

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Climate Change and Environment Committee

DATE OF MEETING: October 17, 2024

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: October 1, 2024

REPORT NO.: DSD-2024-423

SUBJECT: Kitchener 2051 – Official Plan Project Update

RECOMMENDATION:
For information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of Kitchener 2051, the City's new Official Plan project.
- The key finding of this report is that the development of Kitchener 2051 is well underway. The delivery of the initial phase of work sees the project divided into five distinct studies:
 - Engagement;
 - Population and Employment Forecast Update and Housing Needs Assessment;
 - Non-Residential Technical Background Study;
 - Growth Scenarios Study; and
 - Climate and Energy Technical Background Study.
- Each of these five studies will assess existing conditions and provide recommendations for how the City should move forward, in alignment with corporate goals and objectives. City staff will be responsible for development the new Official Plan document, informed by the deliverables and outcomes of the five studies referenced above.
- There are no financial implications arising from this report
- Community engagement is currently underway and includes numerous ways of reaching community members and collaborators. The use of a Community Working Group is a core component of the community engagement approach for this project.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Kitchener is preparing a new Official Plan (OP) – referred to as Kitchener 2051. An OP is a document that shapes the way a city grows and develops. Provincial legislation, specifically the Planning Act, sets out what an OP can do, including:

- Directing growth and change, mostly related to how land and buildings are used;

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- Guiding decisions on land use, development, transportation, physical and community infrastructure, and more;
- Implementing the City's vision, established through the Strategic Plan; and
- Providing direction for implementing tools like the Zoning By-law.

The existing City of Kitchener OP was adopted in 2014 and has positively shaped growth and development across the City over the last decade. A new OP is needed to respond to current and future conditions and trends. 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. The City is 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.

Kitchener 2051 presents an opportunity to tackle these issues head-on, ask big questions, and prepare for an uncertain future. It should reflect the City's values and aspirations for what it can become – a thriving city that offers well-being, potential and quality of life, for everyone. Kitchener 2051 will address conformity with Provincial policy and legislation and the Region of Waterloo OP, alongside recently completed plans for the City, such as Housing for All, Places & Spaces, and Cycling & Trails Master Plan, to set out a forward-thinking and contemporary city-wide policy framework.

REPORT:

The City is a community of approximately 280,000 residents and is the largest city in Waterloo Region, which is home to more than 650,000 residents. The City adopted its current OP in 2014. Since that time, there have been many changes to Provincial planning legislation and policies. In 2024, Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 6 (ROPA 6), the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review, was approved by the Province. This Municipal Comprehensive Review forecasted growth for Kitchener to 2051 and sets key growth management policies.

The City's current OP forecasts 319,500 people and 132,500 jobs by 2031. Kitchener 2051 will determine where and how Kitchener will grow to accommodate the 2051 population forecast of 409,200 people and 170,500 jobs, as identified in the Region of Waterloo Official Plan (ROP).

As part of developing the new OP, City staff divided the project into five distinct studies within the overall Kitchener 2051 project, each with their own separate consultant teams. The five distinct studies include:

- Engagement;
- Population and Employment Forecast Update and Housing Needs Assessment;
- Non-Residential Technical Background Study;
- Growth Scenarios Study; and
- Climate and Energy Technical Background Study.

Engagement

The engagement workplan is informed by the following principles, which will guide conversations with the community and collaborators:

1. Provide meaningful opportunities to shape the plan

2. Build community capacity for informed engagement
3. Build trusting relationships
4. Strive for Representation
5. Elicit a broad range of ideas and go deep on the interesting ones

Community Working Group

Kitchener 2051's engagement approach is centered on the establishment of a Community Working Group. City staff sought a diverse group of individuals that represent the demographics of Kitchener (and look like the Kitchener of tomorrow), each of whom will bring unique perspectives to this process. The Community Working Group will learn about what the City needs to consider through the process of developing a new OP, and collaborate with City staff and consultants to meaningfully shape the recommended policies. The Kitchener 2051 community working group application process received nearly 150 applications from across all wards of the City. A selection committee made up of two staff and three community members reviewed the applications based on equity and representation considerations, interest and experience in city building issues, and community connections. In the end, 30 individuals were selected to form the Community Working Group. The Community Working Group will meet on a monthly basis to stay informed of the project and when applicable, provide input to shape and inform future deliverables and community engagements.

Population and Employment Forecast Update and Housing Needs Assessment

This study will look at updating the population and employment forecast for the City of Kitchener in light of recent changes impacting the City.

The study will also develop a new Housing Needs Assessment which will identify 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).

Non-Residential Technical Background Study

The Non-Residential Technical Background Study will inform the development of the City's new OP to ensure that the City's neighbourhoods are complete communities, with access to a range goods, services, and amenities that enhance the quality of life for residents. The study will also assess matters of compatibility between industrial and sensitive uses, and provide recommendations around the future of local employment lands in the City.

Growth Scenarios Study

This Growth Scenarios Study will focus on the ways in which the City can accommodate the population and employment growth forecasted by 2051.

Climate and Energy Technical Background Study

Of particular importance and relevance to the Climate Change and Environment Committee is the Climate and Energy Technical Background Study. The City of Kitchener has ambitious goals of advancing community energy solutions in pursuit of climate, economic and energy security objectives. In 2018, the Region of Waterloo, area municipalities, and local energy service providers approved the Community Energy Investment Strategy (CEIS). Its goal is to improve the Region's economic competitiveness and quality of life through the coordination of targeted energy investments. City Council declared a Climate emergency in 2019 and directed continued support of corporate and community climate initiatives to

reduce greenhouse gas emission by 80% by 2050. The CEIS seeks to integrate economic and environmental thinking and transform the energy system of the region.

Transform WR is Waterloo Region's community-wide response to the global climate crisis and is led by ClimateAction WR, in partnership with the Region of Waterloo, City of Kitchener, other local municipalities and organizations. The strategy outlines the collective long-term strategy to achieve an 80% local greenhouse gas emission (GHG) reduction target (based on 2010 levels), and identifies local action needed to reduce our emissions by 30% by the year 2030.

The Study will provide strategic direction on how the OP must be positioned to achieve an 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050, support future climate mitigation and climate adaptation initiatives, and support the transition to a low carbon community.

Project Timeline and Next Steps

Kitchener 2051 has set an ambitious timeline, with a new OP proposed to be presented to City Council for a decision in early 2026. The project timeline includes robust community and collaborator engagement throughout.

2024 – In 2024, the focus will be on initiating the technical background studies, establishing the community working group, and undertaking broad community engagement on the technical inputs of the Official Plan.

2025 – In 2025, City staff will begin drafting a new OP 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 OP will be presented to Council for a decision.

Throughout 2025 the Kitchener 2051 project team will share updates on this work and will have specific conversations with CCEC on the Climate and Energy Technical Background Study.