

# Capitola City Council

## Agenda Report

**Meeting:** April 27, 2023

**From:** City Manager Department

**Subject:** Administrative Policy I-7: Memorial Program



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**Recommended Action:** Consider options for memorial plaques currently installed on the Capitola Wharf; review and approve changes to Administrative Policy I-7: Memorial Program.

**Background:** In 2002, the City Council adopted Administrative Policy I-7: Memorial Program. The policy has been revised seven times, most recently on May 27, 2021. The policy outlines a uniform procedure for the public to purchase memorial items to be placed within the City of Capitola. The policy highlights memorial benches and memorial plaques installed along the railings of the Capitola Wharf, Grand Avenue, Cliff Avenue, and on Depot Hill. Memorial trees are also mentioned.

Currently, the program includes approximately 525 installed memorials. The only remaining available spaces are on Cliff Avenue. The Cliff Avenue railing location was approved by the City Council in 2021.

Staff receives approximately four new plaque/bench requests per month. In addition, individuals who have previously purchased a plaque or bench frequently reach out to staff to buy an additional plaque or add to an existing bench.

Administrative Policy I-7 states that “the City will maintain plaques for the life of the plaque. The City will determine when the plaque is no longer reasonable to maintain and needs to either be replaced or removed”. Because the plaques are made of bronze and therefore have a lifespan likely measured in centuries, Staff has interpreted this to mean that the City will maintain plaques in their current location for the life of the object on which it was installed (for example, as long as the bench or railing remains undamaged).

The policy also states that “the program will continue until it is determined by the Public Works Department and the City Council to be complete, or it begins to negatively impact City resources.”

### Discussion:

#### *Memorial Plaques on Capitola Wharf*

Prior to the January 2023 storms, 145 plaques were located on the wooden railing of the Capitola Wharf, along both sides and the head of the wharf. There were also 39 plaques on various Wharf benches. In anticipation of the Capitola Wharf Resiliency and Public Access Project, staff photo-documented and indexed all plaques on the Wharf, so a complete record of what existed before the storm is available for reference. Approximately 20 wharf railing plaques were lost in the storm, and it is possible that upon further inspection and the removal of the current railing, staff will discover more damaged plaques. The Wharf remains inaccessible, and staff can only estimate the status of Wharf plaques and benches.

Soon after the January storms, the City received emails and phone calls from members of the public inquiring about their wharf plaque; to date staff has responded to approximately 32 inquiries.

The Capitola Wharf Resiliency and Public Access Project (Wharf Project) is anticipated to commence this summer. Public Works staff anticipates requesting Council authorization to bid the project at the May 11, 2023, Council meeting. The project scope includes the removal and replacement of the current wharf railing due to the damage sustained in the storm and to meet current safety standards.

Staff has analyzed various options for the wharf memorial plaques in anticipation of the Wharf Project.

*Option 1: Move all Memorial Plaques to a New Location on the Wharf*

Under this option, staff would relocate all plaques (from both the railing and benches) and reinstall them in a new area, such as a wall or artistic structure, still on the Capitola Wharf. This allows the Wharf Project to move forward without being complicated by plaque reinstallation concerns and still honors the intended location of the plaques.

Staff does not recommend reinstalling any plaques along the Wharf railing for several reasons, most importantly because the railing is a safety feature and installing (and fixing, replacing, etc.) plaques along the railing compromises its structure over time. Overall railing maintenance is also complicated by the presence of plaques.

Staff estimates that 45 square feet of space is needed to display all Wharf plaques on a wall or other structure. In this plan, staff would fully account for all lost plaques, replace them, and install them on the new location. If the City Council chooses this option, a ‘memorial wall element’ could be added to the Ancillary Wharf Design Improvements that are currently being developed; these improvements will be presented to the City Council for approval and constructed in coordination with Phase 2 of the Wharf Project.

This option does create potential space for new memorial plaques on the “memorial wall element.” The space would be limited and likely fill up quickly. For years, members of the public who have inquired about purchasing a memorial plaque and placing it on the Wharf have been told that the location is full. Staff is concerned about the reaction of previously denied applicants and cannot accommodate requests to move installed memorial plaques.

Option 1 Pros:	Option 1 Cons:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains all pre-existing plaques on the Wharf</li> <li>• Treats all Wharf plaques in a uniform fashion</li> <li>• Allows for an additional design element on the Wharf</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual plaques will be in a different location than pre-storm</li> </ul>

*Option 2: Remove all Plaques and Return Them to Owners*

Upon initial review, the simplest option is to remove all the memorial plaques on the Wharf and return them to their ‘owners’ (purchasers). The damage to the Wharf has ended the lifetime of the railing as a memorial location. New memorial plaques would not be allowed to be installed on the Wharf railing. This would address the previously mentioned concerns with reinstalling plaques along a new Wharf railing and would not require development of an alternative location. However, due to the consistent interest and emotional attachment plaque owners have to the Wharf location, this option may generate some public concern.

Option 2 Pros:	Option 2 Cons:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats all Wharf plaques in a uniform fashion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plaques no longer on the Wharf</li> <li>• Staff has accurate/recent contact information for estimated &gt;50% of all Wharf plaque owners, but will not be able to return all plaques</li> <li>• Cost to ship/return plaques</li> </ul>

*Option 3: Re-Install all Memorial Plaques along the new Wharf Railing*

As previously explained, staff does not recommend installing/re-installing plaques along the railing.

Option 3 Pros:	Option 3 Cons:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treats all Wharf plaques in a uniform fashion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compromises integrity of the new Wharf railing, affects future maintenance of the railing, and causes delay in Wharf Project</li> <li>Requires significant staff time to recreate the current Wharf plaque installation 'map' Inconsistent with the policy of removing plaques from damaged memorial locations</li> </ul>

### *Public Outreach*

The Memorial Program is significant to many residents and visitors to Capitola, and staff strives to be sensitive to the emotional connection individuals feel towards the memorials. This includes open and informative communication regarding the Wharf Project and the future of the Wharf plaques. Individuals who have enquired about Wharf plaques (approximately 30) have been in direct contact with staff and were sent this agenda report with notice that this item would be brought before the City Council. In addition to direct communication with plaque owners, staff has included relevant information on the Wharf Project and wharf plaques in the Citywide digital newsletter and on the City website.

Due to the nature of memorial programs, staff's contact information associated with the purchaser of each plaque is frequently out of date. As a result, staff is asking that anyone who has previously purchased a Wharf plaque contact the City or use the recently created webform on the City website to submit recent contact information.

### *Overall Memorial Policy Program*

The damage to the Wharf and subsequent Wharf memorial dilemma has highlighted staff concerns with the entire Memorial Program. The expansion of the program in 2021 to include the new Cliff Avenue railing as a memorial location has presented additional challenges to staff. Staff recognizes that the memorial program is important to many people, and that there will likely always be a demand for memorials in Capitola (especially memorials installed in a location with an ocean view) and has prepared a summary of three primary and ongoing challenges posed by the program, and potential solutions, below:

#### *Challenge 1: Maintaining accurate contact information for individuals who have purchased plaques*

The memorial program has been active for more than 20 years, and most Capitola memorials were purchased and installed 10 years ago or more. This, in addition to the general nature of memorial programs, makes it difficult to maintain and rely upon existing plaque owner contact information. Thus, it is challenging for staff to reach plaque owners when necessary; staff ultimately relies on purchasers contacting the City of their own accord.

This challenge is ongoing and can be met by staff but should be considered when reviewing the overall program.

#### *Challenge 2: Maintaining plaques in their original location for their 'lifetime'*

Administrative Policy I-7 states that memorial plaques are purchased for their lifetime. Lifetime is not defined, though the policy also states "the City will determine when the plaque is no longer reasonable to maintain and needs to be either replaced or removed." While it is understandable that the purchaser of a memorial would want it to be semi-permanent, permanently maintaining nearly 600 memorial locations throughout Capitola is both time consuming for staff and creates an unmet demand for new memorial plaques. The time required to intake applications, communicate with plaque owners, and index, survey, fix, uninstall and reinstall all current memorials and plaques is equivalent to 15 to 25% of a full-time employee's workload.

Staff has identified two different responses to this challenge: the City Council could impose a shorter lifetime upon new plaques (for example, five or ten years) or confirm that maintaining plaques in their original location for the 'lifetime' of that location is satisfactory.

### *Challenge 3: Lack of open space for memorials*

Under the current program, there is very little space in the City for additional memorials. The City's capacity for additional benches depends solely on existing benches becoming damaged or replaced with new ones. The only remaining location for new memorial plaques is along the Cliff Avenue railing, where 23 out of 56 spots remain. Staff estimates this location will be full sometime in 2024.

The current Memorial Program policy includes a lottery process if memorial spaces open in previously full locations, which (with no change to the current policy) would be the only way in which new memorials could be purchased and installed once the Cliff Avenue Railing is full. Staff recommends updating this section of the policy (Attachment 2) to allow staff to schedule annual lotteries, rather than opening a lottery every time a bench or plaque space becomes available. This change would allow for a more efficient and satisfactory lottery, as it is likely that more than one space will have opened over the course of a year and staff will have a uniform answer each time an inquiry is made regarding the memorial program.

In response to the lack of open space challenge, the City Council can confirm the listed locations in the current policy, or direct staff to identify potential new memorial locations. Ultimately, expanding the program with new locations will delay the eventuality that at some point the City will no longer have space for new memorials, while providing the option for the public to purchase new memorials in the meantime.

### *Reimagining the Memorial Program*

There are several ways the program could be fundamentally altered to address these concerns. An entirely new location, such as a "memorial wall or artistic structure" could be developed and placed in the new park at the Rispin Mansion (or another location).

The current program could be allowed to fill up, and then shift to a "new" memorial program, like the Village Bricks formerly run by the Capitola Soquel Chamber of Commerce. Staff has reached out to the Chamber of Commerce about reestablishing their Brick program and will include a verbal update on the status of that program at the meeting.

If, based on these identified challenges or other concerns, the City Council directs staff to reimagine the Memorial Program (by imposing a shorter plaque lifetime, expanding memorial locations, etc.) staff recommends identifying this as a Goal for Fiscal Year 2023-24.

### **In summary, Staff recommends that Council:**

- 1) Select one of the three options outlined above for the memorials currently located on Capitola Wharf; and**
- 2) Direct staff to either reimagine the Memorial Program as a Goal in FY 2023-24 or maintain the program as-is.**
  - a. If Council directs staff to maintain the program as-is, staff recommends approving the modifications to the lottery language included in Attachment 2.**

Fiscal Impact: Dependent on Council direction. If the City Council wishes to include a new memorial location as part of the Wharf Ancillary Improvement Project, the budget would be modified to include this in the scope.

### Attachments:

1. Current Administrative Policy I-7: Memorial Program
2. Recommended modifications to the Lottery Section of the policy

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