

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **LANDMARK BURNABY SIGN UPDATE**
PURPOSE: To provide Council with an overview of potential opportunities, locations, and costs associated with a landmark Burnaby sign, and to outline key considerations for future decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT staff be directed to proceed with Option 2, as outlined in the report titled “Landmark Burnaby Sign Update” dated May 13, 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines potential options, estimated capital costs, and anticipated operating costs for a permanent landmark sign, along with key considerations related to its purpose, delivery models, and funding. While there is currently no dedicated budget or aligned civic project to support immediate implementation, early engagement with Tourism Burnaby presents a promising opportunity to advance the initiative through a tourism-focused partnership.

Tourism Burnaby has expressed initial interest in commissioning the sign, with the potential to gift or sell it to the City at a nominal cost. Staff will continue to explore this collaborative pathway and, should the concept be further refined as anticipated in Q3 2025, will report back to Council with recommended locations, operational requirements, and other key considerations.

1.0 BACKGROUND

At its meeting on January 14, 2025, Council passed a motion directing staff to investigate and report back on potential opportunities, suitable locations, and associated costs for installing a landmark City of Burnaby sign. The intent of this initiative is to enhance civic identity, support tourism, and contribute to public space enhancement.

This report has been prepared in response to that direction and focuses specifically on the concept of a landmark Burnaby sign. It does not address broader signage topics such as city gateway or entry signs, which are typically located within road rights-of-way and mark key entrance and exit points. These types of signs serve distinct functions and are considered through separate planning and operational processes. As such, identifying preferred locations for a landmark sign at this stage is challenging, as site

selection would be highly dependent on the program's core drivers and intended outcomes.

Across Canada, landmark city name signs have been implemented by municipalities to reinforce civic branding, provide iconic photo opportunities, and, in some cases, serve as platforms for community art. Examples include Nanaimo's waterfront sign in Maffeo Sutton Park, the illuminated Toronto sign at Nathan Phillips Square, and the Scarborough sign developed through a multi-year public art program. These examples illustrate that landmark signs are often shaped by a municipality's specific goals, whether focused on civic art, tourism, or a combination of both. As such, establishing strategic clarity around the intended purpose and objectives of a landmark sign is considered best practice before initiating a project of this nature, helping to ensure alignment with broader municipal priorities, such as park capital projects or alignment with the public art program, and other community serving investments.

2.0 POLICY SECTION

The recommendations align with the following Council-adopted policies, plans, and strategies: Burnaby Economic Development Strategy (2007), Official Community Plan (1998/2014), the Burnaby Strategic Plan (2022) and the Benefits Based Approach (2024).

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Landmark signs in other jurisdictions tend to fall into two broad categories: public art installations or tourism-focused promotional features. In the first case, the emphasis is on artistic expression, cultural identity, and community engagement. This could include a permanent sign designed by an artist, or a more neutral sign structure that features rotating artist-designed treatments, such as painted or vinyl wraps, which change over time. In the second, the goal is to create a recognizable and visually appealing destination that supports the visitor economy. While distinct, these two approaches are often interconnected. A single installation may be both a cultural expression and a tourism driver, depending on how it is conceived, delivered, and managed.

In Burnaby's case, the core aims of the project, whether it is seen primarily as a piece of public art, a tourism infrastructure investment, or both will have a significant influence on design, location, and delivery. For example, the chosen motivation may determine whether the sign is intended to be a permanent fixture, a temporary or seasonal installation, or a movable feature that can travel to different sites within the city. It will also shape the design process and guide decisions around who is best positioned to lead the initiative, whether that be the City itself, a partner organization, or a community-led consortium with some City support.

The approach to measuring the success of the project will likewise depend on the program's foundational goals. If the primary objective is cultural expression or civic engagement, appropriate metrics might include community participation, number of local artists involved, and the degree of cultural or heritage representation. If the project

is framed as a tourism initiative, key indicators could include visitor numbers, economic spin-offs, and the volume of digital engagement or media exposure the sign generates. These considerations reinforce the need for a clear and intentional articulation of purpose before advancing further with design or implementation.

