



# SHERIDAN MUNICIPAL CEMETERY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION REPORT

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**City Staff:**  
Nic Bateson, Chuck Carbert, John Herbert

**Consultant:**  
MC2 Engineering, P.C.

# Sheridan Municipal Cemetery Committee Recommendation Report

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## Background and Goals

The Sheridan Municipal Cemetery is located at the end of Ash Street and is situated on approximately 80 acres, with stunning views of the city and of the surrounding mountains. The Sheridan Cemetery is rich in history, housing prominent individuals, families, war veterans and scoundrels, and holds so much history inside its gates that the majority of the community is unaware of the true value of the local grounds.

The Sheridan Municipal Cemetery began in 1890 when the Mount Hope Cemetery Association was formed. Prior to the formation of this cemetery, individuals were buried in a cemetery near what is now College and Jefferson streets. By 1895 most of the individuals buried in this cemetery were moved to site of new cemetery which was built on portion of Held homestead (Held's house is one of two original structures of main street and is now the site of Healy Law office). In 1931 the City of Sheridan bought the Mount Hope Cemetery and turned it into what is now known as the Sheridan Municipal Cemetery. The cemetery serves as a vital link between the past and the present.

A committee of citizens and City staff was formed to identify improvements that could be made to the Cemetery to enhance as well as create a better overall community service to citizens. Based on initial meetings it was determined that the committee should focus on developing a Master Plan for the Cemetery to identify how to improve Cemetery operations, prioritize upgrades, plan for future expansion, create public awareness and identify funding sources. The Committee was formed by local citizens Tyson Emborg as Chairman, Tom Kinnison and Tony Forman. City staff also participated as committee members which included Nic Bateson, Public Works Director; Chuck Carbert, Parks Department; and John Herbert, Cemetery. With a focus of developing a product document, including maps and cost estimates, the committee agreed to hire Megan Crow, with MC2 Engineering to provide engineering consultation services for the group.

Other groups that attended meetings and provided input and information in particular areas of discussion were Judy Slack, Wyoming Room, Library; Nathan Doerr, Museum; Representatives from local lodges that are stakeholders in the Cemetery including Mason No. 8, Eagles and Elks; and Kane Funeral Home and Kuchera Kane Monuments. Ferries Funeral Home and Mason No. 43 were also contacted but were unable to attend the stakeholder meetings.

The meetings were held on December 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of 2012, and January 17<sup>th</sup>, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, February 6<sup>th</sup>, February 20<sup>th</sup>, March 6<sup>th</sup>, March 13<sup>th</sup>, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, April 10<sup>th</sup>, April 24<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup> of 2013.

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The first meeting held focused on developing a list of objectives and goals that the committee would like to accomplish. This report outlines the recommendations generated from the following goals and objectives.

- Educate others and interpret cemetery history, both local and national
- Develop a community connection with cemetery outside of burial activities
- Encourage more use of the property for quiet and passive leisure activity
- Improve operations and service to the community
- Improve signage inside cemetery and directional around the community
- Provide map and directory or wireless web access to cemetery information
- Improve monument condition, settings and grounds
- Address poor road conditions with gravel, paving or vacate certain roads
- Plan and prioritize future capital projects and improvements
- Review staffing and work development program
- Review revenue and expenses, check similar operations in the region
- Seek additional funding sources to make initial capital improvements and also continue a high level of maintenance services
- Continue current efforts on accuracy of all burial records
- Contact other stakeholders for input
- Publicize historical aspects, channel 22 tour
- Facility improvements

## Infrastructure Improvements

The Cemetery crew does an excellent job of maintaining the cemetery grounds but there is a need for an update to the existing infrastructure. There are 4.7 miles of roads with the majority of these roads needing repair, the entrance into the cemetery needs improved, and additional landscaping is needed in some areas.

The Committee had MC2 Engineering (MC2) evaluate the condition of the existing roads and the traffic movements throughout the grounds to determine if all 4.7 miles of roadway is needed for the Cemetery to adequately function. The Committee worked with the consultant on identifying a road section that would allow for parking on one side, the ability of two cars to pass on the road, and provide a pathway alongside the road to encourage the community to utilize the Cemetery for leisure. An 18' road section with an attached 5' recycled asphalt base pathway was determined ideal for the Cemetery traffic use. MC2 evaluated each section of road for whether it was an asset for the movement of traffic through the Cemetery. MC2

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recommended the vacation of approximately 1.5 miles of roadway, and the addition of four parking areas to help alleviate the amount of parking needed along the roadways. This new road layout provides accessibility to all areas of the Cemetery and decreases the amount of roadway upkeep. The map showing the proposed roadway layout can be found at the end of this section.

The vacated roads will initially be left intact, and the funeral homes, monument/memorial providers and Cemetery crews will have access to these roads, but signage and possibly posts or gates will be placed to deter the public from driving on the roads that are not going to be upgraded. For the elderly citizens that need assistance with walking, it is proposed that the Cemetery has a utility vehicle that can be used to provide transportation closer to the burial sites.

It is the recommendation of the engineer that the existing roadways have core samples done to determine the thickness of the existing asphalt and base beneath it. The ideal situation for the rehabilitation of the roads would be to rotomill a full depth section, and use the millings as base for the widening of the roads and for the 5' pathway along the outside of the perimeter of the Cemetery (the roads shown in blue on the map in the appendix). A 3" asphalt mat should then be overlaid the entire 18' width of road. For budgeting purposes, it is recommended to upgrade the outside roadway first (in blue) to encourage the use of the Cemetery for leisure use. It is also proposed that this outside loop be available to the community to walk dogs that are on leashes.

The pathway that will traverse the outside edges of the cemetery roadways will have connections on each end to the City of Sheridan Pathway System. The north end will connect to Leopard Street and the south end will connect to the Huntington Area. The City of Sheridan Engineering Department is looking into ways to connect these areas into the City of Sheridan Pathway System. There is a small portion of pathway on the eastern side that may require the acquisition of a portion of land or an easement from an adjacent landowner. If necessary, the Committee recommends this piece of land be acquired by the City or begin discussions on an easement agreement.

The northwestern edge of the Cemetery was platted as additional burial sites. When crews began digging in that area it was found that it was too rocky to be utilized as a burial plots. It is the desire of the Committee to see this area be developed as a Reflection Area. This corner of the Cemetery has breathtaking views of the Sheridan area and would be an ideal area for a possible gazebo, benches and other landscaping improvements. Cremations and the spreading of ashes has become a popular way to celebrate the life of loved ones. Another addition to the Reflection Area would be a wall where plaques could be hung memorializing those whose ashes

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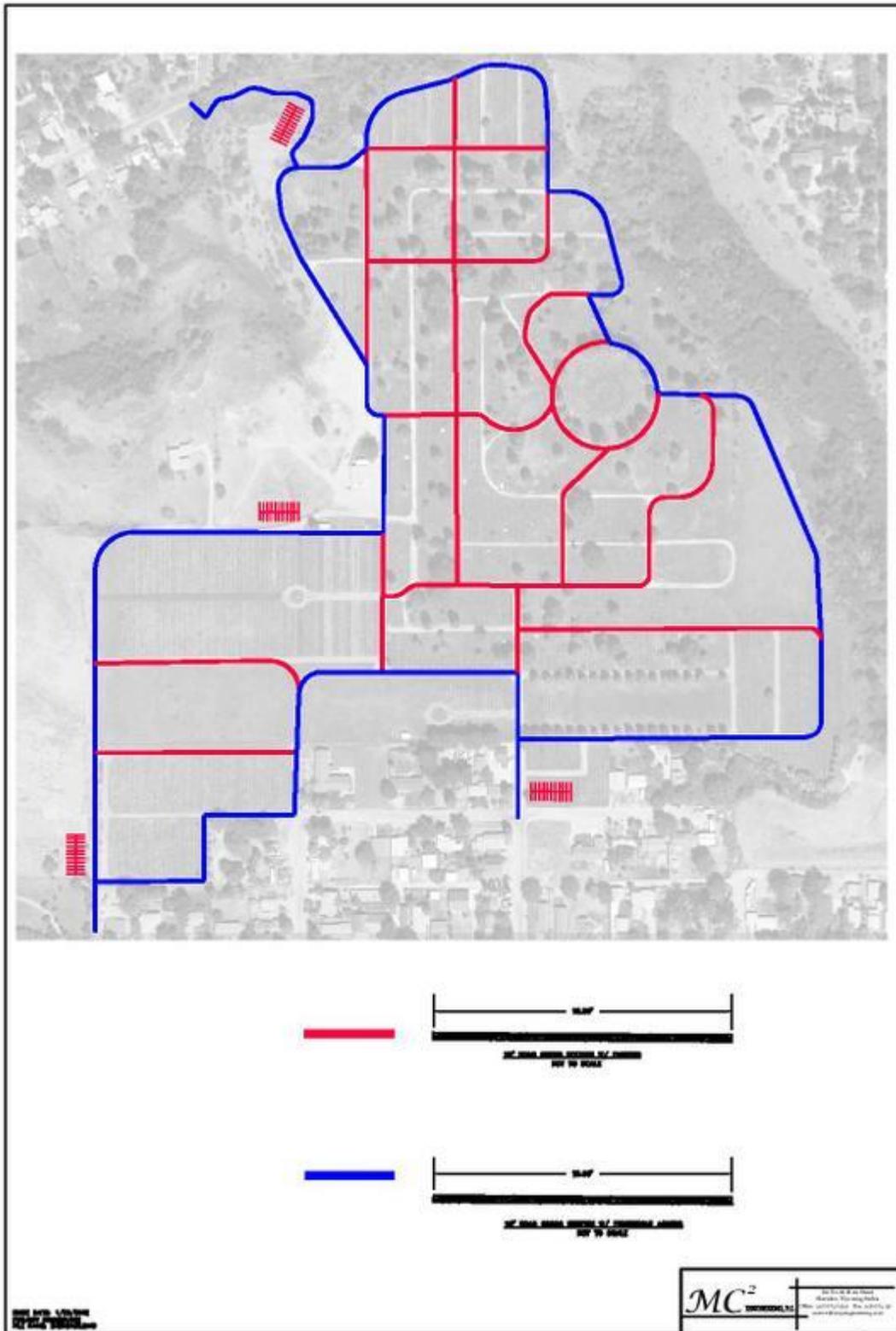
were spread outside of the Cemetery but whose families would like a memorial inside of the Cemetery.

