



FEBRUARY 1, 2025

# CITY OF KITCHENER DEDICATION PROGRAM.DOCX

PROGRAM ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT  
PARKS AND CEMETERIES

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## 2 NOTICE OF MOTION - P. SINGH - PARK DEDICATION PROGRAM REVIEW

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**WHEREAS**, the City of Kitchener has a long-standing informal park dedication program that allows citizens, organizations, and businesses to dedicate trees, benches, and other amenities throughout our city's parks, trails, and public spaces;

**WHEREAS**, the current dedication process may involve unnecessary complexities, leading to delays and inefficient management of resources;

**WHEREAS**, the Places and Spaces strategy development underway includes a review of the dedication program and community engagement has demonstrated support for a formalized dedication program;

**WHEREAS**, the review of the dedication program will ensure that the dedication process is streamlined, transparent, and accessible, maximizing citizen participation and satisfaction;

**WHEREAS**, the dedication of trees, benches, and other objects under this program holds significant value for commemorating loved ones, celebrating accomplishments, and fostering community engagement;

**WHEREAS**, it is essential for the City of Kitchener to maintain an efficient and effective dedication program that aligns with our commitment to sustainability, inclusive community development, the City's strategic initiatives and goals, and responsible resource management;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that staff be directed to conduct a thorough review of the dedication program, with a key focus on the dedication process for trees, benches, and other commemorative donations;

***FURTHERMORE, this review shall include, but not be limited to, the following aspects:***

- 1. Evaluation of the current dedication program's strengths and weaknesses, including feedback from Council , citizens, program participants , and relevant community stakeholders;*
- 2. Analysis of the administrative procedures involved in the dedication process, aiming to identify potential bottlenecks and areas for improvement;*
- 3. Examination of best practices and lessons learned from other municipalities with successful dedication programs for similar amenities;*
- 4. Assessment of resource allocation and cost recovery mechanisms related to dedications, ensuring sustainability and equitable access for all community members;*
- 5. Exploration and recommendation of technological solutions, such as online platforms or mobile applications, that could streamline the dedication process while ensuring transparency and accountability;*

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the staff shall present their findings and recommendations to City Council in spring of 2024, along with an implementation plan for any proposed changes to the dedication program.

***Approved unanimously on October 16th, 2023***

### 3 INTRODUCTION

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Until the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020, the City of Kitchener operated a long-standing yet informal park bench and tree dedication program. It allowed residents to dedicate new trees, benches, and other amenities in parks and open spaces to specific individuals. The informal program was put on hold in 2020 due to resource constraints and priorities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic response.

On October 16th of 2023, City Council unanimously approved a motion for staff to review the tree and bench dedication program and develop a new program. In response to the October 2023 motion, park staff conducted an evaluation of the previous dedication programs strengths and weaknesses by:

- Analyzing the associated administrative procedures
- Examining best practices from surrounding municipalities
- Assessing resource allocation for sustainability and equity, and
- Exploring technological solutions to easier facilitate a revised dedication program

This process identified key shortcomings of the previous program. Those include:

- Inefficiencies in the administrative process
- Unsustainable pricing of memorial items
- Lack of equitable dedication options
- Lack of strategic location criteria specifically for benches, to align with strategic and operational considerations for dedication features

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Parks Staff provided a brief memo and 5-minute presentation of the findings and recommended options to address Council's motion. CLT discussed the pros and cons of:

- 1) revising the bench dedication program with key changes,
- 2) implementing a memorial forest and
- 3) supporting existing cemeteries programs.

The session concluded with direction that the new dedication program be further developed and then brought forward from options 1 and 2: a revised bench dedication program with key changes, and a memorial forest. Work on the dedication policy update was rescheduled to align with previous CLT and Council goals to in coordination with the Sponsorship policy update.

Following the confirmation of the Sponsorship policy update scope of work in February 2025, Staff advanced the proposed formal program to bring back to Council for approval alongside the consideration of the Parks Master Plan (Places) approval.

Through this process, the recommendations for the dedication policy moving forward are:

- A revised bench dedication program that honors the city's tradition of allowing citizens to commemorate loved ones in public spaces while addressing identified shortcomings.

- The implementation of a memorial forest program that aims provide a unique and environmentally forward way for residents to honour loved ones while reducing cost barriers and aligning with the Urban Forestry Strategy's tree canopy targets.

Making strategic improvements to the bench dedication program paired with implementing a memorial forest both maintains the historic dedication program in a more functionally sustainable way and adds a new, innovative, and environmentally friendly dedication option.

The following report includes an analysis that follows the format of the councils' directives, and recommendations informed by the information gathered.

## 4 ANALYSIS

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### 4.1 EVALUATION OF CURRENT DEDICATION PROGRAM'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

*Evaluation of the current dedication program's strengths and weaknesses, including feedback from Council, citizens, program participants, and relevant community stakeholders.*

#### 4.1.1 Community Engagement

As part of Places and Spaces- the City of Kitchener's parks strategy, engagement was conducted with both the community and with internal stakeholders.

