

# Cemetery buried in financial problems

Property could be turned over to City of Burlington

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**BURLINGTON** — A cemetery where thousands of Burlington residents are laid to rest is facing financial troubles and is looking to the city for help to avoid a possible shutdown.

The Burlington Cemetery Association says its maintenance fund for 9,000 burial sites has dwindled to \$100,000 — a fraction of the \$2 million or more needed to ensure adequate care for the historic property.

The private association, which owns Burlington Cemetery, is reaching out to city officials for assistance to save the nonprofit operation from a crisis that could make the cemetery's fiscal woes a burden on local taxpayers.

State law requires municipalities to assume responsibility for cemeteries when private operators become insolvent.

Some city officials have sug-



Burlington Cemetery is a privately owned operation that is the community's only non-denominational cemetery, where families once were able to purchase a burial plot for as little as \$100.

gested imposing a special fee of perhaps thousands of dollars on families with loved ones buried in Burlington Cemetery.

While that idea is drawing immediate pushback, officials are anxious to find a solution that would allow them to avoid a government takeover of an unwanted new liability.

But the alternative could be abandonment of the cemetery,

which would cut off new sales of burial plots and leave families with minimal maintenance and care for the final resting places of their loved ones.

Alderman Sara Spencer said Burlington is fortunate to have a private association managing Burlington Cemetery.

Spencer said she has seen other cities that own cemeteries, and the operations are costly and

labor-intensive.

"Whatever we have going on here," she said, "we should probably try to keep it going."

Located at 701 Browns Lake Drive, the cemetery dates back to the 19th century, with the oldest grave dated 1839.

As the only non-denominational cemetery in Burlington, the operation covers 25 acres that extend into the Town of Burlington and offers room to grow.

Representatives of the private association appeared Tuesday before the Burlington City Council and presented a bleak financial outlook for the cemetery.

Burlington Cemetery suffered a significant setback in the 1990s when a bank executive embezzled \$185,000 from the cemetery's accounts.

The executive was convicted and ordered to make restitution, but cemetery officials said the repayments were not enough to overcome bigger financial shortfalls.

Please see **CEMETERY**, Page B3