

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: February 26, 2024

SUBMITTED BY: Rosa Bustamante, Director of Planning and Housing Policy/City Planner, 519-741-2200 ext. 7319

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: February 7, 2024

REPORT NO.: DSD-2024-077

SUBJECT: Building a Connected City Together: New Official Plan Launch

RECOMMENDATION:

That Staff be directed to initiate work on a new Official Plan for Kitchener in accordance with report DSD-2024-077.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- Kitchener is forecast to grow from today's estimated population of 280,000 to a population of 409,200 by 2051. As the city looks to accommodate new neighbours into its community we need a plan – a new Official Plan – to guide Kitchener's growth and shape the way that neighbourhoods evolve and change.
- The purpose of this report is to provide an opportunity for the community, through a special meeting of Council, to share their thoughts on what we should look at when developing the new Official Plan.
- Kitchener's Official Plan was adopted in 2014, and by Provincial law it is required to be updated.
- Building on the Strategic Plan Vision for the City, staff propose that the new Official Plan focus on the following key themes:
 - Housing supply, choice and affordability
 - Energy transition and climate change
 - Complete walkable communities
 - Sustainable, safe, and equitable transportation
 - Parks, open spaces and community infrastructure
 - How and where we grow, and what is needed to support that growth
 - Creating an economically-thriving city
 - Equity in the Official plan review process, in the policies that result, and the usability of the Official Plan
- The community and collaborators will have opportunities to shape the new Official Plan process. Community conversations will:

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- Provide meaningful opportunities to shape the plan;
- Build community capacity for informed engagement;
- Build trusting relationships;
- Strive for representation; and
- Elicit a broad range of ideas and go deep on the interesting ones.
- Consultant and community engagement costs for the new Official Plan will be funded through existing capital budgets that are supported by Development Charges and the Housing Accelerator Fund as the primary funding sources.
- This report supports **Building a Connected City Together: Official Plan Comprehensive Update**

BACKGROUND:

An Official Plan (OP) shapes the way our city grows and changes, and is particularly impactful at the neighbourhood level. Provincial law, specifically the Planning Act, sets out what an Official Plan can do. That includes:

- guiding growth and change mostly related to how land and buildings are used;
- guiding decisions on land use, development, transportation, physical and community infrastructure;
- translating the City's vision, established through the Strategic Plan, into future uses of land; and
- Providing direction for implementing tools like the zoning by-law.

The Planning Act requires that Official Plans be updated every 10 years or sooner to ensure conformity with provincial plans (i.e. A Place to Grow), policy statements (i.e. Provincial Policy Statement), and matters of provincial interest identified in the Planning Act. Kitchener's Official Plan is now 10 years old and due for an update.

Kitchener is growing fast and facing city-building challenges like the housing crisis, pedestrian and cyclist deaths and injuries, inequity, climate change, social isolation and how to pay for aging infrastructure and city services. We are also presented with opportunities like new mobility technologies, a young and highly skilled workforce, strong neighbourhoods and communities, a rich and diverse culture, and a growing desire for urban connection. The new Official Plan presents an opportunity to tackle these head-on, and ready us for an uncertain future. It should reflect who we are, what we value, and the Kitchener we can become - a thriving city that offers well-being, potential and quality of life – for everyone.

REPORT:

What must be explored through the new Official Plan project

Planning Act – Over the past 10 years, changes have been made to the Planning Act that must be addressed in the Official Plan (OP). These changes relate to parkland dedication, employment areas, community benefits charges and, depending on when certain portions of the Planning Act are approved by the Province, the role of the Region in land use planning. Furthermore, the Official Plan must have regard for the provincial interests identified in Section 2 of the Act.

Provincial Policy Statement, A Place to Grow, and Proposed Provincial Planning Statement

Since the current OP was adopted changes were made to both the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

(AP2G). These changes include updated population forecasts for the Region, changes in the process for identifying new greenfield lands for growth, and the minimum density of people and jobs planned for those new greenfield areas.

Region of Waterloo Official Plan

The City's Official Plan has to align with the Regional Official Plan (ROP) in key areas. An update to the ROP (ROPA 6) was approved in April 2023. It plans for 923,000 people by 2051, 409,200 of whom are planned to live in Kitchener. Key ROP policies which the Kitchener OP needs to align with include:

- revised resident and jobs forecasts to 2051;
- targets for the number of residents and jobs planned for new greenfield areas;
- begin to plan for the Ottawa Street Regional Intensification Corridor;
- policies that protect industrial and business parks as places for good jobs in the long term;
- Planning for a wide range of housing types and stronger permissions for missing middle housing city-wide;
- minimum target of 30% of new units which must be affordable to low- and moderate-income households;
- continuing to plan for complete and walkable neighbourhoods, and;
- drinking water source protection policies to better align with not only with the ROP, but the Clean Water Act and Source Protection Plan.

What will not be explored through the new Official Plan project

ROPA 6 was the result of many years of technical review and community conversations. Kitchener's new OP project will not revisit ROPA 6's decisions including the delineation of and minimum density targets of Protected Major Transit Station Areas; minimum intensification targets, and greenfield area density targets. Any forthcoming Provincial revisions to the Countryside Line and urban area will be incorporated into the Plan, and will not be reconsidered. Revisions to ROPA 6's population and employment forecast may be required in response to Kitchener's municipal housing pledge of 35,000 units by 2031, and lands added to Kitchener's urban area in southwest Kitchener (pending further consideration by the Province).

What should be explored through the new Official Plan project

In addition to the mandatory issues described above, staff are recommending that the project include the items outlined in Table 1. These items were developed by:

- synthesizing recent community engagement on key projects including: the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, Make it Kitchener 2.0, Places and Spaces, Housing for All, Growing Together, Cycling and Trails Master Plan and the Downtown Kitchener Vision;
- assessment of contemporary city building challenges and emerging practices; and
- consideration of Council's stated priorities over the last several years and through the engagement in the development of this official plan.

The new Official Plan project will focus on the following themes:

- Housing supply, choice and affordability;
- Energy transition and climate change;
- Complete walkable communities;
- Sustainable, safe, and equitable transportation;

- Parks, open spaces and community infrastructure;
- How and where we grow, and what is needed to support that growth, and;
- Creating an economically-thriving city;
- Equity in the Official Plan process, in the policies that result, and the usability of the Official Plan.

Table 1 – Matters in and out of Scope for new Official Plan project

In Scope	Not in Scope
Conformity with Provincial and Regional legislation, policy and plans	Matters decided through ROPA 6 including the delineation of PMTSA boundaries, minimum density targets within PMTSAs, intensification targets and designated greenfield area targets. Any forthcoming Provincial changes to the urban boundary/countryside line will be incorporated into the Plan, and will not be reconsidered.
Review and confirmation of population, housing and employment forecasts in consideration of Kitchener’s housing pledge, and possible additional urban area in southwest Kitchener.	Review of Natural Heritage System policies and mapping
Develop ~3 scenarios that provide different options on how and where population and employment growth is allocated. Scenarios will be evaluated against the objectives of the plan including climate, infrastructure and financial implications to arrive at a preferred scenario.	Updated zoning to implement a new Official Plan (it is expected that this will be a key implementation item following closely after the approval of a new Official Plan)
Bold and impactful “look and feel” of the Official Plan	Detailed land use planning for lands that may be added to the Urban Area through a Minister’s decision in southwest Kitchener
Review and update of all policies and mapping unless specifically identified as not in scope	Policies and land uses for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dundee North Secondary Plan area • Hidden Valley Secondary Plan area • Lands within the PMTSAs.
Review and incorporation of the following Secondary Plans currently contained within the 1994 Official Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Ward • Central Frederick • Rosenberg 	Site-specific requests to amend land use designations that are more appropriately considered through applicant initiated processes.
The following technical background studies:	

In Scope	Not in Scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm population and employment forecasts • Housing needs assessment • Strategic Growth Areas and Intensification Study • Energy Transition and Climate Change Mitigation Study • Climate Adaptation Plan • Secondary Plan Review • Non-residential uses and complete communities • Analyze Growth Scenarios • Conformity Study 	
Community, collaborator, and Indigenous engagement and consultation	
Drinking water source protection	
A first and final draft Official Plan	

The purpose of this report and statutory special meeting of Council is to hear from the community and collaborators on what they feel are important matters to consider as part of the new Official Plan.

How is the new Official Plan project going to happen?

