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Date January 29, 2025 **Report No.** 2025-30

To Chair and Members
Economic Development, Tourism & Cultural Initiatives Advisory Committee

From Kara Davey
Manager of Tourism, Culture and Sport

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic **2025-2027 Public Art Initiatives (Traffic Light Wraps and Utility Houses) - 2025-30.docx**

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report #2025-30 2025-2027 Public Art Initiatives (Traffic Cabinet Wraps and Utility Houses) BE RECEIVED;
- B. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to implement a three-year Traffic Cabinet Wrap Program; and
- C. THAT up to \$6,000 BE FUNDED from the Public Art Reserve annually for the Traffic Cabinet Wrap Program in 2025, 2026 and 2027; and
- D. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to implement a three-year Utility House Murals Program; and

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- E. THAT up to \$6,000.00 BE FUNDED from the Public Art Reserve annually for the Utility House Murals Program in 2025, 2026 and 2027.

4.0 Background

Cities with unique public art installations can position themselves as cultural hubs within a region, drawing in visitors and encouraging community pride, both of which can have long-term economic benefits. The City of Brantford's Temporary Public Art collection presently only includes five murals, two of which are indoors:

1. A Star Over Brantford: A Tribute to Phil Hartman (Sanderson Centre, 2024);
2. The Pages of the Grand River (Brantford Public Library, 2024);
3. Community Peace Mural (Market St. Stairwell to Parkade, 2024)
4. Brantford Farmers' Market Mural (Inside, 2023)
5. Children's Library Mural (Inside Brantford Public Library, 2021)

In addition to murals, other temporary public art projects have been approved by Council, including Brantford's Grand Exhibit (2019) and Little Free Libraries in Brantford (2017). In December 2020, Public Works and Communications and Community Engagement staff worked together to initiate an effective new method to curb instances of graffiti on City-owned Traffic Cabinets that, unfortunately, are a major target for graffiti throughout the City. The anti-graffiti campaign entitled "Celebrating our History" features historical imagery relevant to where the Traffic Cabinet is located. To date, 100 out of 150 Traffic Cabinets throughout the City are wrapped in historical images. Staff propose expanding this program by commissioning local artists to provide designs for traffic cabinet wraps and complete 15 locally-designed wraps (five per year) over the next three years. Although some cabinets have been wrapped within the City, this has not been done through a formal policy framework in Brantford but is a very common practice in many municipalities.

Additionally, staff would like to hire a mural artist annually over the next three years to paint a mural on three utility houses (one per year) in parks and community centers. At present no artwork of any kind is displayed on these houses, which makes them blank canvases for tagging and graffiti.

5.0 Analysis

Art can transform mundane infrastructure and utility buildings into creative and expressive pieces that add charm and personality to an area. Small projects, such as the proposed traffic cabinet wraps and painted utility houses, provide opportunities for local artists to showcase their work, helping to foster a sense of community pride and support for the arts. Adding art in every day public spaces such as traffic cabinets on the side of roads or forgettable utility houses in community centres and parks can become part of broader urban revitalization effort. It helps refresh neglected areas and can make streets and parks feel more inviting, livelier and cared for.

5.1 Traffic Cabinet Wraps

Transforming traffic cabinets into canvases for art or murals offers a variety of benefits to the community, the environment, and the urban landscape. Traffic cabinets are often seen as eyesores in the city landscape, so by adding vibrant murals or artwork to the units, we transform mundane infrastructure into visually appealing statement pieces, enhancing the overall look of streets and neighborhoods.

As magnets for tagging, traffic cabinets are often marked with graffiti, so a well-executed mural or art piece on traffic cabinets can actually discourage vandalism. In some cases, the artwork can also help traffic cabinets stand out more clearly, making them more visible to drivers and pedestrians, thus potentially improving safety. Creative street elements can subtly influence the mood of the area, encouraging slower traffic and increasing awareness of the surrounding environment.

Public art on traffic cabinets brings art into everyday life. Unlike traditional gallery spaces, anyone walking or driving by can appreciate the artwork, making art more inclusive and accessible to all.

Presently, the city has an existing program run by Traffic Services that wraps traffic cabinets with historical photographs and important messaging (Figure 1). To date, 100 of the 150 traffic cabinets in the city have already been wrapped. The creation of this art program will expand on the existing one by adding creative and vibrant imagery throughout the City. The goal of this larger program is to cover all the remaining cabinets across the city. The addition of artist wraps would be added to the options for traffic to pull from for designs, while also supporting the development of local and regional artists.



Figure 1 Example of current Traffic Box Cabinet wrap that highlights history of Brantford and/or current community campaigns.



Figure 2 Example of unwrapped traffic cabinet in Brantford. There are 50 of these remaining in the City unwrapped.



Figure 3 Example traffic cabinets wrapped in mural artwork in other communities.

Similar projects have been completed and are well received in Hamilton, Toronto, Mississauga, Burlington, Ottawa, Waterloo, London, Kingston, Windsor, Guelph, St. Catharines, Kitchener, Barrie, and Niagara Falls. This proposed three-year program would allow staff to pay artist design fees and staff in Traffic Services will be able to wrap five cabinets a year with this artwork for the next three years.

5.2 Utility Houses Murals

Like the traffic cabinets, Utility Houses within City parks and outside of public facilities and often welcome by unwanted vandalism and graffiti. Murals on the utility houses would beautify our communities and deter unwanted attention and tagging on these 'blank canvases.'

Vandalism requires valuable staff resources, including staff time and can be draining on operating budgets to properly remediate damage. This proposed mural program is supported by the Parks Services team who see the value in murals as an effort to both beautify and mitigate vandalism to the utility houses. This three-year program will allow for one utility house to be painted by an artist each year for the next three years. Based on priority locations either for graffiti prevention, beautification or both, the first house to be wrapped in 2025 is in John Wright Park, and the second priority for year two would be the house in Tom Thumb Park. The third year of the program will move towards completing the list of utility houses within the city.



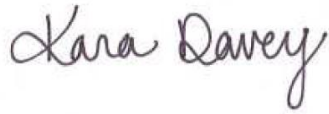
Figure 4 An example of one of the City of Brantford's current utility houses.

6.0 Financial Implications

Staff are requesting a total of \$36,000 in funding from the Public Art Reserve over the next three years. This includes requests for \$12,000 annually to install five new traffic cabinets wraps and paint one utility house each year in 2025, 2026 and 2027.

7.0 Conclusion

Public Art enhances and beautifies our communities supporting redevelopment efforts, promoting wellbeing and creating pride of place. It plays a significant role in the revitalization of urban spaces, contributing to both the aesthetic and social revitalization of neighborhoods. Public art makes spaces feel safer and more inviting, it encourages pride of place and foster support and community building. The two programs outlined in this report take steps towards modernizing the city's public art collection, promoting local and regional artists and elevating arts and culture in the City.



Kara Davey, Manager of Tourism, Culture & Sport

Prepared By:

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Kara Davey, MBA, Manager of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Attachments (if applicable)

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no