

Planning for Cemetery 'In-Fill'

BY NEAL BASTABLE

Increasingly, cemeteries, large and small, private or public, sectarian and non-sectarian, amply endowed or not, approach a future — a future of a cemetery at full capacity. The reality of this eventuality would seem to require an organized approach to planning for this time. Yet many cemetery advocates of “planning ahead,” are themselves too busy with their current operations to plan for this significant eventuality.

Plans for remnant area development, or “in-fill” areas, are sometimes confused with small area expansion plans but they are distinct. These remnant (or in-fill areas) are found in all cemeteries. They include small, landscaped parcels next to or between buildings, existing roads, walks and parking areas, section buffer or boundary areas, as well as environmentally challenging areas such as those with steep slopes or having difficult subsurface conditions.

Taken as a whole, these areas often represent the most significant remaining interment space in every cemetery. But developing these remnant in-fill areas could appear daunting. Often, beyond the physical challenges, the behavioral or perceptual challenges can be even more substantial. Perceptual issues such as a location compatibility with the configuration of the original cemetery layout, their relation to existing buildings, sections or other market-related consequences can be significant. So, absent an acute problem, in-fill plans are often left aside, perceived as something someone else will need to consider in the distant future.

Building Adjacencies

Often, the most significant in-fill opportunities are those next to, between or behind buildings, primarily because of their visibility and/or visitor orientation. Being prominent, near major intersections or entry way, these areas typically have mature, well-maintained landscapes, with walkways and parking. These areas, albeit often small and fragmented, can be valued for higher-end interments capitalizing on this mature infrastructure. Sometimes, the adjacent landscape is planned from the outset to



Landscaped drive for prominent building to serve as cremation/estate garden.

be integrated with a prominent building's landscape that incorporates higher-valued interments and cremations.

Roads, Parking and Walks

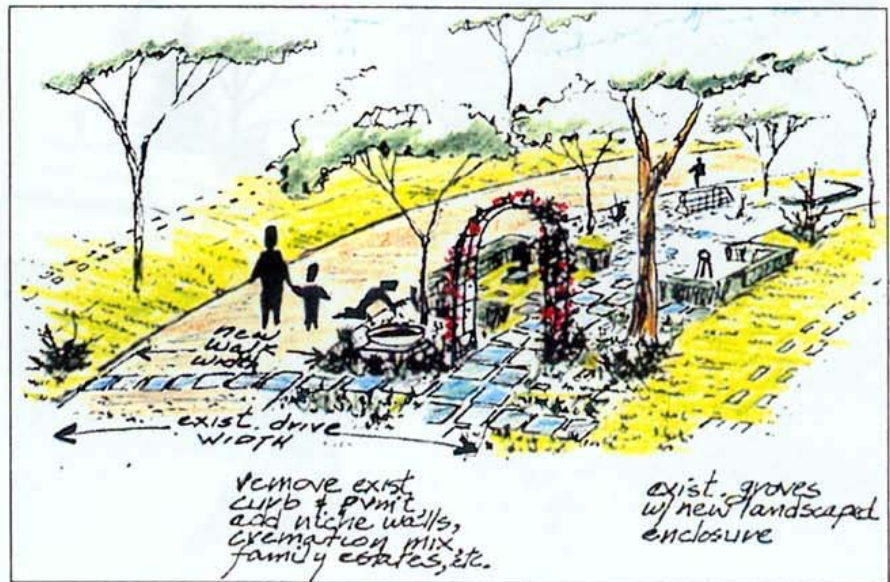
All mature cemeteries have drives, parking and walkways designed at their outset to facilitate visitation and grave access. Many drives are now over-designed for vehicular circulation needed only during their early visitation period or for the annual Easter and Mother's Day crowds. But as a cemetery significantly ages, waning visitor traffic may no longer warrant two-way drive widths of 20 to 30 feet except on the most primary roads. Similarly, walks dividing or through existing sections, though often part of a cemetery's important historic character and its cultural landscape, are little used and later, a maintenance dilemma. These existing drives and walks when removed or narrowed in phases, and when not impacting key criteria such as fire access or historic context, can provide opportunities for remnant area, in-fill development.

In-fill can accomplish more than traditional grave interments, perhaps areas appropriate for higher density niche walls, garden cremations, family estates or a mix. In some cases, even small family or garden mausoleums may be included. Designed sensitively, in terms of character, scale and aesthetics, the resulting "new" in-fill can enhance the existing, older cemetery.

