

Cemetery

From B1

Paul Edwards, a member of the association's board, said the organization has only \$100,000 in its "perpetual care fund," which is the money used for long-term maintenance of the grounds and facilities.

Edwards said the fund should have \$2 million or more.

Although funds are set aside with each new sale of a burial plot, the plots have been underpriced, as low as \$100 each.

Edwards said state law also restricts how such funds can be invested, and a fund as minimal as \$100,000 cannot generate income fast enough to keep pace with the needs.

"That doesn't grow much," he told the City Council.

City officials have been helping the cemetery in recent years with both direct contributions and in-kind support.

City Administrator Carina Walters told aldermen the city has contributed about \$250,000 over the past eight years.

Walters, however, said the cemetery remains on shaky ground financially and that the private association could be forced to abandon the site.

She urged City Council members to support new talks aimed at helping the association continue.

"We need to be able to work together to get to some kind of solvency plan," she said. "There's a balance here that we need to figure out."

The nonprofit association is overseen by a nine-member board of directors that includes one representative each from the city and town.

Board President Bev Gill

said her group has no intention of abandoning the cemetery, but she also noted that many board members are old, and few newcomers are stepping forward to take over.

The association recently discussed selling Burlington Cemetery to another private owner, until the association's weak financial portfolio prompted the potential buyers to walk away.

Gill told aldermen that many municipalities have assumed responsibility for struggling cemeteries, including Twin Lakes, Spring Prairie, Wheatland and the Town of Randall.

"I don't know how they've done it, but somehow they've kept it going," she said.

Some aldermen questioned the cemetery's past practice of pricing its burial plots as low as \$100 each.

Alderman Tom Preusker suggested a study to set the correct prices going forward, as well as a special assessment that could be collected from families with loved ones already in the cemetery.

Noting that he personally has no family at Burlington Cemetery, Preusker said the city's taxpayers should not have to pay to rescue the cemetery.

"Maybe that sounds harsh, but that's the reality," he said.

Cemetery representatives said such a special assessment could amount to \$2,000 or more per family, and they questioned whether such a funding approach is plausible.

Alderman Bob Grandi agreed, saying he could not envision telling families that they must pay a special assessment after their loved ones have been buried.

"I can't think of anything more outrageous," Grandi said. "This has really got to be handled with respect."