



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY
STAFF REPORT

To: Council
From: Chief Administrative Officer
Subject: Memorial Bench Program

File No.: 6200-05 Bench
Date: March 25, 2019

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council options on the future of the dormant memorial bench program.

CAO RECOMMENDATIONS:

That based on the March 25, 2019 staff report "", Council adoption OPTION 1 and

Respectfully submitted,

David Allen, BES, CLGEM, SCLGM
 Chief Administrative Officer

BACKGROUND:


Across North America municipalities have had donor/memorial bench programs for the last 20 to 30 years. The Courtenay memorial bench program was initiated in 1997 with the first bench donated by Stan and Judy Hagen. At that time it was anticipated that the City would be contributing 40% of the cost. The pricing was as follows:

- Park bench - \$480 Park/boulevard tree - \$180
- Street bench \$780 Tree in a sidewalk - \$420

These fees were anticipated to be 60% of the total cost of the bench, pad and plaque including purchase, installation, and 10 years of maintenance. From this we can deduce that the total anticipated cost of a park bench was \$800 over 10 years. This pricing was low but not unlike programs in other jurisdictions. Each donor received a tax receipt for their participation in the program and signed an agreement identifying that the donation was for a 10 year term. The wording on the agreement is as follows:

"All gifts to the City of Courtenay through the Tree Donation Program and Bench Donation Program are accepted on the basis that they will be maintained for 10 years in their original location or in an area near their original location, after which the disposition of the gift is at the sole discretion of the City of Courtenay."

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY



The City of Courtenay Tree Donation Program and Bench Donation Program

<p>Participant Information</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>Postal Code: _____</p> <p>Telephone: _____</p> <p>Donation Amount: \$1800.00 + 10% GST</p> <p>Income tax receipt will be mailed to the above address.</p> <p>Location of Tree or Bench: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Horticultural Information</p> <p>Tree Species: _____</p> <p>Size: _____</p> <p>Other: _____</p> <p>For Office Use Only</p> <p>Date of Application: _____</p> <p>Approval of Inscription: _____</p> <p>Job Order No.: _____</p> <p>Work Order No.: _____</p> <p>Source of Tree or Bench: _____</p> <p>Tree or Bench Number: _____</p> <p>Supervisor: _____</p> <p>Other: _____</p> <p>Date of Completion: _____</p>
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Plaque Inscription for Bench: _____

called in Mar 27 for inscription

Please limit wording to three lines. Wording must be approved by the City of Courtenay prior to ordering plaque. Brass plaque measures approximately 21 1/2" high by 12" long.

Commitment to Maintenance by City
 All gifts to the City of Courtenay through the Tree Donation Program and Bench Donation Program are accepted on the basis that they will be maintained for 10 years in their original location or in an area near their original location, after which the disposition of the gift is at the sole discretion of the City of Courtenay.

Limits of Participation
 Participation in the Tree Donation Program and Bench Donation Program in no way constitutes ownership of the item, the land upon which it is situated or the surrounding lands. The City of Courtenay retains the right to use lands adjacent to these donated items as it deems appropriate. In addition, the City of Courtenay may choose to not accept a gift through the Tree Donation Program and Bench Donation Program at its discretion.

I have read and agree to the above conditions:

Signature: _____ Date: *Oct 3/01*

The Courtenay memorial program was put on hold in XXXXX. Many other municipalities took similar action based on the expiration of the first benches, increased demand, and the realization that the program was subsidized at a much higher rate than originally anticipated. Since then over 100 people have asked to be put on a waiting list in case the program is reinstated.

Memorial programs were initiated with the optimistic but unrealistic view that the community was getting a 'free' bench in exchange for a public memorial. Over the last 30 years it has become clear that the expectations attached to a memorial bench have caused the soft costs to rise far beyond the quoted 'purchase price' due to program administration and increasing requests for service. A memorial bench program has an unintended and inevitable higher service level than other similar services due to the personal expectations of the participants based on their emotional attachment to the asset.

30 years ago only 62.3% of deaths in BC resulted in cremation. The BC cremation rate is projected to rise to 85.8% in 2018. (see appendix 1) However the statistic for the Comox Valley is closer to 91% preferring cremation. This places a significant strain on memorial programs as family members are looking for a public place to remember loved ones and commonly prefer settings outside of a cemetery.

If the program were active and advertised, the demand would be expected to far exceed the available spaces. Historically many municipalities have parks with an excessive number of memorial benches in part to satisfy demand for memorials rather than the need for park benches.

There is a general expectation by participants that memorials are maintained in perpetuity. The existing benches in Courtenay have clearly stipulated 10 year terms with the majority expired. Since the contract was only witnessed by the signatory, other family members often misunderstand the contract term and have trouble accepting that the term does expire. Courtenay's contractual clarity will help in resolving these outdated contracts, but a slow process that informs participants will be needed. Of 325 memorial items, 324 have expired contracts and the final tree expires on April 10, 2019.

