



June 3, 2020

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Artistic Enhancement to Dedicated Park Benches - Report Back

RECOMMENDATION

THAT, in recognition that a new Commemoration Policy is being developed to establish the criteria and process for donations, commissions and collection conservation, and that this new policy will be informed by the Colonial Audit also underway, the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to adhere to existing policy regarding park bench dedications, as outlined in this report and attached as Appendix A, and not consider any artistic enhancements to dedicated park benches at this time.

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to report back on the Board approved motion titled [Artistic Enhancement to Dedicated Park Benches](#) directing staff to investigate options to accommodate artistic enhancements that do not include paint or other coatings to be applied to the natural wood of dedicated park benches under the Park Board's Dedicated Park Bench Program.

In recognition of the colonial audit work underway that will inform a new commemoration policy, staff are recommending that options for artistic enhancements to dedicated park benches not be considered at this time.

BOARD AUTHORITY, POLICY & PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over all areas designated as permanent and temporary parks in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements that occur within those parks.

On June 3, 1991 the Park Board approved the [Park Gifts Program – Bench Donations](#), which provides for donations to be accepted to fund a personalized dedicated park bench for a 10 year term, with the option to renew at the rates in place at the time of renewal. Conditions of the program state “altering dedicated park amenities or its surroundings is not allowed. This includes etching, painting, staining, varnishing, decorating, or attaching items to the dedicated park amenity”.

In December 2003, the Board reconfirmed its commitment to the arts by adopting the renewed [Park Board Arts Policy](#). This policy supports the provision of a vibrant public realm and the experience of public art and cultural events in parks.

The Arts Policy supports the 1997 [Review Guidelines for the Donation of Public Art or Memorials](#). These guidelines were designed to ensure that high quality artwork and memorials of significance to a broad cross section of Vancouver residents can be added to Vancouver's public spaces and that community response is included in the considerations for the siting of the

works. The core principle of these policies is shared decision-making. These guidelines will be updated as part of the forthcoming Commemoration Policy.

On January 11, 2016, the Park Board adopted [Eleven Reconciliation Strategies](#) in response to the Calls to Action provided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The adopted strategies provided an initial framework for Reconciliation.

On April 16, 2018, the Park Board endorsed the [Mission, Vision, and Values](#) to guide and support the implementation of the [Reconciliation Strategies](#). The Mission is to decolonize the Vancouver Park Board. The Vision is that the Park Board is an evolvable organization in which every employee and Commissioner recognizes the humanity in themselves by recognizing and respecting the humanity of First Peoples; an organization that sets a worldwide example in treating Reconciliation as a decolonization process. This Mission and Vision is guided by five Values: patience, clarity, pragmatism, leadership, and learning.

On July 22, 2019, the Board passed the [Artistic Enhancement to Dedicated Park Benches](#) motion directing staff to investigate options to accommodate artistic enhancements that do not include paint or other coatings to be applied to the natural wood of park benches under the Park Board's bench dedication program.

BACKGROUND

Dedicated Park Bench Program

The Dedicated Park Bench Program provides opportunities for the public to make a philanthropic donation to support the enhancement of city parks by dedicating a park bench in celebration of a special occasion or to honour a loved one. The program is similar to programs offered through other Canadian cities such as Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa and North American cities such as Seattle and New York. Dedications on picnic tables are no longer offered as part of the program as the table tops where dedications are placed are unable to withstand the use of barbecues and other cooking devices. The Park Board is fulfilling the terms for existing picnic table dedications.

The Park Board currently has 1,173 dedicated park benches. Demand for the program remains high especially for sites in destination parks and shoreline parks. In 2019, \$608,551 was raised through the program. The donations cover the cost of the installation and ongoing maintenance over the 10-year dedication period. Program highlights include:

- ~50 new donors enter the program annually;
- 10-year renewal rates are ~40%;
- 20-year renewal rates are ~15%;
- ~30-40 bench sites become available through the annual renewal solicitation appeal providing access for new donors to participate in the program.

Terms and conditions for the program (see Appendix A) are agreed to by donors. These terms include recognition that the bench and plaque remain the property of the Vancouver Park Board, and that no alterations to the bench or its surroundings are permitted.

