



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**To:** Members of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee (ACHAC)

**From:** Erik Hanson, Heritage Resources Coordinator

**Meeting Date:** May 12, 2016

**Subject:** Report ACHAC16-025  
Public Art for Utility Boxes

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## **Purpose**

A report to provide information on adding a public art component to surface mounted hydro vaults in the City.

## **Recommendation**

That the ACHAC approves the recommendation outlined in Report ACHAC16-025, dated May 12, 2016 of the Heritage Resources Coordinator, as follows:

That Report ACHAC16-025 be received for information.

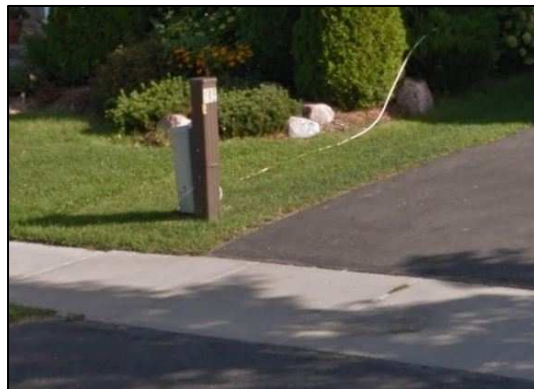
## **Budget and Financial Implications**

There are no budgetary or financial implications associated with the recommendation.

## **Background**

Public art helps to create neighborhood and community identity by enhancing the visual landscape and character of the city. It turns ordinary spaces into community landmarks, promotes community dialogue and, most importantly, it is accessible to everyone.

Utility box public art has been growing in popularity in urban centers for the last five to ten years. One notable example is the City of Calgary which has completed over 140 installations since the project was started in 2010. The program started as a graffiti abatement measure and uses funding for regular lifecycle maintenance of City assets. In Calgary the program applies only to traffic signal boxes which are the property of The City of Calgary.



1 Typical Telecommunications Box

### Types of Utility Boxes

There are many types of utility boxes in the City of Peterborough including surface hydro vaults, telecommunication and switch boxes, and traffic signal switch boxes. Only the traffic control boxes are owned by the City. Telecommunications switch boxes tend to be quite small and not suitable as a canvas for artwork. Surface Hydro vaults are currently owned and maintained by Peterborough Distribution Inc. (PDI). While they are plentiful and located across the City, PDI has expressed reservations about their use in the presentation of public art. While the company is going to have the concept reviewed by its Operations Group, they have initially provided the following comments:

- There is no inherent benefit to PDI and the art would have to be installed at no cost to the company;
- The art would be placed for a finite period. PDI does not want faded or failing artwork on the vaults;
- The maintenance of the art would be the responsibility of the City- eg. the removal of graffiti;
- PDI would not be responsible for damage to the artwork by crews working on the vaults;
- The majority of surface mounted vaults are in outlying suburbs not the urban core.

Traffic signal switch boxes appear at every signalized intersection throughout the City. The Utility Services Department has indicated that it has no concerns over the use of switch boxes. They would have to be painted, not wrapped because they are opened often for service.

### Process

Regardless of the type of box being used it must be properly prepared. Rust and surface imperfections must be removed and a suitable primer applied. The artwork is either hand painted or applied as a vinyl wrap. Hand painting tends to be more durable and can last up to five years depending on the



2 Typical Traffic Signal Switchbox

quality of the paint. Wraps typically last for two to three years before they fade and become brittle under UV rays.

Wraps provide greater quality control and provide access to a wider range of artists because the wrap will be a digital image of the artwork. It is also easier to repair vandalism, especially graffiti on a wrap, and if the wrap is irreparably damaged, it can be cost effectively replaced. However, wraps can be more easily damaged by crew doing routine or emergency work to a vault and they may become brittle in cold weather.



3 Typical Surface Hydro Vault

Hand Painting provides good durability in all climates and paints generally have greater UV protection than vinyl wraps. Also, a higher percentage of the budget goes to the artist because there is no second step in creating and installing the wrap. Like murals, hand painting of utility boxes has a presentational aspect. The act of painting in the street becomes an event and there tends to be a sense by the public that the work is art and not advertising. Hand painting does require an anti-graffiti coating so that paint and markers can be removed.

Submitted by,

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