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## letter to council

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From the Oakhill Cemetery pamphlet:

“The front entrance to Oakhill Cemetery offers a view of the on-site pond. The Grand River borders the eastern side of the property, creating a natural peaceful area for reflection and memories.

In addition to meeting burial needs, further development of Oakhill Cemetery encourages passive recreational and educational use of the land. The office and grounds are actively used for activities other than burials. Presently, many people walk, jog and cycle on the Oakhill Cemetery property while appreciating nature at it’s finest. In all instances, development will emphasize and maintain the dignity and respect due in all burial areas.”

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When council recites the Athenian Pledge, is it meaningless? “...we will fight for the ideals and **sacred things** of the City both alone and with many; we will revere and obey the City laws and **do our best to incite a like respect and reverence in others**, and we will strive unceasingly to quicken the public’s sense of civic duty, and thus **in all these ways transmit our City, greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.**”

Council has achieved one aspect of the pledge. They have quickened my sense of civic duty, which is why I speak out.

Putting aside the impact to the Conservation Area, expense, environmental issues, trails, Indigenous interests, and other reasons, let’s consider just the cemetery for a moment...

Is the cemetery not a **sacred thing**? You would condemn anyone that tipped over headstones in a graveyard, yet heavy construction equipment will rattle the remains that lay in the coffins. I previously lived in a home that backed onto the 403, so I speak from first-hand experience when I tell you that sometimes there would be vibration felt in the house, from trucks travelling the highway. This can hardly be “your best” when it comes to “respect and reverence” for those resting in peace, and for the families that will have these thoughts of their loved ones’ remains. I am gobsmacked that you could consider subjecting the already bereaved to such a cold cruelty. Many residents have plots picked out for themselves; are waiting to join their beloved; were **promised** a “natural peaceful area”, but now are acknowledging that their city has betrayed them, and purposefully has misrepresented the situation in selling the plots. Disclosure was made regarding “further development of Oakhill Cemetery encourages passive recreational and educational use of the land ... grounds are actively used for activities other than burials. ... many people walk, jog and cycle on the Oakhill Cemetery property while appreciating nature at \*it’s finest”

(\*note that the pamphlet should have the spelling error corrected).

Why only a partial disclosure, but knowingly and purposefully omit the bombshell of a 4-lane highway bisecting the cemetery?

Apparently, this road was discussed some 50 years ago. If that was the case, why on earth would they slot a cemetery for this location? Apparently, the city had/has a need for a cemetery. Only those in dire straits or looking for a cheap plot would choose a cemetery next to a highway. Certainly, **you** wouldn't purchase a plot for your family here, would you? We can do better for our citizens and our dead than this sickening disrespect. What about those many people that would "walk, jog and cycle on the Oakhill Cemetery property while appreciating nature at its finest"; they can kiss that goodbye can't they? A little tough to encourage passive recreational & educational use of the land, with highway traffic noise beside you or overhead. It also seems apparent that at least a portion of the tree line will be lost, which also is not acceptable since we are lacking in our percentage of green canopy.

And don't tell me that it's the responsibility of the buyer to do their own research. It is the responsibility of the Seller to fully disclose something like this. Someone reeling from the death of a spouse or child is not to be taken advantage of, by their own city, in some nefarious Bait and Switch scheme.

Also, along the same subject line, is the Gordon Graves Memorial Forest in Brant Park. Here is a similar issue. The bridge will be within sight of the forest, which means it's also within earshot of the traffic noise.

Over the years, the city has spent so much on making this city beautiful, plus the public has donated thousand & thousands of dollars out of their own pockets to have a part of the trails named in memory of loved ones. The trails should not be touched, nor should there be loud & busy traffic close to the trails – people use them as a "calming" area and exercise. "Respect and reverence" is not shown to those that have planted trees in memoriam, or invested in a section of trail, when we disregard what was put in place to honour a loved one who has passed.

I will go further and say that the die has been cast; the cemetery exists with plots already occupied; so council has necessary steps to take in moving forward.

1. Immediately, full disclosure **MUST** take place with any plots that are sold. That a highway extension is being considered, and with a reasonable expectation of when that will come to pass. Anyone purchasing plots must have full knowledge **PRIOR** to making such a permanent decision.
2. Decisions must be made to determine what the city's needs are regarding cemeteries. What is capacity, when will cemeteries be filled? Do we have an obligation to maintain the existing cemetery as a serene resting place for the deceased and the families, since that was the selling point? If Council recognizes the cemetery as a "sacred thing", which I feel you should, then take proactive steps to ensure that this Extension does not come about in the future. Not in 50 years, not in 100 or 200. Place a **moratorium** on allowing the highway to bisect or

be within ear-shot of the cemetery. Let the dead rest, and fulfill the promise that the city has in providing a peaceful resting place for its deceased, and a tranquil place for the bereaved to visit.

3. By moving forward with the Extension, Oakhill cemetery will cease to be a desirable resting place, and we diminish ourselves by failing to provide a suitable burial grounds for our citizenry.
4. Due to the misrepresentation/lack of disclosure on the sale of the plots, **IF** the highway is approved, or **IF** the decision is deferred for a number of years, the city has an obligation to notify all families that have purchased plots, and make a full disclosure **now**. Families need to be able to decide if they wish to keep their plots at Oakhill, or look elsewhere for a peaceful repose. An offer needs to be made to buy back all of the plots at a fair market value, pay fully for exhumation, transport, and re-interment at another cemetery of their choice, and cover costs for the purchase of the same number of plots for the family as they have now. A generous amount of time should be given for families to make a decision and find acceptable plots. A minimum of 5 years, AFTER a decision is made to proceed with the Oak Park Extension. But having to resort to this is NOT what should be ethically or morally happening, and is a sorry reflection of our society.

And lastly, don't you think there's 'gonna be bad press over this issue? "City cheats widows & bereaved, whilst council rattles the bones." How can we give privilege to a few hundred families in West Brant, to add an item of convenience, but in doing so, **desecrate** [treat (a sacred place or thing) with violent disrespect, violate] a cemetery?! And this is no centuries old cemetery that lays overgrown and uncared for, with loved ones long gone; but an active cemetery with the recently deceased, with bereaved families mourning the loss of their loved ones, spending time at the graveside in reflection; and long married couples with thoughts of spending their eternal rest in that peaceful spot. How have we become so jaded and cold-hearted that this option would ever come to even be considered? If you have **any** compassion for these families, then actively explore the other options at your disposal, and put this one to rest, just like our dead.

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