

# Staff Report



Infrastructure Services Department

[www.kitchener.ca](http://www.kitchener.ca)

**REPORT TO:** Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** May 12, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Jeff Silcox-Childs, Director, Parks & Cemeteries, 519-783-8877

**PREPARED BY:** Mark Parris, Manager, Parks and Open Space Design and Development 519-783-8872  
Cara Lozano, Associate Landscape Architect, 519-588-7908

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** March 19, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** INS-2025-132

**SUBJECT:** Park Tree and Bench Dedication Program

---

## RECOMMENDATION:

That the revised Park Tree and Bench Dedication Program be approved as outlined in report INS-2025-132.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the tree and bench dedication program assessment and present council with a modified dedication program informed by these findings.
- The key finding of this report is that the previous programs were found to have several shortcomings including inefficiencies in the administrative process, unsustainable pricing of memorial items, lack of equitable dedication options, and lack of strategic location criteria and placement of features.
- **A newly introduced bench dedication program is intended to be cost neutral** and is proposed to consist of 10-year plaque recognition periods on pre-existing benches, 20-year plaque recognition periods with the donation of new benches, and a flexible memorial forest program at a range of price points. In both programs, the City of Kitchener will retain ownership of the bench and trees.
- The financial implications associated with the revised dedication program are tied to the additional administrative functions required to oversee it. Administrative support will be provided by an existing Operations Technologist approved through the 2025 budget. The program itself is intended to be self funded without the need of additional capital budget.

- Engagement included efforts conducted as part of the parks master plan “Places & Spaces” engagement and included community and Council feedback via a survey and internal staff engagement on lessons learned from the previous program.

This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.**

## **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Kitchener operated an informal park bench and tree dedication program which was put on hold in 2020 due to resource constraints and priorities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic response. The program allowed residents to dedicate trees, benches and other amenities throughout the city’s parks, trails and open spaces.

The program consisted of residents reaching out to pursue dedication features through either phone or e-mail. The placement of dedication features was largely selected by the participating resident, owned by the participant, and then maintained and replaced by the City in perpetuity. The program was not resourced appropriately and resulted in inefficiencies and unanticipated operational impacts.

On October 16<sup>th</sup> of 2023, City Council approved a motion for staff to review the tree and bench dedication program and develop a new program. The motion directed staff to review the following considerations:

- Current program strengths and weaknesses.
- Administrative efficiencies.
- Best practices and lessons learned from other municipalities.
- Resourcing, costs and costs recoveries.
- Technology solutions to streamline process (online forms or portals).

In May 2024, work on the dedication program update was rescheduled to align with the Sponsorship policy update. Following the confirmation of the Sponsorship policy update scope of work in February 2025, Staff advanced the proposed tree and bench dedication program to bring back to Council for approval alongside the consideration of the Parks Master Plan (Places) approval.

## **REPORT:**

The following is an overview of the findings of the review and recommended changes from the informal program to the new programs for both bench and tree dedications. The full review report is found in Attachment ‘A’

### **Existing Program**

Through public consultation, internal interviews and feedback from Council, the existing informal program was found to have critical shortcomings:

- Inefficiencies in the administrative process
- Unsustainable pricing of memorial items

- Lack of equitable dedication options
- Lack of strategic location criteria specifically for benches
- Inefficiencies of participant-owned single tree dedications leading to unsustainable replacement rates

The recommendations proposed within this report respond to the October 2023 council motion, address the inefficiencies and challenges that surfaced during the assessment, and provide improved customer service through variable pricing and technological and access improvements.

## Bench Dedication Program

The proposed bench dedication program aims to re-align the expectations of bench ownership in public parks and allow for bench locations to be selected in pre-identified parks, trails or open space locations. There are also critical improvements to the application and payment processes and offering more affordable bench dedication options. These key changes are necessary to streamline operations, standardize offerings, and operate more equitably and sustainably as a true cost-neutral program.

The revised bench dedication program will offer both the option for plaque leasing on existing benches, and the possibility to pay for the installation of a new bench in pre-identified areas.

