

SUMAS CEMETERY POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Purpose

The purpose of this policies and procedures manual is to ensure that Sumas Cemetery is treated with respect, properly maintained, and preserved for its historical significance. Originally established in 1891, when the Sumas Cemetery Association purchased three acres of land, the cemetery has grown under successive stewardship. In 1923, Sumas I.O.O.F. Lodge No. 85 assumed responsibility and expanded the site by an additional five acres. Ownership was later transferred to the City of Sumas in 1972, which continues to own and maintain the cemetery as it exists today. This manual supports the cemetery's ongoing role as a place of peace, beauty, and dignity for the community.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy:

- **“Cemetery Lot”** means a section of 12 standard plots, typically purchased for family interment purposes.
- **“Cemetery Plot”** means a standard 4 foot wide by 8 foot long plot.
- **“Interment”** Burying of human remains in the ground, or burying of human cremated remains in the ground.
- **“Interred”** refers to the final disposition of human remains.
- **“Next of Kin”** means the closest living relative(s)
- **“Purchaser/ designee”**: The owner, co-owner, or duly authorized representative of a cemetery plot or lot, who holds the right to interment within the plot or lot but does not own the land itself.
- **“Right of Interment”** means the exclusive right to designate who may be interred within a specific cemetery plot or lot, subject to City ordinances, cemetery policies and procedures, and applicable law. The purchase of a cemetery plot or lot conveys only the right of interment and does not transfer ownership of the land.

Sections

The Sumas Cemetery is divided into 4 plotted sections

1. South Section
2. Center Section
3. North Section
4. New North Section

Sales/ Purchase of Cemetery Plots & Services

All fees for plot purchases, interments, permanent care, headstone setting, and other cemetery services shall be established by the City's adopted fee schedule, as amended from time to time. (SMC 3.30.010)

The purchase of a cemetery plot conveys only the right of interment and does not transfer ownership of the land. The City retains ownership of all cemetery properties. A Right of Interment Form (Exhibit A) shall be completed for each interment and approved prior to the burial.

Plots will not be reserved until all applicable fees have been paid in full.

Each plot is limited to a maximum of two interments, provided that at least one interment is an urn. The interment of two caskets within a single plot is not permitted.

Permanent Care

Permanent Care includes general grounds maintenance only, such as mowing and overall upkeep of the cemetery grounds.

The purchaser or their designee is responsible for all additional maintenance of the plot including:

- Headstones
- Monuments
- Markers
- Decorations and other personal items

The planting of live plants, flowers, trees or shrubs is not permitted.

Any item placed on a plot that interferes with cemetery maintenance operations may be removed at the discretion of the City.

Decorations

- A maximum of three decorative items may be placed on each plot at any given time.
- Artificial flowers, fresh-cut flowers, and potted plants are permitted; however, they must be removed and replaced when they become faded, wilted, damaged, or otherwise unsightly.

- Glass containers, vases, ornaments, or any other glass items are not permitted on plots at any time due to safety and maintenance concerns.
- No fencing, borders, edging, or similar structures may be installed around plots or headstones, as they create mowing and maintenance hazards.
- Artificial flowers may not be placed on plots between March 1 and October 31, as they interfere with mowing and trimming operations and present a maintenance hazard.
- All decorations are subject to review and may be removed by City staff at their discretion.
- The City is not responsible for any items that are lost, stolen, or damaged.

Markers, Monuments, and Headstones

- The City crew is responsible for the installation (setting) of all monuments, markers, and headstones weighing 125 pounds or less.
- Monuments exceeding 125 pounds must be installed or removed by a qualified private contractor, approved by the City, at the expense of the purchaser or designee.
- Approved private contractors must install headstones using a pea gravel base extending a minimum of 3 inches below grade, to reduce the risk of damage due to ground movement from freezing and thawing conditions.
- All headstones and markers must be installed within the boundaries of the designated plot.
- Purchasers or designees may not install headstones themselves.
- All monuments, markers, or headstones must only be placed, installed, reset, or removed by:
 - City personnel, or
 - Approved monument dealers or contractors authorized by the City
- The City reserves the right to correct mistakes made in the placement of a monument or a grave without the consent of the family; however, a diligent attempt will be made to contact the family prior to any relocation.

Maintenance

- The care, maintenance, and repair of all monuments, markers, and headstones is the sole responsibility of the purchaser or designee.
- Replacement of damaged, cracked, or deteriorating monuments shall be at the expense of the family or plot owner.
- The City does not clean or wash monuments or headstones.

Design

Headstones may be:

- Handmade, or
- Purchased from a monument company,

Provided that installation complies with all City requirements outlined above.

Interment and grave Opening/ Closing Procedures

The City does not perform interments. All opening and closing of graves shall be carried out by a certified professional contractor, arranged by and at the expense of the purchaser or their designee.

No individual shall open or close a grave themselves under any circumstances.

Record Keeping

- All purchasers and/or designees are required to complete a Purchase Agreement prior to the purchase or reservation of any plot. (Exhibit A)
- The Purchase Agreement must be completed in full and include accurate and up-to-date information.
- A designated contact person for the deceased must be clearly identified within the agreement.
- No plot may be purchased or reserved until a completed Purchase Agreement has been submitted and approved by the City.
- Cemetery records will not be altered without reasonable and reliable proof of an error.
- In the absence of such proof, the City will rely on and default to the records currently on file.

Plot Location Marking

- Upon request, the City of Sumas will mark cemetery plot locations for the purposes of interment or monument placement.
- All requests must be made through the Clerk's Office located at Sumas City Hall.
- A minimum of 48 hours' notice is required for all marking requests.
- Plot marking services are subject to staff availability.

Next of Kin

- For purposes of cemetery records and decision making, the City may rely on the individual identified as the next of kin or designated contract in the Purchase Agreement or other official documentation.
- It is the responsibility of the purchaser or designee to ensure that next of kin and contact information is accurate and kept up to date.
- The City shall not be responsible for the actions, decisions, or representation of individuals falsely claiming to be the next of kin or authorized representative of the deceased or plot owner.

- In cases of dispute or uncertainty, the City may require supporting documentation to verify next of kin status or authorization before proceeding with any request or action.

Policy Compliance and Enforcement

- All purchasers, designees, contractors, and visitors are required to comply with all cemetery policies and procedures established by the City.
- Failure to comply with these policies may result in the denial of services, including but not limited to interment, installation of monuments, or plot marking.
- Any unauthorized installation, alteration, or disturbance of plot, monument, or cemetery grounds may be subject to removal or correction by the City at the expense of the purchaser or responsible party.
- The City reserves the right to refuse access to contractors or individuals who do not adhere to approved standards and requirements.
- Any costs incurred by the City to correct non-compliant work, damage, or violations of policy shall be billed to the purchaser, designee, or responsible party.
- Repeated or significant violations may result in additional administrative action as determined by the City.