

DATE OF MEETING MAY 26, 2025

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SUBJECT REPAINTING OF NANAIMO SIGN AT MAFFEO SUTTON PARK

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with options for the ongoing repainting of the Nanaimo sign at Maffeo Sutton Park, with specific consideration for the letter “O”.

Recommendation

That Council direct staff to commission a new design for the letter “O” for the Nanaimo sign at Maffeo Sutton Park through the City’s Urban Design Roster for 2025, and direct staff to explore the feasibility of establishing an annual public design call for future years.

BACKGROUND

Installed in April 2021, the NANAIMO sign is a prominent landmark located in Maffeo Sutton Park. The sign was initiated as part of a suite of downtown revitalization and public realm improvements identified by Council in 2019. The sign features large galvanized steel letters, with the final “O” painted in a vibrant rainbow motif to celebrate the city’s values of diversity and inclusion. The sign has become a recognizable landmark, drawing locals and tourists alike for photographs and social media engagement.

The sign undergoes seasonal cleaning and a full repainting of the sign was last undertaken in 2023. The sign was vandalised in late April 2025 with the “O” being painted white. Staff have worked to remove the paint with moderate success and the “O” now requires repainting.

DISCUSSION

The repainting of the “O” presents an opportunity to consider the potential for some artistic renewal of the NANAIMO sign. As well as addressing operational considerations, repainting has the potential to reinforce the City’s commitment to public art and inclusivity.

Council may wish to direct staff to repaint the Nanaimo sign in the same manner as present and retain the colourful striped “O” that is recognisable within our community and further afield. Alternatively, Council may wish to opt to commission a new design for the “O”. This could be achieved by utilizing the City’s Urban Design Roster program. The Urban Design Roster is a list of artists who wish to be contacted to work with the City’s Public Art team and other City departments. Projects are activated on an ongoing basis, in relation to opportunities arising from infrastructure renewals, upgrades and maintenance. The Urban Design Roster offers artists and

designers an opportunity to be involved in civic urban design and small-scale artwork related to city infrastructure. By utilising the Urban Design Roster program it would be possible to commission a rotating series of designs on an annual or bi-annual basis.

To enrich community engagement and broaden artistic contribution, Council may also consider the potential to integrate an annual public art call for the design of the “O”. This would encourage local artists to participate and ensure fresh and diverse visual expressions. This would be similar to the City’s Street Banner Design program which offers artists and designers an opportunity to submit proposals for original banner artwork to be hung in Nanaimo's downtown.

The NANAIMO sign is presently hand painted and clear coated, the last full repainting of the sign was undertaken in 2023 at a cost of \$4,097 which was covered by the operating budget. Staff are currently evaluating the use of adhesive decals, which may provide a cost-effective and flexible method for renewing the “O”. If successful, decals could allow for more frequent design updates with minimal disruption and maintenance costs. Alternatively, if the current method of hand painting continues, staff recommend limiting repainting to a maximum of once per year to remain practical within operational capacity.

The NANAIMO sign continues to serve as a valuable symbol of civic pride and inclusion. With several viable options available for maintaining and updating the letter “O” Council has the opportunity to shape an approach that balances artistic expression, community engagement, and operational practicality.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct staff to commission a new design for the “O” through the City’s Urban Design Roster for 2025, and direct staff to explore the feasibility of establishing an annual public design call for future years.

- The advantages of this option: The Nanaimo sign would be artistically renewed adding new interest to the sign and to Maffeo Sutton Park through the use of local artists registered on the City’s Urban Design Roster. A potential annual public call for design after 2025 could encourage local artists to participate and ensure fresh and diverse visual expressions.
- The disadvantages of this option: The “O” is an iconic and recognisable feature in Nanaimo and some may not want this to change. The commissioning of a new design will incur some artist fees which could be absorbed into operational budgets.
- Financial Implications: Urban Design Roster commissions will involve modest artist fees. If an annual call for design is pursued in future years, further funding may be needed for coordination and artist stipends. If the current method of hand painting continues, staff recommend limiting repainting to a maximum of once per year to remain practical within operational capacity. If successful, the use of adhesive decals may prove a cost effective and efficient method of renewing the “O”.

2. That Council direct staff to arrange for the repainting of the “O” in the existing design.

- The advantages of this option: The familiar and iconic “O” design is retained.

- The disadvantages of this option: There is no opportunity for fresh artistic expression on the NANAIMO sign however, there are numerous other opportunities on an ongoing basis throughout the city.
- Financial Implications: Repainting the existing design has minimal cost impact and is budgeted for in Operational budgets.

3. That Council provide alternate direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The NANAIMO sign was installed in April 2019 and continues to serve as a valuable symbol of civic pride and inclusion.
- The “O” is presently in need of repainting.
- There are viable options available for maintaining and updating the letter “O” which present the opportunity to shape an approach that balances artistic expression, community engagement, and operational practicality.

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