

Town of Whitby Staff Report

whitby.ca/CouncilCalendar



Report Title: Commemorative Waterfront Dedication Feature

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: June 9, 2025

Report Number: CMS 09-25

Department(s) Responsible:

Community Services Department

Submitted by:

John Romano, Commissioner,
Community Services

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief
Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

Mattson Meere, Supervisor, Parks
Planning, 905.444.1829

Sean Malby, Sr. Manager, Parks, Parks
Planning & Development, 905.444.1830

1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CMS 09-25 be received;
2. That Council provide direction to Staff regarding the development of a waterfront dedication feature by selecting one of the two options identified in this report; and,
3. That GG-0035, related to staff investigating the installation of a commemorative dedication feature at the waterfront, be removed from the New and Unfinished Business List.

2. Highlights:

- Council Resolution #78-24 directed Staff to investigate the installation of a commemorative dedication feature at the waterfront and report back to Council.
- Two options have been developed for a new waterfront dedication feature to address high demand for commemorative opportunities.
- Option 1 proposes cost-effective fish-shaped plaques mounted along Lions Promenade railing, requiring no capital investment.

- Option 2 proposes a public art installation with capacity for multiple dedications, requiring upfront capital funding.
- Option 2 would be developed through a public art process with community engagement to inform theme, location, and design.

3. Background:

The Commemorative Tree and Bench Policy was updated in April 2024 through Recommendation [Report CMS 04-24](#), which noted the ongoing popularity of waterfront locations for commemorative dedications. Currently, over 70 benches and 8 trees have been dedicated along the waterfront. However, very few existing benches remain available.

Given that the waterfront is already well-served by benches, additional bench installations will generally be limited to park redevelopment projects. While tree dedications remain an option, they have historically been less popular, likely due to a public preference for physical elements—such as benches—that provide a place for reflection.

To address continued demand, CMS 04-24 identified the potential for a new dedication feature, such as a monument or public art installation. Similar initiatives have been successfully implemented in other communities (see Attachment 1). In addition, the 2022 Tree and Bench Program Survey found that over 86% of respondents were either very supportive or somewhat supportive of a new dedication feature at the waterfront.

In response, Council Resolution #78-24 directed staff to investigate options and report back.

4. Discussion:

A waterfront dedication feature offers a placemaking opportunity to establish a new engaging focal point along Whitby's waterfront. In addition to increasing the number of available dedication opportunities, such a feature would provide residents with a unique way to commemorate a person, event, or moment—or to share an uplifting message—while enhancing the visual and cultural identity of the waterfront and provide a space for discovery and connection.

Staff investigations have resulted in two potential options for a waterfront dedication feature as described below. A summary comparison of key characteristics for both options is provided in Table 1, with conceptual imagery included in Attachment 2 and 3 that illustrate the potential scale and placement of the installations.

Option 1 - Fish Plaque Installation along Lions Promenade Railing

Option 1 proposes the installation of metal plaques in the shape of stylized fish, affixed to the existing railing along Lions Promenade. The fish motif was selected for its strong symbolic and visual connection to the Lake Ontario waterfront. As illustrated in Attachment 2, the plaques would be arranged in a flowing, organic pattern to evoke the movement of a school of fish—animating the promenade and enriching the waterfront experience for both residents and visitors.

This installation presents an opportunity to introduce a subtle yet distinctive placemaking element that reflects the Town's natural setting. With more than 400 metres of railing available, the installation could accommodate over 2000 plaques. Over time, it could become a recognizable and cherished part of the waterfront, offering visual interest as well as a unique commemorative opportunity.

A key advantage of this option is that it leverages existing infrastructure, requiring no capital investment from the Town. This significantly reduces implementation costs and provides an affordable commemorative option for residents. Preliminary estimates indicate each fish plaque could be fabricated and installed for a fee of approximately \$500 to \$750 to be paid by the purchaser. This fee would ensure all costs are fully recovered and sufficient funds are set aside to cover the cost of any future maintenance, repairs or replacements of plaques. By comparison, the most affordable bench dedication option is \$2,782 for the dedication of an existing bench.

Consistent with the Town's Commemorative Tree and Bench Dedication Program, each fish plaque would include a personalized inscription, offering community members a meaningful way to honour loved ones, celebrate milestones, or contribute to the vibrancy of the public realm. Program administration could be seamlessly integrated into the existing commemorative program structure, allowing for efficient and timely implementation. Similar to the Tree and Bench Dedication Program, the plaques would be warranted for a period of ten years, with the Town providing one replacement plaque if it is damaged or vandalized during the warranty period. If after ten years a plaque is no longer serviceable, the Town will remove the item. Town staff shall make every effort to contact the donor who may then apply to have the item replaced at cost. If the original applicant chooses not to renew or cannot be contacted, the space would be made available for a new dedication by another applicant.

From an asset management perspective, the railing and pier are currently owned by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). The DFO has expressed support for the initiative, contingent upon the Town assuming full responsibility for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the plaques.

