



Town of Whitby Tree and Bench Dedication Survey Results:

As part of the Town of Whitby's process to update the current tree and bench dedication policy, Parks staff completed community consultation through online engagement to gauge public interest and input on the updated policy and proposed changes.

The public engagement process has now been completed and the results of the public consultation process are summarized below for councils' consideration. Further, Staff have provided recommendations and a draft copy of the proposed policy for review and recommendation.

Parks Staff engaged the public through the Connect Whitby Portal. As part of this engagement, Staff provided the public with a survey and a comparison of current procedure vs the proposed procedure. Further, as part of Staff's review when updating the policy, a jurisdictional scan of other municipalities was also conducted.

Overall, the survey provided to residents/interested parties resulted in the following:

- 11 questions, ranging from multiple choice, poll and essay style questions
- 44 total responses to the survey
- 27 detailed responses to essay style questions

Detailed Survey Results:

Question 2 (Y/N):

Before this survey, were you aware that the Town of Whitby offers a Tree and Bench Dedication Program?

- 88.6% of respondents answered yes
- 11.4% of respondents answered no

Question 3 (Poll):

Regarding the Tree and Bench Dedication Program, have you (select all that apply)

- Used the program (2)
- Had a friend or family member use the program (6)
- Planned to apply to the program (27)
- Not previously used the program (18)
- Did not intend to use the program (2)



Question 4 (Range Question):

Would you support the Town adding a memorial art installation at the waterfront (ex., a dedication wall), which could house numerous plaques and provide a place of remembrance for residents from across the community?

- 65.9% were very supportive
- 20.5% were somewhat supportive
- 13.6% were not very supportive

Question 5 (Two option Question):

With the Town's current Tree Dedications, a commemorative bronze plaque is installed on a concrete pillar near the base of the tree. Considering the proposed changes, which of the two options would you prefer for Tree Dedications?

Option 1: \$1,270 this option includes a tree, printable certificate, and photo of the tree. Your tree would also be included and recognized in an online map of all commemorative tree locations in Whitby, lowering Town maintenance costs.

- 43.2% of respondents selected this option

Option 2: \$2,620 - this option includes a tree and a bronze plaque installed on a concrete pillar near the base of the tree in all parks. This option will also increase Town maintenance costs.

- 56.8% of respondents selected this option

Question 6 (Two option Question):

Related to Bench Dedications, the Town's proposed policy changes include moving from a bronze plaque installed on a concrete pillar under a bench to a stainless-steel plaque installed on the backrest of a bench to reduce costs. See costing information on the Proposed Policy Changes chart. Do you have any concerns with this change?

- 88.6% of respondents answered no
- 11.4% of respondents answered yes

Question 7 (Essay Style Response):



Let us know your concerns with the change from a bronze plaque installed on a concrete pillar under a bench to a stainless-steel plaque installed on the backrest of a bench to reduce costs for bench dedications.

- 5 total responses

Easy to remove or vandalize plaque and perhaps encourage carving of inflammatory or other words into the wooden slats.

I believe that the possibility of vandalizing and dishonoring the plaque and the person being memorialized is more likely if on the bench...vs under the bench

Na

Durability and longevity

The pillar appears to be more substantial and may be more protected than a plaque on the backrest.

Question 8 (Y/N):

With the new policy, the Town will continue to pay for replacements of a vandalized tree plaque or bench plaque for the first year. The Town's proposed changes also include the Town paying to address any damage or maintenance required to a plaque, excluding vandalism, for the first two (2) years. After two years, any tree plaque or bench plaque that is in poor, unsafe condition or vandalized will be removed, and the applicant can choose to reapply for a replacement at full cost to them (the applicant). Do you have any concerns with the applicant having to reapply for a replacement at full cost after two (2) years?

- 61.4% of respondents answered yes
- 38.6% of respondents answered no

Question 9 (Essay Style Response):

Let us know your concerns related to the Town's new suggested approach to addressing vandalism.

- 27 total responses



I am not against the initial cost of the plaque, however, if something is continually vandalized, it could be very costly for the applicant. What about a one-time insurance amount?