Painted Bench at Kitsilano Beach Park

On June 21, 2019, staff became aware that a dedicated park bench dedicated at Kitsilano Beach Park had been painted. Staff contacted the donor to advise that the bench would be removed and replaced since altering a dedicated park amenity or its surroundings is not

permitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of the program. On July 22, 2018, in response to feedback from the artist and general public interest, a Board motion was passed directing staff to investigate options to accommodate artistic enhancement to dedicated park benches, and to leave the painted bench in place on an interim basis until the Board received a report back and could consider staff recommendations.

DISCUSSION

There are several policy considerations that inform the evaluation of artistic enhancements to dedicated park benches.

On February 24, 2020, the Board received a [presentation on Arts & Culture Planning](#) that provided an overview of Park Board & City of Vancouver arts and culture portfolios, related policies and guidelines, and project updates. As noted in this presentation, a proposed new Cultural Framework is being developed to outline a vision for cultural development for the Park Board, and to identify guiding principles to support cultural service delivery across the parks and recreation system. This framework will inform updates to existing Park Board policies, such as the Donation Guidelines for Public Art or Memorials (1997) and the Arts Policy (2003), as well as guide the development of new plans and policies, such as a Commemoration Policy, a Collections Management Plan, and Plaque Guidelines.

The new Commemoration Policy will establish the criteria and process for donations, commissions, and collection conservation. This policy will address donations received through the dedicated park bench program; and will also inform options for any pending commemoration related requests, including the Board motion requesting a Park Board asset be named in [recognition of Dal Richards](#), and the motion to establish a [commemorative tree and shrub planting program](#).

Early stages of the policy planning work has been initiated, with an understanding that findings from the Colonial Audit will inform the policy development and provide direction on equity considerations for future monuments and memorials. Until this policy work is completed, a moratorium has been placed on the review and acceptance of all monument and memorial proposals.

Artistic Enhancements to Dedicated Park Benches

While recognizing the broader concerns around creating a new program for public art in parks while the Colonial Audit is underway and related policies are being developed, staff still explored potential options to accommodate artistic enhancements to dedicated park benches as directed by the Board motion. Since the application of paint or other coatings to the natural wood was excluded as a consideration, the remaining options were limited to plaque modifications, temporary artwork, or virtual tributes.

Plaque Modifications

Staff considered the addition of art on the bronze dedication plaques; however, due to the size of bench boards where the bronze plaques are placed, along with the limited space available on the plaques themselves, very little space would remain for any artistic expression. Adding multiple bronze plaques to benches was also considered; however, the bench styles currently used limit the size of plaques that can be placed and would increase the cost of the dedication.

Temporary/Chalk Based Artwork

Some public spaces utilize chalk boards to support artistic expression and could be used to mark anniversaries or special milestones. This application would be limited to the back side of the bench in order to prevent park patrons from damaging their clothing while seated. However it was determined that allowing the use of chalk or other temporary mediums could encourage vandalism or graffiti with permanent markers or paint; and further, that temporary artwork applications would also present maintenance concerns.

Virtual Tributes

Another option considered was through storytelling with no direct application of materials onto the benches themselves. Donors would have the opportunity to express their connection to the dedicated park bench with stories promoted online or through social media. While creative and artistic, it does not provide a direct tangible artistic enhancement to the dedicated park bench that may be sought or preferred and would also require development and support of an online platform.

With any of these options, standards would need to be developed to determine what would be considered acceptable artistic expressions. These standards would need to align with the same curatorial standards and rigor as required by the [Guidelines for the Donation of Public Art or Memorials](#), which are currently under review as part of the Commemoration Policy planning work.

NEXT STEPS

Park Board staff are currently engaged with the City's Cultural Services department to develop an aligned Commemoration Policy that will advise on the management and development of monuments and memorials, including donations received through the dedicated park bench program. The Colonial Audit, currently underway, will inform this planning work by identifying which cultural narratives are present within parks and which ones are missing. The intent of this new policy is to ensure that the decision-making process for commemoration is equitable, transparent and reflects the Park Board's commitment to decolonization.

With respect to the current artistically enhanced bench located at Kitsilano Beach Park, pending the Board's approval of the approach outlined in this report, staff will work with the donor and artist to identify a sensitive and compassionate path forward.

