

Subject: **Vegetation Cutting Request and Service Level Review**  
 Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 16, 2024  
 Prepared By: Fallon Sherlock, Manager of Parks & Ag Services  
 Presented By: Fallon Sherlock, Manager of Parks & Ag Services

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Committee of the Whole recommend that Administration brings forward to Council four updated service level agreements as it pertains to the cemeteries in Table 1 of this report for consideration.

That the Committee of the Whole recommend that Council consider a service level increase for vegetation cutting at Community Centers located within hamlets in Kneehill County.

**STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT: (Check all that apply)**

	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
High Quality Infrastructure		Economic Resilience		Quality of Life		Effective Leadership		Level of Service	

**RELEVANT LEGISLATION:**

**Provincial (cite)-** Cemetery Act

**Council Bylaw/Policy (cite)-** Nuisance and Unsightly Premises Bylaw 1630

**BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL:**

In February 2024, the Wimborne Community Center reached out to Administration to discuss the possibility of hiring Kneehill County Parks Services for vegetation cutting (mowing and weed whipping) around the community center and the ball diamond. Since the Department does not currently offer this service, Administration wanted to take this opportunity to discuss the potential service options for Council's consideration.

At present, Kneehill County Parks Services is responsible for vegetation cutting at forty-eight (48) locations, which include parks, cemeteries, county utility sites, county buildings, and county-owned land in the four hamlets of Wimborne, Huxley, Torrington, and Swalwell. The Department has a team of four (4) mowing staff members who manage the vegetation at these sites using a rotational and priority-based approach. The prioritization of a location can depend on various factors, such as the occurrence of specific events like funerals or community gatherings. Additionally, not all sites are serviced in every rotation due to differences in vegetation growth rates.

Administration would also like to bring to light that some private lands are included in the above-mentioned rotations, which include four (4) Cemeteries (Lutheran, Lumni, Rempher, and Meehan Catholic) as well as the Huxley Community Center and Curling Rink.

The four cemeteries currently pay an annual fee of \$200 each, which, based on the information we have collected, has remained unchanged since it was established in 1987 through a Council Motion and subsequent letters to the groups owning the sites. Per the original information provided to Council and located in letters to the Cemetery ownership groups in 1987 the original fee was implemented to cover the service delivery of only vegetation cutting as the County does not obtain any revenue from plot sales. Although notes indicating verbal agreement by three Cemeteries and one letter of agreement by another Cemetery, there are no formalized service agreements for the four cemeteries or any other non-county



owned properties. Comments relayed in Council minutes from 1991 one church indicated that they were concerned about the burden of fees on their budget. Administration at this time has not approached the Cemetery ownership groups to discuss a potential increase to the rates or the addition of formal agreements as Administration wanted to discuss this item prior with Council prior to any conversations taking place.

The vegetation cutting in the area around the Huxley Community Center and Curling Rink has been a part of the mowing route for many years. The only Council correspondence found was in a 2011 Council motion to complete the mowing of the Ball Diamond and surrounding area. This space is currently owned by Kneehill County and staff currently mow the area around the ball diamond while the interior operations are managed by the Huxley Community Association.

In July 2019 a request from the Swalwell Community Association was brought forward to Council to mow the area around the Swalwell Hall. This request was denied through Council motion.

**DISCUSSION/OPTIONS/BENEFITS/DISADVANTAGES/OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:**

**Cost Comparisons**

We have not been able to locate any direct comparators as not many offer the service in the rural area as a permanent business. Those we have heard of are individuals and are shared via word of mouth.

**Current County Program Costs**

The current vegetation cutting program costs are calculated out to approximately \$355.60 per hour for 4 staff, mowers and whippers as well as \$2.30/km for transportation. This is for the current vegetation cutting program completion of 48 sites on a 3.5 to 4 week rotation.

**Private Cemeteries**

The current revenue for private cemeteries is \$200 each, annually.

