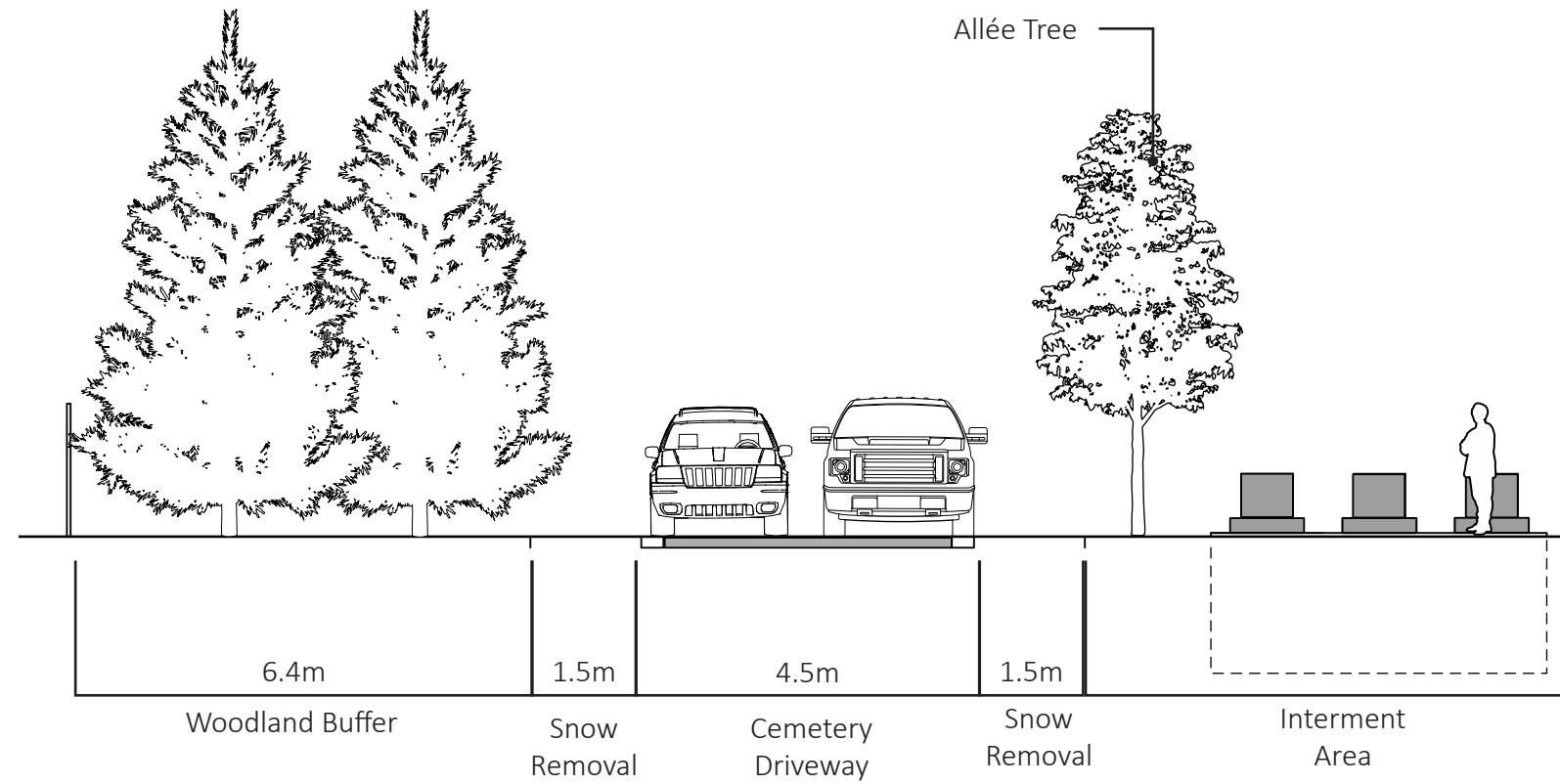


Figure 52: Typical Cemetery Driveway - Section, Source: LEES+Associates, Scale: 1:100

