

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** February 24, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Rosa Bustamante, Director, Planning and Housing Policy,  
519-783-8929

**PREPARED BY:** Oluseyi Ojurongbe, Project Manager (Planning), 519-783-8941

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All

**DATE OF REPORT:** February 4, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2025-067

**SUBJECT:** Kitchener's Great Places Awards program update

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## RECOMMENDATION:

**That the proposed amendments to Kitchener's Great Places Awards program as detailed in DSD- 2025-067 be endorsed.**

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to recommend proposed changes to modernize and streamline the Kitchener's Great Places Awards (KGPA) program.
- The key findings of this report are that staff are recommending two key changes to the KPGA, namely, an additional award category to showcase affordable housing projects and to establish a selection process for the Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards, consistent with other award categories.
- This recommendation will be accommodated in the KGPA capital budget.
- This report supports the delivery of core services.

## BACKGROUND:

In 2015, Council endorsed the establishment of a new comprehensive planning awards program celebrating a broad range of categories related to excellence in urban design and cultural heritage conservation. Known as the Kitchener's Great Places Awards (KGPA), the program honours outstanding development projects that show a commitment to design excellence and innovation in urban design, sustainability and heritage conservation and contribute to a built environment that enhances quality of life. Since inception, the program has brought people together, fostered community pride and contributed to the quality-of-life Kitchener residents expect. Over the years, the award ceremony has recognized awardees across 9 categories as listed below:

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

1. Future Design Leaders
2. Master Planning
3. Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards
4. Neighborhood Design
5. People's Choice
6. Placemaking
7. Schmalz Award for Design Leadership
8. Sustainable Kitchener
9. Urban Design Excellence

In preparation for the 2025 edition, staff identified opportunities to improve the program and highlight additional project types. With a Council priority to build more housing including affordable housing, a new category is proposed as detailed in this report.

## **REPORT:**

Building on the success of previous editions and as part of the KGPA program going forward, staff are proposing changes to modernize and enhance consistency in the program in the two areas below:

- 1. To include an additional award category, the Affordable Housing Solutions Award to Kitchener's Great Places Awards:**

To further showcase the efforts of housing developers across the city to address the housing crisis, staff are proposing to include an additional award category focused on affordable housing. Staff is of the opinion that this award category will highlight and celebrate projects that incorporate affordable housing while sharing the story of their success, which can encourage others to take advantage of the City's affordable housing incentives and explore creative models, programs, and partnerships to create more affordable housing in our community. Attachment A provides an overview of the Affordable Housing Solutions Award including eligibility requirements, jury panel composition and nomination criteria.

As detailed in Attachment A, this category seeks to recognize developments that deliver affordable housing as defined in Kitchener's Official Plan. Staff propose that the jury panel for this category will include the Director of Planning & Housing Policy and up to four professionals representing such expertise as urban planning, affordable housing, social services, urban design and architecture.

Winning project selection will consider projects that incorporate creative or innovative solutions that prioritize affordability, supportiveness and groups that face greater housing challenges. Winning projects may spotlight the relationship between other orders of government, City of Kitchener, and community partners in the successful creation of affordable housing in our community.

Staff is of the opinion that this addition will further spotlight the City's effort in celebrating the people, and organizations who make Kitchener a great place to live, work and play, especially through the provision of affordable housing. Projects nominated in this category will also be eligible for the People's Choice Award (community vote process) and the Schmalz Award for Design Leadership (given to a project that demonstrates excellence in two or more award categories).

## **2. Jury Panel for award recipient selection for the Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards as recommended to Heritage Kitchener Committee in DSD-2025-037:**

Staff requested and received Heritage Kitchener Committee's endorsement on February 4, 2025, to update the program for the Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards to establish a heritage jury panel to select award winners.

Staff are seeking to refine the selection process of this category to align with how winning projects are chosen in other categories. Attachment B provides an overview of the Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Award including existing eligibility requirements, award categories, nomination criteria, and the proposed jury panel composition. Staff propose that the jury panel for this category will include a representative from the Heritage Kitchener Committee, the Director of Development & Housing Approvals and up to four other professionals with expertise in heritage conservation, urban planning, urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture. The jury panel will review nominated projects and may select up to four winning projects in a program year, outlining reasons why projects were selected.

This change in process will allow a more comprehensive review of the nominations among experts in heritage and other related fields. The representative from the Heritage Kitchener Committee will be selected by that Committee, and staff will maintain communication throughout the program.

### **Conclusions:**

Staff recommend changes to modernize and streamline the KGPA program which will continue to showcase and celebrate excellence in city-building supported by the program enhancements. While timelines for the 2025 KGPA program are still being finalized, staff anticipate a nomination period to be open this spring with the award event to be held in the fall. Pending Council's endorsement of the subject program updates, the timelines will be finalized.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

The recommendation of this report supports the achievement of the City's strategic vision through the delivery of core service.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

This recommendations in this report will be accommodated in the KGPA capital budget. The Kitchener Great Places Awards event has steadily grown in scale and attendance over the last few years and staff will undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the allocated KGPA budget after the 2025 KGPA event.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

INFORM - This report has also been posted to the City's website in advance of the Committee meeting.

### **PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

CSD-15-083: Urban Design Awards Program Update

DSD-2025-037: Kitchener's Great Places Awards program update

**REVIEWED BY:** Janine Oosterveld, Manager, Customer Experience and Project Management

**APPROVED BY:** Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services Department

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A - Overview of the Affordable Housing Solutions Award

Attachment B - Overview of the Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards