

**Subject: Birchwood Trail Lookout Tower****APPROVALS:****Annette Antoniak**\_\_\_\_\_  
Director\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT the Birchwood Trail Lookout Tower project be cancelled; and

THAT Administration undertake a new public consultation regarding the use of donations provided by the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwara's Committee in accordance with the alternatives listed under number 1 in the alternative section of this report; and

THAT any recommended use of funds determined through the public consultation be subsequently approved by the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwaras Committee.

**Summary:**

Administration was directed through Council resolution on December 2, 2016 to build a commemorative tower in Birchwood Trails. Key stakeholders were contacted and engaged and they provided general support for the concept. Formal construction commenced and once stakeholders could see the physical location and the work that was being undertaken, concerns were raised opposing the specific location. The project was immediately put on hold, while administration reviewed the project and considered other options.

An alternative location was suggested in Abasand and a survey was conducted to gauge community support. Upon completion of the survey, the results indicated a lack of support in general for the project, and that there should be more engagement regarding the use of funds related to the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwara's Committee donation.

**Background:**

On December 2, 2016, Council unanimously approved the following motion:

“THAT a Birchwood Trail Lookout Tower be constructed to commemorate all responders to the May 3, 2016 wildfire in the amount not greater than \$500,000”

Capital reserve funding for the construction of this project was approved by Council during the 2017 Capital Budget deliberations. Subsequently, a donation was received by the municipality from the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara’s Council and Ontario Gurdwara's Committee. This project was presented to the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara Council and Ontario Gurdwara's Committee and they supported the use of the donation to fund the project. In September of 2017, a fiscal capital budget amendment was approved by the Capital Budget Steering Committee to revise the funding source from reserve to donations. The project was originally described as a wildfire commemorative tower with commemorative plaque that would highlight the resiliency of the community and provide acknowledgement of the Sikh donation.

On July 24, 2017, a contractor was selected through a competitive process and has since then completed the design, acquired all the necessary permits for the Birchwood site, and some of the construction materials were purchased to erect the structure. The contractor was mobilized at the site and began the installation process when concerns were raised by stakeholders about the project. As a result, the Municipality immediately stopped work, assessed the project and provided an alternative location at the north end of the Abasand subdivision. The location was chosen due to its proximity to an existing trail system as well as the locations excellent view of the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers, Lower Townsite and MacDonald Island Recreation Facility.

Citizens were engaged through a survey, with an opportunity to comment on which of two designs they preferred and provide any additional comments. The survey is closed and the results of the engagement strategy including the survey are as follows:

1. 60 percent of the survey respondents preferred design 2 (elevated).
2. Approximately 43 percent of the survey respondents disapproved of the project, 12 percent provided positive feedback, and the remaining 45 percent provided neutral comments related to accessibility, wheelchair access, placing a bench at the location or commenting on the memorial park in Beacon Hill.
3. 59 percent of social media responses were negative, while 32 percent were positive and the remaining 9 percent were neutral.
4. There were approximately 33,113 online impressions for the project.

**Alternatives:**

1. Consider utilizing the funds to assist with the development of a place that commemorates those that lost their lives in a tragic motor vehicle crash, first responders and the wildfire event in general. But also provides a place for community reflection regarding that day. Suggestions include:

- A commemorative park that provides a place of reflection for those impacted by the fire.
  - Trail bridge in the Birchwood trails as a place of commemoration and reflection.
  - Help fund a new gateway sign and facilities into the community in collaboration with Rotary to provide a place of reflection regarding the wildfire as well.
  - Additional trail lighting to enhance the Birchwood Trails.
2. Continue to build the tower at the original location in Birchwood Trails and utilize the donations as previously approved by the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwaras to complete the project.
  3. Build the tower at the proposed Abasand location. This will result in additional costs to be negotiated for the scope change related to the new location and a capital budget amendment is required.

### **Budget/Financial Implications:**

To cancel the project will result in paying project closing costs associated to holding the project, loss of profit, work already completed and materials. This amount would have to be negotiated with the vendor. The approved capital budget would not be fully utilized and the remaining funds would not be spent. Any associated costs would be funded through reserves and the donation would be left intact. It would also be necessary to find an alternative use for the donations provided by Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwaras; they would also have to approve of that alternative use of funds.

Alternative 1 - budget implications would need to be determined based on the results of a public consultation to determine if additional funds would be required based on public opinion and feedback.

Alternative 2 - to continue to build the project at the original location in Birchwood Trails, there would potentially be a small cost increase related to holding the project. This will be an incurred cost regardless of the option chosen, but this cost will be within the approved capital budget. No capital budget amendment would be required.

Alternative 3 - will result in additional costs related to holding the project, as well as the design and location change. The additional design and location change costs would be over the approved budget and would need to be approved through a capital budget amendment.

### **Rationale for Recommendation:**

The project was initiated based on an unanimously approved Council motion. Initial engagement indicated no resistance to the project and as such, there are costs associated to the project start regardless of which alternative is chosen.

Subsequent stakeholder engagement and feedback indicated a lack of support for the

project to move forward.

Cancelling the existing project results in paying only the existing costs to date and negotiated holding fees, but no further costs for a project that is not supported based on public feedback.

Further engagement can be undertaken that ensures that the public and the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara's Council and Ontario Gurdwaras support a community based recommendation that provides a place for commemoration and reflection.

**Strategic Priorities:**

Responsible Government