Pedestrian Pathway - Typical Driveway

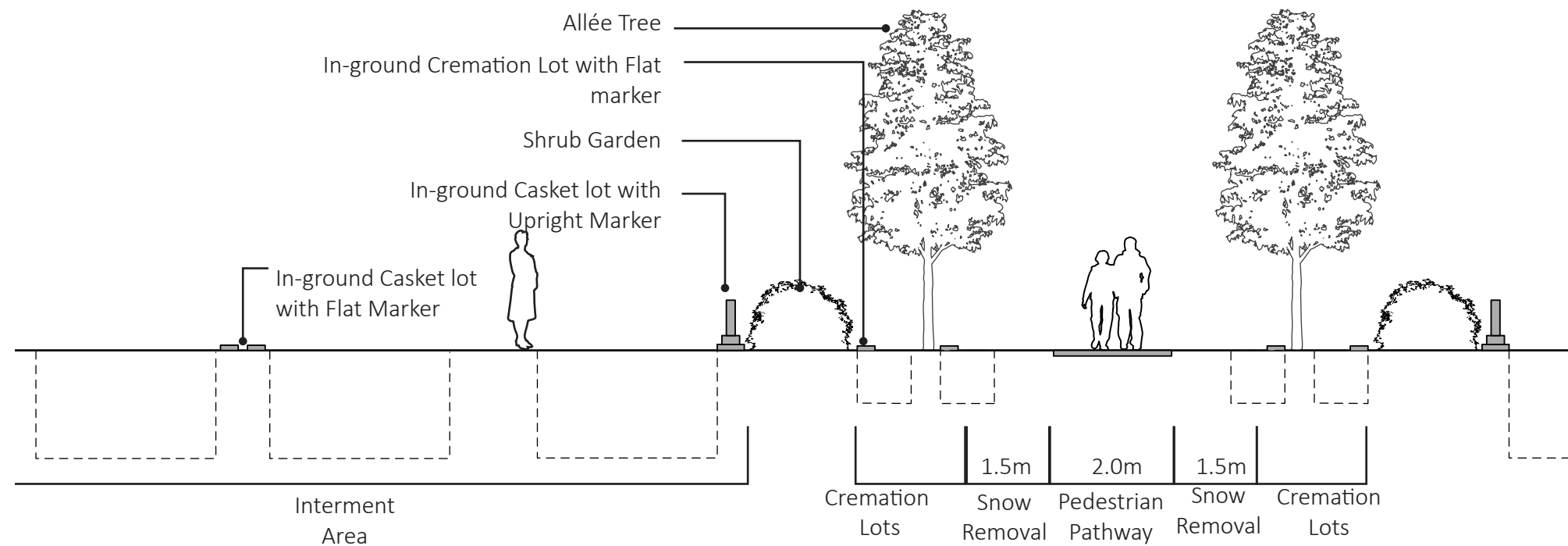


Figure 53: Typical Cemetery Pedestrian Walkway - Section, Source: LEES+Associates, Scale: 1:100



Figure 54: Whitecourt Cemetery Expansion Area B
Source: Town of Whitecourt

Conclusion

Implementation of the recommendations set out in this section of the Master Plan will help ensure the Town is able to address three key issues:

- The provision of sufficient burial inventory and the appropriate types of interment and memorialization options to serve Whitecourt and area families for generations to come;
- The long-term enhancement of the overall cemetery aesthetic to ensure the evolution of a beautiful and sacred memorial park landscape, and
- A physical organizational structure of the cemetery that will allow families and operations to navigate with ease.



Figure 55: Whitecourt Cemetery In-ground Burial Section, Source: LEES+Associates

Chapter 5: Implementation Plan

It is recommended that new burial areas and cemetery-wide improvements are developed in phases. The recommendations are identified as:

- Phase 1: High priority
- Phase 2: Medium priority
- Phase 3: Low priority

The proposed phasing reflects the need to balance:

- Immediate need for upgraded records management process;
- Immediate need for in-ground cremation lots;
- Immediate need for columbaria niches, and
- Upcoming demand for in-ground casket and alternative interment types.

Accompanying the phasing recommendations are recommended budget allowances. These are high level budgets that should be used for capital budget planning.

A financial plan was not part of the scope of this project, but it is recommended that a Capital Development Fund is set up for the cemetery to assist in paying for the implementation of recommendations set out in this Master Plan. Typically, capital projects are funded by injections of funding from a municipality's general capital budget.

It is recommended that the Town procures LEES+Associates to undertake a business plan for the cemetery comprising of a financial plan to ensure the economic sustainability of the cemetery going forward.



- Legend
- Phase 1
 - Phase 2
 - Phase 3
 - Future Phases

N
↑ Scale: NTS

Figure 56: Whitecourt Cemetery Phasing Diagram Source: LEES+Associates

Phase 1- High Priority

The table below summarizes recommended items to include in Phase 1.

