

Cemetery district finishing projects

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The Johnson County Cemetery District aims to wrap up ongoing project work with its fiscal 2027 budget.

The cemetery requested one mill from the county, in line with previous requests, which is expected to be valued at \$475,000, up more than \$50,000 from the current fiscal year's mill value of \$423,000.

"We have too many unfinished projects to take less than a mill," said Barb Mueller, the district's board chair, during the board's preliminary budget discussions at its May 12 meeting. "Because we don't know what happens when the sprinkler system blows up or the columbarium blows over in our wind, God forbid. I don't think it's a good year to take less, because we don't have everything wrapped up yet."

Cemetery staff are still working on installing the irrigation system, which is expected to be completed and functional by fall. In December 2023, the board voted to allocate \$270,000 to begin repairs to the cemetery's aging irrigation system, which dates back to the late 1980s or early 1990s, according to previous Bulletin reporting.

Cemetery sexton Shawn Sullivan wrote in an email that the project is

expected to be completed at or under the original budget, which could leave enough materials to begin a second phase at Willow Grove Cemetery's front entry, an area that has not had irrigation in the past.

"Installing the irrigation system with existing staff is estimated to save nearly \$1,000,000 in contract labor with an irrigation company," says the district's budget message to the Johnson County Commission.

The district also expects the columbarium, a concrete wall that will house cremated remains, in Willow Grove Cemetery to be completed and that spaces will soon be available for purchase.

Board member Liz Graves said during the May meeting that projects the district has been funding and carrying out the past few years are an investment in the cemetery's future.

"I look at them like 20-year projects, the sprinkler system and things like that," Graves said. "... We really upgraded equipment."

The board estimates that revenue derived from cemetery services and donations will total around \$58,000 in the coming fiscal year. Total income is anticipated to be \$575,000, up slightly from the \$560,000 the district brought in this fiscal year. Expenditures are expected to total \$658,931, which is up from \$592,840

spent in the current fiscal year. However, the district has \$256,000 that will carry over from the current fiscal year into the next that is expected to balance the budget.

The board plans to spend \$142,297 on capital improvement projects, including installing a new metal fence for the Kaycee Cemetery, paving the parking areas for the front and rear restrooms and the driveway and parking lot of the main office at Willow Grove Cemetery, purchasing equipment for clearing limbs, pine cones and other debris, as well as a contingency account for unforeseen circumstances.

Like other boards and departments, the cemetery district is budgeting for an increase in costs of utilities, fuel and health insurance.

The district's reserves sit at \$743,813, the same amount as this time last year. The board notes in its budget message to county commissioners that the district may draw its reserves down slightly to complete projects in progress.

"With the current climate in our state, we continue to feel our reserves are necessary to cushion against future decreases in revenues," the message reads. "That will allow for a steady, consistent operation of the cemeteries in Johnson County for the foreseeable future."