



# Dedication

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan





*All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.*



## Related sections

### **Places**

### **Spaces**

Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation

Park Amenities

Signature & Feature Parks

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A scenic view of a pond with reeds and a forest under a blue sky, seen from a wooden deck. The foreground shows the wooden planks of the deck and a railing. The middle ground is filled with tall reeds in the water. The background is a dense forest of green trees under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The sun is shining brightly from the upper right, creating a lens flare effect.

# Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.



A photograph of a park scene. In the foreground, there is a paved path that curves to the right. To the left of the path, there is a grassy area with several large, mature trees. The trees have green and yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn. The background shows more trees and a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent dark overlay covers the bottom half of the image, where the title text is located.

# Introduction



**This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.**

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## Background

The City of Kitchener ran an informal park 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.

To apply for a dedication through the previous program, a person would fill out an application form and select one of four memorial features: Rock and Tree, Premium Bench and Plaque, Standard Bench and Plaque, or Table with Pad. The location of memorial items were chosen by the applicant with support from City staff.

The prices of the memorial features under the previous dedication program no longer reflect current market prices. Benches purchased through this program were maintained annually with other city benches and replaced as needed. For the cost of the feature,

residents could purchase a dedication piece in a park that was to be maintained and replaced by the City in perpetuity.

Dedication program staff worked with families and residents to create meaningful memorials in Kitchener's public parks and walking trails. However, the informal nature of the program led to coordination barriers. Program staff noted challenges such as: a long manual application process, lack of publicly accessible information, staff capacity, and inconsistent tracking and participant records.

In October of 2023, City Council unanimously approved a motion for staff to review the tree and bench dedication program and develop a new program. The review was to include an evaluation of the previous program, an examination of best practices from other municipalities, a resourcing assessment, and an exploration of technological solutions. The future program will be informed by this review.





# Data Sources



This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

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**Legislation**



**Equitable engagement**



**Engagement with the broader community**



**Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**



**Engagement with partner organizations**



**Comparative analysis**



**External research**



**Policy**



**City of Kitchener strategies**



**Region of Waterloo strategies**



**Best practices**



**City of Kitchener staff experience**





# Findings



Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

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## Inclusion

The need to make dedication opportunities more accessible for all was identified. Conversations with Equity, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Division staff at the City of Kitchener highlighted the challenges of incorporating equity in the tree and bench dedication program as it previously existed. Barriers to inclusion in Kitchener's tree and bench dedication program often included cost, ease of use, and access to program information.

The previous dedication program relied on applicants to reach out to the City of Kitchener Parks Division to become informed of their options and the dedication request process. The information was not readily available to the public, creating a barrier for the public

and for City staff. The informal process often led to confusion and complication.

Because memorial items were priced below market value, the City was highly subsidizing this program, highlighting the need for updated pricing structures. Updating and implementing a new pricing model to align with current goals would require an exploration that prioritizes equitable access to dedications.

During engagement with Kitchener residents, more than half communicated that they would not be willing to pay for dedication pieces. Regarding cost-sharing, one quarter of these residents believed that the cost of dedication pieces should be shared between the resident and the City to support equitable access to dedications. Equity was emphasized by many sources proposing lottery systems, income-adjusted payment options, grant systems, sharing funds with equity-deserving groups, and more affordable dedication options in general.

Tree and bench dedications are challenging from an equity perspective. Dedication models that are based on payment exclude those without the ability to pay. To provide greater opportunity for participation, additional program offerings could be considered.



One option is having a donation-based memorial forest in addition to other tree and bench dedication options. An added benefit of having a memorial forest is more opportunities for community-building through planting programs and annual events.

## Environmental sustainability

Findings supported a desire and need to pursue alternative dedication options such as naturalization gardens and memorial forests. Strategic planting of these memorial forests can promote ecological sustainability and biodiversity. Where dedication benches are added, choosing from a list of pre-determined locations could reduce environmental risks. This method would also support areas with fewer seating options. Furthermore, this option would contribute to the current canopy targets outlined within the Sustainable Urban Forestry Strategy.

## Partnerships

It is common for memorial forest programs to partner with local funeral homes to facilitate outreach and engagement with potential donors. A memorial forest dedication program could provide opportunities for collaboration with a wide variety of community groups. Partnerships between the memorial forest and community groups could lead to the organization of community planting events, site stewardship groups, and more community-led involvement.

## Additional considerations

**Administrative burden:** The program was cumbersome for staff, with inefficient administration and resource allocation. Dedicated staff resources are needed to manage the program effectively.

**Lack of defined opportunities:** Nearly unlimited options for dedication locations led to inconsistencies as well as maintenance and administrative challenges.





In Loving Memory Of  
A. Jones & J. Sandiak  
1987-2012 1988-2013



A photograph of a forest path with sunlight filtering through the trees. A dark horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image to provide a background for the title text.

# Recommendations



This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation is accompanied by a symbol or a number representing its prioritization status. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

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## Introduce a revised dedication program

**Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench and tree dedication program.**

The proposal in response to the October 2023 directive from Council includes a modified bench dedication program and a memorial forest program. The changes made to the bench dedication program aim to streamline maintenance, standardize offerings, and operate more sustainably. The memorial forest program is introduced as an innovative and environmentally

friendly way for residents to honour loved ones with more opportunities for community building.



## Bench dedication program

An improved bench program includes lifecycle and maintenance changes, standardization of placement and design, and set recognition periods for dedication plaques.

### Lifecycle and maintenance

#### *Dedication plaque recognition period*

Five-year or ten-year recognition terms provides a sustainable revenue stream for the program and allows for easier maintenance.

#### *End of recognition period*

At the end of the recognition period, the participant may be offered a renewal at the discretion of the program administrators. If the recognition period is not renewed, the plaque will be returned to the resident. Factors influencing offer of renewal include availability of dedication locations and demand for dedication items.

#### *Flowers and wreathes*

Memorial features such as flowers, wreathes, 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*

Establish a clear policy regarding replacements during the recognition period (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 according to the standard bench maintenance and replacement schedule.



## Design of dedication items

### *Plaques available for benches only*

Dedication trees, stones, and picnic tables have been identified as being costly and inconvenient 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.

## Placement of dedication items

### *Determine eligible bench locations*

Through consultation and assessments done by staff, specific benches and locations can be pre-determined for dedication. This ensures that dedications are in a visually appealing place while responding to seating needs. By using the plaques for recognition as opposed to the benches themselves, existing benches maintained by the city can be used to further reduce costs for program participants.

### *Rotation system for availability*

Implementing a rotation system for bench locations helps manage demand for dedications and simplifies the process to choose locations. By periodically rotating available locations, the program can accommodate a diverse range of dedications while preventing overcrowding in any one area.



## Memorial forest program

The implementation of a memorial forest program should aim to address the following items:

- Appropriate resourcing to oversee the memorial forest program.
- Community involvement opportunities including tree planting.
- Cost can be considered through an equity lens as all combined donations support tree planting and plaque costs.
- Criteria for tree placement and maintenance will be determined by the Forestry department to align with current tree canopy and Forestry goals.
- Dedication plaques not attached to specific features (individual trees, benches, stones, etc) but recorded in a shared database and/ or memorial wall.
- Direct funds from donors towards planting trees and maintaining a memorial forest.
- Scalable cost options to support an equity approach to program participation.

## 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.

### *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.



#### *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.

#### *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.

#### *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.

#### *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.



# Recommendations summary



## **Introduce a revised dedication program**

Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench dedication program.







