Kitchener 2051
Phase 1 & 2 What We Heard Report

February 2025

Prepared by Urban Strategies for the City of Kitchener

Territorial Acknowledgement

The City of Kitchener is situated on the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee People's. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Metis and Inuit in Kitchener today.

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Section 1
Introduction

1.1 Kitchener 2051 Overview

The City of Kitchener is preparing a new Official Plan (OP) – known as Kitchener 2051. An OP is a document that shapes the way our City grows and develops. A Provincial law called the Planning Act sets out what an OP can do, including:

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

- 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 Official Plan was adopted in 2014 and has positively shaped growth and development across the City over the last decade. A new OP is needed now 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 will address conformity with Provincial policy and legislation and the Region of Waterloo Official Plan, 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.

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

That includes Indigenous people, newcomers, longtime residents, business owners and entrepreneurs. It's about our community today but also about the people who are not yet here. Like the young people who 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 as a resilient and complete city.

Kitchener 2051 needs to consider a full range of perspectives to ensure that the OP 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 OP that reflects who we are, what we value, and the Kitchener we can become.

1.2 Kitchener 2051 Process Timeline

Phase 1:
Groundwork
Summer 2024

Phase 2:
Public Launch
Fall 2024

Phase 3:
Framing the Plan
Winter / Spring 2025

Phase 4:
Draft Official Plan
Fall 2025

Council Decision
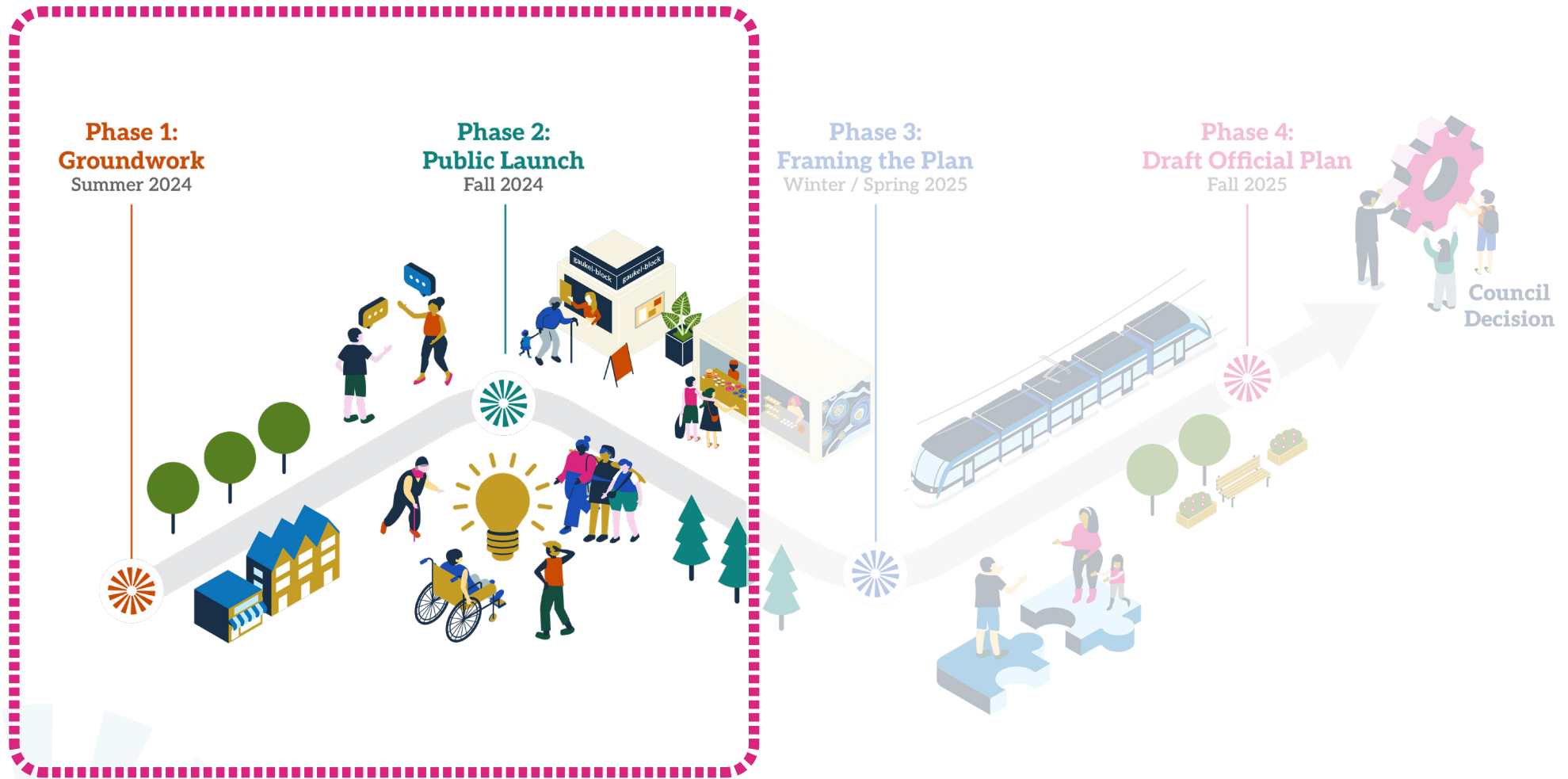
Figure 1: Illustration showing the Kitchener 2051 timeline - by phase. Phases 1 and 2, the focus of this report, are highlighted.