Totally or partially removing a drive may provide a landscaped garden walk that divides older sections yet still respects historic circulation and responds to the increasingly infrequent access to existing grave areas. In many cases, secondary drives can be narrowed to as little as one lane (10 to 12 ft.) — designed to seem like a wider walkway. These minor drives (or landscaped walkways), can be designed to be one way or for "funerals only" circulation for the infrequent funeral cortege, when signed and controlled by management. These design solutions may require techniques such as eliminating curbs for reinforced edges, or subtly incorporating removable barriers. Low niche walls integrated with landscaping can separate and ease the transition between the newer, in-fill development and the adjacent, older section.

Section Boundary and Buffer Parcels

In most cemeteries, these areas are broad and typically lineal, often because of original layout, grade change, subsurface conditions or other technical reasons. Linear areas can sometimes provide



Remodeled older drives provide substantial in-fill opportunities.

opportunities to incorporate niche columbaria with cremation gardens, sometimes enhancing the original buffer intent.

Environmentally Challenging Areas

Areas such as those having a high water table, wetlands, drainage course or those with subsurface rock or unconsolidated fill are problem areas often regarded as unsuitable for interments. However, with creative design solutions, when combined with technical and environmental systems addressed by specialists in a specific discipline, these remnant parcels can become viable sections or interment areas.

Often this planning requires teaming management with a range of consultants including a cemetery planner advised by geotechnical or other resource-based engineers or envi-

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*Concept:
12' wide lineal area between sections. Plan niche/cremains garden.
Phase and modify as market demands.*



Lineal Cremation/Niche In-fill

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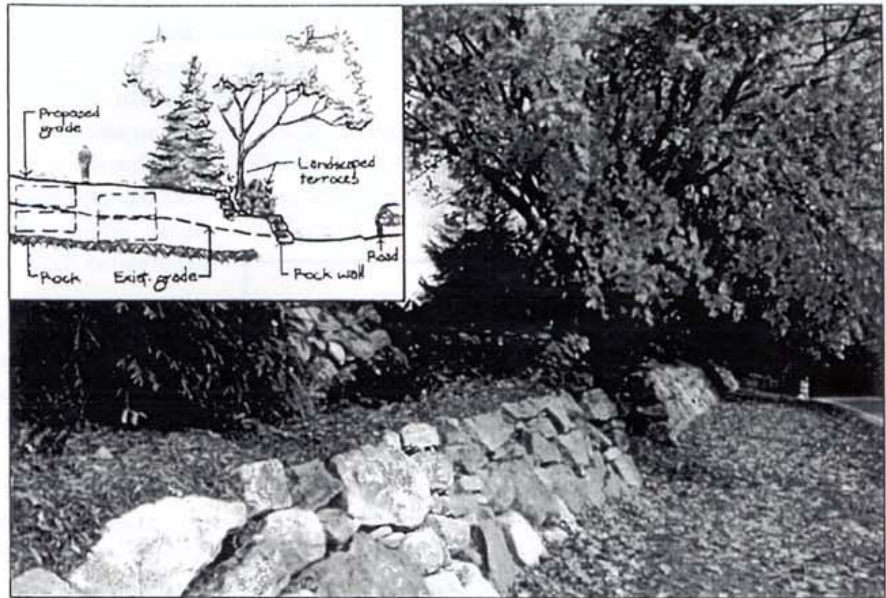
ronmental consultants.

A comprehensive team approach can quickly analyze the feasibility of a difficult, remnant area in-fill, logically incorporating cost-benefit analysis. Soils problems, such as subsurface rock, drainage areas or areas with unconsolidated or wet soils can often be resolved with proven engineering techniques. A seemingly insurmountable problem area is sometimes mitigated by incorporation of geotextile fabrics, under-drains, deep dynamic compaction and similar methods. Retaining walls and fill, to provide level grades, can utilize a "soft-scape" approach such as utilizing mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) walls, providing cost-effective techniques to develop underutilized property. These and other techniques can sometimes permit developing these areas more economically than before.

Behaviorally or perceptually challenging areas are those that are most difficult to develop due to on or off site, incompatible uses, adjacent off-site noise or simply distant access to existing drives and walks. While intense buffering and landscaping may help, sometimes these areas require such costly site and landscape improvements that they really can't be economically logical unless the highest interment densities are planned. In these cases, an affordable garden mausoleum, perhaps integrated with a higher density cremation garden may be the only solution.

