

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Special Council

DATE OF MEETING: February 10, 2025

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

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: February 6, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2025-061

SUBJECT: Council Strategic Session – Kitchener 2051

RECOMMENDATION:

For information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide background information to inform the Council strategic session regarding the new Official Plan project: Kitchener 2051
- The key finding of this report is that community engagement and technical studies are well underway, and staff are now seeking Council input on the framing of the Official Plan.
- There are no financial implications arising from the report.
- Kitchener 2051 includes a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan. A set of community values has emerged from Phase 1 of community engagement. These values form a bridge between the community's aspirations for its city, and the draft big ideas and focus areas that will form the basis of a new Official Plan for Kitchener.
- This report supports **Building a Connected City Together: Focuses on neighbourhoods; housing and ensuring secure, affordable homes; getting around easily, sustainably and safely to the places and spaces that matter.**

BACKGROUND:

As Kitchener grows to become a city of up to 450,000 people by 2051 (an average annual growth rate of 1.5 per cent), we need a new Official Plan. A new Official Plan will guide where people live and work and shape the way that neighbourhoods evolve and change over time. It will be ambitious and intentional as we plan for the Kitchener of 2051.

Kitchener 2051 is about the people who call Kitchener home today and in the future.

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

That includes Indigenous people, longtime residents, newcomers, business owners and entrepreneurs. It's about our community today but also about the people who are not yet here. Like the future people who are born here and will grow old in our community, the family looking to move to Kitchener, or the student who will call our community home after graduation. Kitchener 2051 looks at how we move around the city and the places in between. It is about what we will need to do together to grow, adapt, and succeed in a resilient and complete city.

Kitchener 2051 is considering a full range of perspectives to ensure that the Official Plan reflects the needs of all. This includes communities often underrepresented in these processes, like equity-seeking communities, renters, and people who have experienced homelessness, poverty, and housing precarity.

Along the way, we will learn from the community as we shape an Official Plan that reflects who we are, what we value, and the Kitchener we can become.

Since the February 2024 Council meeting that launched Kitchener 2051, staff have retained five consultant teams to undertake technical background work and to support community engagement. In early fall 2024 Kitchener 2051 was launched with a community working group and a Gaukel Block launch party. Since then, we have heard from the community about what is important to them and have received early direction from the consultant studies. We are now positioned to start framing a new Official Plan for Kitchener.

REPORT:

Community Values

Engagement on Kitchener 2051 builds on what we've heard over the last several years of community conversation through various City initiatives including the Strategic Plan, The Downtown Kitchener Vision, and Places and Spaces. Community and collaborator engagement in Phase 2 was structured around four Strategic Plan theme areas: a Connected City, a Caring City, a Thriving City and a Green City. Community engagement in Fall 2024 for Kitchener 2051 validated these thematic areas. We heard a strong emphasis on a Caring City as a broad theme that underlies the three other theme areas rather than standing on its own. What we heard from the community in Phase 2 can be synthesized by the following Community Values:

- Affordability.
- Thoughtful & resilient growth.
- Access & inclusion.
- Safe & sustainable mobility options.
- Mutual care & belonging.

Taken together with the technical background studies, policy analysis, and Council input, the community values serve as a bridge to the development of big ideas, areas of focus, and Official Plan policies. City staff shared these Community Values at pop-up events throughout the city and via an online survey in January 2025.

Big Ideas & Focus Areas

Big Ideas are the main aspirations for the new Official Plan, characterizing new ways of growing the city. Big Ideas reflect community values and integrate policies in all areas of the

Official Plan. Big ideas are the north star guiding our desired future. Big ideas can and should tie into multiple chapters and sections of the Official Plan.

Focus areas are the most important strategies we'll advance and things we'll focus on to deliver the big ideas. These are a bridge between the big ideas we're talking about now and specific policies that are yet to come.

Big Idea: Our Neighbourhoods

If you live in Kitchener, or if you would like to live here, if you rent or own, if you live alone or with others, if you need care or assistance, there will always be a home for you here. You and your family – however you define it, are able to make your home in any of Kitchener's thriving neighbourhoods. Our neighbourhoods will be places where neighbours can connect, where people of all ages can learn and play, and where shops and services are close by.

We're focusing on:

- Building affordable homes using all the tools we have and working with others, including other orders of government, builders, and organizations.
- Adding homes of all kinds to all neighbourhoods, particularly for those who need it most.
- Making sure our homes and neighbourhoods meet all of our needs.
- Evolving our neighbourhoods to be more diverse, inclusive, and human. Making sure our neighbourhoods have places to connect with neighbours, family, play, learn, and access shops and services for your everyday needs.

Big Idea: Our Economy

Our economy will be built on businesses of all types in neighbourhoods across the city, from shops and services to industry, innovation hubs, and offices. Residents and goods will get where they need to go quickly, efficiently and sustainably. Coordinated energy and infrastructure investments in businesses across the city will create a more competitive, resilient economy.

We're focusing on:

- Growing Kitchener's economy by adding more shops and services in all neighbourhoods, making it easier to get groceries, a cup of coffee, a haircut, or to your job.
- Creating more options to get people and goods where they need to go, including walking, biking, public transit, and driving.
- Creating conditions that attract the employers and industries of tomorrow, and play to Kitchener's economic strengths.
- Protecting and preserving industrial employment lands for uses that need to be there, and making sure that offices are easy to access and located close to transit.