Task	Phase 1 1-5 Years	Phase 2 5-15 years	Phase 3 15+ Years
Site Wide Improvements			
Develop the new cemetery driveway, and plant allée trees.	*		
Develop improved entrance to the cemetery including a gate, entrance sign and information kiosk.	*		
Improve information signage and section markers through out the cemetery.	*	*	*
Adjust the cemetery fence line along the south and east to accommodate for the new cemetery driveways.	*		
Interment and Memorialization			
Add a columbaria to the existing cremation garden. Upgrades to the cremation garden should include a gathering space, a memorial wall, upgraded scattering garden, ossuary, family vessel, and gathering space	*	*	

Recommended Budget Allowance for Phase 1

This phase of implementation will meet the immediate need for more columbaria niche sales, and will establish the new cemetery driveway, enhance wayfinding for staff and families and increase the canopy cover in the cemetery.

The recommended budget allowance for Phase 1, including the listed recommendations, project overhead, design fees and a contingency of 20% is: \$900,000.

Phase 2- Medium Priority

The table below summarizes recommended items to include in Phase 2.

Task	Phase 1 1-5 Years	Phase 2 5-15 years	Phase 3 15+ Years
Site Wide Improvements			
Develop a Landscape Management Strategy and Implement the first phase		*	*
Upgrades to the existing cenotaph.		*	
Develop the pedestrian circulation and gathering spaces.		*	
Begin clearing of Expansion Area B and planting on the existing berm		*	*
Interment and Memorialization			
Develop Expansion Area A in-ground interment lots including casket and cremation lots.		*	
Develop new cremation gardens including scattering gardens, columbaria, ossuary, family vessels, memorial wall and gathering space		*	

Recommended Budget Allowance for Phase 2

This phase of implementation will meet the need for more in-ground interment sales, columbaria niches, and will establish pedestrian circulation through the newly developed areas. During this phase, clearing of Expansion Area B should begin to prepare the area for development.

The recommended budget allowance for Phase 2, including the listed recommendations, project overhead, design fees and a contingency of 20% is: \$950,000.

Phase 3- Low Priority

The table below summarizes recommended items to include in Phase 3.

Task	Phase 1 1-5 Years	Phase 2 5-15 years	Phase 3 15+ Years
Site Wide Improvements			
Develop the new cemetery driveway, and plant allée trees.			*
Develop the pedestrian circulation			*
Interment and Memorialization			
Develop Expansion Area B in-ground interment lots including casket and cremation lots.			*
New cremation garden including scattering gardens, columbaria, ossuary, family vessels, memorial wall and gathering space			*
Develop new Green Burial section with circulation, gathering space, planting and communal markers.			*

Recommended Budget Allowance for Phase 3

This phase of implementation will meet the future need for more in-ground interment sales, columbaria niches, and will establish the extended cemetery driveway and pedestrian circulation through the newly developed areas.

The recommended budget allowance for Phase 3, including the listed recommendations, project overhead, design fees and a contingency of 20% is: \$1 million.

Future Phases

The table below summarizes recommended items to include in Future Phases.

Task	Phase 1 1-5 Years	Phase 2 5-15 years	Phase 3 15+ Years
Site Wide Improvements			
Develop the pedestrian circulation and gathering spaces.			*
Interment and Memorialization			
Develop Expansion Area B in-ground interment lots including casket and cremation lots.			*
Develop new cremation gardens including scattering gardens, columbaria, ossuary, family vessels, memorial wall and gathering space			*

Recommended Budget Allowance for Future Phases

This phase of implementation will meet the need for more in-ground interment sales, columbaria niches, and will establish pedestrian circulation through the newly developed areas. During this phase, clearing of Expansion Area B should be to prepare the area for development.

The recommended budget allowance for Future Phases, including the listed recommendations, project overhead, design fees and a contingency of 20% is: \$600,000.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This Cemetery Master Plan comprehensively reviews the cemetery needs of the Town of Whitecourt, and outlines recommendations to serve as a guide for future cemetery site development and operations. This plan will help ensure that the Town of Whitecourt will have the resources required to effectively meet the future interment and service needs of the community for the next 25 years and beyond, and chart a path forward that will move this important social service towards long term sustainability in its future operations.



Figure 57: Whitecourt Cemetery In-ground Burial Section, Source: LEES+Associates