The table below compares the previous informal program and the new recommended program:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Former Program</b>	<b>Recommended Program</b>
<b>Locations</b>	Anywhere; requested by participant	Pre-determined existing benches  Pre-determined locations for new dedication bench installation
<b>Lifecycle</b>	In perpetuity	10-year plaque recognition period on existing benches 20-year plaque recognition period with the donation of a new bench
<b>Asset Ownership</b>	Plaque – Program participant Bench – Program participant	Plaque – Program participant Bench – City of Kitchener
<b>Costs</b>	Standard Bench and Plaque - \$1500 (2015 cost) This included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wood bench</li> <li>• Concrete pad</li> <li>• Recognition plaque</li> </ul>	A dedication plaque on existing bench: \$600 This covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of plaque (including shipping)</li> <li>• Cost of labour</li> </ul>

<b>Category</b>	<b>Former Program</b>	<b>Recommended Program</b>
	Premium Bench and Plaque - \$2700 (2015 cost) This included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premium bench</li> <li>• concrete pad</li> <li>• recognition plaque</li> </ul>	New memorial bench and concrete pad: \$6500 This covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of park bench</li> <li>• Cost of concrete pad</li> <li>• Cost of memorial plaque</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	Program participant reaching out to supervisor of parks infrastructure  Supervisor of parks infrastructure conducting intake, payment, consultation with participant, and feature installation coordination	Online map of available locations for both existing benches and potential bench installation.  Online portal for application intake and payment  COK staff to accept applications, coordinate installation, handle correspondence with participant  Mapping portal to be maintained and updated by staff
<b>Staff Responsible</b>	Supervisor of Parks Infrastructure	Park Operations Technologist

### Tree Dedication Program - Memorial Forests

The implementation of a memorial forest program is intended to provide a unique and environmentally focused way for residents to honour loved ones or events while reducing cost barriers. The program will strategically align with the urban forest tree canopy targets. The memorial forest program will offer dedication opportunities at a range of price points, where donations towards the program contribute to our urban forest growth and stewardship. Rather than plaques, donors will be recognized through a public online database.

Single tree dedications with plaques are available through Kitchener Cemeteries tribute program which includes several memorial options including memorial benches and trees.

The table below compares to the previous park tree dedication program and the new recommended program:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Former Program</b>	<b>Recommended Program</b>
<b>Locations</b>	Anywhere; requested by participant	Memorial forest; location to align with Urban Forestry Strategy

<b>Category</b>	<b>Former Program</b>	<b>Recommended Program</b>
<b>Lifecycle</b>	In perpetuity	In perpetuity
<b>Asset Ownership</b>	Program participant	City of Kitchener
<b>Costs</b>	\$850 (2015 cost)	Donation minimum of \$50
<b>Process</b>	<p>Program participant reaching out to supervisor of parks infrastructure</p> <p>Supervisor of parks infrastructure conducting intake, payment, consultation with participant, and feature installation coordination</p>	Online portal to provide program information, receive donations, and recognize donors
<b>Staff Responsible</b>	Supervisor of Parks Infrastructure	Park Operations Technologist

The revised bench and tree dedication programs will provide opportunity to rebrand the programs to include both dedications and celebrations within the City's parks and open spaces. Memorial programs continue to be offered through Kitchener Cemeteries.

#### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.**

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – Additional administrative functions are part of the new Operations Technologist position approved through the 2025 budget.

It is anticipated that following the initial program implementation requiring approximately 20% capacity of the position that the ongoing administration would account for approximately 10-15% of time allocation.

The tree and bench dedication programs are intended to be self-funded with no additional capital budget required.

#### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

**INFORM** – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

**CONSULT** – Engagement contributing towards the assessment of the tree and bench dedication program occurred internally and with the broader community through the City of Kitchener’s parks master plan, and through consultations with relevant internal stakeholders and council members. For an in-depth summary of this engagement, please refer to Appendix A.

Community members provided insight about dedication type, dedication location, lifespan of a dedication feature, costing, and more. Many themes emerged regarding making a dedication program that is fair, equitable, inclusive, and accessible to everyone, including community, anti-capitalism, cost-sharing options, and naming suggestions for parks.

Internal engagement for tree and bench dedication consisted of internal stakeholder meetings through Places and Spaces, and through separate additional meetings with representative’s from Parks Operations, Forestry, Equity Anti-Racism and Reconciliation (EARR) and Technology Innovation Services (TIS).

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

There are no previous reports/authorities related to this matter

**APPROVED BY:** Denise McGoldrick, General Manager of Infrastructure Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – City of Kitchener Dedication Program; Program Analysis and Recommendations