






Subject: Vegetation Cutting and Snow Plowing at Hamlet Community Centers

Meeting Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025

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STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT: (Check all that apply)

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High Quality Infrastructure		Economic Resilience		Quality of Life		Effective Leadership		Level of Service	

RELEVANT LEGISLATION:

Provincial (cite)- Cemetery Act

Council Bylaw/Policy (cite)- Bylaw 1630: Nuisance and Unsightly Premises; Policy 15-13: Community Center Operational Grant; Policy 15-4: Community Center Project Grant

BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL:

At the April 16, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting Administration presented a request for vegetation-cutting services (mowing & weed whipping) by the Wimborne Community Center and a background on the vegetation cutting services delivered to both Kneehill County sites and privately owned cemeteries. The Committee recommended that Council consider mowing and snow removal agreements with the Rural Community Halls within our Kneehill County Hamlets. The Committee also recommended that Council consider the development of a mowing of private cemetery level of service, after consultation with private cemetery owners.

At the December 10 Council meeting Administration presented a summary of information and options of various levels of subsidization for vegetation cutting and snow plowing services for Community Halls in Hamlets. Council then requested Administration bring back additional information regarding the cost of offering services to other community centers in the County and private cemeteries.

The four (4) privately owned cemeteries have been under the \$200/year agreement since 1991. These were done through Council motion and information letters and have been included in the Master Rates bylaw since. There are not currently any formal service agreements in place.

Feedback from Community Organizations

Administration has reached out to Community hall groups and private cemetery proprietors currently using County mowing services for comment on the options surrounding mowing. The responses are as follows:

- Wimborne Hall: Has since purchased a used mower and a local volunteer is completing the work; they are no longer seeking County services.
- Swalwell Hall: Currently has a contractor complete the mowing, would consider the County services based on cost but is not a necessity.



- Huxley Hall: Currently they have a mower and volunteers that mow the ball diamond but it is difficult to get consistent coverage. They have stated that they do not have the funds in place to be able to pay for the mowing around the buildings.
- Torrington Hall: Awaiting comment.
- Sunnyslope Hall: Volunteer group mown. They would consider County-offered services based on cost.
- Three Hills Rural Hall: Awaiting comment.
- Orkney Hall: Mowing is done by volunteers for no cost as a community get-together.
- Mt Vernon Hall: Volunteer mown, occasionally hayed. Based on cost, they would consider the County services.
- Hesketh Hall: Volunteer mown and plowed. Would be more interested in plowing services but currently have an appropriate set-up.
- Meehan Catholic Cemetery: Would likely be able to support an adjustment in service fees at approximately \$600-\$800 per year.
- Trochu Lutheran & Torrington Zion Cemeteries: Would likely be able to support an adjustment in service fees at approximately \$600-\$800 per year. Awaiting confirmation of this from members.
- Lumni (St. Ann of the Prairies) Cemetery: Awaiting comment.

Kneehill Community Center Grants

Kneehill County does currently provide grants to rural community halls for operational costs and projects. The amounts for operational support are set by usage as outlined in the chart below.

Level A	Used year Round: 20 or more times per year	Annual Rate \$3,400.00	Huxley Community Association Sunnyslope Community Association Wimborne Community Centre Torrington Community Centre Swalwell Community Association Three Hills Rural Community Association Orkney Athletic Association
Level B	Used Year round or seasonally: 10-20 times per year	Annual Rate \$2,500.00	Mount Vernon Community Association
Level C	Used Year Round or Season less than 10 times per year	Annual Rate \$1,300.00	Hesketh Community Hall Association

Municipal Benchmarking

Administration also reached out to other Counties to benchmark on how and if they provided this level of service. Out of the twelve (12) who responded, there was a wide variety of arrangements, including those who own some halls but don't do the mowing (2), those who don't own the halls but do the mowing (2), those who own and do the mowing (3) and those who don't own or mow (4). Some absorb the cost into their public land mowing program, others pay a contractor, some provide a grant directly, and others provide a rebate for county services (mowing or plowing) up to a certain amount.

