

# Staff Report

Chief Administrator's Office



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**REPORT TO:** Special Council

**DATE OF MEETING:** May 8, 2023

**SUBMITTED BY:** Dan Chapman, CAO, 519-741-2200 ext. 7350

**PREPARED BY:** Angie Fritz-Walters, Strategic Plan Engagement and Program Manager, 519-741-2200 ext. 7059  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** May 3, 2023

**REPORT NO.:** CAO-2023-217

**SUBJECT:** 2023-2026 Strategic Plan Development – 20-Year Vision, Key Priorities and Approach to Action Planning

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**RECOMMENDATION:**  
For discussion

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council a progress update on work underway to define the City's next Strategic Plan for 2023-2026, with a focus on engaging Council in a discussion to establish a set of strategic goal areas for the Strategic Plan.
- Staff continue to work with Compass Kitchener to implement meaningful, inclusive and enhanced community engagement to inform the Strategic Plan, with the Resident Panel actively underway.
- This report supports the creation of a new Strategic Plan with key goals and actions for the next 4-year timeframe, and defining a new 20-year vision for the City of Kitchener to proactively plan for the future.
- There are no financial implications associated with this staff report.

## BACKGROUND:

The City's Strategic Plan sets priorities and a plan for action that guides progress over the four-year term of Council towards our long-term community vision, and represents a commitment to the public to move forward on those things that are most important to them. Each term of Council represents an opportunity to set a new four-year agenda that builds on the progress made, while planning for the future to take advantage of new opportunities to better serve the community and respond to emerging issues, trends and shifts in citizen priorities.

Discussions have deliberately spanned the previous and new terms of Council, to access both the depth of knowledge gained over the previous term, and engage with Council following the

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municipal campaign and election. **The May 8 Council strategic session will provide opportunity for discussion surrounding a new 20-year Vision, key priorities and the approach to identify actions for the next 4-year cycle.** The feedback provided and direction established by Council will be used by staff to identify potential actions in which the City could make progress over the life of the Strategic Plan, for discussion at a future Council session.

**REPORT:**

**Strategic Plan Workplan Progress**

The workplan to define the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan has six stages as shown below; we are currently in stage 5:



Given the increasing complexities facing the city, Kitchener is innovating new approaches to develop the next Strategic Plan, by working with the REFOCUS team and their Enterprise Evolution approach which combines scientific knowledge and management processes to pursue economic, equity and environmental objectives. A working group of 20+ staff representing all departments and various levels is engaging in a series of progressive sessions with REFOCUS to learn and apply these methods. The staff group is generating ideas, options and making recommendations together with the Corporate Leadership Team to develop a proposed 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

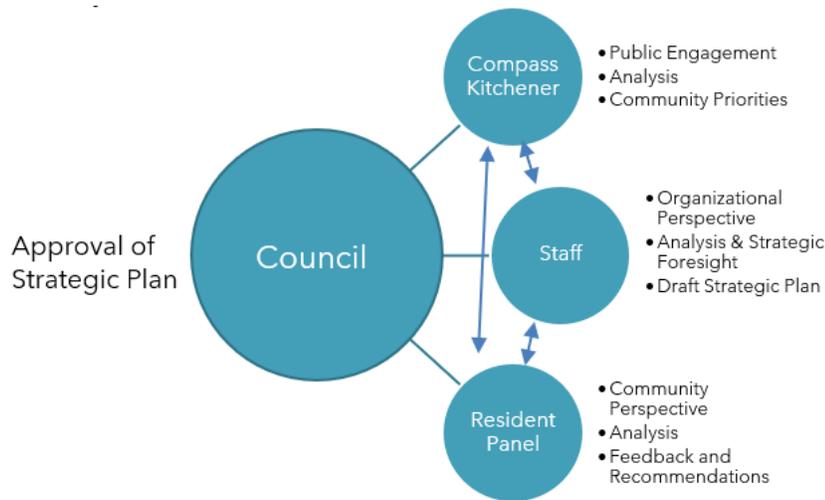
**Council Leadership**

To support Council in its leadership role to oversee and direct development of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, staff have identified several points for discussion and direction in Council strategy sessions throughout the process. Council and staff have already held five meetings in relation to the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan; a summary of Council’s input and direction to date, and how it has shaped the planning process in a meaningful way is included in Appendix A.

**Strategic Planning Roles and Inputs**

The Strategic Planning process includes a variety of inputs from a number of groups outlined in the visual below. Compass Kitchener, staff and the Resident Panel each contribute different perspectives, functions and develop deliverables for Council’s consideration. Key learnings are

being shared between the various groups, and all of these inputs are considered by Council in its leadership role to oversee development of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.



As noted in previous discussions with Council including on Compass Kitchener community priorities, there is a high degree of alignment between inputs gathered from the various phases of community engagement – which are reflected in the Vision and key priorities featured in this report.

### Strategic Plan Components

The Strategic Plan includes several key components which together reflect the City’s aspirations and commitments for Kitchener as outlined in the visual below; **the Vision, priority Strategic Goal Areas that will lead to Action development, and the approach to Action Planning are the focus of this report and Council discussion.**



The **Vision** is our 20-year community vision for a desired future of Kitchener and what we as a City organization are striving for on behalf of the community. Within this 20-year timeframe the City establishes a series of Strategic Plans aligned to each term of Council, to make meaningful progress on what is possible to achieve over that 4-year cycle. **Strategic Goal Areas** are focus

areas in which the City can take action to make change in themes that are important to the community in the 4-year cycle, and aligned to the Vision. **Actions** outline the specific commitments and progress the City will make within the Goal Areas, often reflected as projects in the annual Business Plan.

**New 20-Year Vision for Kitchener**

An exciting aspect of this strategic planning cycle has been gathering significant and diverse community input to help cast a new long-term 20-year vision for Kitchener as a community. Broad community feedback from hundreds of people who were engaged in providing ideas and aspirations for the future of Kitchener has been thoughtfully considered in developing this vision and deliberated upon by many stakeholders. Residents told us that the vision should be inspiring and reduce “intimidating” language, so staff have taken a plain language and storytelling approach intended to resonate with people from all walks of life.

Staff have written a compelling story of the future of Kitchener in 20 years, supported by a short aspirational statement – which will have broader application beyond the Strategic Plan within the 20-year timeframe; both are included in full in Appendix B. The vision is intended to inspire and instill pride in the community for residents, staff and other stakeholders. As such, it creates a sense of belonging and reflects the aspiration that what we collectively do together changes things for the better, and there is a role for everyone to play in building the future:

***Building a city for everyone where, together,  
we take care of the world around us – and each other***

Compass Kitchener, all City Advisory Committees, residents and staff have meaningfully contributed to creating this picture of what Kitchener can be in 20 years, and that staff and Council can use to guide our work together moving forward.

**2023-2026 Strategic Goal Areas and Statements**

Within the 20-year vision, Council will define a series of 4-year Strategic Plans with unique goal areas of importance to each period. At the February 2023 strategic session, Council supported 5 Strategic Goal areas for the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan as accurately summarizing community and Council priorities for this cycle, and provided early input on areas of emphasis for the 4-year cycle.

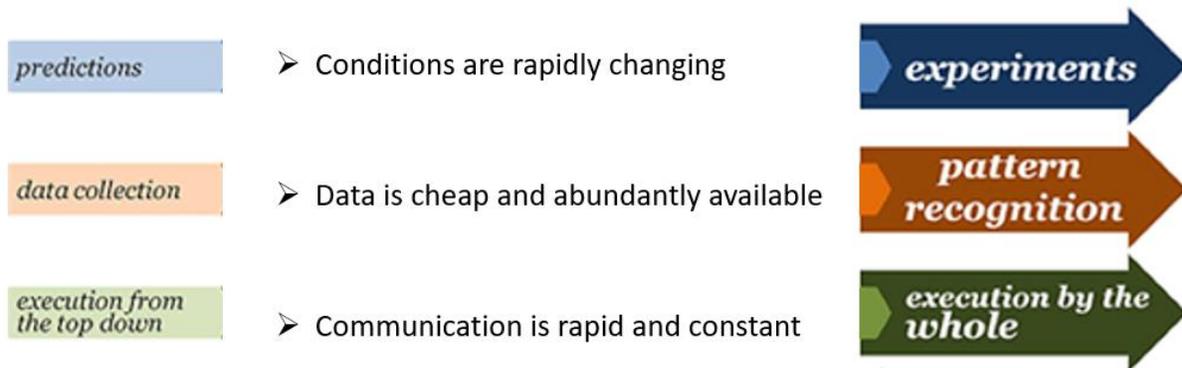
The Strategic Goal Areas have been renamed to be a strong complement and companion to the 20-year Vision around a theme of ‘forward together’ – acknowledging that multiple stakeholders collaborating on this work will lead to better and more timely outcomes.

Previous Strategic Goal Area Title	Updated Strategic Goal Area Title
Belonging and Participation	Fostering a Caring City Together
Housing, Land Use and Mobility	Building a Connected City Together
Environment and Climate Action	Cultivating a Green City Together
Economic Prosperity and Opportunity	Creating a Thriving City Together
Good Government	Stewarding a Better City Together

Goal statements were written to reflect the aspirations of the community and Council, which identify where we will focus energy and resources in the next 4 years to address opportunities, needs and gaps, while also working toward our long-term vision. The goal statements are included in full in Appendix C.

### Approach to Strategic Action Planning

An innovation REFOCUS introduced and staff have brought into the 2023-2026 strategic planning process is around an adaptive approach to defining actions and projects, within established Strategic Goal Areas. Cities and organizations’ operating context have changed and continue to evolve – with several key elements that present as challenges and opportunities, outlined in the diagram below:



- **Traditional strategic plans rely on straight-line predictions** of trends, yet in reality conditions are rapidly changing and often unpredictable – and so there is a need to be open, observe, learn, and respond to changing conditions, even within our 4-year planning cycle and term of Council.
- **Data collection** can be a key investment of time and energy in defining classic strategic plans; with data proliferating and being readily available, it is more critical to recognize patterns in data to make informed choices and decisions.
- **Communication and execution** of strategy was traditionally a top-down structure; in our current environment, communication is rapid and constant, with execution happening up, down and across hierarchies.

The pandemic and other emerging trends have demonstrated the need for Cities to have capacity to respond to other emerging issues – and opportunities – as they arise. Our previous 2019-2022 Strategic Plan ambitiously articulated 5 clear, measurable Actions within 5 Goal Areas, designed to respond to the key issues and needs of 2018. While many were completed in the 4-year period, a significant number took longer than expected due to complexity and shifting needs/resources partnership opportunities, while still others were paused and restarted due to the pandemic. We also saw some strategic priorities become more prominent during this timeframe including active transportation, Housing for All and Make It Kitchener; staff and Council flexed, changed and re-aligned resources to respond. The key lessons learned by staff and supported by Resident Panel deliberations are that we are in a new reality of rapidly changing circumstances. Attempting to predict or plan 4 years’ of Actions can constrain expectations and the ability to respond to what emerges within that period.

To formally enable this new approach through the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, staff will identify Actions for the first 1-2 years, as well as longer-term known Actions that will span beyond 1 year, to provide a balance between immediate and longer-term progress. By improving the cadence of setting and forecasting projects, instilling better measurement of outcomes, as well as innovation into the work, an ongoing approach to strategy development throughout the 4-year term of Council will provide greater adaptability and resilience.

Council in its governance role will have the opportunity to adjust/refine resources to emerging priorities annually within the 4-year timeframe through enhanced and better-integrated Budget and Business Planning processes. Staff will create capacity to measure, manage and communicate progress in order to communicate with Council and provide confidence of progress made throughout the Strategic Plan. This measurement will see Kitchener applying the MultiCapital Scorecard approach to track and communicate progress on the Strategic Plan across a triple bottom-line (financial, environmental and social) and aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The collaborative approach to planning with residents through the Resident Panel has provided staff with ongoing input and suggestions from a group who are deeply engaged and knowledgeable about the complex issues the City is grappling with and are representative of the diversity of the community. Their perspectives have been incredibly helpful to the process, and they report having a greater understanding and appreciation for the work that staff and council do. The Resident Panel encouraged the City to take a more flexible approach to adjust priorities based on changing conditions and ongoing stakeholder engagement, and to adopt new actions over the next 4 years as circumstances and opportunities change, specifically stating “Swerve within your lane.”

### **Key Priorities Within Strategic Goal Areas**

Not all potential areas can be considered of equal importance or effectively resourced and actioned. Recognizing this, staff identified key priorities to focus on for the first 1-2 years of the Strategic Plan drawn from the original list of ~20 shared with Council in February. Staff assessed the importance of each priority in comparison to others, the potential for the City to make progress. Staff also applied different lenses including strategic foresight, urgency and interdependency, and considered Council’s previous input on priorities. This new way of thinking and considerable deliberation resulted in the following grouping of priorities into 3 levels, which are also visually represented in the diagram below by 3 degrees of shading (dark for top priorities, medium for secondary, light for third).

**Top Priority - representing top priorities for the initial 1-2 years of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan; anticipated to be the primary focus of actions, budget investments, business planning and resource requests:**

- Connection & Belonging
- Newcomer Experience
- Housing & Sustainable Urban Growth
- Climate Adaptation & Mitigation and Energy Mix
- Employer Identity/Value Proposition
- Data Strategy/Management
- Leadership & Organizational Capabilities

**Secondary Priority - representing priorities to be actioned over the term of Council through the business plan with moderate potential budget/resource requests:**

- Physical & Mental Health
- Parks & Open Space
- Transportation & Trails
- Stakeholder Engagement

**Third Priority - representing priorities to be actioned over the term of Council through the business plan primarily within existing resources:**

- Community Participation
- Tree Canopy
- Natural Systems & Areas
- Innovation Culture (external)
- Workforce & Employment (external)
- Entrepreneurship & Small Business Community Health



Core Services are represented in the centre of the diagram, as a focus of service to the community every day which also contributes to the Goal Areas. Improving the capabilities of staff

and the organization through strategic investments in Stewarding a Better City (previously Good Government) has an impact across the organization in the delivery of core service, and also contributes to delivering on the strategic actions that the City undertakes through the Strategic Plan; as such, these have emerged as key priorities for the initial phases of the 4-year cycle.

### **Discussion with City Council**

At Council's May 8 Strategic Session, staff will engage Council around a new 20-year Vision and Key Outcomes for the 2023-2026 timeframe within that, including the following:

- 1. What are your reflections on, and reactions to, the Vision Story and Vision Statement? Have Community and Council aspirations for a desired Kitchener 20 years from now been captured?***
- 2. Do the Key Priorities within each Strategic Goal Area capture Council's broad and collective priorities?***
- 3. What opportunities or challenges to you see with establishing an initial set of Actions for the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan?***

The outcomes of Council's discussion will provide focus and inform the approach for staff to identify proposed actions which the City might undertake in the next 4 years to make progress; these will be shared with Council in June for discussion, and final approval of main content of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

### **Final Steps in the Strategic Planning Process:**

- Development of final recommendations for strategic actions informed by Resident Panel, staff and Compass Kitchener (May 2023)
- Refinement of key priorities, options and actions through an iterative process with Corporate Leadership Team direction and guidance (May-June 2023)
- Final online public survey (EngageKitchener) and targeted engagement on proposed key priorities and actions (May-June 2023)
- Council engagement on prioritizing actions, receiving Resident Panel report and recommendations and final approval of 2023-2026 Strategic Plan content (June 2023)
- Strategic Plan launch and communications (fall 2023)

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports the development of the 2023-2026 City of Kitchener Strategic Plan.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

CONSULT AND COLLABORATE – This report included input from broad and diverse community engagement to support and inform the creation of Kitchener's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, including a new 20-year Vision for Kitchener, community priorities, and potential goals and actions for the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

- CAO-2022-160 [Preparing for the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)
- CAO-2022-198 [Results of Environics 2022 Survey of Kitchener Residents](#)
- CAO-2022-413 [Strategic Foresight and Community Engagement Update](#)
- CAO-2023-047 [Compass Kitchener Advisory Committee Community Priorities](#)
- CAO-2023-081 [Prioritizing Strategic Goal Areas](#)

**APPROVED BY:** Dan Chapman, CAO

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Appendix A - Summary of Council Input into the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to Date
- Appendix B - 20-year Vision Statement and Story for Kitchener
- Appendix C - 2023-2026 Strategic Goal Areas and Statements