Other municipalities have tried to resolve these completed contracts by removing the plaque and making the space available to other participants. There has been substantial backlash in other jurisdictions where poorly executed.



Daughter condemns \$2,000 extra for mom's memorial park bench in Sooke

KEVIN GRIFFIN Updated: December 10, 2017



'A shame': Richmond family to lose memorial bench bought in 1990s

Posted By: CBC News on January 22, 2019 In: CBC



A family that bought a park bench to honour deceased loved ones in Richmond — before the city changed its fee structure in 2003 — hopes to hold on to the bench, and avoid paying \$3,000 for another ten years.

Although memorial programs are very common, Council is asked to consider if a public memorial outside of a cemetery is actually a core service

to the citizenship of Courtenay. Effective City services benefit a large number of citizens or serve marginalized populations. If a service does neither, it should be a full cost recovery service. In this model, the value of the service is calculated and pricing is established to fully recover the cost of participation. In most municipalities the value of participation is calculated considering the following factors:

Memorial Bench Valuation:

<i>Build/Install Concrete Pad</i>		
Labour	240	
Materials	300	
Installation of bench	80	
Purchase of bench	1,100	
Plaque engraving	300	
<i>Maintenance</i>		
Pressure washing	400	(40/yr x 10 yrs)
Graffiti Removal	400	(40/yr x 10 yrs)
Administration fee	50	
Total Value	\$2,870	

Although this methodology is common, it fails to acknowledge the cost of the administration of the program itself. This includes bench/plaque replacements, removal of flowers/plantings, advertising, brochures, front desk meetings with the clients, point of sale, financial administration including receipting, record keeping and the ongoing service requests from the client. These costs are estimated at an additional \$500 per bench over a 10 year term.

Bench installation and lifecycle costs: Memorial program = \$3,300 Regular bench = \$1,700

Note: A key consideration in the calculation of these costs is the expected service levels associated with these 2 scenarios.

If the service was priced at \$3,300 to be full cost recovery, there is \$1,700 in value to the community while \$1,600 in additional expense will serve the one donor family. **Since the model allows for full cost to be recovered, this would seem to be a clear benefit to the community, however what's not seen in this example is that Courtenay has not dedicated staff to respond to the demands of this service.** Memorial bench programs are typically run as an additional service that pulls staff from their regular duties and ultimately lowers the levels of service for core operations. The demands of the program bring office staff from their core responsibilities and field staff from regular maintenance. As an example, a key factor is the timing of the bench installation. Normally benches would be installed in a season that fits the work plan of a crew. With a memorial program the timing of bench installations is on the basis of customer orders and service level expectations. The segmented nature of this work tends to be inefficient and therefore more costly.

Historically the true costs are not reflected in the program fees. If the full value of the program were included into the cost of participation in the program, the pricing would appear to be an unfair burden on mourning tax payers. This has been stated in recent news articles. If the full value isn't included in the cost of the program, the service to a few will be subsidized by the rest of the tax payers.

I submit that the public memorials do not add value to the park spaces or the experience for the common users and that taxpayers would be unwilling to bear this subsidy if asked. To this end many municipalities are increasing the cost of a memorial bench to compensate.

The price of participation in a memorial bench program varies substantially between municipalities. The Courtenay program was \$1,100 in 2008. Even if this price was doubled to \$2,200 it would be close to the median of other municipal programs, but only 2/3 of the true costs. (see appendix 2)

Even at a conservative projection of 1 memorial bench/month, the subsidized cost is \$1,100/month or \$13,200 /year. This statistic fails to acknowledge the waiting list or the rate of cremations in the Comox Valley. It's reasonable to expect the first year of reinstatement to have a demand of over 100 benches and the years there after to level out closer to 30 benches annually. Clearly the municipality would be unable to satisfy this demand.

Council is regularly faced with the public desire to memorialize prominent citizens or the victims of tragic circumstances. Both staff and elected officials feel compelled to find municipal solutions for clients. Since the public is used to benches functioning as memorials, a strong policy is needed to provide clarity on memorial options.

A well designed memorial bench program can address efficiencies and limit available space to bench quantities and placement that the public needs. However, with the numerous pitfalls outlined above, and recognizing that public memorial isn't a core service of a municipality, the key question is; should we offer this service?

Instituting this service would require additional staff to adequately administer and maintain.

Alternatives should be developed to satisfy the demands. These alternatives may include:

Gifts program:

Through this program service clubs and individuals may gift cash or products to the City. The donor would be receipted for their donation. Common examples of gifts are, playgrounds, in-kind labour, signage, public art, lighting, trail improvements, facility equipment, room upgrades, etc. A gifts program should always be accompanied with a recognition policy that stipulates how the scale of recognition is proportional to the size of the gift. All recognition should also have an expiry date specified.