Table 1: Private Cemetery Cost Breakdown					
Location	Cuttable Acres	Avg Cutting Time	Cost per Cut*	Avg. Times Cut per season**	Estimated Total cost per season
Lutheran	1.34ac	2hr	\$798	4	\$3,194
Lumni	2.2ac	1.75hr	\$705	4	\$2,820
Rempher	0.5ac	0.45hr	\$275	4	\$1,100
Meehan (Catholic)	2.34ac	2hr	\$780	5	\$3,901
Estimated total cost per year					<b>\$11,015</b>
Current revenue received each year					\$800
Current Subsidized amount					\$10,215
Option 1: Keep Private Cemetery rates the same, see costs above.					
Option 2: Increase the rate to \$200/cut			Revenue		\$3,400
			Subsidized amount		\$7,615
Option 3: Increase rate to \$300/hour			Revenue		\$1,860
			Subsidized amount		\$9,155
Option 4: Increase rate to \$400/year			Revenue		\$1,600
			Subsidized amount		\$ 9,415

\*Determined by labour, equipment and mileage    \*\*number of cuts determined by vegetation growth



Increasing mowing rates would allow the municipality to recover more of the costs associated with providing this service by reducing the subsidized amount. Alternatively in comments relayed in Council minutes from 1991 one church indicated that they were concerned about the burden of fees on their budget.

Official service agreements should be implemented for any work done on non-county owned sites to mitigate legal and financial liabilities and clarify the expected levels of service for both parties.

### Community Centers

Table 2: Community Center Cost Estimate Breakdown				
Location	Cuttable Acres	Estimated Time (hr)	Cost per cut*	Annual cost for 4 cuts
Huxley Hall/ Curling Rink <i>(currently taking place at no charge)</i>	0.85ac	1hr	\$595	\$2,380
Wimborne Hall & Ball Diamond <i>(Requested)</i>	2.35ac	2hr	\$900	\$3,600
Torrington Hall	0.4ac	0.45hr	\$335	\$1,340
Swalwell Hall	1.0ac	1hr	\$457	\$1,828
			<b>Estimated total cost per year</b>	
			<b>\$9,148</b>	
Option 5: Subsidize the full cost		Cost	<b>\$9,148</b>	
Option 6: Set rate at \$300/hour for 4 cuts		Revenue	\$3,200.00	
		Subsidized amount	<b>\$5,948</b>	
Option 7: Set rate at \$600/year for 4 cuts		Revenue	\$2,400	
		Subsidized amount	<b>\$6,748</b>	
Option 8: Decline Vegetation Cutting at any Community Centers				

*\*Determined by labour, equipment, and mileage*

The Community Centers listed in Table 2 are located in hamlets that are already part of the existing cutting rotation and could be integrated with a lesser impact to the overall program, extending the cutting rotation period by about a week, depending on the rate of vegetation growth or special event requests. There are 5 other local Community Centers (see attached list of community centers) that are not within the current mowing locations that could bring forward similar requests but were not included in the Table 2 options as extending beyond the current mowing locations may require additional resources and increased service costs.

Options for service delivery models could include:

- an agreed upon minimum number of cuts per year at a specified amount with additional cuts at an increased cost.
- cutting by request as it fits into the program schedule and availability without a guarantee of reaction time.



The addition of the Hamlet Community Centers to the cutting program would contribute to the continued care and maintenance of the communities these centers are a part of. This service is often a difficult item for volunteer groups to source, especially locating individuals with proper equipment, time, and adequate insurance coverage to complete this role in a public space.

Alternatively, this would be an increased service level to the Parks department that would have to be clearly defined through policy and an adjustment to the Master Rate Bylaw. Should additional requests come from other community centers located outside the Hamlets or other private cemeteries in the County additional considerations would have to take place.

#### **Administration Recommendations:**

- Entering into signed service agreements clarifying rates and service level specifications for any non-county owned site where vegetation cutting takes place.
- Selecting Option 1 of Table 1 and Adjusting Private Cemetery mowing to \$200 per cut for a more balanced revenue/ subsidy.
- Selecting Option 6 in Table 2 and offering the 4 Community Centers within the Hamlets the option to enter into service agreements with the County for \$300 per hour for vegetation cutting.

#### **FINANCIAL & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

Financial: The potential financial impact is detailed in Tables 1 and 2 of this report and/or may also include other potential costs, depending on alternate options discussed that have not been detailed in this report. The options and financial impacts will be brought back to Council for consideration at a future regular Council meeting.

Staffing: With the existing staff and resources, the addition of the four Hamlet Community Centers would extend the cutting rotation to approximately 4 to 4.5 weeks depending on vegetation growth. Should Council want to take on the Community Center Mowing while retaining or decreasing the length of the cutting rotation then additional resources would need to be needed and could be determined.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Current Vegetation Maintenance Maps of Hamlets

Hamlet Community Center Maps, Lists of All Community Centers and Cemeteries in Kneehill County

#### **APPROVAL(S):**

Mike Haugen, Chief Administrative Officer

Approved-