The importance of community and collaboration

Community and collaborator engagement are key drivers of the new Official Plan. The Official Plan presents a significant opportunity for all of us to think about what we love about Kitchener and what we want to become. The opportunity before us is to think about:

- The cities and neighbourhoods we have visited or might want to live in someday, what makes them great and how they can inform the Kitchener of the future?
- What does the future of my neighbourhood look like?
- How can I welcome new neighbours?
- How we can ensure that Kitchener takes care of the world around us, and each other
- Which new ideas can help address our most pressing city-building challenges and capitalize on opportunities?

The Official Plan project presents the opportunity to roll up our sleeves, have some fun, dig deep, and articulate our collective vision of Kitchener and the plan to get there. Now is the time to talk about the growth and change you want to see for Kitchener and not leave it to others to shape it for you while making sure we welcome new neighbours.

The following principles will guide conversations with community and collaborators:

1. **Provide meaningful opportunities to shape the plan**– People across the community will have real influence on the goals, objectives and policies of the plan.

The people who will be most affected by policies and actions of the plan, who historically have not had equal access or opportunity to community conversations, must have a say in what those policies and actions look like.

- 2. Build community capacity for informed engagement** – Planning, city-building and the Official Plan are complex matters that many in our community don't have a lot of experience with. Through our engagement we will build capacity for people to understand planning and the bounds of influence on process and outcomes, while being open and welcoming to all perspectives and priorities. We will also build capacity for members of the community to understand growth and change and to be able to share this knowledge with their neighbours.
- 3. Build trusting relationships** – Meaningful engagement is built on a foundation of trusting relationships between the community, City staff and council. This is especially true when engaging with marginalized communities whose relationships with government institutions leave room for improvement. We need to be clear about where influences lie, listen carefully to what is being shared, and demonstrate how what has been shared has been considered and shaped outcomes. We will strive to seek out a panel of citizens that mirror the demographics of Kitchener.
- 4. Strive for Representation** – Build an engagement process that makes space to hear from communities that have typically been underrepresented in Official Plan processes including equity-denied communities, renters, people who have experienced homelessness, poverty and housing precarity. We need to talk to youth and other voices that represent people who don't live or work in Kitchener today, but who expect to, or want to, in the future. We'll learn from all these communities early in the process, to understand what's important to them, and how they want to be engaged in this process. Representation also means getting out of City Hall and meeting people where, when and how it works for them, both virtually and in person. Some loud voices that have historically influenced planning processes will not be provided the same opportunities to amplify their influence as we strive to develop equitable engagement and participation practices. By limiting the platforms for a vocal few in the community to influence the process, some community discomfort may arise, but this will be necessary as our community and organization strives to achieve greater equity in our work.
- 5. Elicit a broad range of ideas and go deep on the interesting ones**– Our engagement approach will not focus primarily on reaching the most people, or the greatest variety of people - it will value the quality and depth of the conversations. The OP project will use thoughtful engagement strategies and practices to generate a large volume of great ideas that represent the views of a wide variety of collaborators. It will also make time to do deep dives into interesting and novel ideas that emerge. We know people will have ideas that are outside the scope of an OP or outside of the City's control. Not all the ideas that add value will be able to be addressed in the new OP.

Community Working Group

While the details of the engagement strategy that deliver on the above principles are still in development, at the centre of the Official Plan engagement is a community working group

that will be comprised of a diverse group of individuals that represent the demographics of Kitchener, each of whom will bring unique perspectives to the process. The community working group will learn about the planning considerations facing the City and collaborate with staff and consultants to meaningfully shape the recommended policies. They will also serve as the starting point for conversations with the broader community.

The importance of technical considerations

Together with a robust community engagement approach, it is important that the Official Plan be informed by technical information. Staff are recommending a series of background studies to be prepared to support the Official Plan.

Confirm population and employment forecast and servicing capacity – The ROP plans for 409,200 Kitchener residents by 2051. Do we need to plan for a different number in light of potential changes to the urban boundary, and Kitchener’s housing pledge of 35,000 homes by 2031? If so, is there sufficient planned water supply and wastewater treatment capacity to service growth?

Housing needs assessment – What kinds of housing is needed? This study will explore housing needs in terms of type (single detached dwellings, apartments and everything in between), tenure (rental or ownership) and affordability (suitable homes that all kinds of households and incomes can secure by spending less than 30% of their income on housing). The study will identify the gaps between need and supply across the continuum including family housing, rental housing, accessible housing, seniors housing and housing for people at risk of becoming unhoused.

