Haliburton Highlands
GREEN BURIAL SOCIETY

~ Forever Green ~

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Celebrating Progress at May 21st 2024 AGM

The 2024 HHGBS AGM, which will take place both virtually and in-person, will feature a celebration of the progress we've made toward creating the first year-round green burial section in Haliburton County.

While there's still much work to be done, it's important to take the time to reflect on how far we've come since Environment Haliburton (EH!) formed a *Green Burial Working Group* back in March of 2019.

Everyone is welcome to attend the AGM and encourage to register **HERE** whether or not they plan to attend in-person or virtually.

From Policy to Implementation

All the larger policy decisions involved in creating a year-round green burial section within the St. Stephen's Cemetery on Buckslide Road in Algonquin Highlands have now been made. Those decisions are being embodied in a draft revised *Cemetery By-law* soon to be presented to Township Council for endorsement. After that, it must be approved by the *Bereavement Authority of Ontario* (BAO), before the Township can begin selling plots within the green burial section.

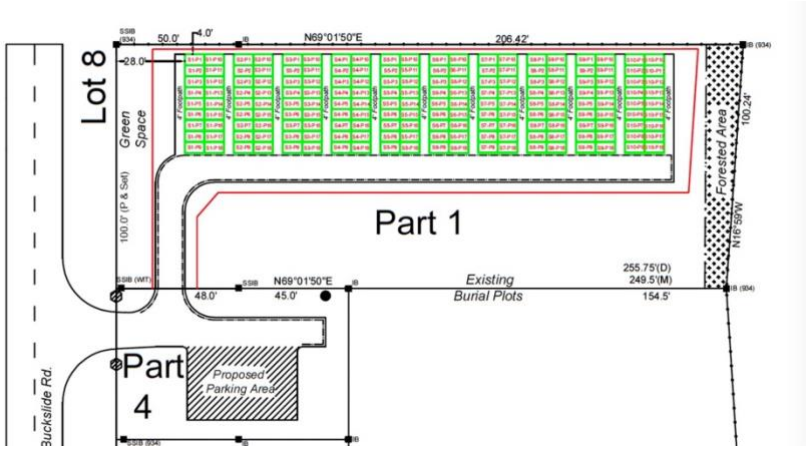
It's important to note that those key policy decisions were made after AH Council received advice from the *Joint AH/HHGBS Green Burial Advisory Committee,* which has proven to be an invaluable forum for discussing and finding common ground on the advice to be provided to Council.

Interment Rights at St. Stephen's

One of the key policy decisions AH Council needed to deal with was how *"interment rights"* would be managed within the relatively small (.3 acre) green burial section. HHGBS members were consulted on this issue at a special membership last summer. In order to maximize the amount of green and

natural space within that section, while minimizing the area required for equipment access laneways to gravesites at the same time, it was decided that the right to be buried within the green burial section will be a general right and not a right to buried in a specific pre-determined plot.

Sections within the green burial area will be opened for burials starting from the back of the green burial section – the section on the far right of the green area highlighted in green in the diagram on the right.



Specific plots will be assigned on an as-needed basis within the area being filled at the time a plot is required for a burial. This process will leave the rest of the green burial section open for planting with native vegetation or renaturalization, with no mowing allowed except to provide temporary access to gravesites during funerals or interment ceremonies.

Winter Burial

The other key policy decision AH Township Council needed to make had to do with the provision of winter burial at St. Stephen's. The HHGBS has long argued that the success of any green burial alternative to cremation hinges on making burial a year-round reality. Once again, the Joint Advisory Committee was key to arriving at consensus recommendation to Council and winter burial will be provided within the green burial section.

There will be an extra fee charged if burial is required in the winter due to the extra costs involved in providing that service. For example, clearing snow to gain access to the green burial section as well as opening a pathway to the assigned gravesite will mean extra time and work. While it has not yet been determined what the extra charge will be, the work will be contracted out to a third party and the fee will be set on a "full cost recovery basis".

It is likely, however, that the overall cost for a green burial will be less than the total cost of either a conventional burial or cremation, depending on the discretionary choices made by families regarding everything from caskets vs shrouds to the cost of hosting celebrations of life in rented facilities.