CONCLUSION

Until a new Commemoration Policy is developed and approved, staff recommend that the Park Board continues to adhere to the existing terms and conditions regarding dedicated park benches and that any artistic enhancements not be accommodated at this time.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by: Josie Riebe, Manager, Fundraising and Development

/jr/jh/sw/clc

**Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Dedicated Park Bench Program - Terms & Conditions**

Donation, Term, Donor Recognition:

- a) Donations to Canadian municipalities are tax deductible and are non-refundable.
- b) A donation of \$6,000 funds a personalized dedication on a park bench for 10 years.
- c) The donation is used to fund:
 - 1) Replacement of an existing park bench at an existing bench site;
 - 2) Production and installation of a bronze plaque for dedication purposes;
 - 3) Maintenance of the dedicated park bench for 10 years.
- d) Donations are made on-line at <http://donate.vancouver.ca> or by cheque or bank draft.
- e) The donation can be made by one or more individual or organization.
- f) A tribute fund (e.g., In Honour or In Memory) can be set up to assist community groups to crowdfund a dedication.
- g) Dedications expire 10 years from the date of installation and can be renewed at the rate in place at the time of renewal.
- h) Donations of \$1,000 or more are recognized on the web site for one year following the year in which the donation was made.

Dedication Renewal:

- a) Dedications can be renewed on a 10-year basis.
- b) The renewal process takes place in Q1 through a solicitation letter advising the donor of the renewal options.
- c) The 2020 renewal rate for dedications that have reached 10 years is \$5,000, which provides for a dedication to remain as is for a further 10 years. After 20 years, the bench must be replaced at which time the donor has the option to fund a replacement bench at the rate in place at time of renewal. The 2020 renewal rate for dedications that have reached 20 years is \$6,000. This option includes a new plaque, providing the donor with the ability to update the dedication to reflect any changes.
- d) Donors who have not responded are contacted by phone in Q3. If we are unsuccessful in making contact with the donor, the site is made available for others to dedicate. This is communicated to the donor through the solicitation letter.

Park Bench Style and Site Selection:

- a) Existing park amenity sites are available for dedication.
- b) Donations are not accepted for new site requests. New sites are made available through park development or park redevelopment and are available on a first-come first-serve basis.
- c) Donations are not accepted for new park amenity designs or styles. Bench designs and styles are determined by Park Planning as part of park design to ensure consistency and maintain consistent park aesthetic.
- d) Sites must be selected and confirmed before the donation is made.

**Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Dedicated Park Bench Program - Terms & Conditions**

Installation Timing:

- a) Funding in full is required.
- b) Plaque wording must be received within 30 days of funding.
- c) Installations take approximately 8 to 10 months.
- d) The Park Board does guarantee the installation date.

Bronze Plaque Specifications:

- a) One single dedication plaque measuring 2 inches x 14 inches is allowed.
- b) Plaque provides up to 3 centred lines of uppercase text and a maximum of 45 characters per line for a personalized inscription (a space counts as a character, for a total of 135 characters).
- c) Plaque lettering uses ISO (International Organization for Standardization) basic Latin alphabet and ISO punctuations (i.e., 26 letter alphabet with some variances permitted at our discretion, numbers, and grammatical punctuation characters).
- d) Advertising or promotion is not allowed.
- e) Plaque can be changed for a fee of \$750 (non-tax deductible).
- f) Plaque can be requested at the time of renewal for a fee of \$500 (non-tax deductible).

Conditions:

- a) The City of Vancouver does not allow spreading of ashes in public spaces.
- b) Dedicated park amenities, including plaques, remain the property of the Park Board.
- c) Altering dedicated park amenities or its surroundings is not allowed. This includes etching, painting, and staining, varnishing, decorating, or attaching items to the dedicated park amenity. Dedicated park amenities that have been altered will be removed. Replacement and repair costs will be billed to the individual or organization responsible for the alteration.
- d) In compliance with the City of Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan, dedicated park amenities, including dedication plaques, are recycled.
- e) The Park Board retains the right to use land adjacent to dedicated park amenities as it deems appropriate. The Park Board will inform donors of any changes that require relocation.
- f) Park maintenance, park upgrades or special events in parks, including filming, may require temporary removal of dedicated park amenities.
- g) Prices are subject to change and may be adjusted annually as required.