It is also recommended to place a shelter in either the shop area, or near the entrance where visitors could gather and read maps during inclement weather.

Another improvement would be to the Entrance. With the last expansion on the south side of the Cemetery, the entrance is set back from where the Cemetery actually begins. It would be ideal to move the entrance line with the Cemetery boundary and also add improvements such as landscaping, brochures, maps, signage to the entrance area.

Several of the monuments are broken and the grave sites have settled causing low areas throughout the property. These monuments should be repaired and/or reattached to their bases, and the settled burial sites be recompact and topsoil brought in to make the areas level.

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## Cemetery Operations

The highest priority the Committee believes needs addressed is an update of the Cemetery Records, including obituaries and burial information, and the accessibility of that information to the public. It was reported by Judy Slack from the Wyoming Room that of the 14,000 records her office has they have only been able to update and correct 4,000 records over the last few years. A website known as findagrave.com has information on all records from Sheridan Cemetery uploaded on their site, but according to Ms. Slack many of those records have errors in them. Her staff has continually worked on the update of the records, but she does not have the manpower to finish out the project.

City of Sheridan staff, Scott Badley, Chuck Carbert and John Herbert, went to a demonstration on software called Cemetery Information Management System (CIMS). This software has been implemented by the Campbell County Cemetery District and according to Staff that attended the demonstration it would be ideal for the Sheridan Municipal Cemetery. This software will computerize all the burial information into one database that can be utilized by the Clerk's Office and the Wyoming Room, as well as providing the public with reliable information. This program allows for not only the basic information about each plot, but has the ability to have obituaries and monument pictures to be uploaded.

It is the recommendation of the Committee for the City of Sheridan to implement this program, and assist the Wyoming Room with the updating of old records for a launch of the software by September of 2013.

It was also noted that the City Ordinances related to the Cemetery are outdated and need to be restructured to allow for the Cemetery to be more in line with the current burial protocols and procedures. City Code Chapter 17 discusses the codes related to the municipal cemetery. It is recommended that City staff review other community codes and standards and identify sections that need to be updated. Suggested changes and modifications should come back to this original committee and other associated stakeholders to review and provide comment. Some of these updates may include monument dimensions, dogs allowed on designated loop on a leash and placement of waste containers.

Lastly it was discussed that the facilities and equipment used to maintain and service the cemetery are dilapidated and there is currently no improvement plan or equipment replacement plan developed. It is recommended by the committee that necessary capital improvement plans are made for the shop and visitor facilities. Also a five year equipment replacement plan should be developed for not only the cemetery division but also the overall parks division.