The HHGBS published a comparison of estimated final disposition costs in the Fall 2022 edition of *Forever Gree*n. Here's a summary of what we found:

Conventional Burial	**Cremation**	**Green/Natural Burial**
$4,570 - $18,245	**$2,690 - $8,990**	**$2,294 - $5,145**

A chart with the complete breakdown of relative costs can be found HERE or be requested by sending an email to the HHGBS at the following address: hhgreenburialsociety@gmail.com.

Communal Memorialization

While the principle of communal vs individual memorialization for those buried in the green burial section has been embraced for St. Stephen's, questions remain as to what this will look like in practice.

The existing AH Cemetery By-law calls for the installation of a communal stone similar to the one shown on the right from the *Willow's Rest Green Burial Section within the Fairview Cemetery in Niagara Falls.*

The names, dates of birth, and death of all those interred in the Willow's Rest green burial section are engraved on four communal memorialization stones spread throughout the site.

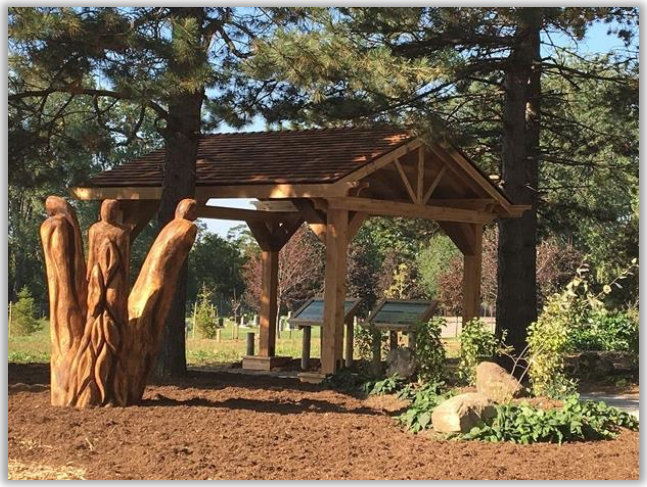
Joint AH/HHGBS Advisory Committee Shifts From Policy to Implementation

The joint AH/HHGBS Advisory Committee has been meeting monthly since it was created in January of 2023. This committee has been an invaluable forum for discussing all the details involved in turning the Township's commitment to create a Green Burial Section into a reality.

The committee is chaired by Ward 2 Councillor, Lisa Barry, with two AH Councillors (the other being Deputy Mayor, Jennifer Dailloux) among its three members. Operations Manager, Adam Thorn is the 3rd Township member. The three HHGBS reps include Terry Moore, Jennifer Rieger and Shirley Moore, the HHGBS president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer, respectively.

Now that the key policy decisions about St. Stephen's have been made, attention has turned to what the green burial section will actually look like and the amenities it will contain.

Timber-Framed Welcoming "Gazebo"



The first decision on "amenities" was to erect a timber-framed Gazebo within the green burial section modelled on the one shown in the photo on the left from Willow's Rest. This structure will provide shelter from the elements for small groups of family members attending burials of their loved ones as well as a cover for educational material on the ecological benefits of green/natural burial.

The HHGBS and AH Township are partnering with the Fleming College Timber-Framing Program which will be donating the labour involved in crafting the structural components and erecting them on site in July of this year.

AH has committed $10,000 toward the material costs of the project and the HHGBS has agreed to raise the additional $13,000 required to cover the total $23,000 budget.

From “Hardscaping” to “Plantscaping”

Joint committee attention is also being focussed on developing a “Plantscaping Plan” for the St. Stephen green burial section to become as green and ecologically inviting a place as possible.

The Master Gardeners of Haliburton County have provided some initial options for such a plan that will be discussed at the next Joint Committee meeting on May 13th.

An ambitious *plantscaping plan* for St. Stephen’s would involve significant costs that exceed what the Township is able to fund at this time. The HHGBS is developing a fundraising campaign to help fund projects that will help make St. Stephen’s into the attractive final destination of choice that we all want it to be.

The HHGBS has recently been granted Charitable Organizational Status by Revenue Canada and can now issue charitable tax receipts for donations. This will make fundraising campaigns more attractive to not only HHGBS members but also to green/natural burial supporters everywhere.

Highlands East Green Burial Update

While we’re continuing our work with Algonquin Highlands to create the County’s first year-round green burial section, the HHGBS has been trying to work with the other three Townships, as well. For example, the HHGBS made a presentation to Highlands East Township Councillors on February 13th encouraging Council to embrace a winter burial option, as well as green burial services, at its Deer Lake Cemetery.