When it came to Cemeteries, there were similar mixed results, including those who don't own the cemetery but do the mowing (2), those who own and do the mowing (5), those who own and contract out the mowing (1) and those who don't own or mow (3). Many municipalities in the province provide grant funding to rural cemeteries in amounts ranging from \$500-\$3000 per year for operational costs and up to \$5000 for Capital projects.



DISCUSSION/OPTIONS/BENEFITS/DISADVANTAGES/OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Vegetation Program Costs

The current vegetation cutting costs are calculated to be approximately **\$202.21 per hour** for cutting for four (4) staff, mowers, whippers, and mowing fuel; in addition, there would be transportation costs of \$1.97/km, which covers two (2) trucks and trailers, fuel and four (4) staff members.

These costs are calculated for the completion of forty-eight (48) sites on a four (4)-week rotation in the current vegetation-cutting program. It includes all the time allocated for staff to complete the sites, including active mowing and weed whipping, equipment maintenance, and travel, as well as non-mowing related time such as safety meetings, inspections, data entry, staff time off, and average weather delays, all in moderate growing conditions. With all of these additional factors under consideration, the average active mowing time per day for calculation purposes is five (5) **hours** of active cutting per day.

If the service level was to remain the same while incorporating all of the discussed locations then additional resources would be necessary. The **upfront capital costs** to set up an additional team of two mowers, two weed whips, one truck and one trailer would be **\$187,500**. The staff costs for two additional staff for the season would be approximately **\$16,000** per year.

Existing and Potential Vegetation Cutting Service Costs

Hamlet Halls compared to other Hamlet mowing (no travel included)

Site	Est. Cutting Time (hrs)	Cost per Cut	Cost per 4 cuts per year
Torrington Hamlet	4.5	\$ 1,071	\$ 4,285
Torrington Hall	0.75	\$ 121	\$ 482
Wimborne Hamlet	2.5	\$ 536	\$ 2,142
Wimborne Hall	2.5	\$ 536	\$ 2,142
Huxley Hamlet	2	\$ 536	\$ 2,142
Huxley Hall	1	\$ 268	\$ 1,071
Swalwell Hamlet	3	\$ 1,406	\$ 5,623
Swalwell Hall	1	\$ 268	\$ 1,071
Additional time for hamlet halls	5.25		
Additional cutting cost for hamlet halls		\$ 1,192	\$ 4,767

Breakdown of rural hall cutting

Site	Veg Mgmt Size (ac)	Est. Cutting Time (hrs)	Round Trip Travel Time (hr)	Round Trip Travel Distance (kms)	Est. Total Time (hr)	Total cost per cut	Total Cost per year
Orkney Hall	5.36	4	1	70 km	5	\$ 1,393	\$ 5,572
3 Hills Rural Hall	0.97	1	0.25	14 km	1.25	\$ 332	\$ 1,329
Sunnyslope Hall	3.51	3	0.75	54 km	3.75	\$ 1,052	\$ 4,207
Mt. Vernon Hall	2.89	2.5	0.5	36 km	3	\$ 835	\$ 3,340
Hesketh Hall	0.63	0.75	1.25	97 km	2	\$ 642	\$ 2,569
total rural halls		11.25	3.75		15	\$ 4,254	\$ 17,017



Breakdown of the costs associated with mowing the current private cemeteries

Site	VegMgmt Size (ac)	Est. Cutting Time (hrs)	Round Trip Travel Time (hr)	Round Trip Travel Distance (kms)	Est. Total Time (hrs)	Total cost per cut	Total Cost per year
Lumni	2.2	1.75	0.46	36 km	2.21	\$ 634	\$ 2,537
Trochu Luthuran	1.34	2	0.44	28 km	2.44	\$ 712	\$ 2,841
Torrington Zion	0.5	2	0.62	50 km	2.62	\$ 431	\$ 1,723
Meehan Catholic	2.34	2	0.38	30 km	2.38	\$ 674	\$ 3,368
total private cemeteries		7.75	1.9		9.65	\$ 2,451	\$ 10,469

Vegetation Cutting Service Delivery Models

Options for service delivery models could include:

1. A set agreed-upon number of cuts per year at a specified amount (i.e. \$200 per year for 4 cuts)
2. As described above, with specially requested cuts outside of the regular rotation at an increased cost for additional travel.
3. Cutting by request as it fits into the program schedule and availability without a guarantee of reaction time at a specified rate (i.e. \$200 per hour plus \$2/km travel).

