Green Burial Council Cemetery Standards 2020

The Green Burial Council (GBC) completed a revision of the cemetery standards in December of 2019. The standards for hybrid, natural and conservation cemeteries were last revised in 2015. This revision focused primarily on clarifying and improving standards for natural and conservation burial grounds, however some of the standards even for hybrid cemeteries have been moved to a 'Best Practices' document – that is, recommendations that are generally accepted as good operating policy or procedure.

This 2020 cemetery revision:

- Creates a Grandfather clause for existing GBC-certified burial grounds
- Creates Green Burial Council Best Practices
- Distinguishes between Natural Burial and Conservation Burial Standards
- Reduces the total number of Green Burial Standards from 21 to 16

The GBC would like to thank LANDMATTERS and the Conservation Burial Alliance for assistance, guidance and recommendations in producing these comprehensive and important changes.

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A. GRANDFATHERING

Based on the density and acreage standards mentioned above, the GBC is aware that some burial grounds may not be certified at the same level under the 2020 standards.

- All existing certified burial grounds not meeting these changed standards shall be grandfathered and allowed to maintain their current GBC classification (under the 2015 or earlier version of the standards).
- All burial grounds seeking certification or recertification must comply with the 2020 classification standards and should follow the recommended best management practices.

Should a cemetery seek to alter its certification category status (e.g., move from hybrid to natural), the most recent version of standards shall be applied and grandfathering will not apply. Should a cemetery certification lapse, its recertification shall utilize the standards relevant at the time of new application.

Recertification will adopt more rigorous standards, thus if a cemetery has not completed the required documentation (e.g. an environmental or sensitive area assessment), these documents must be completed before recertification can be awarded.

B. BEST PRACTICES

The 2020 version of the cemetery standards has altered the number and order of the standards; removing five standards and categorizing them as Cemetery Best Practices.

Cemetery Best Practices apply high-quality operating principles to all types of burial grounds. They are conditions by which all of the GBC certified cemeteries should operate.

Cemetery Best Practices may be modified by the GBC from time to time, impacting the cemetery operation practices of all GBC-certified burial grounds.

Green Burial Council

Cemetery Best Practices

Adopted December 18. 2019

	Best Practices
1.	Obtain GBC certification for any funeral home that operates on the premises.
2.	Compile a list of native plants based on the ecological assessment to use as memorial features and to enhance plant diversity on the site.
3.	Develop a plan for protecting or salvaging rare plants identified in the *Ecological Impact Assessment*.
4.	Minimize the use of chemical controls, such as pesticides and herbicides for property management
5.	Include a plan for dealing with unauthorized grave decoration and landscaping in the cemetery's *Maintenance and Operations Manual*.

C. CEMETERY STANDARDS IMPLEMENTED IN 2020

Green Burial Council

Cemetery Certification Standards

Revised and adopted December18, 2019

	Standard	Hybrid Cemetery	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
1.	Accurately represent earned level of GBC certification in marketing materials, websites, and conversations with the public, clients, and the media.	✔	✔	✔
2.	Provide clients and families with the opportunity to participate in the burial and ritual process, in keeping with state law and with these standards.	✔	✔	✔
3.	Accept for burial only decedents that have not been embalmed or those embalmed only with GBC-approved, nontoxic chemicals.	✔	✔	✔
4.	Prohibit the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner in the burial plot.	✔	✔	✔
5.	All burial containers, shrouds, and other associated products made only of natural, biodegradable materials.	✔	✔	✔
6.	Develop a *Maintenance and Operations Manual* to be utilized by all staff members, contractors, and volunteers to implement site goals, policies, and best practices.	✔	✔	✔
7.	Establish an endowment fund to ensure the long-term maintenance of the site by setting aside at least 10% of all burial plot sales.	✔	✔	✔
8.	Conduct an *Ecological Impact Assessment*, starting with a property baseline document that includes existing ecological conditions and sensitive area analysis. Update periodically to assess future property/habitat conditions and plant inventory.		✔	✔
9.	Restrict access and burial operations within sensitive areas as identified in the *Ecological Impact Assessment*.		✔	✔
10.	Use operational and burial practices that have no long-term degradation of soil health, plant diversity, water quality, and ecological habitat.		✔	✔
11.	Limit the type and size of memorial markers so that they do not impair the ecological conditions and aesthetic of the natural cemetery landscape.		✔	✔
12.	Site conditions as identified in the *Ecological Impact Assessment* and sensitive areas analysis, will restrict burial density on the property; therefore, Natural and Conservation burial grounds will have limits to		✔	✔

	allowable burial density. For Natural Burial, the cemetery's average density shall not exceed 500 burials/acre. For Conservation Burial, average density shall not exceed 300 burials/acre. Burial density of sensitive areas may be transferred to less restricted areas on the property to maximum densities of Natural Burial - 600/acre, Conservation Burial - 400/acre.			
13.	Establish and apply strategies that conserve, preserve, enhance, or restore the historic native or natural habitat and flora of the region.			✔
14.	Conserve or restore a minimum of 20 acres, or 5 acres if contiguous to other protected land.*			✔
15.	Operate in conjunction with a government agency or a nonprofit conservation organization that has legally binding responsibility for perpetual monitoring and enforcement of the easement.			✔
16.	Guarantee preservation of the burial ground by deed restriction, conservation easement or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement that runs with the land and is enforceable in perpetuity.			✔

**All existing certified burial grounds not meeting these changed standards shall be grandfathered and allowed to maintain their current GBC classification.*

D. MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES – Acreage and Burial Density

Natural and Conservation Burial grounds will be the most affected by the revised standards. The 2020 revision includes two significant changes to both acreage and burial density.

Acreage

As a conservation burial ground operates hand-in-hand with a bona fide conservation organization, which generally has overarching rationale and criteria necessary for the placement of a conservation easement, the GBC increased the acreage minimum from 10 to **20 acres for a conservation burial.** Although context dependent, larger properties generally have a greater chance for conservation success, as neighboring properties are more intensively utilized. There is no acreage requirement or change for a natural burial ground.

Burial Density

After twenty years of green burial in U.S., the absence of a burial density standard weakened the GBC's definition of natural and conservation cemeteries. By definition, natural and conservation cemeteries are developed with regard to their environmental and ecological values, providing an aesthetic distinct from conventional cemeteries. Natural and conservation cemeteries are ecologically sensitive sites that are impacted by disproportionate burial densities. Therefore, restricting burial density must be a prerequisite to certification.

Restrictions for burial density:

1) substantiate GBC's definition of natural and conservation burial;

2) protect the ecological conditions as identified in the Ecological Impact Assessment;

3) distinguish between hybrid, natural and conservation cemetery classification; and

4) eliminate the potential conflict between an applicant's interpretation and GBC's classification system by placing a limit on the cemetery's capacity.

Site conditions as identified in the Ecological Impact Assessment and sensitive areas analysis, will restrict burial density on the property; therefore, Natural and Conservation burial grounds will have limits to allowable burial density.

For **Natural** Burial, the cemetery's average density shall not exceed **500 burials/acre**. In areas where burial may not occur based on the Ecological Impact Assessment or sensitive area analysis, burial density may be transferred to a less restricted area. Density in those less restricted, allowable burial areas may not exceed **600 burials/acre**.

For **Conservation** Burial, average density shall not exceed **300 burials/acre**. Density in the allowable burial areas in a conservation burial ground may not exceed **400 burials/area**.