However, in March HE reaffirmed its 2021 decision to move forward with green burial services only at Deer Lake and is in the process of amending its Cemetery By-law for submission to the Bereavement Authority of Ontario for approval. That approval is expected in early summer and green burial plots will be open for sales to the public soon after.

Actions We Can All Take Right Now

While we are pressing for year-round green burial options to be created all across Haliburton County, it's important to remember that, outside of the winter months when no burial of any kind is currently allowed, cemeteries can already accommodate a number of green burial-related requests. Embalming, for example, is **not** mandatory nor is the use of concrete vaults or non-biodegradable caskets.

So, if you or a loved one wish to be buried *as green as possible*, make that fact is made very clear to your family as well as funeral home and cemetery administrators. Putting your wishes in writing will eliminate any confusion down the road.

Green Burial in The Highlands:

Making It Happen

Since at least 70% of pre-pandemic deaths in the County resulted in cremation and the pandemic has accelerated that trend, policy makers are more inclined to support the purchase of columbaria to house cremated remains than creating green/winter burial sections. The covid-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in the proportion of cremations vs burials. So, if we're going to see movement toward more environmentally sustainable end-of-life dispositions, we're going to have to make that desire very clear to decision-makers.

By demonstrating to Councillors and senior Township staff that there is a demand for green burial sections, we can encourage them to support green/winter burial initiatives. Please keep us in the loop with regard to any conversations you have with Township Councillors or staff about green/winter burial options.

The HHGBS Is Now a Registered Charity!!!

The HHGBS began the process of applying for registered charitable status back in 2022. The process was a long and involved one and was complicated by the fact that the HHGBS is the first green burial society to seek Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) recognition as a registered charity.

Our initial application was turned down and we appealed. The CRA told us that the success of that appeal hinged on the Society providing clear evidence that the adoption of green/natural burial practices will help ... "restore, protect or preserve the environment or to lead to a reduction in pollution". We submitted a large amount of information, including academic research, to make that case and the CRA responded positively with suggested changes to the HHGBS Articles of Incorporation clarifying our educational and environmental purposes.

The HHGBS membership authorized those changes at a Special Meeting on December 7, 2023 and the CRA officially approved our charitable status in February of this year.

Becoming a registered charity opens up new fundraising possibilities for the HHGBS as we increase our efforts to raise awareness of the ecological benefits of year-round green/natural burial options across the County.

Donations Are REALLY Helpful!

The HHGBS operates largely on the basis of people volunteering their time and energy. However, there are important initiatives, like the "Welcoming Gazebo" and ecologically-sound "Plantscaping Plan" for the Stephen's Green Burial Section, that involve outside professional service expenses and significant material costs.

If you have the means and the inclination, donations can help us get to where we are going faster and can be made to the **Kyle Moore Memorial "Green Burial Initiative".**

As the HHGBS is now a Registered Charity there are three ways for you to make a tax-deductible donation:

- **Online through Canada Helps** at https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/haliburton-highlands-green-burial-society-inc/
- **Via E-transfer** to hhgreenburialsociety@gmail.com
- **Via Cheque** made out to Haliburton Highlands Green Burial Society (HHGBS) and mailed to *HHGBS, Attention Shirley Moore, Secretary, 1193 Braeloch Rd., Algonquin Highlands, Ontario K0M 1S0.*

Further information on donating can be found on the Society's website at this link:
https://www.haliburtongreenburial.ca/donations/

Your HHGBS Board Members

We currently have six (6) members on the HHGBS Board but have spaces for nine (9) - which means that we have three (3) open positions available.
If you're interested in serving as a Director, please send us an email at hhgreenburialsociety@gmail.com.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We would love to hear any comments or suggestions you would like to send our way.

We hope to see you, in-person or virtually, at the May 21st Annual General Meeting. Please make every effort to attend and bring a friend or two. Click **HERE** to register for the meeting.

Officers: Terry Moore, President, Jennifer Rieger, Vice-President, Shirley Moore, Secretary/Treasurer
Directors: Carolyn Langdon, Greg Roe, Jenn Watt

To visit the HHGBS Website click **HERE.**
To visit the HHGBS Facebook Page click **HERE.**