

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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

**DATE OF MEETING:** March 17, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Rosa Bustamante, Director, Planning & Housing Policy/City Planner, (519) 783-8929

**PREPARED BY:** John Zunic, Senior Planner, Policy & Research, (519) 783-8952  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** March 7, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2025-091

**SUBJECT:** Kitchener 2051 – What We Heard in Fall 2024 and Upcoming Engagement on Approaches to Growth

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## RECOMMENDATION:

For information.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to highlight community and collaborator engagement that has occurred throughout Phases 1 and 2 of Kitchener 2051, including key takeaways and findings. Additionally, this report outlines community and collaborator engagement that will occur as part of the “Growth Scenarios Study” introduced as part of DSD-2025-084.
- There are no financial implications arising from this Report.
- Kitchener 2051 includes a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan. Kitchener 2051 is moving into the third phase of engagement starting in March 2025 as outlined in this report.
- 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 residents by 2051 (reflecting an average annual growth rate of 1.5 per cent, lower annual growth than what has been experienced over the past few years), a new Official Plan is needed. 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.

On February 10, 2025, a Council Strategic Session ([DSD-2025-061](#)) was held to present the Community Values and seek Council's input on the draft Big Ideas and Focus Areas which will help shape Kitchener's new Official Plan.

This Report is being brought forward to Council alongside Report DSD-2025-084 "Evaluating Approaches to Growth (Kitchener 2051)".

## **REPORT:**

### **Community and Collaborator Engagement**

Through meaningful community and collaborator engagement, the new Official Plan and elements of the planning process such as data analysis, forecasting, and the work of policy experts, will be anchored in and shaped by the voices and experiences of those who live, work, and play here.

#### *What We Heard in Phases 1 and 2*

Phase 1 of Kitchener 2051 engagement was focused on developing the engagement approach, gaining a deeper understanding of community demographics, building relationships, and enhancing collaboration between City staff undertaking other city-building initiatives. Staff had conversations with representatives from Conestoga Students Inc., the Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener-Waterloo, the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, as well as Kitchener's Equity and Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and Lived Expertise Working Group, amongst others. This early foundational work prepared the Project Team to foster productive discussions, integrate diverse perspectives, and create a transparent and inclusive process in the Community Engagement Plan.

A call for applications to join the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group was put out in July 2024, with over 140 applications being received. Applications were carefully reviewed by community members and City staff, with 32 residents being selected to join. The CWG meets monthly with City staff and consultants supporting Kitchener 2051 which provides opportunities to learn about city planning, shape the project process and outcomes, generate ideas based on personal experiences, and act as champions for the project in their communities. To-date, the CWG has helped identify community groups to engage with, shape Community Parameters, and inform key messages around approaches to growth.

Phase 2 of Kitchener 2051 engagement was focused on publicly launching the project in a big way, sharing information on the role of a new Official Plan with the community, and seeking input and ideas on how the changes unfolding in our community over the next 25 years can benefit everyone.

A "What We Heard Report" (Attachment A) has been prepared by Urban Strategies – the Kitchener 2051 community engagement consultant, to summarize the extensive

engagement completed and input received to-date. Kitchener 2051 has taken bold steps to reach new audiences, equity denied communities, and residents from all wards of the city including:

- Hosting a day-long Gaukel Block Party launch event in October which was attended by over 1,200 residents who shared their ideas and aspirations through game-based learning throughout the day;
- Hosting 7 Community Working Group Meetings, and finding opportunities for members to support community engagement by attending events in their neighbourhood;
- Holding 20 additional engagement opportunities City-wide with the community and collaborators, including advisory committee meetings, one-on-one meetings with community groups, and industry meetings;
- Starting the Kitchener 2051 Speaker Series, with the first event being hosted in collaboration with KW Habilitation to discuss topics around ability and mobility, attended by over 100 community members;
- Receiving over 1,300 comments, ideas, and survey responses; and
- Promoting Kitchener 2051 on the cover of the “Kitchener Life” magazine, which is sent to over 60,000 households, and reaching an additional 20,000 residents via social media, posters, and radio advertisements.

Distilled from the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions gathered during Phase 2, the Community Values illustrate a shared desire for a future Kitchener that is equitable, connected, and resilient, with a deep sense of care for its people and environment.

### *What's to Come in Phase 3*

Building on what was shared and heard in Phases 1 and 2, Phase 3 will focus on conversations about approaches to growth through a series of Community Parameters and sharing the Big Ideas and Focus Areas. Key components of Phase 3 engagement include:

- Continued monthly conversations with the Community Working Group;
- Continued dialogue with First Nations;
- Launching the Community Conversation Kits; and
- Hosting interactive in-person and online community engagement and the second event in the Kitchener 2051 Speaker Series.

Phase 3 of engagement will communicate where changes have been made to the process and connecting what we learned to the development of new content in the introduction of Big Ideas and Focus Areas (DSD-2025-084) and Approaches to Growth.

During the Council Strategic Session on February 10, 2025 ([DSD-2025-061](#)), members of Council shared comments as they related to the Big Ideas and Focus areas, as well as general comments for consideration in the new Official Plan. Attachment B provides responses to many of the questions raised during the Council Strategic Session.

## *Conversation Kits*

Accessible and interactive Conversation Kits will introduce and gather feedback on the Big Ideas and Focus Areas through community-led discussions facilitated by members of the Community Working Group and other communities in Kitchener. These kits aim to build knowledge, provide opportunities for community connection, and generate ideas and conversations about the directions of Kitchener's new Official Plan. The Community Conversation Kits will be available digitally online and in-print at City facilities.

## *Approaches to Growth Engagement & Speaker Series Event*

An interactive and engaging public event is being designed to have conversations about Kitchener's future and approaches to growth. This will begin with the second Speaker Series session that will get the audience thinking about Kitchener's future and about the types of disruptions and opportunities that exist as we write a new Official Plan. Following the speaker, the event will continue with activities based on the Community Parameters to help attendees better understand the trade-offs and opportunities that need to be considered as we plan for growth.

Three approaches to growth (Attachment C) as well as the community parameters will be the focus of the conversations held at this in-person engagement event, as well as a parallel engagement online. As outlined in report DSD-2025-085, the community parameters will be used by participants to understand the community's priorities. The input gathered at this event as well as online, together with all input gathered to date, and technical studies/evaluation will be considered by the Project Team in developing a recommended composite approach to growth.

## **Modelling Approaches to Growth**

To enable the assessment of different ways of distributing housing and job growth, the City undertook a modelling exercise to evaluate three potential approaches to growth. Attachment C details the approach to developing these models, including the background and core assumptions.

## **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:**

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

## **PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

- *Planning Act*
- Provincial Planning Statement, 2024
- DSD-2024-077 – Building a Connected City Together: New Official Plan Launch
- DSD-2025-061 – Council Strategic Session – Kitchener 2051

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

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

**ATTACHMENTS:**

**Attachment A** – Kitchener 2051 Phases 1 and 2 What We Heard Report

**Attachment B** – Reporting Back on the February Council Strategic Session

**Attachment C** – Approaches to Growth Brief