The summary of community engagement from places and spaces is as follows:

- **What:** Nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) liked the idea of both single and collective dedications, while nearly one third (30%) did not want to see dedications at all.
- **Where:** Just over half of respondents agreed that dedications should be allowed in legacy parks (57%), city parks (57%), community parks (57%) and neighbourhood parks (50%).
- **When:** Nearly half of respondents (47%) think a dedication should not last forever, with 36% thinking the dedication should last the lifespan of the item and 11% thinking the dedication should last for a fixed term.
- **How:** When asked if dedicated benches/tables would discourage their use, most respondents (64%) answered "never", and one quarter (24%) answered "sometimes".
- **Who Pays:** 48% of respondents believe the resident requesting the dedication should pay the full cost, while 26% believe the cost should be shared between the resident and the city. Most respondents (54%) were not willing to pay anything for dedications, and 29% of respondents were agreeable to paying \$1,000. Among those willing to pay any amount of money, respondents expected the fee to cover materials (87%), installation (78%), maintenance (57%) and replacement at the end of the lifespan (17%). Respondents who support cost sharing to pay for dedications referred to equity as a reason to cost share, and suggested creative solutions such as a lottery system to determine who gets the next dedication space, income-adjusted payment options, and a grant system to support dedications.
- **Sponsorships:** Respondents were most agreeable to sponsorship in exchange for naming park buildings and park amenities (59% somewhat to agreed in both cases). Respondents were least agreeable to sponsorships in exchange for naming parks (54% somewhat to disagreed). In terms of naming parks, many respondents suggested reflecting Indigenous land in park names or asking Indigenous people what name to give to the land. Some respondents suggested naming parks after the associated street or neighbourhood. In terms of naming park spaces, many respondents suggested naming parks after the natural features unique to the park itself. Examples provided include birds, plants, trees, geographical features, and bodies of water.

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. These themes are expanded on below.

- ***Inclusion & Belonging:*** Respondents reflected a desire for park spaces to build community and reflect the community itself with a caution to avoid naming spaces after individuals with potentially prejudiced histories.
- ***Equity & Equality:*** While some respondents recognized that sponsorships and dedications are a reasonable fundraising method, many mentioned the connection to dedications and sponsorships as a method of negatively perpetuating capitalism.
- ***Sustainability:*** As a sustainable alternative to built dedications, respondents suggested planting trees as dedications.
- ***Education & Information:*** One respondent suggested offering dedication information to funeral homes, especially those that commonly service historically marginalized communities.

#### 4.1.2 Internal Engagement

##### 4.1.2.1 *Places and Spaces*

The internal stakeholder meeting as part of places and spaces addressed a multitude of concerns and insights. As a summary:

- Information about the current/ previous dedication program was confirmed; it was administered by one Parks Supervisor and offered a range of memorial items, the values assigned to the items did not reflect their actual costs, and previous contracts allowed donors to have memorial items in perpetuity.
- Moving forward, we heard from internal stakeholders a need for a reassessment on pricing (closer to \$5500 for a bench and concrete pad), a pre-set list of eligible dedication spots strategically located based on park amenity needs/gaps, and a “leasing” system to remove the option of permanent dedications.
- Stakeholders also voiced a need for better-defined nomenclature; “memorial”, “Dedication (not in perpetuity)”, “Donor Recognition”, sponsorship of an asset, etc. Furthermore, the distinction between memorialization and dedication; (Memorialization: cemeteries, site specific) (dedication – can be celebratory) & Corporate Sponsorship.
- Based on experiences in other municipalities, staff also discussed lease agreements and the lease of plaques only.
- Final thoughts from this engagement include a need for yearly assessment of the program, and exploration about what do with current permanent dedications.
- The most important considerations identified through internal engagement included:
  - Staffing and resources to implement
  - Well defined program
  - Equity
  - Not a resource intensive program
  - Donate instead of purchasing
  - Properly funded (more money or resources)
  - Resources
  - Are we moving forward with donor recognition, donate vs. purchase,



- Non-object options

#### **4.1.2.2 Internal Feedback**

Internal discussions regarding the current dedication program and considerations for future programs have highlighted several key themes. These were costing, location, design and alternatives, lifecycle, best practice, and administration and staffing.

##### **Costing**

There is a consensus that programs should be self-funded, encompassing the cost of the bench, replacements, and staff time. Suggestions include allocating a percentage of the cost to a maintenance fund and offering different pricing options to ensure accessibility and effectiveness. Equity considerations have also been emphasized, with proposals for holding back a portion of funds for distribution to equity-deserving groups or providing cheaper alternatives for those unable to afford higher-priced options.

