

**TO:** MAYOR & COUNCILLORS  
**FROM:** DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE  
**SUBJECT:** **PRESENTING BURNABY – PARKS DONATION PROGRAM**  
**PURPOSE:** To inform Council about a temporary suspension of the Presenting Burnaby donation program.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the report titled “Presenting Burnaby – Parks Donation Program” dated July 08, 2024 be received for information; and

**THAT** the report be forwarded to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee for information.

## **1.0 POLICY SECTION**

The Presenting Burnaby - Parks Donation Program review is aligned with the following Council adopted policies and plans/strategies: Equity Policy (1994, updated 2020 and 2023), Economic Development Strategy (2007), Social Sustainability Strategy (2011), Corporate Strategic Plan (2022).

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

The Presenting Burnaby - Parks Donation Program was initially developed in the 1970s with the primary aim of providing residents the opportunity to sponsor the installation of benches and picnic tables, helping to support amenity installations within parks in exchange for a recognition plaque. Although not originally intended as an exclusive memorial bench program, over time, it has gradually evolved into one, as more and more individuals saw the program as a meaningful way to honour and remember loved ones.

Balancing remembrance with the broader needs of parks as shared public spaces is crucial. While memorial bench programs offer a meaningful way for individuals to honour loved ones, it is important to maintain the right tone for parks, ensuring they remain welcoming and functional for all visitors. Parks require benches for rest, relaxation, and socializing, but they can only accommodate a certain number without compromising the overall experience. Overcrowding parks with benches can detract from the park’s natural beauty and open space, which are essential for recreation and community enjoyment.

Managing this balance requires planning and coordination, which is a process that is heavy on staff involvement. Due to resourcing and other department priorities, the program has been paused so it can be fully reviewed and restructured to assure alignment with core objectives and desired outcomes.

**3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION**

As the Presenting Burnaby program evolved, it succeeded in enhancing community involvement and improving park amenities, but it also encountered significant financial and administrative challenges, necessitating a thorough review and restructuring to continue meeting the community’s needs effectively.

In its early years, particularly around mid-1990s, the program allowed donors to cover 80% of the capital cost of a bench at \$1,500, with minimal administrative expenses. Over the past 28 years, the cost of the sponsorship increased to \$3,000 per bench and the administrative costs compounded significantly without cost recovery. Currently the sponsorship cost is \$3,000 per bench but the actual installation costs have escalated to \$5,000 per bench. In addition to capital costs, the lifetime administrative cost is estimated at \$2,000 per bench over a ten-year period. With over 440 benches of various ages, staff are tracking, replacing, and renewing contracts on average 44 bench sites per year. The donation funds recover approximately 60% of the capital cost. The administrative costs are not recovered in the program.

One major consequence of the program’s below-cost structure has been its over-subscription. The program has seen an exponential increase in donor requests over the years. This surge in demand has made it challenging to find suitable locations for new benches in large, popular parks, causing frustration among potential donors who face long waiting times to sponsor a bench.

To manage this high demand, staff have limited new donations to ten per year over the past few years, however, requests would escalate to 25 per year or higher if advertised. This cap was seen necessary because bench installations are subsidized by capital funds, and there are limited additional locations for new benches. The process for accepting new donations operated on a first-come, first-served basis at the start of each year, with a focus on replacing benches that have exceeded their ten-year term. However, this system has proven to be highly frustrating for customers.

The administrative burden associated with the program is significant. Tasks include processing order forms, often requiring language translations, conducting site reviews before and after installations, managing donor information, and handling renewals and replacements. Additionally, the lack of modern tracking systems for donor information exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult to manage renewal contracts effectively. Navigating this topic can be challenging and emotional, requiring a high degree of sensitivity in customer service interactions.

Given these challenges, staff have reviewed the program and concluded that significant updating and restructuring is required to create an effective and meaningful donation program that meets current needs in a fiscally responsible way. This includes restructuring costs and implementing systems for long-term asset management. As a result, staff intend to temporarily suspend the receipt and processing of new donation bench requests until such time as the program can be reviewed and updated. Other donation items, although not typically popular, will continue to be available. Given the busy business workplan, the Presenting Burnaby program review is not anticipated until 2025, pending the need to resource other emerging priorities, and the new requests for benches will not be processed until late 2026 at the earliest.

The program also needs to refocus broadly on opportunities for amenity donations, rather than focusing solely on memorial benches. The program review will also involve the development of a business case and fundamental analysis with guiding principles for park amenity funding, assessing whether donation and/or sponsorship initiatives like Presenting Burnaby justify the administrative and other public space commercialization burdens. This shift aligns with best practices and administrative processes seen in various other municipalities.

**4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The intent of this report is to provide clarity and transparency to the Presenting Burnaby program. As such, the report serves as an important communication tool, facilitating informed decision-making and fostering corporate dialogue. Staff will be working to communicate the review of the program through program webpage and other corporate communication channels.

**5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Presenting Burnaby program review is anticipated to be conducted by internal staff, and will be integrated into the department’s 2025 business workplan. Future program reports will cover and discuss any potential program capital or operating implications for Council’s consideration and feedback.

Respectfully submitted,

Carmen Gonzalez, Deputy General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

**REPORT CONTRIBUTORS**

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