Big Idea: Our Environment

We value, protect and conserve our natural environment so that Kitchener is a place where you and your family can be safe, healthy, and comfortable for generations to come. Kitchener will emit almost no greenhouse gases and our communities and built and natural environments are ready for a wetter, warmer, and wilder climate. We will learn from Indigenous land-based cultural practices and stewardship in the spirit of reconciliation to

build a stronger community, based on a mutual understanding of each other and the environment.

We're focusing on:

- Protecting the countryside as a critical ecological landscape.
- Planning for housing and jobs that supports sustainable transportation options and makes better use of existing land and infrastructure.
- Driving emissions to zero and building resiliency with every decision we make.
- Connecting people with each other, the land, the air, and the water, and helping people stay safe and comfortable in neighbourhoods across the City.
- Harnessing opportunities to make our businesses and industries cleaner and more resilient by making changes that reduce the impact on the environment while planning for the changing climate.

Council Strategy Session pre-work

Members of Council were sent a short survey in advance of the Council strategic session.

The survey asked Councillors to individually rate the big ideas on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly resonates, resonates, neutral, does not resonate, strongly does not resonate). Council was also asked what they liked and what they would change about each Big Idea.

The survey also asked Council if they agree with each of the draft focus areas using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). Council was asked to explain why they disagreed with any of the draft focus areas.

Council Strategic Session Activity

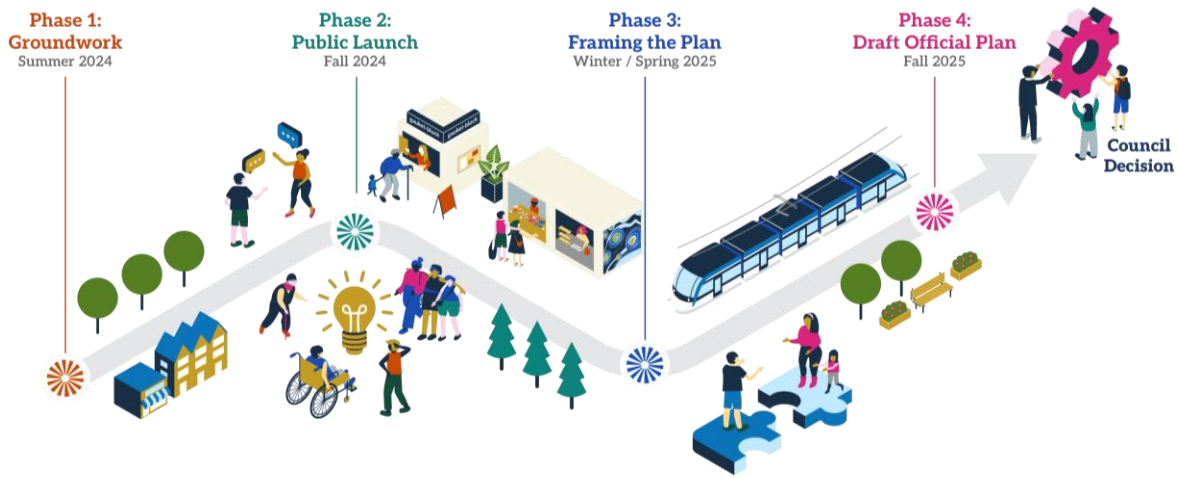
The Council Strategic Session will include a staff presentation that will:

- Share progress to date on Kitchener 2051.
- Outline the scope of the new Official Plan (endorsed by council via [DSD-2024-077](#))
- Outline how the new Official Plan will be informed by the transition of regional planning responsibilities under Bill 23.
- Share highlights of community engagement to date that have culminated in community values discussed above.
- Share the results of the Council Strategic Session pre-work council survey.

The presentation will be followed by a facilitated discussion that will focus on why the draft big ideas and focus areas do or don't resonate for council, and any that are missing. The discussion will focus on areas where there is less alignment. An agenda is attached to this report as Attachment A.

Next Steps

With the public launch (Phase 2) completed, Phase 3: Framing the Plan begins with the February community working group meeting (February 6, 2025) and Council Strategic Session.



Following the Council Strategic Session, staff will advance the development of criteria that will help decide how and where to grow. Small group discussions with all of Council are being scheduled for the end of February. The draft big ideas and focus areas will be refined based on input from the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group and Council to inform community conversations in March.

During March, there will be community engagement on big ideas and focus areas through community facilitated conversations and conversation kits. This will be followed by conversations with the community on approaches to growth (in person and online) and will include the second instalment of the Kitchener 2051 speaker series. In March staff will also seek Council’s endorsement of criteria to evaluate ways to grow. Later this Spring, Council will be asked to endorse a preferred approach to growth which will be followed by a draft new Official Plan in early Fall.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Building a Connected City Together: Focuses on neighbourhoods; housing and ensuring secure, affordable homes; getting around easily, sustainably and safely to the places and spaces that matter.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – Project updates are posted regularly at engagewr.ca/kitchener2051.

CONSULT and COLLABORATE – Kitchener 2051 includes a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan and has surfaced a set of community values. These values form a bridge between the community’s aspirations for Kitchener, and the big ideas and transformative actions of the plan.

COLLABORATE- Collaboration on Kitchner 2051 is occurring at selected opportunities, but most often with the community working group (CWG). The CWG includes a diverse group of individuals that represent the demographics of Kitchener (and look like the Kitchener of tomorrow). The Community Working Group is learning about what the City needs to consider through an Official Plan update, and collaborating with staff and consultants to meaningfully shape all aspects of the plan.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- *Planning Act*
- [DSD 2024-077](#) Building a Connected City Together: New Official Plan Launch

REVIEWED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager, Policy and Research

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Council Strategic Session Agenda