##### **Location**

Regarding location availability parameters, suggestions include limiting the number of benches in specific areas, creating a list of parks needing more benches, and building an inventory of available spots to strategically place dedications.

##### **Design and Alternatives**

There is a desire to explore alternative dedication methods such as naturalization gardens or dedication forests. Concerns have also been raised about the theft of bronze plaques, and plaque alternatives as a response to the issue. The idea of QR code-based e-memorial pages has been proposed as a modern alternative to explore.

##### **Lifecycle**

Maintenance and lifecycle considerations have also been prominent. It has been suggested to establish clear maintenance protocols regarding the longevity and upkeep of dedication pieces, specifically pertaining to fixed dedication terms, and replacement guidelines for stolen or damaged assets.

##### **Best Practice**

Best practices from other programs, such as Waterloo's previous program, have been cited for reference, emphasizing the importance of learning from successful models.

##### **Administration and staffing**

Staff capacity and administrative challenges have also been acknowledged, with recommendations for dedicated resources or staff to oversee the program.

##### **Other**

Finally, there has been a call to differentiate between dedication programs in parks and cemeteries to ensure clarity in program identity and implementation.

#### **4.1.3 Feedback from Council**

On April 30<sup>th</sup> of 2024, members of council were emailed a survey that sought their feedback on their vision for a dedication program (**Appendix 3**).

From their responses, there remains a demand for a dedication program despite one not currently being active. From resident feedback, councillors relay a want for the program to be more accessible, and with

more options for placing trees and benches. Going further, councillors expressed the belief that accessibility, plaque options by trees, and ability for participants to select locations special for them should be prioritized. When asked about other municipal programs that they would like us to look towards, one councillor suggested we look towards Kincardine's dedication program, and the dedications along Elmira's Covered Bridge. Lastly, of the five elements being considered as part of the updated dedication program, councillors were asked to identify those that aligned with their vision for the program. The items most important from the feedback received are:

- Ease of application (ex. online application and payment options)
- Provide accessible tree and bench dedication options across all income levels.
- Provide communal memorial forest option with City annual event for family members (Equitable -- open to all regardless of ability to pay).

## 4.2 ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

### ***Analysis of the administrative procedures involved in the dedication process, aiming to identify potential bottlenecks and areas for improvement.***

As part of analyzing the administrative procedures of the previous dedication program, an interview was conducted with the city's operations supervisor. The following questions were asked:

1. *Please explain the existing procedure for securing a memorial item, and what type of memorial items have been installed.*
2. *For the existing memorial items, how was pricing for the items determined at time of purchase and what is included in purchase?*
3. *Approximately how much does the memorial item cost the municipality (including install, purchase, and maintenance) over the span of its life?*
4. *In your opinion, what were the largest challenges and bottlenecks with this set up?*
5. *Moving forward, what suggestions do you have for improving the dedication program?*

### 4.2.1 Memorial Options and Dedication Requests

If pursuing the purchase of a memorial item from the previous program, a dedication request (appendix 1) form was provided to be filled out. In it, a selection of 4 memorial features; Rock and Tree, Premium Bench and Plaque, Standard Bench and Plaque, and Table with Pad and Plaque. The dedication request form indicates an availability of pre-determined locations to choose from approved by City of Kitchener Landscape Architects. Through discussion, this was determined to not be the practice. Site selection primarily consisted of site visits between the interested party and a member of Parks Operations staff.

### 4.2.2 Price Breakdown and Inclusion

The dedication request form prices the previous dedication pieces at the following prices:

Rock and Tree - \$850

Premium Bench and Plaque - \$2700

Standard Bench and Plaque - \$1,500

Table with Pad and Plaque - \$1,800

Importantly, these prices from 2015 no longer accurately represent the cost of their respective items and new calculations must be done according to the current market. Furthermore, pieces obtained during the previous dedication program were maintained in perpetuity and not for fixed terms. For the cost of the item, residents could establish a dedication piece in a park that was permanently maintained and replaced by the city.

#### 4.2.3 Lifecycle and Maintenance Costs

Due to the perpetual nature of the previously purchased memorial items, determining an exact number for the cost of an item during its lifespan is not realistic. Benches purchased through this program were still considered city benches and were thusly maintained at the same frequency; maintenance and replacements being conducted annually. Separately from annual maintenance, making replacements due to vandalism occurred as needed.

#### 4.2.4 Challenges and Bottlenecks

It was expressed that the previous system of allowing donors to select their spots was not realistic and instead provided additional work and conflict. Furthermore, allowing them to pick their own spots meant areas highly saturated with benches (e.g.: around the lake at Victoria Park). The program itself was incredibly onerous and required admin from the beginning to the end of the process so that information and tasks didn't fall through the cracks. As a result, it was an incredible amount of work. The supervisor responsible for the program further emphasized a need for an administrator or dedicated member(s) of staff if the program was to be resurrected. When asked if there were memorial features previously offered that are unrealistic to move forward, both memorial rocks and picnic tables were said to pose problems. The stones: often placed along trails (for visibility) but then frequently in the way of maintenance vehicles. The accessible picnic tables: seldom purchased and vulnerable to unique damage from water wells due to the placement of the plaque.

