CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Mosher and Assembly Members

Thru: John Leach, Municipal Administrator

From: Amy Ainslie, Planning and Community Development Director
Ariadne Will, Planner I

Date: November 4, 2026

Subject: Rezoning of Sitka Cemetery Properties

Background

In 2019, the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) created a cemetery district in its zoning code. This highly restrictive district allows only uses intended to be cemetery-related and conducted with reverence and respect for those interred.

At the time of the district's creation, all cemeteries in Sitka were zoned as R-1 single-family and duplex residential district, R-2 multifamily residential district, or P public lands district. These more permissive zoning designations allow for the possibility of redeveloping cemetery properties in a manner that could disturb those interred.

Following the establishment of the C cemetery district, one cemetery was rezoned from R-2 to C; no other property owners submitted requests to the Planning Office for rezoning. In June 2025, the Planning Office contacted all known cemetery property owners with cemeteries zoned R-1, R-2, and P to ask for written support regarding the rezoning of their properties to C cemetery district. Staff also approached the Historic Preservation Commission and Sitka Tribe of Alaska to attempt to identify additional properties that could benefit from a cemetery zoning designation.

Staff received responses from five of six contacted property owners. The properties included in this rezoning are only those for which the Planning Office received support or non-objection responses from their respective property owners. CBS is also a cemetery owner; the CBS-owned cemetery property is included in this rezoning effort. Further information on the cemetery properties included in this rezoning request is provided in the "Analysis" section of this document.

The Historic Preservation Commission unanimously recommended the rezoning of these cemeteries at its October 14, 2026 meeting, and the Planning Commission

unanimously recommended the rezoning of these cemeteries at its October 21, 2026 meeting.

Analysis

The proposed zoning map amendment will impact six cemetery properties in Sitka. The address, name, property owner, and current zoning of each cemetery are listed below:

Address	Legal Description	Cemetery Name	Owner	Current Zoning
501 Lake St. and 501 Shennett St.	Unsubdivided remainder of U.S.S. 226 and U.S.S. 11423	Old City and Pioneer Cemeteries	State of Alaska	P public lands district
600 Baranof St.	Block 1, U.S.S. 2865	Moose Cemetery	City & Borough of Sitka	P public lands district
215 Marine St.	Lot 1A, Russian Orthodox Cemetery-Mathews Lot Line Adjustment	Russian Orthodox Cemetery	Orthodox Diocese of Sitka & Alaska	R-1 single-family and duplex residential district
207 Princess Way	Lot 1, Lutheran Cemetery Lot Line Adjustment	Lutheran Cemetery	Lutheran Church of Sitka	R-1 single-family and duplex residential district
803 Sawmill Creek Rd.	Lot 1, U.S.S. 1558	Sitka National Cemetery	U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs	P public lands district
805 Sawmill Creek Rd.	Lot 2, U.S.S. 1558	Sitka Memorial Park Cemetery	Sitka Cemetery Association	P public lands district

The zoning map amendment seeks to change the zoning of all six cemeteries to C cemetery district.

Spot Zoning

Sitka General Code (SGC) 22.10.380.B.1. says that *Except for the extension of existing zoning district boundaries, no change in district mapping shall be considered that would result in spot zoning or that would be inconsistent with proper and well-defined physical boundaries such as streets, major creeks, changes in topography or other physical features.*

Spot zoning has been referred to by this Planning Office as parcels zoned dissimilarly to surrounding properties. The American Planning Association cites several definitions for spot zoning from around the country; these definitions take on a similar approach but also cite a prioritization of private interests as a key component of spot zoning.

While some cemetery properties may appear to be spot zones, the intent of the zone is to protect burial grounds, a goal of public, rather than private, interest. The Planning

Commission also recognized during creation of the cemetery district that some isolated zoning of properties may occur given the various and dispersed historical burial sites present in Sitka, and given that nearby development followed, rather than preceded, cemetery uses.

Further, the cemetery properties in this request would not necessarily create spot zones; each property is immediately adjacent to at least one other cemetery property, creating three distinct areas to be rezoned, each of which is at least the size of a city block and already somewhat segregated from other adjacent uses.

Comprehensive, Strategic, and Historic Preservation Plans

The 2030 Comprehensive Plan specifically addresses the maintenance of Sitka cemeteries to promote respect for these sacred and historic spaces as well as for the purposes of heritage tourism (112, 131). Further support is provided by Action HCA 1.1.c, "Coordinate and collaborate with interested parties to compile cemetery information."

The 2022-2027 Strategic Plan prioritizes fostering relationships with underrepresented groups and populations in the community to improve engagement and representation (Goal 2.3).

Sitka cemeteries are spaces in which Sitkans of all ages, races, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds are interred. The rezoning of cemeteries to protect, specifically, the remains of Sitka's Indigenous residents has been identified by local stakeholders and tribal citizens as of particular interest. The rezoning of the identified cemetery properties is a gesture of respect towards all interred therein; it is of particular resonance when applied to those who have been, at times, historically disinterred without regard.

The rezoning of cemetery properties is also in alignment with the 2026 Historic Preservation Plan, which was adopted in April of this year and which lists the rezoning of Sitka cemetery properties as a priority within its goals and actions (Goal 2.7).

Fiscal Note

There are no costs to the municipality associated with this action.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the rezoning of the above cemetery properties to C cemetery district.

Encl: Cemetery Parcels to be Rezoned
Property Owner Letters of Support and Non-Objection
Oct. 14 Draft Historic Preservation Commission Minutes
Oct. 21 Final Planning Commission Minutes