This option offers a creative, cost-effective, and visually engaging way to enhance the waterfront while expanding commemorative opportunities for the community.

Timing: If approved, this option could see the first plaques sold and installed by spring 2026.

Refer to Attachment 2 for a conceptual image of this option.

Option 2 – Public Art Dedication Feature

Option 2 proposes the creation of a new, permanent public art installation along the waterfront, designed to accommodate a large number of dedications over time. The individual dedication pieces could take the form of engraved pavers, plaques, or other integrated design elements that are incorporated directly into the artwork. As illustrated in Attachment 3, potential locations include the south end of Lions Promenade near the pier entrance, or other prominent locations and rest areas along the waterfront trail.

The feature would be designed by an artist or design team to create a visually compelling and meaningful focal point. The goal is to establish an inspiring, reflective space that enhances the waterfront's identity while serving as a lasting tribute to the community's stories and values.

At this preliminary stage, the design, theme, materials, and exact location have not been finalized. Should Council approve Option 2, these elements would be developed through a multi-phase public engagement process, following the format used for the Thicksen Road Public Art Project and aligned with the Town's Public Art Policy.

Unlike Option 1, this option would require an upfront capital investment by the Town (see Financial Considerations for further details). For estimation purposes, staff have assumed the feature would be designed to accommodate approximately 250 dedication plaques which could be purchased by interested applicants for a fee ranging from \$950 to \$1400 per dedication. These assumptions are subject to refinement based on community feedback and the final design vision.

The final fee would be set to recover the full cost of the dedication pieces, as well as setting aside sufficient funds to cover the cost of any maintenance and replacement of the dedication pieces over the warranty period and partially offset the costs of additional waterfront art pieces. Similar to the Tree and Bench Dedication Policy, the dedication pieces would be warrantied for a period of 10 years, with the Town providing one replacement plaque if it is damaged or vandalized during the warranty period. If after ten years a dedication piece is no longer serviceable, the Town will remove the item. Town staff shall make every effort to contact the donor who may then apply to have the item replaced at cost. If the original applicant chooses not to renew or cannot be contacted, the space would be made available for a new dedication by another applicant.

Dedication pricing would be set to balance affordability with maintenance and replacement costs. Program uptake would be monitored closely, and adjustments could be made—such as revising dedication fees or implementing targeted marketing strategies—to support sales and ensure long-term viability. The Town receives approximately 10 applications for dedications at the waterfront each year. At this rate, it would take approximately 25 years for all the dedication spaces to be filled. If the fee for purchasing a dedication piece was offered at a lower price point, there is potential that the number of dedications per year would increase.

Once constructed, the dedication component of the art feature would be administered as part of the Town's Commemorative Tree and Bench Dedication Program. As dedication space fills, this model could be replicated at other waterfront locations, creating a series of public art focal points that collectively establish a unique waterfront public art trail celebrating Whitby's sense of place and community spirit.

Timing: If approved, this option would be subject to funding availability through the Town's Municipal Accommodate Tax ("MAT"). Currently, the MAT has allocated funding for a number of tourism and public art projects until 2027. Therefore, should Council consider this option, the Call for Art on the proposed public art dedication feature could be launched in 2027 and fabricated and installed by summer 2028. In accordance with Council's

direction, the appropriate recommendation below would be required to moved and approved.

1. That Council direct staff to proceed with implementing Option 1 (as outlined in Staff Report CMS 09-25), offering fish shaped plaques which would be mounted on the Loins Promenade Railing in addition to the existing Tree and Bench Dedication Program; OR,
2. That Council direct staff to proceed with implementing Option 2 (as outlined in Staff Report CMS 09-25), a Public Art Dedication Feature with design and construction to be deferred until sufficient Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) funding becomes available and is incorporated into the Town's budget.

See Attachment 3 for conceptual imagery of this option. To assist with visualization, a transparent placeholder box has been added to the imagery to illustrate the potential scale of the installation.

Table 1: Comparison of Waterfront Dedication Feature Options

Feature	Option 1: Fish Plaques	Option 2: Public Art Dedication Feature
Description	Metal fish-shaped plaques affixed to existing railing in a flowing pattern	New permanent public art installation designed to accommodate multiple dedications
Location	Lions Promenade railing (existing infrastructure)	Potentially at south end of Lions Promenade or along the waterfront trail
Cost	No capital funding required \$500 - \$750 per plaque (full recovery of costs)	\$100,000 - \$150,000 investment through the MAT. \$950 - \$1400 per plaque (full recovery of costs + contribution to offset a future art installation)
Capacity	High capacity – over 400m of railing available could accommodate 2000 plaques.	250 minimum - Capacity depends on final design; expandable to other sites over time