Several municipalities have adopted delivery models that reflect their unique local contexts and partnerships. In Scarborough, for example, the Scarborough sign was managed by Scarborough Arts as a community-driven public art initiative, developed over several years and featured at multiple locations. In Vancouver, a temporary “Vancouver” sign was installed at Granville Square Plaza with funding provided by the Hotel Association and Port of Vancouver, demonstrating a tourism-led model supported by the private sector. These examples highlight the potential value of grassroots support, cross-sector collaboration, and third-party leadership in delivering and sustaining such projects.

3.1 Option Analysis

Option 1: Permanent Sign as Public Art

This approach would focus on artistic expression and cultural identity. The sign could be designed by a commissioned artist or configured to support rotating treatments, such as painted, or vinyl wraps that change over time. While this option aligns with community engagement and cultural enrichment goals, Burnaby does not have sufficient funds set aside in a Public Art Reserve, and there are no civic or development projects at this time that would serve as a suitable vehicle for integration. For these reasons, staff do not recommend pursuing this model under current conditions.

Option 2: Permanent Sign as a Tourism Feature (Recommended)

A tourism-led model focuses on delivering a visually iconic and strategically located sign to support Burnaby’s visitor economy. This option has gained the most traction, as staff have held early discussions with Tourism Burnaby, who have expressed interest in commissioning the sign. Their concept involves collaborating with the City to install a permanent feature, potentially on City land within a Metrotown-area park that is both pedestrian friendly and visible from the SkyTrain. The sign could be gifted or sold to the City at a nominal cost, with the City potentially assuming responsibility for site-related needs and maintenance funded through annual operating budgets. This model presents the most promising path forward and offers a practical framework to advance the initiative without direct substantial investment from the City. While early conversations with Tourism Burnaby have been positive and indicate a willingness to explore the opportunity further, any formal commitment would require additional project refinement and approval from their board and Council. Should Council endorse this option, staff would continue to engage with Tourism Burnaby and report back to Council as appropriate.

Option 3: Integration into the 2026 Budget Request

A third approach would involve bringing the project forward through the City’s 2026 budget planning cycle. As the sign is not a capital asset, it would need to be funded through general revenues as an operating initiative. While this pathway would allow for

internal development and oversight, it would have to be considered as part of all other city priorities being considered for limited operating funding. Depending on the outcome of further discussion with Tourism Burnaby as noted in Option 2, staff may still bring this project forward for consideration in the 2026-2030 financial planning process.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

If Council wishes to explore this initiative further, future stages will benefit from a comprehensive engagement strategy. Community input could help shape both location and design elements. Feedback from local artists, cultural organizations, and Burnaby's host Nations would ensure the project reflects the city's diverse cultural identity and fosters meaningful representation. Staff also anticipate further discussions with tourism and business stakeholders to explore interest and potential for co-investment or long-term programming support.

Community involvement plays a significant role in ensuring that landmark projects are embraced and sustained. While the City may be able to manage the installation as a static sign, delivering a more interactive or evolving initiative would require dedicated operating support or leadership from an engaged civic group. Establishing a stewardship model that aligns with the scale and ambition of the project will be critical to its long-term success.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. However, should the City wish to proceed, several financial constraints must be acknowledged. Under Public Sector Accounting Board Standards (PSAB), a landmark sign would not qualify as a capital asset and cannot be funded from the capital reserves. Instead, the project would need to be financed through general revenues or limited discretionary sources such as the gaming reserve, both of which are currently under pressure from other competing service needs.

Preliminary benchmarking suggests that a permanent installation could cost between \$200,000 and \$600,000 depending on its location, size, materials, lighting, and artistic complexity. Annual operating costs such as maintenance, power, and cleaning would be dependent on the final design and delivery model selected. Should the project advance, staff would prepare a placeholder estimate for future operating budgets.

The most promising development to date is the City's ongoing dialogue with Tourism Burnaby. If refined and formally supported by their board and Council, this partnership may enable a shared delivery model in which Tourism Burnaby commissions the sign and the City contributes through site coordination and operational support. While many details remain under discussion, this approach would reduce financial risk and support alignment with broader tourism goals. Staff will continue to explore this opportunity and, should the initiative advance, will report back to Council with more detailed recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Carmen Gonzalez, Deputy General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Andre Isakov, Director PRC Planning, and reviewed by Emmaline Hill, Director Culture.