It costs so much and is only guaranteed for 2 years? that would be a deterrent

The cost to have a plaque is already high and to expect people to pay again after just two years is not reasonable

The grieving donor is being penalized making the Town of Whitby seem parsimonious.

See comments above. I believe the brass plaque mounted underneath the bench should be kept as an option.

as per my comments above, vandalizing the plaque below the bench, I think is less likely

Share the replacement cost

Could cost of replacement be shared? i.e. the whole thing may not need to be replaced. if nobody can be contacted, replacements shouldn't be provided

you should pay for the damage

The initial cost is already so pricey

Too much to pay after only 2 years.

The cost is way too high for the applicant to have to replace every 2 years. The cost associated with the plaque should be more than sufficient to cover more than 2 years.

The town should continue to cover the cost of maintaining the trees and plaques etc. even if it is the result of vandalizing. The applicant should not have to incur future costs

I would like to have information about how often this happens that a replacement is necessary. I would hope rarely but it would influence my decision if it is likely that the tree or bench would be removed after two years. Provide the information and maybe increase the time period, if necessary, based on the data.



Costly to reapply

I feel with the amount of money that it costs to put it by a tree or on a bench should be looked after by the city forever. This is a very personable thing the family member would be doing and does not need to have to worry about that it's like a graveyard your stones are looked after forever

At the price the person is paying, they should not have to reapply. One replacement should be free and if additional replacements are required, the cost should be discounted.

I have several issues with this. I think it is absurd to ask someone to continue to pay for a memorial that they have already paid for, in order to continue to have it. People's circumstances change, financially and physically, they may no longer be able to afford it, they themselves may be no longer with us, the vandalism is no fault of the person who purchased the memorial (I hope), people purchase these types of things for the permanency of them, not to have to continue to re-do it.

Not clear if the replacement cost is the same as the initial cost. Assumption is that costs will increase as years go on, i.e., replacement cost in 10 years would be more than replacement cost in 2 years. May be a deterrent to participating in program. My understanding is that Town replaces plaque currently.

It is not long enough 1 or 2 years, the tree is planted in memory of a loved one. It should be in perpetuity, forever!!

The life of the plaque should be insured as long as the bench is there, and this shouldn't be an additional cost to the applicant.

The applicant should not have to reapply. There should be a period of time (12m) in which the applicant should have the non-competitive option to replace the plaque. The application should not have to pay full cost again. Replacements should be offered at half the cost of new.

It's a lot of money for only 2 years of service.



Perhaps the replacement cost could be equally shared by the applicant and the town the first time it needs replacing due to vandalism. Any further replacements would be at full cost to the applicant.

Install cameras, increase patrols, fines, allow public to report vandals for a prize

Seems cruel to the person who paid for plaque for their loved one to be remembered. This is completely unacceptable! I was going to apply for a tree and plaque, but I won't be now. Rude and disgraceful! How can that be ok with you? I pay \$2600 for a tree and plaque and if some jackass vandalizes it, you will remove it and they lose out on money and the place they go to remember their loved one? I need to move. This place is becoming pathetic. How could you even think about these changes?

Question 10 (Multiple choice):

Are you supportive of tax dollars being used to subsidize the Tree and Bench Dedication Program to keep costs low for the applicant by what percent?

- 50 – 27.3% of respondents
- 25 – 18.2% of respondents
- 10 – 20.5% of respondents
- Not supportive – 34.1% of respondents

Question 11 (Essay Style Response):

Let us know of any additional comments or concerns you have with the suggested changes to the Tree and Bench Dedication Program Policy.

- 23 total responses

My mother passed away in 2020 from Covid at a Regional Long Term Care home in Oshawa. Prior to being in the LTC home, she lived down at the lake for a number of years. Her bedroom looked out over Lake Ontario. Since she was recently buried in Montreal, I would like to have a memorial (preferably a bench) down at the lake that our family can more easily visit. I have been in touch for 2 years with Melanie Kennedy, who today forwarded the information about the new proposals for tree/bench dedications. Please feel free to contact me by email: bgibb15@yahoo.ca or by phone at 905-721-2505. I would really like to have some kind of memorial to my mother down by the lake. Thank you.