Feature	Option 1: Fish Plaques	Option 2: Public Art Dedication Feature
Design Process	Minimal – uses existing infrastructure and standardized plaque design	Custom design by artist or design team, informed by public engagement
Public Engagement	Not required	Required in alignment with Public Art Policy
Implementation Timeline	Short-term – 2026	Medium- to long-term - 2028
Integration with Existing Program	Easily integrated into current Commemorative Tree and Bench Program	Will be integrated upon completion
Placemaking Value	Subtle, whimsical visual interest	Strong visual impact; creates new focal point and destination
Scalability	High – railing offers long-term growth	Medium – model could be replicated along the waterfront

5. Financial Considerations:

Option 1 – Fish Plaque Installation

Option 1 requires no capital funding. Community Services Staff estimate the fee for each fish motif plaque will be \$500 to \$750, which would be paid directly by the applicant. The fee will be set based on a cost recovery basis similar to the existing Tree and Bench Program. As with existing tree and bench dedications, these plaques would not be eligible for a donation receipt for income tax purposes.

Option 2 – Public Art Dedication Feature

Option 2 would require an upfront investment by the Town, with preliminary costs estimated at approximately \$100,000 to \$150,000. Community Services Staff prepared the estimate based on comparable projects and accounted for public engagement, artist/design consultant fees, conceptual and detailed design, and construction.

As noted earlier in this report, the Town's portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax, which was established to fund projects that support tourism, could be used to fund this project. Total MAT revenues are projected to be \$350,400 to \$525,600 annually of which the Town's (50%) portion is projected to be \$172,046 to \$258,070 per year (as outlined

in the [CAO 13-24](#)). However, the Town's portion of MAT revenues are committed until 2027 to fund items such as a public art fund (at \$50,000 per year), a tourism strategy, the new Town Signature Event (i.e. \$20,000 for the Home Sweet Home Festival), and a summer tourism ambassador. Should Council choose to proceed with Option 2, design and construction of the public art would be subject to sufficient funds in the Town's MAT reserve fund and approval of a capital project to proceed. In the interim Staff could also investigate other external funding sources, such as grants or partnerships, to offset the capital cost of the public art dedication feature.

The cost of the individual dedication pieces for option 2 is excluded from the capital cost of the public art feature noted above. Community Services Staff estimate the fee to be \$950 to \$1,400 per dedication piece to cover the cost of fabricating, inscribing, installing, and replacing (during the warranty period) the dedication pieces and to contribute towards an additional public art dedication feature in the future:

Revenue Model and Assumptions:

- **Estimated dedication fee:** \$950 to \$1,400 per dedication.
- **Total potential revenue:** \$237,500 to \$350,000 (based on full subscription of 250 dedications).
- **Use of revenue:**
 - \$300 to \$600 of the estimated dedication fees would be applied toward the cost of supplying and inscribing the dedication pieces and warranty replacements.
 - The balance of the estimated dedication fees, i.e. \$650 to \$800, could be considered as a donation to be set aside for a future public art feature by the waterfront for additional dedications. Based on 250 dedications, this could generate \$162,500 to \$200,000 for an additional future public art feature.
 - Note: the above fees and allocations between dedication pieces and funding for a future art feature are preliminary estimates at this time. Should Council wish to proceed with Option 2, the final dedication fee, revenues, and allocation will be subject to design and total number of subscriptions available based on the design.
- **Donation Receipts:** Subject to final allocation between the cost of the dedication pieces and donation to a future public art feature, a portion of the dedication fees may be eligible for a donation receipt for income tax purposes. In accordance with Canada Revenue Agency rules, if the cost of the dedication piece is not more than 80% of the proposed dedication fee, the difference between the dedication fee and cost of the dedication piece may be eligible for a donation receipt for income tax purposes. Residents and businesses paying the dedication fees for Option 2, will receive a dedication piece attached to the first public art feature and will not have any rights related to the future public art feature (e.g. no ability to approve the design, location of the future art feature

and no right to have an additional dedication piece on the second/future art feature).

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

The 2022 Tree and Bench Program survey revealed strong community interest in a waterfront dedication feature, with over 86% of respondents supportive.

- **Option 1:** No further engagement required.
- **Option 2:** Will include a Call for Art that incorporates a public engagement process led by internal staff teams from Community Services, Strategic Initiatives, and Corporate Communications, using the Connect Whitby platform. The engagement approach will follow the successful format of the Thickson Road Public Art Project and comply with the Town's Public Art Policy. No additional budget impact is anticipated for this engagement.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Various internal departments were consulted in the development of options for the waterfront dedication feature, including Finance, Parks Planning and Development, Parks Operations and Strategic Initiatives.

8. Strategic Priorities:

The recommendations of this report advance the Town's Strategic Pillars and Actions identified in the Community Strategic Plan, including increasing opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of the community, enhancing community connectivity and beautification and delivering services that respond to community needs while balancing the impact to taxpayers.

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Dedication Features from Other Jurisdictions

Attachment 2 – Visualizations of Fish Plaques (Option 1)

Attachment 3 – Visualizations of Public Art Dedication Feature (Option 2)