



**City of Kingston**  
**Report to Environment, Infrastructure & Transportation Policies Committee**  
**Report Number EITP-25-004**

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**To:** Chair and Members of the Environment, Infrastructure & Transportation Policies Committee

**From:** Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Infrastructure, Transportation & Emergency Services

**Resource Staff:** Karen Santucci, Director, Public Works & Solid Waste

**Date of Meeting:** December 10, 2024

**Subject:** Graffiti Management and Abatement

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**Council Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Theme: 3. Build an Active and Connected Community

Goal: 3.2 Beautify City streets and spaces.

**Executive Summary:**

Like most cities within the province, Kingston sees a significant amount of graffiti on both private and public properties. An initiative under Council's Strategic Plan was to identify areas of targeted graffiti and develop solutions within the City of Kingston. An internal staff working group was created and 10 City departments were brought together to identify key locations of graffiti, methods of identification, removal techniques, and preventative methods.

Graffiti was classified into vandalism graffiti, hate graffiti, and street art, largely due to how they are treated. This review identified that many of the programs and methods currently being employed to report, remove and prevent vandalism and hate graffiti, are consistent with best practices found in other municipalities in Ontario.

Graffiti is found throughout the city in areas that have open, plain, flat surfaces that allows graffiti to stand out. Although it is more prevalent in darker areas that experience low volumes of people allowing individuals to 'tag' unnoticed, graffiti is also found in highly visible locations. Areas that are highly targeted throughout the city include bus depots, signs, play structures,

roads, sidewalks, bridges, pay and display stations, buildings, garbage and recycling receptacles, city furniture, public art displays, parking garages and utility boxes. Based on reports from the public some of the most frequently targeted areas include the downtown core, Shannon Park, Victoria Park, Lion Civic Gardens, Waaban Crossing, and bus shelters. It is estimated that \$250,000 is expensed annually for graffiti removal by the City.

The “4E” model of Eradication, Education, Empowerment and Enforcement, is a North American standard practice in vandalism management and addresses vandalism including unsanctioned graffiti, with a variety of proactive approaches. Many municipalities have implemented programs based on this model and the City of Kingston has aspects of eradication, empowerment and enforcement already in the current programs. However, expansion of these programs through introduction of educational components directed towards the public and internal departmental staff is needed. The staff working group has adopted the 4E model and recommends that work be undertaken to develop a communications plan that would provide information to residents in addressing graffiti issues in the community.

**Recommendation:**

**That** the Environment, Infrastructure & Transportation Policies Committee recommends to Council:

**That** Council direct staff to develop a graffiti communications plan by Q2 2025, with information for residents on how to prevent, report, and remove graffiti on both private and public property; and

**That** staff report back to the Environment, Infrastructure & Transportation Policies Committee in Q2 2026 on the implementation of the educational components of the anti-graffiti program, including the identification of any additional programs if required.

**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

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**Brad Joyce, Commissioner,  
Infrastructure, Transportation &  
Emergency Services**

p.p. ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

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**Lanie Hurdle, Chief  
Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

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| Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate Services            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

## Options/Discussion:

### Background

Graffiti can be categorized into these types for discussion:

- Vandalism Graffiti: Is wilful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property.
- Street Art: Graffiti as a specific style of street art that are artworks created and affixed to property that is approved by the property owner or occupant, where the artwork aesthetically enhances the surface and the general surroundings, having regard to the community character and standards.
- Hate Graffiti: Is motivated by hate, bias or prejudice, based on race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any similar factor.

When graffiti is applied to property without consent, it is considered vandalism and can cause public safety issues and negatively impact the City's image. These occurrences negatively impact the community's quality of life as graffiti damages and can destroy public amenities. The damage can perpetuate a negative view of the community and make public spaces feel less safe for residents resulting in a loss of faith or dissatisfaction in public services and enforcement. Operationally, responses to incidents of vandalism graffiti are a draw on staff resources and operational funds. These acts are a mischief-based crime and go largely unreported with little, if any, consequence to the offenders.

Hate graffiti refers to symbols, images, or text that promote hate, discrimination, and violence against individuals or groups based on attributes such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Kingston has experienced several reported incidents involving hate graffiti in recent years. These acts are particularly concerning given the City's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

The presence of hate graffiti can cause significant psychological and emotional harm to affected individuals and groups, and fosters an environment where people feel unsafe, unwelcome, and marginalized. For marginalized communities, the appearance of hate graffiti serves as a constant reminder of their vulnerability. Moreover, such incidents can contribute to a broader climate of intolerance, reinforcing negative stereotypes and deepening societal divides. Hate graffiti can also damage the City's reputation, deterring tourism, investment, and fostering a climate of division rather than unity.

Graffiti is typically found on public or private property adjacent to public spaces, particularly if the area or object has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Easy-to-reach; e.g. signs
- Highly visible; e.g. building walls and freeway overpasses
- Locations where a wall or fence is the primary security and where there are few windows or people
- Locations where oversight is cyclical during the day or week, or where people are intimidated by graffiti offenders
- Mobile targets that generate wide exposure for the graffiti; e.g. trains or buses.