1.3 About this Report

This **Phase 1 and 2 What We heard Report** outlines the engagement goals, objectives, values, and approaches guiding the Kitchener 2051 process, as well as the engagement opportunities provided between June and December 2024. It also summarizes the feedback and key learnings that emerged during the first two phases of the process.

Phase 1: Groundwork, conducted between June and August 2024, was a pre-engagement phase centred around audience identification and mapping, process design, objective and approach setting, and strategy development.

Phase 2: Public Launch, conducted from September to December 2024, was used to introduce the process and the four key themes to the broader community. The Public Launch phase provided 21 engagement opportunities designed to gather high-level input, ideas, and aspirations from the public and interest holders about Kitchener's future.

What follows is an overview and summary of key findings gathered through multiple engagement channels, including, pre-engagement interviews, community working group sessions, a public launch event, workshops with industry leaders and subject matter experts, advisory committee and community presentations, a speaker series event, and through online engagement (online survey, interactive mapping, and visioning tools) and social media.

First Nations and Local Indigenous community engagement is being undertaken in a separate, yet parallel process, with the intention to build stronger relationships with First Nations Rights Holders, those with historical and continued interests in the lands and waters of the City of Kitchener, and local Indigenous community members.

Engagement with Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation follow consultation and accommodations protocols established by each respective Nation and will not be included in this document. It is important to keep these processes separate to respect the understanding that the First Nations are Rights Holders, and their involvement is uniquely positioned as such.

Engagement with the Local Indigenous community will be summarized and included in future 'What We Heard' reports completed at the end of each phase.

Section 2
Engagement Overview

In February 2024, Kitchener City Council directed staff to initiate the work on a new Official Plan, founded on engagement principles to guide how community members and collaborators would be included in the process. These principles were then used as a starting point for the Kitchener 2051 Community Engagement Strategy (CES). The CES:

- outlines the project background, overall engagement goals, objectives, and values guiding the process;

- identifies the different audiences who will be engaged throughout the process; and

- provides a high-level plan, timeline, and approaches for how the City will engage with each audience.

2.1 Overall Engagement Goals & Objectives

The overarching goal of Kitchener 2051's engagement strategy is:

" Through meaningful 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. **"**

To help achieve this goal, five overarching engagement objectives were developed:
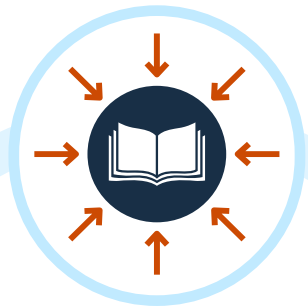
1

Provide meaningful opportunities and seek substantive input to help shape the OP

2

Build awareness and capacity for informed engagement

3

Build trusting relationships

4

Strive for equity and representation

5

Elicit a broad range of ideas and go deep on the interesting ones

2.2 Overall Engagement Values

Guiding all Kitchener 2051 engagement are 5 key values:

1. Inclusive

This means sound engagement practices that are welcoming and accessible for all, providing safer and appropriate opportunities for community members to express their views and share ideas.

2. Equitable

This means reducing barriers for those who may have challenges to participation and including those outside traditionally recognized structures and processes.

3. Respectful

This means listening first and engaging from a place of regard and intention, and valuing lived / living experience and community expertise.

4. Meaningful

This means being clear and transparent about what we're engaging on – what is open to change / input and what is not.

5. Responsive

This means engaging with community members in ways they'd like to be engaged and being open to feedback on methods to meet their needs / interests.