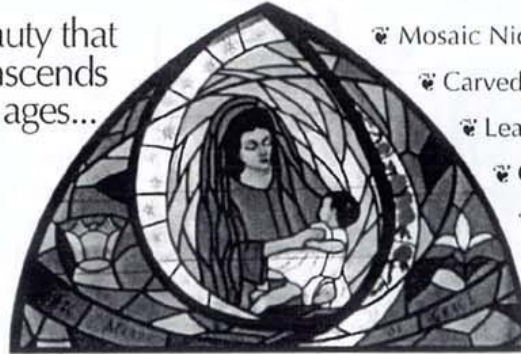
The Planning Process

So, what to do, where to begin? In-fill planning begins with thorough analysis often initiated by detailed mapping. Few cemeteries have maps sufficiently detailed to define potential interment "yield" for in-fill. Detailed mapping (by ground or aerial mapping for cemetery-wide areas) permits small, remnant parcels and underutilized drives and walks, to be documented, inventoried and analyzed in detail. Physical issues that



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impact in-fill parcels should be analyzed and evaluated, such as slopes, groundwater and soils condition, adjacent vegetation, existing monuments, site improvements and utilities. Similarly, behavioral issues impacting visitor experience, perception and use should also be considered. Often an assessment by an independent planning specialist, familiar with the industry, can provide valuable input offering creative techniques responding to both behavioral and physical issues.

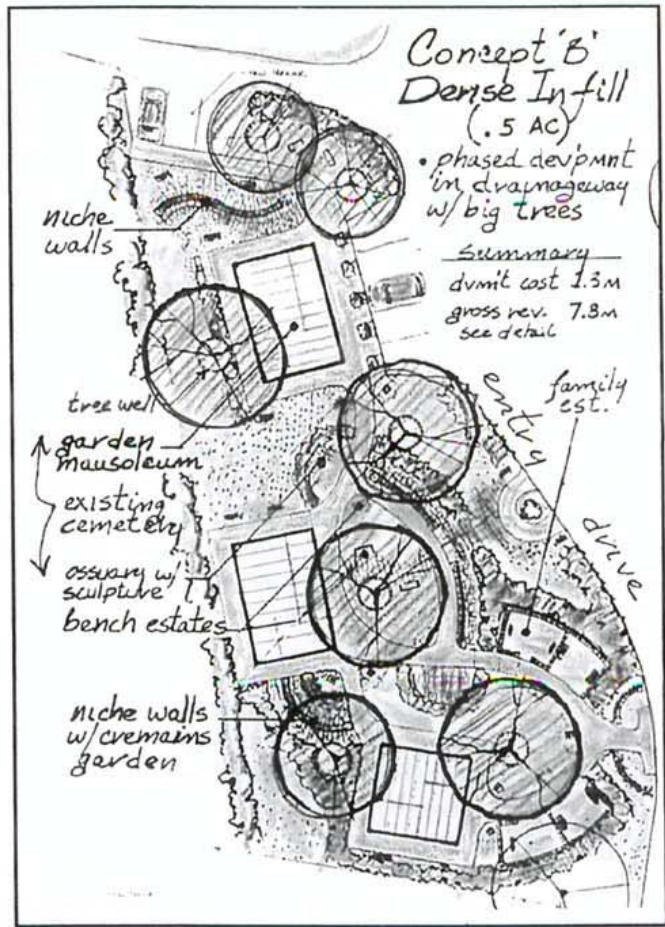
In most cases, management and consultants should first develop program goals that are responsive to some level of market analysis. Then the planning process often quickly evaluates conceptual alternatives leading to a preferred concept and the desired level of final plan.

Carefully planned and strategically located, even the smallest remnant parcel can yield a substantial number of cremation interments. Sometimes higher density or higher valued interments are the opportunity. But, whether it be a small in-fill area or a comprehensive in-fill plan for an entire cemetery, the goal for developing remnant areas should be a well thought-out plan, to be implemented over many years. An in-fill plan that can provide continued interments and revenue, while being responsive to existing families' expectations of access, aesthetics, and protection of cultural heritage, can offer long-term funds for the maintenance of

the entire cemetery — justification to extend the life and maintenance of a cemetery for years to come.

AC

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