



**TO:** Deputy Mayor Hale and CBJ Committee of the Whole  
**FROM:** George Schaaf, Parks & Recreation Director  
**THROUGH:** Katie Koester, City Manager  
**DATE:** May 2, 2024  
**RE:** Acquisition and Maintenance of Private Cemeteries in Douglas

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### **Introduction**

Former Juneau Mayor Merrill Sanford has proposed donating the Eagles' Cemetery in Douglas to the City & Borough of Juneau. In addition to the Eagles' Cemetery, Mr. Sanford asked the Lands Committee to consider acquiring seven other cemeteries in Douglas that are privately owned or whose owners are unknown (Catholic Cemetery, Russian Orthodox Cemetery, Masons Cemetery, Native Cemetery, Asian Cemetery, Servian Cemetery, and the "City" Cemetery).

This memo provides information regarding the estimated cost and legal hurdles to acquire and maintain these cemeteries. These cost estimates assume a low level of maintenance and do not include costs associated with future burials.

### **Background**

The CBJ owns the parcel containing the Odd Fellows Cemetery, and the Parks & Recreation Department clears brush on a monthly basis. After construction at Gastineau Elementary School disturbed human remains in 2012, the city manager's office directed the Department to provide weekly maintenance of the Douglas Indian Cemetery, which is owned by the Ross Estate. The other cemeteries in Douglas receive varying amounts of maintenance from volunteers.

Owner	Cemetery	Area (ft <sup>2</sup> )
Unknown	Servian Cemetery "City" Cemetery	35,393
Merrill Sanford, Trustee	Eagles Cemetery	5,230
Corp of Catholic Bishops of Juneau	Asian Cemetery Native Cemetery Catholic Cemetery Russian Orthodox Cemetery	46,928
Ross Estate	Masons Cemetery	18,885
Total		106,436 (2.44 acres)

### **Legal/Acquisition Costs**

If the CBJ wants to acquire one or all of the cemeteries, there are a variety of necessary acquisition tasks. Each cemetery would likely have a slightly different process, but the following are basic steps: negotiate with willing seller or invoke eminent domain authority, obtain title report, commission boundary survey, comply with Title 49 platting/zoning requirements, and finalize a negotiated transaction or finalize the eminent domain lawsuit. The CBJ does not necessarily have to independently complete each of those tasks, as community members have expressed a willingness to help. Regardless, the Municipal Attorney estimates that a simple acquisition could cost ~100 hours of staff time (MGR, Law, Lands, CDD, P&R) and a complicated acquisition could cost ~1000 hours of staff time in addition to title, survey, and purchase expenses. The creation of a Cemetery Acquisition CIP with \$100,000 of initial funding would allow the acquisition process to start.

### **Maintenance Costs**

Maintenance costs depend on the level of service provided. It would be very costly to restore most of these properties to a high standard, such as the Eagles' Cemetery. Most of the graves are sunken and unmarked, making it difficult to establish and maintain grass. A private contractor would need to clear brush in most of the cemeteries, as the Parks & Recreation Department does not have the staff capacity for this work.

The following estimate reflects one-time contract costs to clear the cemeteries and increased staff to provide a minimal level of maintenance. This level of service includes keeping the area clear of brush and saplings, but does not include turf or gravesite restoration and maintenance. Attachment "A" contains examples of different service levels for cemeteries in Juneau. These costs are based on the fully loaded FY25 rate for Parks & Landscape Maintenance of \$82.92/hour (this includes personnel services, materials & commodities, and equipment).

<b>Cemetery</b>	<b>Initial Clearing (Contractor)</b>	<b>Labor (FTE)</b>	<b>Labor Costs (FY25)</b>
Servian Cemetery "City" Cemetery	\$10,000	0.10 FTE	\$16,418
Eagles' Cemetery	\$0	0.07 FTE	\$11,493
Asian Cemetery Native Cemetery Catholic Cemetery Russian Orthodox Cemetery	\$5,000	0.14 FTE	\$22,985
Masons Cemetery	\$5,000	0.09 FTE	\$14,776
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>0.40 FTE</b>	<b>\$65,672</b>

Incrementally acquiring these properties without a corresponding increase in staff would steadily erode the Department's ability to maintain other parks and facilities. It is not practical to hire an employee to work 41 hours per year (0.02 FTE), for example, so an additional 0.40 FTE position is necessary to maintain these cemeteries without reducing service levels elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

Acquiring the Douglas cemeteries is a long, expensive, complicated, and staff intensive process due to ownership issues. It would be difficult to prioritize without additional resources (legal and otherwise). Staff estimates \$120,000 in initial capital cost for clearing the grave sites and legal fees. Maintaining the cemeteries has an ongoing operational cost estimated at \$65,672. If the Assembly wishes to support the preservation and beautification of Douglas cemeteries, a mechanism could be to establish a small grant program that would be available to non-profits and neighborhood groups to coordinate that work. The challenge would be finding an outside organization to administer the grant; it is not something CBJ has expertise in and requires staff resources. A direct appropriation to a qualified entity interested in maintaining the cemeteries would be the most streamlined option.

## **Options**

1. Status quo; volunteer maintenance, occasional help from Parks staff
2. Direct appropriation to an entity to coordinate maintenance (who is the big question, CBJ could issue an RFI)
3. Create a grant program for different entities to apply for funding to maintain cemeteries (structure of program to ensure equity and accountability could be time consuming; best to find an entity with experience to administer).
4. Initiate legal process to acquire ownership of cemeteries. (Minimum of \$120,000 + staff time initial investment; \$65,000 operating budget addition).

**Recommendation:** The simplest option to execute quickly is a direct appropriation. Assembly could add an appropriation to the pending list. If approved staff would issue an RFI to solicit interested organizations.