#### 4.2.5 Suggestions for Moving Forward

Seating was still considered a need in parks, though it was strongly suggested to limit the available memorial items and furthermore, to have bench and plaque standards that eliminates complications associated with customization. This echoes feedback received from other sources.

Along with the removal of memorial rocks, picnic tables, and premium benches from the available features, memorial trees (where the tree features a plaque dedicated to a specific person) was identified as problematic by forestry staff, as trees and their growth can often be unpredictable and frequent tree replacements has been an issue in the past.

A conversation specifically relating to Victoria Park and the suggestion from other parties to stop offering memorial features at this park was had. This interview yielded that there is still a demand a need for benches in Victoria Park, but measures must be taken to promote other locations not around the lake where the most demand had been in the past.

The bench adoption/ sponsorship angle is recommended, where the asset would remain municipal property, but the plaque could be purchased and then affixed to the bench for a period before returning to them at the end of the term. This would a) make the program more affordable and b) eliminate the logistic issues that come with the entire asset being owned by a program participant. For the replacement of plaques after a 5 or 10-year period to be realistic, they would need to be surface mounted. When asked about the theft aspect, it was stated that the occasional vandalism that affects all parks assets was more of an issue than the theft of the bronze plaques.

Additionally, that the supervisor and assistant supervisor of parks operations should be consulted when determining possible dedication bench locations.

### **4.3 EXAMINATION OF BEST PRACTICES**

***Examination of best practices and lessons learned from other municipalities with successful dedication programs for similar amenities.***

#### **4.3.1 Standard Tree and Bench Dedication Programs**

Within the immediate area, it should be noted that, at the time of writing this report, the Cities of Waterloo and Guelph have both paused their tree and bench dedication programs. Per the City of Cambridge website, their bench dedication program is currently suspended due to excessive orders and expected late deliveries this year. Through an exploration of municipalities with active dedication programs, a few key themes can be used to categorize their practices. Those being 1) item design and availability, 2) pricing 3) location selection 4) administration and dedication applications, and 5) lifecycle and maintenance. Notes pertaining to these themes and specific municipalities can be found in

#### **Appendix 2.**

In examining various municipalities' approaches to standard tree and bench dedication programs, several common practices have emerged. These include providing a preset list of available locations where dedications can be made, typically within designated participating parks. Additionally, municipalities often establish annual application deadlines and installation dates to streamline the process. A maintenance period is commonly stipulated, during which the city agrees to replace the dedication, if necessary, usually limited to a single replacement or a predetermined number over the period. Furthermore, municipalities typically implement a set contract duration, commonly ranging from five to ten years, to ensure the longevity of the dedication.

In addition to these common practices, other notable approaches have been identified that enhance their dedication programs. These include administrative approaches such as dedicated e-mail addresses to handle and manage inquiries efficiently and holding the right to first refusal of renewal at the end of the initial contract period. Other notable practices include enforcing specific guidelines regarding memorial items, such as prohibiting the placement of wreaths, flowers, candles, etc., reserving the right to remove or relocate benches with prior notification to participants, and placing the onus of maintaining up-to-date contact information on program participants.

### 4.3.2 Memorial Forest Programs

In addition to these common practices, certain memorial forest programs implement notable strategies to enhance their impact and sustainability. For instance, strategic planting of assets is undertaken to fulfill various ecological objectives such as naturalization, windbreaks, wildlife corridors, screening, and reforestation, maximizing the environmental benefits of the program. Furthermore, some programs establish a development or maintenance fund utilizing a portion of the donations, ensuring ongoing care and stewardship of the memorial forests for future generations. Tax receipts have also been provided for donations to the program, incentivizing contributions and facilitating financial transparency. Additionally, information brochures are made available to the public, offering comprehensive details about the program's mission, objectives, and how individuals can participate, promoting awareness and engagement within the community.

## 4.4 ASSESSMENT OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION TO ENSURE EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

***Assessment of resource allocation and cost recovery mechanisms related to dedications, ensuring sustainability and equitable access for all community members.***

### 4.4.1 Equity and sustainability

A meeting was conducted with the City of Kitchener's Equity, Anti-Racism, and Reconciliation team (EARR) regarding equitable approaches to dedication and possible ways to emphasize EDI principles in our recommendations moving forward. Through discussion we were informed that a typical dedication program that consists of residents paying to put names on items in public spaces could not be done equitably. Both the payment piece and the naming piece would make equity an unrealistic goal. When approached with the memorial forest alternative, the consensus was that this would be a more equitable approach.