2.3 Phase 1 Engagement Goals & Objectives

The goal for Phase 1: Groundwork was to:

"

Establish a strong foundation for a successful planning process.

"

Phase 1: Groundwork Objectives:

1. **Define the Engagement Approach**
   Finalizing the Community Engagement Strategy, Indigenous Engagement Plan, and Project Schedule to ensure a clear, inclusive, and well-coordinated approach;

2. **Understand Our Community**
   Identify and map key audiences, interest holders and collaborators to tailor engagement activities effectively and prepare for meaningful participation in Phase 2;

3. **Build Partnerships**
   Select and onboard a representative Community Working Group to provide diverse perspectives and help shape the conversation from the outset; and

4. **Enhance Collaboration**
   Work closely with other City departments and related initiatives to identify opportunities for alignment, efficiency, and shared learning.

This foundational work ensured that as we moved into broader engagement, we were well-prepared to foster productive discussions, integrate diverse perspectives, and create a transparent and inclusive process.

2.4 Phase 2 Engagement Goals & Objectives

The goal for Phase 2: Public Launch was to:

> " **Understand what matters most to the public, including core issues - and how we can move forward in drafting a new Official Plan that plans for change which benefits all.** "

Phase 2: Public Launch Objectives:

1. Publicly launch Kitchener 2051 with all audiences, with a priority to engage rightsholders first.

2. Build broad awareness of the Kitchener 2051 process and its key components with all audiences.

3. Educate audiences on the role of the new OP in the larger policy ecosystem (Provincial, Regional, other municipal strategies and policy documents) and how it will help the City achieve other civic objectives (Transportation Master Plan, Places and Spaces, etc.).

4. Seek meaningful and substantive input, ideas and feedback on the new OP and its key components, which have been organized under four key themes derived from the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and include:

   - A **Connected City**: how we move and how we grow;

   - A **Thriving City**: how we live and ensure a prosperous future for all;

   - A **Green City**: how we care for the earth and each other; and

   - A **Caring City**: how we come together to plan and build for individual and collective wellbeing.

5. Encourage participation from a broad cross section of the public through a mix of engagement approaches and tactics and by creating welcoming, accessible opportunities to engage with a focus on communities who have traditionally been pushed to the margins.

6. Ensure that input gathered is visibly woven into the technical work led by the project team and its associated consultancies.

7. Report back on how their input influenced the process and its outputs.

8. Begin building relationships with a large pool of interested people who will continue to participate in this process and future civic processes.

2.5 Phase 2 Engagement Approach

A key priority of the Phase 2 engagement approach was to provide information about the OP, its components, and its role in the larger planning and policy ecosystem in an accessible way. To achieve this, we broke the content into 4 key topic areas - and structured engagement materials and opportunities around them.

This approach allowed participants to engage in a scalable way – offering opportunities to learn about and provide input on as many (or as few) as they were interested in, at a level of detail that was right for them.

A Connected City...

is about how we move and how we grow. Elements of the Official Plan that relate to this theme include the transportation system, and our urban structure which defines where we grow.

A Green City...

is about how we plan for the planet and our resiliency. Elements of the Official Plan that relate to this theme include natural heritage and environmental management, parks and open spaces, and natural hazards.

A Thriving City...

is about how we create vibrant communities for all. Elements of the Official Plan that relate to this theme include housing, economy, community facilities, arts and culture, and heritage.

A Caring City...

is about how we plan for community wellbeing. This theme is related to every aspect of the Official Plan. It's about embedding equity and inclusion into everything we do in hopes that we can all feel a sense of belonging in our City.

2.6 Engagement by the Numbers

Between July and December 2024, there were over 21 opportunities to engage during Phases 1 and 2 of the Kitchener 2051 process, reaching over 2,000 members of the community.

21 opportunities
to engage in-person and online

1,200+ attendees
at the Public Launch Event

Presentations to
9 City Advisory Committees

102 attendees
at the first Speaker Series Event

308
Online Survey Responses

699 comments
collected at the Launch Event

215 comments
on the in-person and digital maps

4
Community Working Group Meetings

Section 3
Summary of Phase 1 & 2 Engagement Opportunities

3.1 Phase 1: Pre-Engagement

Pre-engagement is the critical foundation setting stage in a project that helps the team establish clear project objectives, timelines, communications and engagement approaches and project messaging. Investing time in pre-engagement helps foster trust, reduces opportunities for misinformation, and set the stage for meaningful engagement that leads to well-informed decision-making.

