**City eyes ‘green burial’ plots on Mountain**

**Council will be asked to change its bylaw this week to allow natural burials in a new cemetery section at Mount Hamilton**

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If Hamilton council signs off on new cemetery rules this month, you will soon be able to be buried with a beloved pet, or in a field of wildflowers — and without chemicals, coffins or concrete.

After two years of study and pandemic delay, the city is proposing to change its bylaws to allow “green” or natural burials in a section of Mount Hamilton Cemetery on Rymal Road East.

Separately, Hamilton will also look at allowing residents to be buried with a cremated pet in some areas.

A “green burial” seeks to avoid the use of eco-unfriendly embalming chemicals, lacquered caskets and concrete burial chambers, with bodies instead placed in the ground covered by a shroud or in a biodegradable container.

The city floated the idea as far back as 2018 after public feedback to a Spectator story featuring “death-care educator” Rochelle Martin’s advocacy for more eco-friendly burial options.

Resident interest in green burials has not waned. “We have a waiting list of people,” said Kara Bunn, the city’s manager of parks and cemeteries.

The city’s proposal includes an 8,400-square-metre green burial area that could be seeded with wildflowers and surrounded with trees, rather than manicured grass. Individual graves would not be marked with traditional headstones, but names could be inscribed on a central monument or sculpture.

Bunn said the city is still doing construction drawings and finalizing a budget for needed landscaping, so it’s unlikely anyone will be able to book a natural burial plot at the Mountain cemetery until next year.

The city originally estimated it needed a $100,000 cemetery budget bump for the natural burial area, but Bunn said she is hopeful design changes and “inhouse” work will help cut costs.

Regardless, she said the first step is to change Hamilton’s bylaw — and ask permission from Ontario’s cemetery and funeral regulator — to allow natural burials in specific parts of Mount Hamilton Cemetery.

Similarly, council has to sign off on a rule change to allow animal remains — typically cremated — to be buried alongside pet owners in certain sections of Mount Hamilton Cemetery.

Councillors will get a look at the proposed bylaw changes Friday.

“I think it’s super that they’re moving ahead,” said Martin, a registered nurse who pitched the idea to curious city bureaucrats in 2018, even connecting them with operators of a green burial section at Fairview Cemetery in Niagara Falls.

Increasingly, she argued ecoconscious residents are “starting to think outside the box about death” and the impact funerals, burials and pesticidetreated cemetery lawns can have on the environment.

“I hear from so many people asking about options in this area. I want to be able to say we have one coming.”

At the moment, Martin said the closest municipal cemeteries with green burial practices she would endorse are in Niagara and Waterloo. She hopes Hamilton will eventually expand green burial to other cemeteries.

Bunn said future expansion is possible, but for now the city’s focus is on Mount Hamilton.