### 4.4.2 Resource Allocation

The allocation of staff to this program was a repeated concern throughout our analysis. Internally, our forestry and operations departments both expressed the onerous nature of the previous program and the staffing it would require to properly administer a program. In many cases, it has been recommended to have a member or members of staff dedicated to program administration and implementation so that issues of staff capacity can be mitigated.

## 4.5 EXPLORATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

***Exploration and recommendation of technological solutions, such as online platforms or mobile applications, that could streamline the dedication process while ensuring transparency and accountability.***

Opportunities for technological solutions for the dedication program were addressed during consultation with a representative from the City's Technology Innovation and Services division. Primarily the two key pieces of payment collection and mapping/ asset tracking. Both an online payment process and interactive mapping are both viable options with our current technical abilities.

## 4.6 SUMMARY

The analysis of the City of Kitchener's dedication program uncovered several key challenges and areas for improvement, informed by engagement with stakeholders, engagement with community, an examination of best practices, and examination of administrative procedures.

### Challenges Identified:

- **Administrative Burden:** The program was deemed cumbersome for staff, indicating inefficiencies in administrative processes and resource allocation.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Pricing of memorial items was considered too low, resulting in financial losses for the city and highlighting the need for revised pricing structures.
- **Equity Concerns:** Limited mechanisms existed to maintain equity within the program, raising accessibility and inclusivity issues for community members.
- **Lack of Defined Opportunities:** Excessive freedom in selecting dedication pieces and locations led to inconsistencies as well as maintenance and administrative challenges.

### Key Feedback:

- **Staffing:** Stakeholders emphasized the need for dedicated administrative staff to manage the program effectively.
- **Equity:** Community members stressed the importance of ensuring equitable access to dedication opportunities, advocating for measures to support underserved communities and address participation disparities. Importantly, internal discussions with EDI highlighted the unrealistic nature of incorporating equity in a standard tree and bench dedication program.
- **Memorial Alternatives:** Stakeholders expressed interest in exploring alternative dedication methods, such as establishing a memorial forest. This alternative was viewed favorably for its environmental sustainability, potential for creating a unique tribute space, and more equitable principles.

In conclusion, the analysis revealed significant challenges related to administrative burden, financial sustainability, and equity within the dedication program. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in enhancing program effectiveness, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring the long-term viability of dedication opportunities in the City of Kitchener. Additionally, exploring alternative dedication methods and drawing upon best practices from other municipalities will enrich the city's approach and contribute to program success.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 5.1 REVISE THE BENCH DEDICATION PROGRAM WITH KEY CHANGES.

#### 5.1.1 Summary

This recommendation aims to revitalize the dedication program by focusing on bench dedication in identified areas. Key changes are necessary to streamline operations, standardize offerings, and operate more sustainably. 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.

#### 5.1.2 Recommendations

##### 5.1.2.1 *Admin Process Improvement*

- **Dedicated Administrative Staff:** Administrative responsibilities associated with the oversight of the program to be incorporated into the responsibilities of a full time Operations Technologist position. This position has been approved through the 2025 Budget. Administrative staff to manage the program ensures efficient operation, timely processing of dedications, and effective communication with stakeholders.
- **Admin Process to include (but not limited to):**
  - Request intake
  - Request Review
  - Payment Processing
  - Work order prep for install.
  - Maintenance of records,
  - Correspondence with relevant parties
  - Updating list of available dedication benches
- **Resident Responsibilities:**
  - To keep contact and payment information up to date and accurate and inform administration staff upon any changes.

##### 5.1.2.2 *Lifecycle and maintenance*

#### **Dedication plaque recognition period**

Providing a recognition period for ten-year terms provides a sustainable revenue stream for the program and allows for easier maintenance. At end of term, participant to be offered a renewal at the discretion of the program administrators. Plaque will be returned to the resident if lease not renewed. Factors influencing offer of renewal include availability of dedication locations and demand for dedication items.

#### **Flowers and wreaths**

Memorial features such as flowers, wreaths, stuffed animals, candles, and others are not permitted to be kept on dedication benches and will be removed by parks operations staff. This practice will aim to preserve dedication benches as usable public assets.

### **Plaque replacements**

Clear policy regarding replacements during the recognition period to be implemented (e.g. one plaque replacement may be covered with additional replacements paid for by the participant.)

### **Bench maintenance and replacements**

The bench remains an asset owned by the City of Kitchener and will be maintained and replaced through the standard bench maintenance and replacement schedule. This remains true of new benches that are installed through the program.

#### *5.1.2.3 Design of dedication items*

### **Plaques available for benches only**

Dedication trees, stones, and picnic tables have been identified as being costly and difficult to maintain. The recommendation moving forward is to limit dedication features to benches with plaques. By discontinuing plaques on other features, the program can better focus its resources. Dedication forests, as opposed to individual dedication trees, will be considered to offer a tree dedication option.