During this phase, the Kitchener 2051 team worked closely with staff from other City departments, community partners, and decision makers to identify key project audiences, assess community concerns, aspirations, dynamics and potential barriers to engagement – with a focus on equity-seeking communities who have been historically left out of, or pushed to the margins of traditional planning processes. This foundational work helped with refinements to engagement approaches, tactics, and tools outlined in the Phase 2 Engagement Plan – ensuring that Phase 2 engagement was accessible, equitable, and responsive.

Interviews with Key Partners (External) – Spring & Summer 2024

During the Phase 1 pre-engagement phase, the project team conducted interviews with key external partners and collaborators to: share information about the Kitchener 2051 process, help foster community relationships, and to identify audiences, community concerns, and potential engagement opportunities and gaps. External partners and collaborators engaged during this phase included Conestoga Students Inc., KW Habilitation, the Lived Expertise Working Group, Kitchener Youth Engagement Network, Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener-Waterloo, and the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre.

Interviews with Key Partners (Internal) – Spring 2024

The project team also conducted interviews with key City staff from across multiple departments to share information about the Kitchener 2051 process, learn about recent City initiatives, processes, and outcomes, and to identify potential audiences, community concerns, dynamics, and engagement gaps.

Project Engagement Webpage Launch
– Summer 2024

A dedicated project engagement webpage (www.engagewr.ca/kitchener2051) was launched on June 26th, 2024. This page introduces the Kitchener 2051 process, provides background information and materials, and shares news, updates, and opportunities to be involved in the process. The page also hosts online engagement tools used to gather public ideas, concerns, and feedback. These tools offer an alternative method of engagement for those unable to attend in-person events, those with additional ideas to share, or those who prefer to participate asynchronously/online. The webpage had 15,714 views[1] by 9,801 unique visitors[2] between June 26th and November 26th, 2024.

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1 The number of times a page is loaded or reloaded, regardless of whether the user was already on the page or came from an external page

2 The number of unique browsers that visit a site.
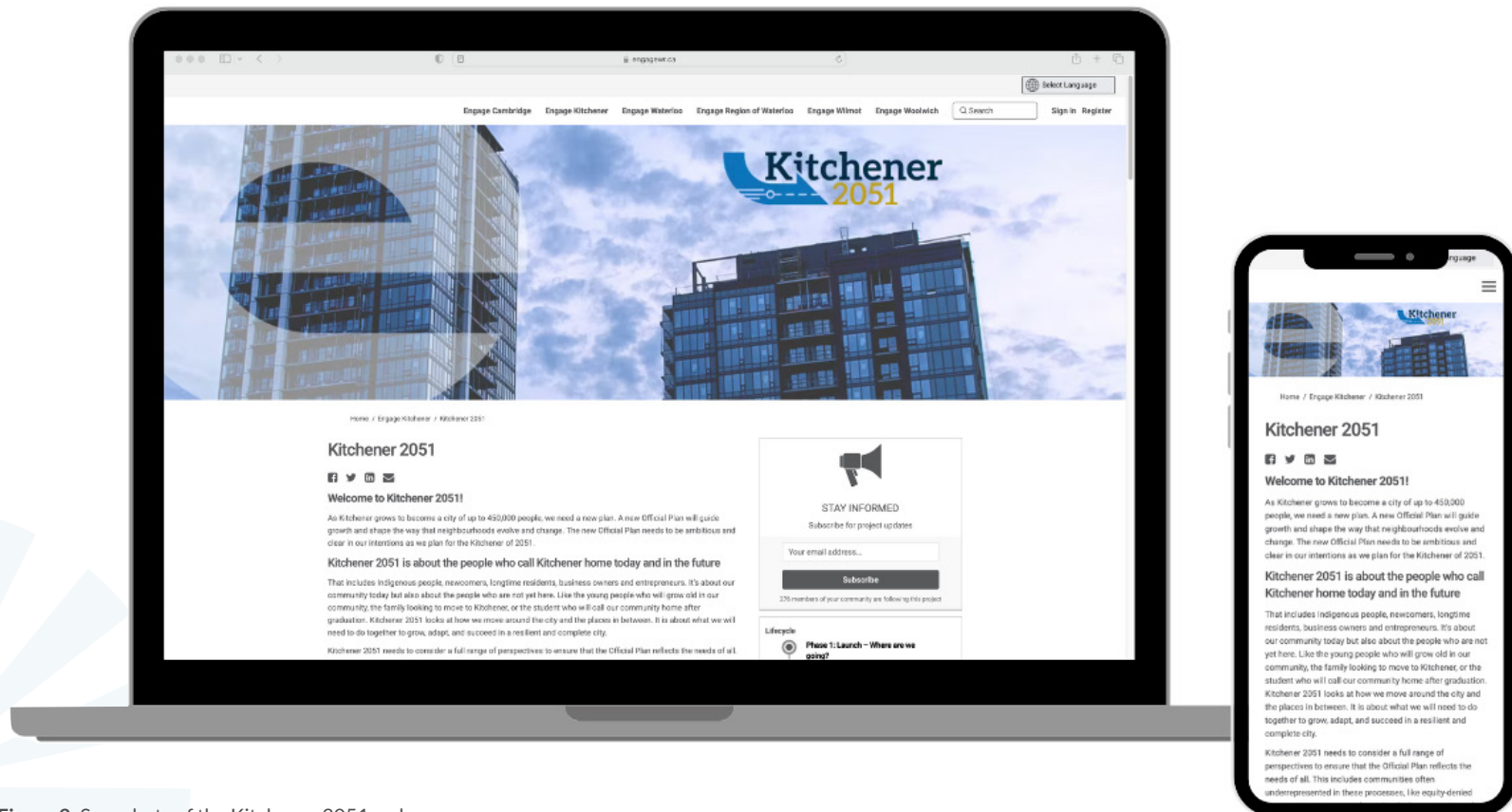
Figure 2: Snapshots of the Kitchener 2051 webpage.

