

# Soldotna Cemetery Proposal

Respectfully Submitted  
By  
The Soldotna Cemetery Task Force



August 16, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor David Carey and City Council Members

FROM: Cemetery Task Force Committee  
Dick Troeger and Kearlee Wright, Co-Chairs  
Committee Members: Katherine Parker, Colleen and Jim Fassler,  
Billie Gillilan, Pete Sprague, Brandii Ohlsen, Barbara Jewell, and  
Lisa Parker, Council Representative

SUBJECT: Cemetery Task Force Report

Attached is the Cemetery Task Force Report. We took a great deal of time acquiring information, walking sites for an appropriate cemetery location, and deliberated on our findings for this report.

In gathering information, we heard from Kari Mohn, President, Kenai Totem Tracers (Kenai Peninsula cemetery history and geneology); Don Warden, Director of the Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery; Tim Wisniewski, Director, Peninsula Memorial Chapels and Crematory; and Rev. Alan Humphries, President, Kenai/Soldotna Ministerial Association. We also read A Cemetery Should be Forever by John F. Llewellyn and an Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery publication. All of the speakers were supportive of a cemetery in Soldotna and were of the feeling that this is an excellent opportunity to establish a cemetery in the correct manner, i.e., accurate surveys, creating computer generated listing of lots and occupants, setting guidelines, etc.

We trust this information will be helpful to you in making a decision to establish a cemetery for our community. Our report also includes letters of support for this facility.

If we can be of further service, we would be happy to assist you.

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In the fall of 2001, the Historical Society contacted Mayor Carey concerning the need for a cemetery in the city of Soldotna. Mayor Carey subsequently appointed a task force to study the development of a Soldotna Cemetery. The following is the proposal of the Soldotna Cemetery Task Force.

# BLUEPRINT FOR THE CEMETERY MASTER PLAN

*"Show me your cemeteries, and I will tell you what kind of people you have."*  
Benjamin Franklin

1. Purpose - To determine the feasibility of a cemetery in Soldotna.
2. Need for Cemetery - In 1991 and 1995, ordinances to create a cemetery were introduced at public hearings, however neither passed. The 1995 Soldotna Comprehensive Plan states that, "Soldotna has considered developing a public cemetery for several years. Several city-owned sites are potentially available." Local burial options for residents of the Soldotna area are in Kenai and Kasilof. Spruce Grove Cemetery at Kasilof is nearing capacity. The residents of Soldotna and the surrounding area deserve a final resting place near home.
3. Death Rate Forecast - Based on national averages one may conservatively estimate of 8-10 burials of Soldotna residents in the cemetery per year, initially. This number would surely increase as some buried elsewhere are re-interred in Soldotna and as residents of the surrounding area use the cemetery as well.
4. Acreage and Location - When properly planned, each acre of usable cemetery land will accommodate 750 burial plots. Ten acres would be a suitable amount of land. Only two acres would be necessary for use initially; however, plans must be made for growth and expansion.

The considered sites included:

1. A 40-acre parcel at the southwest end of West Redoubt Ave (private ownership).
  2. A 40 acre parcel the northwest end of West Redoubt Ave. (City of Soldotna/borough owned)
  3. 80 acres off the end of the Soldotna airport (City of Soldotna owned)
  4. 11 acres of Arc Lake Recreation site (City of Soldotna owned)
  5. Ski Hill Road acreage located within the National Wildlife Refuge.
5. Management - Options for cemetery management include:
- a. Owned and operated as a 501 (c) 13 non- profit corporation.
  - b. Privately owned and operated,
  - c. Owned and operated by the City of Soldotna
  - d. City owned and contracted out

Alaska statutes as well as the Anchorage Municipal Code could help to serve as guidelines for developing management and operation.

6. Design- Cemeteries are usually divided into two broad categories:

- a. Traditional cemeteries have upright monuments as well as mausoleums, and have a great deal of history.
- b. Memorial parks have markers placed level with the ground, blending in with the landscape and making maintenance easier.