Strategic Growth Areas and Intensification Study – Where should new housing go? Should most of the new homes be located along major roads or spread out across existing neighbourhoods? We also need to start planning for Ottawa Street as a potential future phase of the ION transit network, and how other existing intensification corridors, like Belmont Avenue and Lancaster Street may evolve and change.

Energy Transition and Climate Change Mitigation Study – How do we need to change the way we grow to ensure we have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2051. What must the Official Plan do to support, and be ready for, the clean energy transition?

Climate Adaptation Plan – How does the Kitchener of today need to change to reduce risks to the health of our community, as well as risks to our infrastructure arising from climate change?

Secondary Plan Review – The Rosenberg, North Ward and Central Frederick neighbourhoods land use framework is from the mid-2000s and mid 1990s respectively. The land uses within these neighbourhoods will be reviewed to form part of the new Official Plan.

Non-residential uses and complete communities– While the housing crisis is arguably today’s most pressing issue, how will we plan for places to work, shop, play, learn and connect are crucial components of complete walkable communities. . How will the location of our jobs and daily routines change in response to flexible, remote and hybrid work? How do we make sure there are opportunities to learn, play, and connect close to most homes?

Analyze Growth Scenarios – This study will develop three possible options for locating and shaping growth and examine how they measure up against criteria like equity, climate and energy, hard and soft infrastructure, financial implications and more.

Conformity Study – Address all provincial and regional conformity matters not addressed in other studies.

A new Official Plan is a key opportunity to link together growth forecasts with our plan for supporting services. This coordination ensures that the key city services we rely on are delivered when and where it makes sense, and in a cost-effective manner. The Official Plan will be coordinated with:

- Integrated Sanitary Master Plan;
- City and Regional Transportation Master Plans;
- Regional Water Supply Strategy;
- City and Regional Water Distribution Master Plans;
- Places and Spaces, and;
- Leisure and Facilities Master Plan.

When is the New Official Plan going to happen?

An ambitious timeline is proposed for the Official Plan, but one that will see robust community and collaborator engagement throughout. This is balanced with the delivery of a new Official Plan in quick succession.

2024 – This year we will focus on technical studies, establish the community working group and have broad community engagement on the technical inputs of the Official Plan.

2025 – In 2025, we will begin drafting a new Official Plan that will be informed by community and collaborator conversation from 2024 and all of the technical studies. There will be continuous engagement with the community working group, community and collaborators on the policies that form Kitchener’s new Official Plan.

2026 – In early 2026 a new Official Plan will be presented to Council for a decision.

The new Official Plan provides an opportunity for the community, Council and staff to **be bold** in the **policies** that guide Kitchener’s future and **be bold** in **how we work collaboratively** over the next 2 years to set the stage for the Kitchener of tomorrow.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports **Building a Connected City Together: Official Plan Comprehensive Update**

One strategic plan action is to undertake a comprehensive review of both the City’s Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan in an integrated way, to update the rules around what can be built in Kitchener’s neighbourhoods and provide more flexible options for how people get around; and including a focus on encouraging missing middle housing and adapting to climate change.

The vision for Kitchener established through the Strategic Plan 2023-2026, “Building a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us – and each other”, will guide the new Official Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – Consultant and community engagement costs for the new Official Plan are funded through existing capital budgets. \$745,000 funding in 2023-2026 was identified in the Development Charges background study for studies to support the Official Plan. In addition, approximately \$300,000 from the City’s Housing Accelerator Fund will be used to advance work on a Housing Needs Assessment and Climate Adaptation Plan that will support the Official Plan.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Key engagement principles and approaches are included in “The importance of community and collaboration” section of this report.

INFORM –

This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting and advertised in the Waterloo Record on January 19 and 25th (see Attachment A) and advertised on social media. Additional information on Kitchener’s Official Plan and the new Official Plan project can be found on [the City’s website](#).

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- *Planning Act*
- Region of Waterloo Official Plan, and Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 6
- City of Kitchener Official Plan
- Provincial Policy Statement
- A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- *Clean Water Act*
- Grand River Source Protection Plan

REVIEWED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager, Policy & Research
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ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Notice of Special Meeting published in the Record on January 19 and 26, 2024.