So, the high cost does not pay for the maintenance cost of a plaque on a tree? I can't imagine someone wanting just a certificate and a map to find their tree for that amount of money. I was terribly disappointed that this process could not be stated during covid. The program was on hold the whole time. Staff were still at work virtually being paid and our taxes were still collected. thank you for trying to continue the tree dedication program

The town subsidize the plaques would certainly make it more affordable for seniors and their family's we pay a lot off taxes in Whitby at the same time wanting to remember our loved one

The cost for the bench and tree program is far too expensive. Please note that I have participated in 2 other memorial tree and bench programs not with the Town of Whitby. Clearly these very high costs are meant to be a barrier for most citizens. Just doesn't look good on our Town.

This should be 100% funded by the person who wants to participate. The taxpayers should not have to fund any part of it other than if the town wanted to erect a dedication wall. Then the town would pay for the building of the wall and hopefully the cost per plaque would eventually offset the building costs, making it cost neutral at worst and profitable enough for maintenance at best.

I believe that the current program is very effective and based on the

long list of applicants, the demand and appreciation by the families is there. Changes may affect the long term response and commitment to the program clarify conditions to be met with dedication-for example, can you commemorate a living person?

I think the cost of this new program is so high compared to the neighbour town (Oshawa, Ajax), not affordable to many, would like to see the town cut the cost somehow, also a naming plaque is preferred, it is not meaningful without that.

I have concerns that the true cost to install a new bench with a plaque on a concrete pad costs closer to \$9,000-\$10,000.

Dedication plaques at Civic Park only are not enough for a growing community.

Behind the town hall looks like a cemetery. I get that people want the dedications, there has to be a better way.



Consider not including/allowing Birth and Death years which can turn 'dedication' plaques into cemetery style markers.

Rationale for the town subsidizing the program is that the community benefits as well from the trees and benches, not just the applicant. I understand costs have increased of everything but these costs prohibit many people from honouring loved ones in an environmentally friendly way.

Yes, I put my name in to have one a plaque put on a bench at the waterfront and I'm yet to hear from anybody I phoned a few times

I think that this is a nice way to enhance our community with trees and benches, while providing the opportunity for loved ones to memorialize their lost one in an affordable and meaningful way – of which, there are otherwise not many. To make this an ongoing cost for people will only discourage use of the program, in my opinion.

With the amount of taxes Whitby residents and businesses pay, there certainly should be enough to cover unexpected and long term costs.

Instead of one big memorial wall, perhaps smaller installations in various spots (parks and waterfront trail). Would vandalism replacement fee also apply?

I would like to see more benches (seating) all throughout our town. Make public places more user friendly. Give people somewhere to sit and chat. And proper washrooms too. Many people, especially seniors would make use of our green spaces if accommodations were made. Result: spaces are safer where there are people (young and old); keep people more active, healthy and able to enjoy the outside. We have playgrounds for kids but few places that are inviting to adults. Win / Win!

Prices are very high, and you receive less. Some more lower cost options would be nice, brick paths, walls, plaque on boulders on walkways/paths. Options on our walking trails so many loved ones walk the trails and waterfront area. Even a flower garden in memory of loved ones with a group dedication every few years to help maintain it.

For Q9, you have not revealed if tax dollars are currently subsidizing the program, nor have you revealed the actual cost of tree/bench dedication installation. Without all the information, it's impossible for citizens to make an informed decision regarding costs. Do better.



I understand that the Tree and Bench program is a tradition and a special way to honor loved ones. And I fully respect it. However, as there is a limit on resources including public spaces availability, financial funds and workforce, we have to be very mindful of its usage. If it was all online rather than having physical plaques and concrete pillars it would be much better. I believe that the Tree and Bench program only reaches a small percentage of the city residents.

And that not being an essential service, its costs should not be shared with us all.
Thanks

Can include trees on boulevards and upkeep of trees (managed by professional landscapers) to beautify the town of Whitby and Brooklyn

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