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## Public Awareness and Use

The Sheridan Municipal Cemetery is full of history and a final resting place for many loved ones in the Sheridan community. One of the main objectives of this Committee was to create an awareness of the Cemetery to the public and encourage use of the area. Several ideas were discussed by the Committee that by implementing will help to create more public use of the Cemetery grounds.

The objective of some of the Committee's recommendations are to make the grounds more user friendly for those trying to locate loved one's gravesites or those doing historical research. The CIMS software discussed in the previous section would lend to creating a smartphone app that would combine an interactive program on the phone with GPS to provide users information at their fingertips. This application would require the Cemetery to upgrade to a public accessible wireless network to integrate this technology on the grounds. A kiosk would be available at both the Cemetery and at the Library for the public to use if they do not have access to a smartphone.

The Committee also felt it was important to increase signage not only on Cemetery grounds, but in the community to help those unfamiliar with the area find the cemetery with ease. It is also desired to produce informational brochures describing the colorful history of some of the Cemetery's more well known, influential and notorious residents, and maps of the grounds and plots that are available for sale at the entrance. Permanent interpretive signs and programs could also be made available in the future.

Connecting the Cemetery to the City's Pathway System was also a priority identified by the group. The outer road loop is a total distance of 2.1 miles and by providing a connection on each end of the Cemetery it would become a valuable addition to the pathways across the City. It was also discussed with other stakeholders that attended the meetings on their thoughts of allowing dogs on this designated route. It was the consensus of the groups polled that as long as dog walking stations were installed and the leash law enforced that the addition of dogs on the outskirts of the grounds would not affect cemetery operations and would encourage more public use of the area.

Mr. Emborg gave a wonderful historic tour at one of the initial meetings of the Committee. Another recommendation from the group would be to have a series on Channel 22 featuring the Cemetery and highlighting the rich history of our Cemetery.

As part of a public outreach campaign, it is suggested to present this report to such organizations as Rotary and the Historical Society. Also it would be ideal to also have these

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organization start collecting any photographs or information they have on the cemetery and take them to the Wyoming Room to be scanned and cataloged.

## Future Expansion

The City Park staff reported the remaining plots available for sale could be depleted in 1-2 years, prompting the need to form an expansion plan. Several options were discussed including reselling unused sold plots, approaching leaders from the Elks, Eagles and Masons about possibly obtaining portions of their unused plots, and the expansion into the 15 acres of cemetery land to the west, called the Bellevue area.

According to State Statute if a plot has gone unused for 25 years, the city can publically advertise the vacation of ownership and if there is no contact from an owner's representative, the plot can be reverted back to the city for resell. There are many plots that could possibly be reclaimed by the City via this vacation method, increasing the current availability by untold years.

Currently the Elks, Eagles and Masons maintain their own sections of the cemetery reserved for their members. The committee met with each of these Lodges to determine if there was a possibility of obtaining some of their excess land. The Mason Lodge No. 8 is receptive to the idea of transferring ownership of some of their land in exchange for the City taking over upkeep of their area. By pursuing this option the existing grounds could be utilized for additional years before needing to plat and develop the Bellevue Area.

The Bellevue Area is located to the west of the current boundaries of the cemetery and consists of about 15 acres. To prepare this area for burials would require platting and development of the area including landscaping, irrigation upgrades, roadways, and signage. The operations budget would also need to be increased with this expansion option.

The recommendation of the Committee is to follow through with the negotiations with the Lodges, and resell the unused plots to extend the use of the existing grounds.

## Cost Estimates

A preliminary cost estimate of the Committee's recommendations was tabulated by MC2 Engineering. The Infrastructure Improvements were broken down into two priorities. The first priority would encompass all the roads marked in blue on the road layout map found in the Appendix. This route is proposed to have a 5 foot path attached to it and will be designated as

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dog friendly. The parking line item in the estimate would include the four parking areas indicated on the layout map. These areas would provide about 20-24 spaces each.

The Operation Improvements breakdown includes a small utility vehicle to transport the elderly and others who need assistance to areas that are no longer accessible by the public. Also included in this section is a cost to build a new 75'x75' maintenance shop and office in place of the existing building. Other equipment upgrades that are needed at the cemetery are a new mower and a light utility truck.

Miscellaneous Enhancements include signage in and around the cemetery, entrance improvements, benches and dog stations along the pathway, landscaping improvements and reflection area and monument repairs.

The Technology section is a priority one per the Committee's recommendations. This section includes the software upgrades, data migration, and the corrections associated with the remaining records in the Wyoming Room.