In addition, two types of surfaces attract graffiti:

- Light-colored surfaces. Dark surfaces do not generally attract as much graffiti but can be marred with light-colored paint.
- Large and plain surfaces. Surfaces without windows or doors may be appealing for large-scale graffiti. Smooth surfaces in particular attract offenders who use felt-tip markers.

The City sees a significant amount of vandalism graffiti which requires a substantial amount of time and money to manage. It is estimated City staff deal with approximately 750 vandalism graffiti incidents on public property annually at a cost of approximately \$250,000. Although there were 211 reports of graffiti through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in 2023, many City departments address additional graffiti issues while conducting regular inspections and through the course of their work.

### **Graffiti and Removal**

A number of City departments are involved in dealing with graffiti found on the assets they manage or in general. Hate graffiti is given high priority for removal and normally prompts an immediate response once reported. Vandalism graffiti is generally removed within 48 hours of it being reported, or on a scheduled frequency if using a contractor. Details are below.

#### **Kingston Transit**

Annual Incidents: Approximately 25 in 2023 through CRM but many more incidents on a daily frequency are reported by bus operators on route.

Locations: Transit shelters, signs and on buses.

Removal: Initial response by transit operations team with follow-up by third-party contractor for shelters; other locations handled by City staff.

#### **Parking Operations**

Annual Incidents: Typically fewer than 20 through CRM but many more through inspections conducted by staff.

Locations: Parking garages, pay-and-display machines.

Removal: Almost all graffiti removal is done by City staff at the time it is identified.

#### **City Facilities (buildings)**

Annual Incidents: 15 incidents in 2023.

Locations: Building exteriors and garage door panels

Removal: Graffiti may be larger in size than that found in other locations and, depending on the size and complexity of the removal, may be completed by a third-party contractor or City staff.

**Solid Waste**

Annual Incidents: Approximately 25 through CRM in 2023 and double that many through collections staff.

Locations: Mostly on recycling depots.

Removal: Third party contractor removes graffiti every two to four weeks amounting to approximately 100 hours.

**Public Works**

Annual Incidents: Approximately 150 requests in 2023 through CRM and about another 150 incidents reported by staff.

Locations: Playground equipment and splash pads in parks and sports fields, signs, roads, sidewalks, bridges, city furniture, public art sculptures, and park buildings.

Removal: Normally by staff, however a contractor is used for more difficult removals.

**By-Law**

Annual Incidents: 110 in 2023 with 70 of those being on private property. Reporting originates from the public, By-law officers, and community agencies such as Kingston Police and the DBIA.

Locations: Mostly on private property.

Removal: Graffiti on private property results in the owner being notified that they must clean up or remove the graffiti. On public property, the respective City department is notified to address. In the City of Kingston, by-law enforcement addresses graffiti under property standards and community cleanliness provisions. Property owners are required to maintain their properties free of graffiti to uphold neighborhood aesthetics and discourage vandalism. Upon identification or report of graffiti, by-law officers issue a notice to the property owner, typically allowing a set period to remove the graffiti. If the property owner does not comply, further enforcement actions may follow, including potential fines. By-law works collaboratively with City departments and community initiatives to promote graffiti removal and prevent reoccurrence, supporting a clean and safe environment for residents and visitors.

**Utilities Kingston**

Annual incidents: 20 in 2023 reported through CRM though Utilities Kingston does not track the number of incidents they deal with directly.

Locations: Aboveground infrastructure such as buildings, streetlight poles, traffic signal control boxes.

Removal: Staff and third-party contractor. A contractor is used to complete weekly inspections of treatment facilities to remove any graffiti. Staff are often used to paint over graffiti found on streetlight and electrical infrastructure.

A review of requests for graffiti removal indicated that the following areas reported the most frequent number of incidents:

- Downtown Business Area
- Lions Civic Gardens
- Shannon Park
- Victoria Park

In a few of these areas, there is already Police and City involvement as there are active working groups to address larger issues in the area. Work has been done at most of these locations using Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED).

### **City Activities to Deal with Graffiti**

The City uses a number of efforts to help with the removal of graffiti including:

- Attempting to remove the graffiti within 24 hours of notification.
- Applying special anti-graffiti coatings that allow paint to be removed easily.
- Painting over the graffiti using paint of the same color.
- Washing (and pressure washing) target areas on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Using graffiti films that can be peeled off if tagged with graffiti.

There is also a significant amount of work which has been done to attempt to prevent graffiti from occurring:

- Improving lighting around facilities and assets.
- Placing physical assets prone to tagging into more visible areas and activating the space to attract people.
- Installing security cameras.
- Conducting regular inspections.
- Having a presence in targeted areas.
- Utilizing assets that do not have clean open spaces (e.g. garbage receptacles with slats and playground equipment with slats and holes.)
- Wrapping or placing busy graphics or writing on assets to prevent open plain surfaces. (e.g. wrapping planter boxes in patterned vinyl and putting posters on recycling depots.)
- Planting shrubs and trees in front of open wall spaces. (e.g. electrical distribution substations).

In addition, the City has created public art programs that encourage residents to place art legally in public and private areas, an example of which is the Street Art Legal Wall in Douglas Fluhrer Park. This sanctioned space where graffiti-style art is permitted and encouraged, fosters community art projects and mural opportunities, including directly commissioning artists to create murals on public property.

## 4E Model

Staff contacted several municipalities and conducted reviews through municipal research to examine what practices are employed to prevent, abate and eradicate vandalism from their respective properties. Many municipalities have graffiti management plans based on a North American standard practice for vandalism management. The '4E' model has the key elements of Eradication, Education, Empowerment, and Enforcement at its core:

**Eradication** encourages timely reporting of vandalism and fixing it quickly and efficiently. Research has shown that prompt and persistent repairing of property and areas damaged by vandals helps to prevent future damage and destruction.

**Education** is vital to effective vandalism prevention. It raises awareness in the community about the negative impact and costs associated with vandalism and the important role that prevention can have. Education programs raise community awareness around vandalism pointing out the consequences that could even involve the criminal justice system with the aim of deterring people from committing more significant acts in the future.

**Empowerment** maximizes available resources and relationships by developing a network of volunteer groups and encouraging all stakeholders to take a key role in deterring and reducing vandalism. It involves promoting programs within the community that instill a sense of pride, ownership, and control among all stakeholders.

**Enforcement** applies applicable law, including the Criminal Code when necessary. Apprehending, prosecuting, and obtaining restitution from offenders is a key element of a successful vandalism management program. Individuals found guilty of vandalism related crimes should be held accountable to the community for their crime. Major components of accountability include restitution, community service and sentencing alternatives. Proactive enforcement dedicated to tracking and apprehending vandals is considered a strong deterrent. Police Services are engaged with all escalated issues (i.e., hate crimes, public nuisance activities).

## Analysis

Currently, Kingston has programs and associated activities that fall into the 4E categories of Eradication, Empowerment and Enforcement, to deal with graffiti. However, with respect to Education, the City does lack a cohesive approach to graffiti awareness within the community. There is opportunity to work together to point out the negative impact and costs associated with graffiti and the value of prevention. Many municipalities have a dedicated webpage to provide important graffiti management information to residents regarding prevention, reporting, removal techniques (for graffiti on private property), and sanctioned street art programs.

The development of a graffiti communications plan would help to provide important information on the related processes and programs the City offers thereby building that key educational component into the City's management of graffiti. A new webpage aimed at residents and



businesses would be a component of this providing the beneficial information and reporting procedures in one common location. Other information might include dealing with hate graffiti, best methods for graffiti removal, available street art programs, organizing community clean-up programs, and a link to the City anti-hate resource webpage.

There is value in the continued sharing of graffiti management information between departments to ensure removal service efficiencies are realized and to discuss products or changes effective in reducing and removing graffiti. A working group consisting of members from Public Works, Facilities, By-law, Recreation, Utilities Kingston, Parking, Solid Waste, EDI, Arts & Culture, Transit, and Communications would benefit all by continuing to meet semi-annually. Information gained through these meetings could be shared with residents to assist in reducing graffiti within the community.

### **Existing Policy/By-law**

By-law Number 2005-100 – A By-law for Prescribing Standards for the Maintenance and Occupancy of Property Within the City of Kingston has under Section 4.17:

#### **Graffiti**

Written slogans and graffiti on the exterior of any building, wall, fence or structure shall be prohibited, including painted or chalked titles or messages with the exception of the Street Art Wall that uses the Rideaucrest retaining wall adjacent to Douglas Fluhrer Park as a designated legal wall in conjunction with the City of Kingston’s Public Art Policy.

With the exception of murals on private property as approved and sanctioned by the City of Kingston through the established application and review policy as identified in and in conjunction with the City of Kingston’s Public Art Policy. (By-law Number 2005-100; 2020-89; 2023-92)

### **Financial Considerations**

Graffiti removal is estimated to cost the City approximately \$250,000 annually, and is managed within the departmental operating budgets. It is not expected that additional costs would be incurred for the development of the graffiti management communications plan.

### **Contacts:**

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### **Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Kyle Compeau, Director, Licensing & Enforcement, Licensing and Enforcement

Speros Kanellos, Director Facility Management & Construction, Facility Management & Construction Services

Vanessa Mensah, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager

Ruth Noordegraaf, Director, Community Development & Wellbeing and IIDEA

Kelsey Pye, Communications Officer, Communications & Public Engagement

Gary Wimmer, Supervisor Traffic & Lighting Operations, Utilities Kingston

Laird Leggo, Manager Licensing, Parking Operations & Policy, Licensing Operations

Ian Semple, Director, Transportation and Transit

Christopher Norris, General Manager Transit, Transportation and Transit

Danika Lochhead, Director, Arts and Culture Services

**Exhibits Attached:**

None