

**CITY COUNCIL  
COMMUNICATION:**

**ITEM \_\_\_\_\_**

**OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA**

**99-249**

**SYNOPSIS -**

**AGENDA:**

MAY 24, 1999

Approval of recommendation from Park and Recreation Board regarding a request from the Islamic Center of Des Moines to allow for a modification of the current burial process for Islamic burials.

**SUBJECT:**

ISLAMIC  
CENTERBURIAL  
REQUEST

**FISCAL IMPACT -**

None.

**TYPE:**

**RECOMMENDATION -**

**Approval.**

**RESOLUTION**  
ORDINANCE  
RECEIVE/FILE

**BACKGROUND -**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

DONALD M. TRIPP  
PARK AND  
RECREATION  
DIRECTOR

On January 6, 1997, the City Council approved a License Agreement with the Islamic Center of Des Moines, which designated an area of Glendale Cemetery, approximately ½ acre in size, for its exclusive use for burial of members of the Muslim faith. On January 4, 1999, the City Council approved an amendment to the City's Cemetery Ordinance which allowed persons for whom a burial vault or liner would violate their established religious custom, rule, or practice, to opt not to use such vault or liner. An Addendum to the License Agreement with the Islamic Center was approved by City Council on December 21, 1998. Among the changes in the Addendum to the Agreement were rules for placing the deceased into the burial space.

Since the last changes in the License Agreement were made, a significant population of Muslims of Eastern European ancestry moved into the Des Moines area and become members of the Islamic Center. The preferred style of burial for the Eastern

European Moslem is slightly different from that of the Moslem of African or Middle Eastern ancestry. Consequently, staff was asked to consider additional changes to the License Agreement in order to accommodate the religious burial preferences of the Eastern European Moslem. Concurrently, a slight alteration in the digging of the graves for African and Middle Eastern Moslems was suggested. The two proposals are summarized as follows:

1) The grave of the Eastern European Moslem ("Type I") should be dug no more than 96 inches long, 38 inches wide, and 60 inches deep. Friends or relatives of the deceased may place boards approximately 54 inches long, 12 inches wide, and two inches thick diagonally across the body of the deceased.

2) The grave of any other Islamic deceased ("Type II") should be dug no more than 96 inches long, 38 inches wide, and 60 inches deep. The final 24 inches of depth will be inset seven inches on each side so the width is reduced to only 24 inches. The body of the deceased will be lowered into this inner cavity and may be covered by a one-inch thick board. Because the inner cavity excavation must be prepared by hand tools, an existing labor charge will be assessed for this style of burial.

A member of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Center of Des Moines will inform the Cemetery Supervisor or his designee which style burial is preferred by relatives or friends of the deceased. Grave dimensions are standard size openings, but one foot shallower since a vault or liner is not required.

A further change in the process becomes necessary due to the required positioning of the deceased's body and boards. Where previously the License Agreement prohibited staff or representatives of the deceased from entering the grave, it is now recommended that representatives of the deceased be permitted to enter the grave for a brief period of time to position the body, place the boards, and perform any required rituals. The risk of entry is minimized by reducing the depth of the grave to five feet from the standard six feet (to accommodate the liner or vault), and requiring the presence of several relatives and/or friends with shovels. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) rules do not require any shoring or reinforcement of dirt walls that are no deeper than five feet. The City's Division of Risk Management has agreed to these conditions for this type of burial. Cemetery staff will still not be permitted to enter the graves except to

hand dig the inner cavity of the Type II space.

The Citizens Cemetery Committee met with staff on February 17, 1999, and agreed to recommend the above changes to the full Park and Recreation Board. On April 27, 1999, at its regular monthly meeting, the full Park and Recreation Board, by Resolution #99-133, approved the recommendation as presented above from the Citizens Cemetery Committee.