Actual layout of the cemetery would be done after the land is obtained.

7. Cost

- a. Start-up: Will include acquiring and clearing land, survey and design costs, building roads and paths, making utility connections, erecting storage buildings, constructing fences, and whatever else might be considered necessary and desirable.
- b. Annual: Will include record keeping, utilities, maintenance, and expansion of the site. In addition, a cemetery perpetual maintenance non-expendable trust fund is essential to provide funding for future maintenance.

8. Final Recommendations -

The first step is to secure and define land for the specific purpose of developing a cemetery. The borough-owned ten acres on West Redoubt and adjacent to the city owned acreage is recommended by the task force for the needs of the community based on the following:

- a. Accessibility
- b. Low start-up cost
- c. Topography and aesthetic value

The second step in the plan is to assign duties and responsibilities for the planning and execution of the proposed development.

Most development will occur slowly as the cemetery grows and expands over the years, but some development must be considered from the outset. The land must be surveyed so the required roads can be designed within the proposed ten-acre parcel. The survey should include a precise layout grid for pathways, sections, rows and individual grave sites. Although the cemetery will be cleared and developed in phases this master plan is necessary for long-range development and precise record keeping. The cemetery land needs to be surrounded by a fence to set it apart from the surrounding residential area and to deter vandals and careless snowmachiners.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- The cemetery be owned and operated by the City of Soldotna. This would ensure consistency and continuity in record keeping and maintenance.
- As the land is developed the city may need to assign personnel so that management and upkeep of the cemetery fall under control of the Public Works Department.
- The required work will involve the sale and record keeping of burial plots, the development and overseeing of a perpetual care fund, a record of biography or obituary of each interred body, the regulation of grave adornment, the physical maintenance of roads, lawn mowing, watering, grave leveling and head stone resetting and the designation of a contact person responsible for resolving issues as they arise.
- Cemetery establishment and operations should be set in place by city code.
- An advisory board should be developed in order to insure that the cemetery is being managed and maintained in a way that is reflective of the kind of statement we want our city to make about it's dedication to the preservation of our history.

**We urge the council to proceed expeditiously with the establishment of a cemetery in Soldotna.**

- Developing a municipal Greenhouse and Arboretum which would house city plantings and a botanical garden;
- Formulating master development plan for facilities of the Soldotna Historical Society and Museum in Centennial Park;
- Encouraging the State to construct a regional office building in Soldotna; and,
- Assisting the Kenai Peninsula Borough with plans for a new School District Administration Headquarters Building on Shady Lane.

### Cemetery

Soldotna has considered developing a municipal cemetery for several years. Currently, there are four cemeteries located in the surrounding area: the Kasilof Cemetery, Spruce Grove Cemetery, Kenai Cemetery and the McGann Cemetery. Generally, cemetery sites should have the following characteristics:

- They should develop with gradual expansion in mind. A well-planned cemetery can hold up to 1,000 graves per acre. At least three feet separation should be planned between grave sites. The Kenai Cemetery is about 4 acres in size.
- Landscaping and plantings are very important in creating a special feeling of exclusiveness, serenity and respect. Large tracts should be divided into smaller accessible sections with interior drives and plantings.
- Sites require good site drainage, less than a 30% slope grade, and a site plan allowing easy access and maintenance.

Care of a city cemetery would require an additional seasonal employee for about nine months per year. Operation and maintenance would probably have to be financed by the General Fund. Increased operation and maintenance of a city cemetery could cost about \$60,000 annually:

Wages and Benefits	\$ 32,400
Supplies	5,000
Contracted Services	<u>25,000</u>
Total estimated cost	\$ 62,400

Several sites owned by the City are potentially available for a cemetery. These include:

- Arc Lake property along the Sterling Highway. The City owns about 20 acres at Arc Lake. Little money would need to be spent on road construction. An on-site water and septic system could be created.