Property Acquisition and Future Platting are the remaining items that were broken down into costs. The property acquisition refers to the small area on the eastern side of the Cemetery that would either need to be acquired or an easement granted to connect the pathway loop inside the cemetery. The future platting would need to be prepared if the Cemetery were to expand into the Bellevue area.

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<b>CEMETERY IMPROVEMENT COSTS</b>						
	Unit	Quantity	Unit Cost	Total Cost	Priority	
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS</b>						
Streets						
<i>Priority 1</i>	SF	94466	\$3.70	\$349,524.20	P1	
<i>Priority 2</i>	SF	135285	\$3.70	\$500,554.50	P2	
Pathways	LF	12581	\$5.62	\$70,742.96	P1	
Parking	SY	17600	\$1.12	\$19,782.40	P2	
<b>Total Infrastructure Improvements</b>				<b>\$940,604.06</b>		
<b>OPERATION IMPROVEMENTS</b>						
Shop Improvements	SF	5625	\$53.00	\$298,125.00	P3	
Equipment Upgrades						
<i>Four seat utility vehicle</i>	EA	1	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	P2	
<i>Mower</i>	EA	1	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	P3	
<i>Light Duty Truck</i>	EA	1	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	P2	
<b>Total Operation Improvements</b>				<b>\$353,125.00</b>		
<b>MISCELLANEOUS ENHANCEMENTS</b>						
Signage	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P2	
Entrance	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P2	
Benches and Dog Stations	LS	1	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	P2	
Monument Repairs	LS	1	\$100,000.00	\$100,000.00	P3	
Landscaping and Irrigation Relocation	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P2	
<b>Total Miscellaneous Enhancements</b>				<b>\$270,000.00</b>		
<b>TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES</b>						
Software Licensing (CIMS)	LS	1	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	P1	
Data Migration and GIS Mapping (CIMS)	LS	1	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00	P1	
Wi-Fi Capabilities	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P2	
Data Review and Correction	LS	1	\$40,000.00	\$40,000.00	P1	
<b>Total Technology Upgrades</b>				<b>\$140,000.00</b>		
<b>PROPERTY ACQUISITION</b>						
Land Acquisition for pathway	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P2	
<b>Total Property Acquisition</b>				<b>\$50,000.00</b>		
<b>FUTURE PLATTING</b>						
Bellevue Area	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	P3	
<b>Total Future Platting</b>				<b>\$50,000.00</b>		
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>				<b>\$1,803,729.06</b>		

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## Funding Sources

Three different options were discussed in relation to funding sources for the Cemetery. It was the objective of the Committee to create a funding source to allow the Cemetery to be self-sufficient like other Cemeteries in the area. The options discussed were setting up an endowment, creating a Cemetery District and receiving a portion of an existing Levy.

An endowment would consist of funds being placed in an account with a 5% rate of return. The Cemetery is currently allocated \$90,000 from the City's budget to run its operations. If the recommendations of the Committee are implemented the approximate budget the Cemetery would need is \$120,000/year. This is taking into account the increase of grounds to maintain, whether it be from taking over maintenance of one or more of the Lodges' areas, or expanding into the Bellevue Area. An endowment of \$2.4 million dollars would be required to operate with a \$120,000 return each year. If donors are not able to reach this amount, there could be an opportunity where the City subsidizes the difference. Current burial and plot revenue to the City is about \$40,000 annually.

Another option discussed by the committee would be to create a Cemetery District similar to Gillette, Wyoming. In order to pass a new district, a petition would need to be circulated to get the support needed to place the District on the ballot in November to be voted upon by the residents of Sheridan County. The Committee felt that this would not be an item that would be overly supported by the residents of the community partly due the additional levy they would then be paying towards the Cemetery.

The final option discussed was modifying an existing Levy to include the Cemetery. According to Scott Badley, City Clerk, this is allowed for in the State Statutes. This option would also need to be voted on by the community, but since it is not creating an additional levy the residents may be more apt to support it on a ballot. It is the recommendation of the Committee to pursue the endowment fund to subsidize the Cemetery Operations and would help facilitate the search for potential funding sources and donors.

## Cemetery Committee

At the conclusion of the final meeting, the Sheridan Municipal Cemetery Committee was disbanded. It is the recommendation that the City of Sheridan forms a new committee combining the Cemetery, Parks and Pathway into one, and consisting of seven members with term limits appointed by the Mayor.