

Report to Council

Report Title: 25th Walkerton Water Commemoration

Prepared By: Christine Brandt, Community Development Coordinator, and Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer

Department: Economic Development

Date: March 18, 2025

Report Number: ED2025-04 **File Number:** C11ED

Attachments:

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby approves Report Number ED2025-04 – 25th Walkerton Water Commemoration, prepared by Christine Brandt, Community Development Coordinator, and Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer and in doing so, Council acknowledges that this is a significant and meaningful event in the community's history that evokes a range of emotions among residents that deserves respect both locally, Provincially and Nationally; and further that a commemorative event will not be organized respecting the opportunity for individuals to honour their loved ones and observe this anniversary in their own personal ways; and further that Council's support of the renewal of the Heritage Water Garden will continue to serve as space for quiet reflection for our community.

Background:

The 25th anniversary of the Walkerton water contamination will occur in May 2025. It is important to continue recognize and honour the legacy of those who were impacted by the E. coli outbreak while also reflecting on all that Brockton has accomplished in the past 25 years. Brockton Council has approved a revitalization of the Heritage Water Garden, which is already underway. The revitalization will include the replacement of donor wall signage, the removal of old pergolas, maintenance of light fixtures, restoration of the fountain stone and painting of benches. This park will be maintained to a high standard as it provides a place of quiet reflection for residents and visitors and serves as a public monument to a significant chapter in Brockton's history.

In November 2024 Council requested staff obtain feedback from Brockton residents regarding their feelings on a commemoration event to mark the passing of 25 years since the water contamination occurred. At the same time, staff applied to the Ontario Heritage Trust for a commemorative plaque that would be installed next to the existing donor wall that would replace all previous plaques and mark the legacy of this historic event that changed legislation in the Province of Ontario related to drinking water.

Analysis:

Service clubs and community groups were contacted for feedback, and the request was published three times in the Brockton Buzz - twice electronically and once through a paper copy included with property tax mailings - to ensure residents, businesses and organizations within the community were asked. Through all of this outreach only a total of nine responses were received regarding the anniversary, with opinions divided on whether a commemoration event should be held. The limited feedback received indicates a lack of strong consensus or interest on the matter. Moreover, the Ontario Heritage Trust has currently declined to advance approval of a Provincial plaque at this time and would require further in-depth discussion and consultation to proceed. A letter from the Trust is forthcoming and will be shared with Council when received.

Below is a summary of the feedback gathered:

Comments in Favour of an Event	Comments Against an Event
A moment of silence would be appropriate, with the names read aloud of the seven people who passed, Justice O'Connor and/or the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario could be invited to speak, could be combined with public tours of the WCWC, First Nations representatives could be invited to bless the water	The memories that would be recalled by those affected could be devastating emotionally, and the potential for wide-spread negative media attention exists, and the stigma of living/working in/visiting Walkerton would be brought up again
Yes, acknowledge the anniversary because like the Legion motto, we should never forget	It would be best not to hold an event; it will not ease the pain of those affected
Members of the OFSAA-winning girls' rugby team from SHHS could be invited back, as their win in 2000 was quite impactful amid the water crisis	No public event is warranted but an announcement could be posted asking citizens to keep all families involved in their thoughts; a list of those who lost their lives could be shared
A commemoration is warranted to keep public safety in the forefront to prevent repetition of the crisis	
We need to recognize those were impacted, those who didn't make it, those who survived and those who worked hard for changes	

Based on these submissions, discussions, and the outcomes of the community consultation there does not appear to be a strong desire to hold a commemorative event in the community due to the varying emotions that surround this anniversary. As a result, we outline the following options for Council's consideration:

- 1) Council directs staff to invite the community and dignitaries to a commemoration in May. This commemoration will focus on emphasizing the community's resilience and the positive changes made to the Safe Drinking Water Act and highlighting the renewal of the Heritage Water Garden in recognition of the 25th anniversary.
- 2) Council acknowledges that this is a significant and meaningful event in the community's history that evokes a range of emotions among residents that deserves respect both locally, Provincially and Nationally. A commemorative event will not be organized respecting the opportunity for individuals to honor their loved ones and observe this anniversary in their own personal ways. The renewal of the Heritage Water Garden will continue to serve as space for quiet reflection for our community.

We bring this forward for Council's information and based on the input received staff recommend Option 2 as the preferred path forward.

Strategic Action Plan Checklist:

What aspect of the Brockton Strategic Action Plan does the content/recommendations in this report help advance?

- Recommendations help move the Municipality closer to its Vision Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Heritage, Culture, and Community Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Quality of Life Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Land Use Planning and the Natural Environment Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Economic Development Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Municipal Governance Yes

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding:

- Do the recommendations represent a sound financial investment from a sustainability perspective? Yes

Monies are included in the 2025 budget for the renewal of the Heritage Water Garden.

Reviewed By:

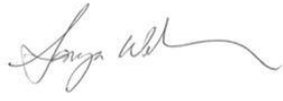


Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer

Respectfully Submitted by:



Christine Brandt, Community Development Coordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sonya Watson", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer