

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: August 14, 2023

SUBMITTED BY: Cory Bluhm, Executive Director Economic Development, 519-741-2200 ext. 7065
Garett Stevenson, Interim Director of Planning, 519-741-2200 ext. 7319

PREPARED BY: Darren Becks, Manager of Downtown Development and Innovation, 519-741-2200 ext. 7064
Natalie Goss, Manager of Policy and Research, 519-741-2200 ext. 7648

WARD(S) INVOLVED: Wards 9 and 10

DATE OF REPORT: July 21, 2023

REPORT NO.: DSD-2023-315

SUBJECT: Downtown Kitchener Draft Vision and Principles

RECOMMENDATION:

That the comprehensive community engagement results received to date, combined with Council feedback, be used with input from the Downtown Community Working Group to finalize a vision statement and set of principles; and further,

That staff report back with the final vision and set of principles for Council approval later in 2023.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- This report provides an overview of the project work to date and seeks Council's input on the draft vision and principles for downtown Kitchener.
- The work of the DCWG is framed by the Terms of Reference approved by Council and detailed in Report No. DSD-2022-014.
- The Downtown Kitchener vision process is community-led, and staff supported. Central to this community-led process is a Downtown Community Working Group (DCWG) comprised of approximately 25-30 members of the downtown and broader Kitchener community each bringing unique and diversified perspectives to the process.
- Community engagement for Phase One (June 2022 – April 2023) included workshops with the DCWG as well as participation from approximately 1,700 participants in person through a wide range of engagement methods including pop up sessions at the Kitchener Farmers' Market, meetings with stakeholders, and do-it-yourself workshops and an additional approximately 900 participants online.
- This report supports the Strategic Plan theme A Vibrant Economy.

*** This information is available in accessible formats upon request. ***
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

BACKGROUND:

Downtown Kitchener is at a critical point in its evolution. Unprecedented growth is happening at a time where housing affordability, climate, equity, and social factors are intersecting. The pandemic has caused significant impacts to Kitchener's business community, including the many businesses and organizations reliant on in-person engagement. As a result of all these converging factors, it is an opportune time for the community to shape a new vision for downtown Kitchener. Since June 2022, a Downtown Community Working Group (DCWG) has been guiding the development of the vision and principles, with support from City staff and LURA Consulting (a community engagement consultancy). The DCWG is comprised of 25-30 members of the downtown and broader Kitchener community, each bringing unique and diverse perspectives.

The work of the DCWG is to create a high-level vision and guiding principles to inform new and ongoing City initiatives. These current and future initiatives may include a land use and zoning framework for the Major Transit Station areas, Civic District Master Plan, District Energy, Bramm Yards Master Plan, Arts and Culture Strategy, Inclusionary Zoning, Places and Spaces, Comprehensive Review of City-owned Properties and a new or updated Official Plan.

To date the DCWG shaped and assisted in delivering a fulsome community engagement process to gather input to inform the vision and guiding principles and receive input on the draft. This community-driven process has been intended to build consensus, motivate, and inspire action and ensure inclusive community building.

The report titled, "[Downtown Kitchener Vision and Principles Phase One Engagement](#)" summarizes input received during Phase One of this project.

The DCWG has used the input provided through Phase One to draft a vision and principles for community and Council input which is the subject of this report.

REPORT:

Since June 2022 the Downtown Community Working Group has worked together with City staff and LURA Consulting to shape a comprehensive community engagement process and identified key themes and issues in the downtown. From February to April of this year phase one of the DTK Vision and Principles community wide engagement occurred which included:

- 1,615 participants over 5 community pop-up events
- 95 participants through 11 do-it-yourself workshops including the City of Kitchener's Downtown Action and Advisory Committee and Climate Change and Environmental Advisory Committee
- 2 meetings with local Indigenous Organizations
- 4 DTK social service organizations through a service provider workshop
- 1,313 project webpage views on kitchener.ca
- 60,216 social media ad impressions
- 3,210 project webpage views on EngageWR
- 899 participants in online engagement
- 1 Council workshop

The community and Council input received earlier this year is summarized in Attachment A to this report.

Key messages that emerged throughout the Phase One engagement process are:

- The need for community-building efforts, strengthening the connection between neighbours.
- The importance of vibrant streets, public spaces and green space, especially as density grows within the downtown.
- Strong support for more connected and continuous active transportation and public transportation networks.
- Greater efforts to support the unhoused/precariously housed and those in crisis who live in Kitchener.
- Downtown Kitchener was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and requires investment and rejuvenation to support existing local businesses and attract new ventures.
- The importance of integrating climate adaptation and resiliency actions into the city's day-to-day functions.
- Strengthened support, advocacy, and action towards an inclusive, equitable and accessible downtown, that also helps to advance Truth and Reconciliation.

Using the community and Council input the DCWG, with support from staff, and the project consultant, LURA, drafted a vision statement, and three (3) guiding principles. These are a first step towards a final vision and principles that will form a Council recommendation in the fall of 2023.

The draft vision and principles are currently part of an ongoing community engagement process which commenced on June 17, 2023 at a community pop-up at Gaukel Block. Online engagement launched on the [DTK Vision Engage Page](#) on July 5th and is open for input until August 18th.

The purpose of this report is to engage with members of Council at the committee of council meeting to obtain their input on the draft vision and principles developed collaboratively by the DCWG with support from staff and the consultant. To assist Council with providing input on the draft vision and principles, the following questions are being asked which are the same questions are being asked of the community.

1. Does the vision and principles establish a clear direction for the future of DTK?
2. Do the principles prioritize the matters that should be focused on to achieve the vision? If not, what is missing?
3. What actions could be taken to implement the above principles?

Draft Vision

Downtown Kitchener is the inclusive, dynamic, and energetic heart of the city. Together our community can thrive through vibrancy, connection, and belonging.

Principles

Vibrancy

The DTK community is vibrant. As our city's economic and employment hub, our streets bustle with entrepreneurs' unique shops, restaurants, and experiences to explore. World-class cultural institutions, a burgeoning arts scene, unique places, and a diversity of lively festivals define our downtown's identity.

Connection

The DTK community builds meaningful connections. Diverse residents come together through a shared network of dynamic public places and community spaces. Our downtown prioritizes pedestrians while providing a full range of safe and accessible transportation choices within and beyond the core.

Belonging

The DTK community is a place where everyone belongs. Thoughtful planning, sustainability, and exceptional design weave new growth into the history of DTK, where complete neighbourhoods offer diverse housing forms for people at all stages of life. Our collective decisions center on inclusivity and empathy to build a welcoming, equitable and accessible downtown where everyone can thrive

All input received to date will be provided to the DCWG to assist them in developing a final vision and series of principles for DTK. Staff anticipates bringing a final vision and principles to Council for a decision later this fall.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports A Vibrant Economy. The DTK vision project plan delivers a wholistic vision for the future of DTK enabling the continuation of strategic investments supporting job creation, economic prosperity, thriving arts and culture, and great places to live.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – This project is funded through approved capital budget for costs associated with consultant services and community engagement.

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

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

The DTK vision engagement process is community-led and, staff supported. Central to the engagement process is a DCWG, comprised of 25 to 30 individuals representing different aspects of downtown life. The DCWG informed, guided, and participated in themed conversations which have been used, together with broad community input, to develop a draft vision and principles for Downtown Kitchener that is being used to have conversations with the broader community.

Since June 2022, the DTK Vision Project has included:

- 11 DCWG meetings
- Meetings with local Indigenous organizations
- A workshop with downtown service provider agencies
- A Do-it-Yourself Workshop completed by eight community organizations/city advisory committees
- Five community pop-ups, and
- Two phases of online engagement that included surveys, ideas boards, and mapping exercises.

In addition to the broad representation that was critical to the formation of the Downtown Community Working Group (DCWG), the project team engaged the Downtown Kitchener BIA, the Downtown Action and Advisory Committee (DAAC), the Climate Change and Environmental Advisory Committee (CCEC), Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC), and Arts and Creative Industries (ACAC) as part of engagement in March/April of this year.

DAAC, at its June 2023 meeting provided further comments and feedback on the draft vision and principles.

All input received to date will be provided to the DCWG to assist them in developing a final vision and series of principles for DTK. Staff anticipates presenting a final vision and principles to Council for a decision later this fall.

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

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

[DSD-2022-014 Downtown Kitchener Vision Project Plan](#)

[DSD-2023-197 Downtown Kitchener \(DTK\) Vision and Growing Together Workshop](#)

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

[Attachment A - Downtown Kitchener Vision and Principles – Phase One Engagement Summary](#)