
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Memorandum CDP-M01-2021 Update Regarding Street-Barnes Cemetery - Canfield



For Consideration by Council in Committee on February 9, 2021

To: Mayor Hewitt and Members of Council

From: Katrina Schmitz, Manager, Community Development & Partnerships

This Memorandum is intended to provide an update regarding the Street-Barnes Cemetery in Canfield, which is historically-significant as the resting place of Black settlers who came from the United States through the Underground Railroad before settling in Canfield. The Cemetery dates back to the 1870s and, among those individuals buried there, is the niece of famed American abolitionist and political activist Harriet Tubman. The last known burial in the Cemetery was in the 1940s.

Recently, there has been much community discussion about the Cemetery and its condition, with an increasing push for the municipality to get more involved in ensuring its preservation and care. The municipality has now been approached by the current land owner in terms of accepting ownership of the cemetery.

Cemetery Details:

The Street-Barnes Cemetery is located on private property near the intersection of Hwy. #3 and County Rd. 56. Its care has, for the most part, been neglected for decades and it has fallen into significant disrepair.

Since the 1990s and up to 2009, family members of descendants, other interested community members, local heritage groups (including LACAC, now Heritage Haldimand), Haldimand County and the Province have attempted to gain access to the Cemetery on a number occasions to determine its condition, with little success.

In 2016, local historian Sylvia Weaver gave a presentation regarding the little-known history of Black settlement in Canfield, which generated great interest and later resulted in the community partnering with Haldimand County—through the Community Partnership Program (CPP)—to install a Black Settlement Marker. The installation of this memorial attracted interest throughout Ontario and into the United States, with more than 200 family members of descendants and guests attending the unveiling of the marker.

In early 2020, Graeme Bachiu of Windecker Road Films received Council support for a documentary series he is producing about the Black history of Canfield for Bell Media. The production of this series is ongoing at this time, with anticipated airing later this year.

Interest in this local history has only grown, including renewed concerns about the condition and preservation of the Street-Barnes Cemetery.

As a result, Haldimand County staff began to work with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO)—which is legislatively responsible for ensuring that cemeteries, whether on public or private property, are appropriately cared for and maintained—to better understand the municipality's responsibility for the Cemetery.

Through legal advice and consultation with the BAO, it was determined Haldimand County has a significant role to play in gaining access to and preserving the Cemetery, either through cooperation with the property owner or by acquiring the Cemetery via legislation. Under current legislation, the

County would be obligated to take on responsibility of the cemetery should the current property owner abandon it. In this case, the current property owner has now approached the County with a request to transfer the Cemetery—and all responsibility for it—to the municipality. This process also requires collaboration with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) to create an access point to the Cemetery, which is land-locked on the property.

Planned Approach & Timeline:

February is Black History Month, and it is anticipated there will be much in the media (traditional and social) about this local history. The County itself plans to post and promote an online video presentation of the history of Black settlement in Canfield.

In the case of the Street-Barnes Cemetery, the current property owner has indicated his desire to transfer the ownership and care of the Cemetery to Haldimand County. As a result, Staff have been working actively for the past six months to facilitate access to, transfer of and (eventually) repair/ongoing maintenance of the site.

Staff are proposing project funding in the 2021 Tax-Supported Capital Budget in the amount of \$100,000 to complete restoration/upkeep and access works, which will be formally introduced in early March as part of Council's deliberations. Staff believe that—with the recent work to determine the municipality's role and responsibility in caring for the Cemetery, along with a high-level assessment of its condition—there is an opportunity to get ahead of any negativity and begin to manage and promote this project based on Council's direction.

Staff are planning a two-phased approach: Phase 1 would be led by the Facilities, Parks, Cemeteries & Forestry Division and include the acquisition, access and preliminary rehabilitation of the Cemetery for safety. Phase 2 would be coordinated by Community Development & Partnerships staff and include the creation of a Community Stakeholder Committee to determine next steps for the Cemetery restoration.

Phase 1: Acquisition, Access, Preliminary Rehabilitation

Item	Timeline	Status
• Request received from property owner to transfer cemetery to County	December 2020	Completed
• Negotiation with MTO for access easement	November 2020	In Progress
• Negotiation with property owner for final easement location	Pending MTO Easement Approval	In Progress
• Complete survey of easement area and connect with existing Cemetery survey	Pending MTO Easement Approval	
• Prepare Capital and Operating Budgets for anticipated clean-up of Cemetery to safe condition	Capital Budget Allocated for 2021	Proposed
• Council Report (#1) – Recommendations associated with Cemetery acquisition and project maintenance budgets	Fall 2021	
• Transfer of Cemetery property to County		In Progress
• County staff (Cemeteries, Forestry, Roads, etc.) undertake work to make grounds safe and prepare site access	Fall 2021	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Report (#2) – Proposed municipal policy and program for abandoned cemeteries 	Winter 2022	
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Phase 2: Creation of a Community Stakeholder Committee for Restoration

Item	Timeline	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Communications Plan for all phases of this project. Opportunity to clearly identify roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholder parties, lay out the County's plans and manage expectations 	February 2021	In Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Windecker Films to provide additional details of Haldimand County's plans 	February 2021	Proposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a Community Stakeholder Committee to develop a community engagement and implementation plan for the Cemetery 	March 2021	Proposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Report (#3) – Proposed restoration plans 	TBD	