### **Standardization for consistency**

Standardizing the design and details of dedication benches and plaques ensures consistency across dedications, simplifies the selection process for citizens, and facilitates maintenance and implementation for staff.

#### *5.1.2.4 Placement of dedication items*

### **Determine eligible bench locations**

Through consultation and assessment done by staff, specific benches and locations for future benches can be pre-determined and made available for dedication. This ensures that dedications are in a visually appealing place while responding to seating needs.

## **5.1.3 Rationale**

### *5.1.3.1 Maintains Tradition with Improvements:*

Revising and improving the dedication program honors the city's tradition of allowing citizens to commemorate loved ones in public spaces while addressing identified shortcomings. By making key changes to the program structure and administration, we can ensure its sustainability and effectiveness for future generations.



## 5.2 IMPLEMENTING A MEMORIAL FOREST

### 5.2.1 Summary

The implementation of a memorial forest program will aim to:

- Appropriately resource the oversight of the memorial forest program.
- Provide opportunities for community involvement including tree planting.
- Consider cost through an equity lens.
- Align with current tree canopy and Forestry goals through tree placement criteria and maintenance by the City's Forestry division.
- Recognize donors through a shared online database rather than specific features (individual trees, benches, stones, etc.)
- Direct funds from donors towards planting trees and maintaining a memorial forest.
- Provide scalable cost options to support an equity approach to program participation.

### 5.2.2 Rationale

Making strategic improvements to the bench dedication program paired with implementing a memorial forest both maintains the historic dedication program in a more functionally sustainable way and adds a new, innovative, and environmentally friendly dedication option.

#### *5.2.2.1 Alignment with Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy canopy target*

In January of 2022, City Council supported and approved a tree canopy target of 30% in each ward by 2050 and 33% across Kitchener by 2070 as part of the Sustainable Urban Forestry Strategy. This strategy includes recognizing the value of current trees, sustaining existing canopy, growing canopy, and communicating with and involving neighbourhoods. Supporting a memorial forest program as an option for dedication both supports the growth of the urban canopy and supports community involvement.

#### *5.2.2.2 Expert management for success*

Employing dedicated staff to oversee the bench dedication and memorial forest programs ensures proper management and maintenance for both initiatives. By collaborating with the Forestry Division and following established criteria for tree planting and maintenance, the City can ensure the success and longevity of the memorial forest.

#### *5.2.2.3 Flexibility and adaptability*

Providing the opportunity to record dedications in a shared database as an extension of the memorial forest program rather than attaching plaques to specific features provides increased flexibility in placement, replacement and maintenance, and cost requirements. This approach accommodates changing needs and preferences while ensuring that dedications remain meaningful and accessible to donors and their families. The "plaque" component could be an online resource or, alternatively, a singular dedication wall with a display of remembered names.

#### *5.2.2.4 Innovative and sustainable approach*

Pursuing a memorial forest program as an alternate dedication method offers a unique and environmentally friendly way for citizens to honor loved ones. By using funds for tree planting and maintenance, the City can create a lasting tribute that enhances the natural beauty of the city and contributes to its overall sustainability.

#### *5.2.2.5 Maintains tradition with improvements*

The previous dedication program allows citizens to commemorate loved ones in public spaces. By making key changes to the program structure and administration, the City can ensure its sustainability and effectiveness for future generations.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

The assessment of the City of Kitchener's dedication program highlights several areas for improvement, including administrative efficiency, pricing sustainability, equity, and level of involvement.

The proposed options offer distinct paths forward, each with its own set of recommendations to address the identified limitations. These recommendations aim to address the identified shortcomings of the previous dedication program while aligning with the overarching goals and priorities of the City of Kitchener. By carefully weighing the benefits and considerations of each option, Council can make an informed decision that best serves the interests of The City of Kitchener and its residents.

Regardless of the option pursued, there should be regular evaluations of the program to assess effectiveness and address emerging issues, to monitor its financial sustainability (and adjust pricing and resource allocation as needed).

## 6 APPENDICES

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### 6.1 DEDICATION FEATURE REQUEST FORM



Work Order Number \_\_\_\_\_  
(Office use only)

**City of Kitchener  
Dedication Feature Request Form**

The Dedication Feature Program invites the public to pay tribute to a person, group or occasion by purchasing a dedication feature for installation in a public park. Please complete the Dedication Feature Request Form, submit along with payment to the location below.

**Donor Name** (Person or Organization): \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your preference:

Qty	Feature
	<b>Rock and Tree Feature</b> Armourstone and native tree, with plaque affixed to rock Cost \$850
	<b>Premium Bench &amp; Plaque</b> (Victoria Park ONLY) Premium bench on a concrete pad with recognition plaque Cost \$2,700
	<b>Standard Bench and Plaque</b> Wood bench on a concrete pad with recognition plaque Cost \$1,500
	<b>Table with Pad and Plaque</b> Permanent 4-seat table with accessibility option, with recognition plaque affixed to table Cost \$1,800

**Feature Location** (Park Name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Note: City staff will complete a site visit with you to ensure the correct location within the park is chosen.)

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Wording to Appear on Plaque(s)

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### Plaque Orders

- The recognition plaque can accommodate the following combination of text:
  - Upper case text, 0.25" high
  - 20 letters per line
  - 3 lines max.
- The dedication feature costs above include the standard 2" x 8" plaque. Plaques with additional lettering or that exceed these measurements will be subject to an additional fee.
- Due to dimensions of wood slats, Operations staff reserves the right to limit the size of the plaque.
- Plaque to be mounted onto front side of wood slat of back rest on benches.
- Wording for the plaque should be respectful and tasteful (avoiding profanity, advertisements, vulgar statements, etc.) and must meet the approval of the City of Kitchener.
- Operations staff reserves the right to limit the number of plaques dedicated to an individual or group.
- Plaque orders generally take 8-10 weeks for fabrication, delivery, and installation from the time the final proof approval is signed. However, installation times may vary based on bench style, availability and weather conditions.

### Feature Locations

- Bench location per selection of site locations pre-determined by C of K landscape architect.
- The approved location of a planting site or bench installation depends on proposed future development within a park, the location of trees, underground utilities, and other site restrictions. Some parks may already be at capacity and therefore a tree or bench may not be made available for such a park.

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Dedication feature orders may be submitted in person at the Kitchener Operations Facility. Please ensure you include payment with the application form. Prior to your order can be placed, we must have a cheque for the full amount, payable to the "City of Kitchener".

**Kitchener Operations Facility**  
**131 Goodrich Drive**  
**Kitchener, ON**

*Thank you for your participation in this noteworthy program!*

## 6.2 BEST PRACTICE NOTES

### 6.2.1 Standard Tree and Bench Dedication Programs

A few key themes categorize best practices from municipalities with active dedication program. These are: 1) item design and availability, 2) pricing 3) location selection 4) administration and dedication applications, and 5) lifecycle and maintenance.

#### 6.2.1.1 Toronto

##### *Pricing*

- Tree and bench dedications are considered donations to the city and are therefore a tax deductible.

##### *Location Selection*

- Provides a preset list of available locations which applicants can apply for
- Clearly communicate their parks that have “reached capacity” and no longer accept applications.

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- Applications taken annually.
- Dedicated e-mail address used for dedication applications.

##### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- They have a warranty period on their dedications. Toronto pays for replacements and maintenance during the maintenance period. After that, it's on the donor of the feature.

#### 6.2.1.2 Oakville

##### *Location Selection*

- You can apply to adopt an already existing bench.
- You take a picture of the bench you want and send that in with application.

##### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- They operate on a 5-year contract where the price includes the product, care during that time, and the plaque.
- Set renewal fee of \$755 + tax after those 5 years.
- The city has first right to refusal for renewal.

##### *Other*

- Memorial wreathes, flowers, candles etc. are not permitted.

#### 6.2.1.3 Port Hope

##### *Item Design and Availability*

- They have a few dedication options including benches, trees, paver stones, athlete wall of honour, and veteran banners.

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- They do all their installs in the spring, and they have a strict deadline of March 15<sup>th</sup> for applications.

#### 6.2.1.4 St. Catharine's

##### *Item Design and Availability*

- Due to the varying aesthetics in different parts of the city, the design of dedication benches must follow the design choices of the park its in. Prices for pieces vary accordingly.

##### *Location Selection*

- Applications can request from pre-approved locations.
- Non-participating parks are clearly listed.

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- They have 2 application deadlines (1 for spring 1 for fall) April 1 and September 1

#### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- Their bench contract is 10 years.

#### **6.2.1.5 Windsor**

##### *Item Design and Availability*

- Benches only
- bench options of different prices

##### *Location Selection*

- Bench location to be decided by the manager of parks operations.

##### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- Donations accepted for bench maintenance.

#### **6.2.1.6 London**

##### *Item Design and Availability*

- Their dedication items include benches, trees, and memory wall.

#### **Benches**

##### *Pricing*

- \$4500

##### *Location Selection*

- From preapproved locations

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- City holds the right to move or remove bench but will first notify the donor.
- 20 applications accepted a year.

##### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- 10-year contract
- They will replace if within that year + 1 free plaque if vandalized. Additional

replacements to be covered by participant.

##### *Other*

- Participant's responsibility to keep contact info up to date.

#### **Trees**

##### *Pricing*

- \$550

##### *Location Selection*

- Non-participating parks are clearly listed.
- Species of tree are preapproved by forestry.
- Applicant can request a location that's not from a preapproved list.

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- 20 applications accepted a year.

##### *Lifecycle and Maintenance*

- 5-year contract
- Replacement if fails within first 2 years.