Options for fees structures could include:

1. Full subsidization: no fees charged and County absorbs all costs
2. Full cost recovery: cost recovery rate as determined annually by administration
3. 50% cost recovery: 50% of the cost recovery rate as determined annually by administration and added to the master rates bylaw
4. Set a single rate of \$1000 per year for four (4) cuts.
5. Add on cuts could be done for a separate rate plus milage.

Snow plowing at Community Centers

The following costs for snow plowing are based on standard equipment rates:

- Plowing: T770 skid steer – **\$119.03/hr** (operator included)
- Travel: 1 Ton truck – **\$32.77/hr** (operator NOT included)

Time spent at each site would be 0.5-2 hours for snow plowing depending on the amount of snow. These costs do not include snow removal from the site which would have to be a separate service/cost.

Considerations

- The number of Community centers opting into the service may impact program costs, as additional resources, such as staff, may need to be procured to meet existing service standards. The attached table outlines the costs and times for each community center. If all halls opted for the service on a four (4) cut per year basis it would increase the length of the rotation by approximately four (4) days to almost five (5) weeks.
- Community centers have already received a grant from Kneehill County for operational costs.
- Uptake in the program would depend highly on the rates selected as most centers are currently done at no cost by volunteers.
- A change in service level or rates would impact locations currently being done for free or at low costs (Huxley Hall and curling Rink and the Private Cemeteries).



REQUEST FOR DECISION

- 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.

FINANCIAL & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Financial: The potential financial impact is detailed above and/or may also include other potential costs, depending on alternate options discussed that have not been detailed in this report.

With the existing staff and resources, the addition of all rural Community Centers would extend the cutting rotation to just under five (5) weeks, depending on vegetation growth.

If the service level was to remain the same while incorporating all of the discussed locations then additional resources would be necessary. It is the opinion of Administration that with an additional team as detailed above, the County could incorporate all of the additional locations and retain the existing service level.

For snow plowing this impact would vary greatly depending on snowfall amounts and frequency.

RECOMMENDED ENGAGEMENT:

Directive Decision (Information Sharing, One-Way Communication)

Tools: Individual Notification

Other:

ATTACHMENTS:

None

COUNCIL OPTIONS:

1. Motion to not create a program for Community Center mowing and snow plowing and to discontinue the service at the Huxley Community Center and Curling Rink in 2026 to allow for sufficient time to locate an alternative option and funding. Furthermore, to increase the Private Cemetery mowing fees to \$1000 annually in 2026 and implement formal service agreements with the four listed Cemeteries.
2. Motion to pilot services to Rural Community Centers and the four listed private cemeteries at a 50% cost recovery rate of \$101.11/hour and \$0.98/km for four (4) vegetation cuts annually and snow plowing services to Community Centers at \$75.90/hour for skid steer and \$16.38/hour for 1-ton truck incorporated into the existing road/hamlet plowing rotation.
3. Motion of an alternative option determined by Council.
4. Motion to request for additional information.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

1. That Council direct Administration to discontinue the mowing service at the Huxley Community Center and Curling Rink in 2026 in order to allow for sufficient time to locate an alternative option and funding.
2. That Council increase the Private Cemetery mowing fees to \$1000 annually in 2026 and implement formal service agreements with existing serviced cemeteries.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS:



That administration notifies the affected stakeholders and creates service agreements where necessary.

APPROVAL(S):

Mike Haugen, Chief Administrative Officer

Approved- ☒