Cemetery recognition:

The Courtenay and District Cemetery currently offers various memorial options to clientele. This includes memorial walls, plaques, headstones, etc. The list of product options could be expanded at the cemetery.

Referrals to partners:

The City should keep a list of community partners that can offer memorial options. These may include cultural partners, adjacent municipalities, private gardens, businesses, institutions, etc.

If you agree that the termination of the program is needed, I'll develop a report to council as directed. The report would also address the strategic steps needed to address the existing inventory of memorial benches.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The proposed budget is formulated by the Recreation and Cultural Services Department to reflect the existing gaming grant, existing staff service levels and the procurement of goods and services. With the creation of the commission, insurance costs will be reduced substantially through the Municipal Insurance Association.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

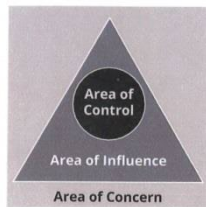
The administrative burden of the commission will be greater than the former structure. The Director of Recreation and Cultural services will work with the Director of Corporate Services to ensure Community Charter and Procedure Bylaw requirements are met. This will include the procurement procedures as well as the publication of agendas, public notifications, minutes, and council reporting.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

The new commission will consider appropriate service levels as they become more familiar with municipal processes. The budget is based on existing service levels, however with the Canadian 150 year celebrations, the commission will establish an appropriate approach to this celebration.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

We value and recognize the importance of our volunteers, and will focus on organizational and governance excellence.



- **Area of Control**
The policy, works and programming matters that fall within Council's jurisdictional authority to act.
- ▲ **Area of Influence**
Matters that fall within shared or agreed jurisdiction between Council and another government or party.
- **Area of Concern**
Matters of interest outside Council's jurisdictional authority to act.

We invest in our key relationships

- We will actively engage with our K'ómoks First Nation neighbours on issues of mutual interest and concern
- We will advocate and cooperate with other local governments and senior governments on regional issues affecting our city
- We value and recognize the importance of our volunteers
- We will continue to engage and partner with service organizations for community benefit

We will focus on organizational and governance excellence

- We support and encourage initiatives to improve efficiencies
- We support meeting the fundamental corporate and statutory obligations
- We recognize staff capacity is a finite resource
- Communication with our community is a priority, and will be considered in all decisions we make
- We will responsibly provide services at a level which the people we serve are willing to pay

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN REFERENCE:

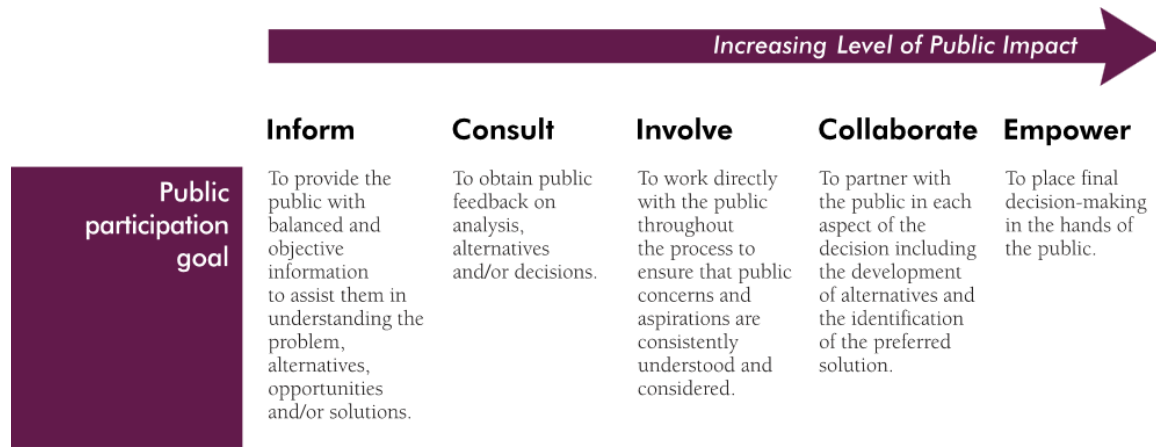
No specific reference

REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY REFERENCE:

No specific reference

CITIZEN/PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff have **consulted** with the existing July 1st Committee in the development of this report as identified in the *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*.



OPTIONS:

1. Council create the Courtenay Canada Day Commission; and
Approve the attached Terms of Reference to guide the functioning of the commission; and
The commission membership be assigned by Council as per the Terms of Reference.
2. That Council refer this item back to staff for further consideration
3. That Council takes no action on this matter at this time.

Prepared by:

Dave Snider *BCSLA*
Director of Recreation and Cultural Services

Attachments:

1. Terms of Reference – Courtenay Committee on Canada Day Celebrations