#### **Memory Wall**

##### *Pricing*

- \$1500
- Partial funds go to the arboretum.

##### *Location Selection*

- Names engraved on a memorial wall at a local arboretum.

##### *Admin and Dedication Applications*

- Participants apply for an engraving.
- 20 applications accepted annually.
- All engravings happen in the fall.

## 6.2.2 Memorial Forest Programs

Information about memorial forest programs, taken from their websites.

### 6.2.2.1 *Wall-Custance Memorial Forest (Guelph Arboretum)*

From:

<https://arboretum.uoguelph.ca/educationandevents/WCservice>

“The Memorial Forest is a partnership began in 1989 with the Wall-Custance Funeral Home and Chapel in Guelph. For each donation to the Wall-Custance Memorial Forest Program, a tree or shrub is planted in the Memorial Forest using 16 species of native trees and 10 species of native shrubs as part of reforestation efforts across The Arboretum. These forested areas serve as windbreaks, screening, wildlife corridors and habitat for many species. Ten percent of each donation to the Memorial Forest program is added to The Arboretum Endowment Fund to support development and maintenance.

Individual names are listed at the Wall-Custance Funeral Home & Chapel website and on memorial plaques at the dedication grove. Since 1989, over 18,000 trees and shrubs have been planted in memory of loved ones. For more information, please visit the Wall-Custance website or call the Wall-Custance Funeral Home & Chapel at (519) 822-0051, or The Arboretum at (519) 824-4120 ext. 52113.”

### 6.2.2.2 *Grey Sauble*

From:

<https://www.greysauble.on.ca/foundation/memorial-forest/>

“The vision began in 1995, planting a tree in memory of a loved one – creating a forest. In 1997, utilizing property owned by Grey Sauble Conservation, the Foundation initiated a Memorial Forest Program. Trees can be planted in memory of a loved one, friend or neighbour at one of three available sites in the watershed (Pottawatomi, Griersville and Big Mud Lake).

Each year, a plaque is added to the sign listing the names of the loved ones that have had a tree planted in their memory. These signs are located at the memorial forest sites.

Each year, in June, a Commemorative Ceremony is held at the Administration Centre to recognize all those who have had a tree planted in their memory. An invitation to this Ceremony is extended to you and family of the loved one. The cost is \$75.00 per tree.

To support and enhance this program, donations are encouraged to help maintain and expand the Memorial Forest properties. As memorial trees have been planted every year since 1997, the properties are nearing capacity, and the GSCF are in the early stages acquiring new properties to accommodate future tree planting throughout the watershed.”



### 6.2.2.3 *Upper Thames River*

From:

<https://thamesriver.on.ca/landowner-grants-stewardship/forestry-tree-planting/memorial-forests/>

“The Memorial Forest program provides a natural, lasting tribute to loved ones. The UTRCA is involved in four memorial forests across the watershed:

London with Logan and Evans Funeral Homes, 519-433-6181 or 519-451-9350

St. Mary’s and Area with Andrew L. Hodges Funeral Home and the St. Mary’s Ministerial Association

Thamesford/Zorra Township with the Township of Zorra, 519-485-2490

Woodstock with the City of Woodstock, 519-539-1291, and Brock and Visser Funeral Home Burial and Cremation Services, 519-539-8831

Anyone may contact the UTRCA directly and have a tree planted in the memorial forest of their choice.

The family of the deceased receives an “In Memorium” card notifying them that a tree will be planted in memory of their loved one. A dedication service is held each fall at the London, St. Mary’s, and Woodstock Memorial Forests.

The cost varies depending on where the tree is planted and the tree species:

London – \$50 per tree, an income tax receipt will be issued by the UTRCA.

St. Mary’s & Area – \$50 per tree

Thamesford/Zorra Township – \$40 per tree

Woodstock – \$20 per tree

Brochures and further information are available from any of the partners involved.

## 6.3 PARK DEDICATION PROGRAM SURVEY FOR COUNCIL

\* Required

1. Enter Full name

2. Have you heard from any constituents who participated in the previous dedication program? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Based on feedback from area residents, what aspects of the current program do they most appreciate, and what aspects would they like to see improved?

4. Based on feedback from area residents, what do you believe should be prioritized in a new tree and bench dedication program? \*

5. Are you aware of dedication programs from other municipalities and that you would like Kitchener staff to evaluate as part of this update? \*

6. The following elements are being considered as part of updated tree and bench dedication program in park. Please check all that you agree with. \*

☐ Ease of application (ex. online application and payment options)

☐ Provide accessible tree and bench dedication options across all income levels

☐ Provide time-bounded dedication options (10yr agreement) with ability to renew (i.e. not in perpetuity)

☐ Provide communal memorial forest option with City annual event for family members (Equitable -- open to all regardless of ability to pay)

☐ The program is intended to be cost-neutral

☐ Other (please list)