

Message from the Mayor

On July 1, 2023 the Ontario government provided strong mayor powers to select municipalities, including Kitchener. While this legislation requires that the Mayor is responsible for proposing the municipal budget, I have endeavoured to do so in a manner consistent with the collaborative approach that exists between Kitchener Council and staff in our work. Based on direction that was provided earlier this year, City staff prepared a draft budget informed by Council and community priorities, and in alignment with the City's approved financial guidelines and policies. The Draft 2025 Budget was presented to Council for consideration and discussion at Budget Committee meetings held on November 18th and 25th. I want to thank Councillors Scott Davey and Bil Ioannidis, Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, for their leadership and support in these meetings and all of Council for their engagement throughout this process.

Kitchener has demonstrated its commitment to considering affordability when setting its budget, consistently delivering tax rate increases that are aligned with the rate of inflation in Ontario. Kitchener's track record speaks for itself when comes to balancing affordability, service demands, and responding to growth related pressures. I'm proud of Council and staff's approach to rate setting, and believe Kitchener is a model of efficient, effective, and sustainable local government in Ontario.

During the past 10 years, **Kitchener's tax rate increases have averaged 2.47%**, below **Ontario inflation which has averaged 2.64%** during that same timeframe.

As part of the Budget, there was \$1M in one-time capital funding unallocated and available to further advance strategic priorities that are important to the community. I support the Draft 2025 Budget that was prepared by staff and presented to Council and propose, based on feedback received from Council and the public, that the City move forward with the following strategic investment related to the additional \$1M in onetime capital funding:

\$1M for a community court investment program that will see 10 basketball or tennis/pickle-ball courts installed or rehabilitated in various wards across the City. This investment will see the installation of new courts in under-serviced areas of the City or enhance the condition of existing courts, recognizing that these types of recreational amenities serve as an important gathering space for residents of all ages in neighbourhoods across Kitchener.

The City's 20-year vision included in the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan is "Building a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us – and each other". I'm pleased with where we have landed with the 2025 Budget, for the progressive action that we continue to take as a City to move us closer to achieving that vision, while still balancing affordability and operational service delivery needs.