Phase 1- Online Engagement - Ideas Wall

The online ideas wall was launched with the project webpage to spark early discussion and help build awareness about Kitchener 2051. Two questions were posed through the tool, which was open for comments from July to October 2024.

This activity asked participants two questions:

- *What brings you joy in your community?*

- *What are the biggest challenges facing Kitchener?*

Participants could submit their responses by submitting them on a digital 'sticky note'. Participants were also able to up-vote or comment on other people's ideas. 288 people visited the ideas tool, 44 ideas were submitted, 198 up-votes were cast, and 33 comments were left.

The Summer 2024 communications campaign reached over

20,000

people, informing them about Kitchener 2051 and the different ways to get involved!
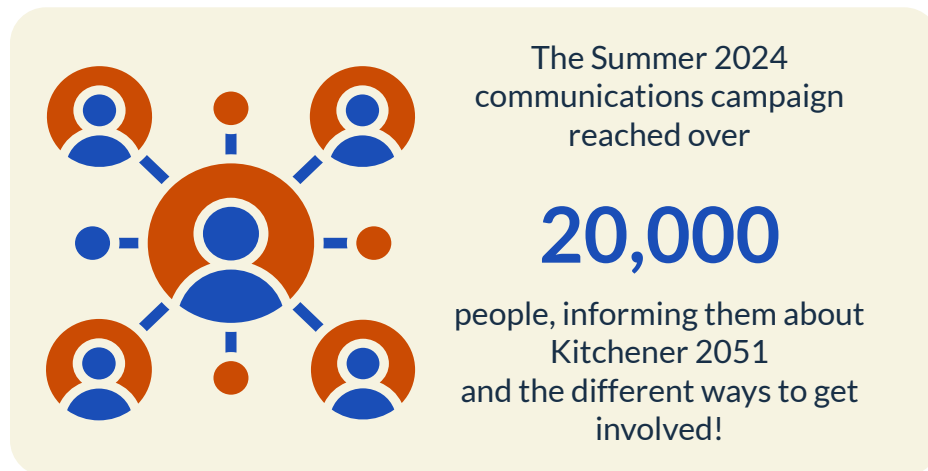
Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group

In July 2024, the City of Kitchener put out a call for applications for the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group (CWG), a community-led, staff-supported group made up of community volunteers intended to represent a dynamic mix of voices, perspectives, and experiences from across all wards of the City. The call for applications was made via the project website, a press release, a radio interview with the Mayor, City social media channels, chalk art along trails, and posters in community centres and libraries, resulting in the submission of over 140 CWG applications. In August 2024, a panel of community members and City staff carefully reviewed the applications and selected the final group of 32 CWG representatives.

Throughout the Kitchener 2051 process the CWG will meet monthly with City staff and project consultants to deepen their understanding of city-building, planning, and the bounds of influence on process and outcomes. Other opportunities to help shape the process include:

- helping identify city-building challenges, generate ideas, and craft solutions based on personal experiences and by reviewing documents and technical reports provided by staff;

- helping guide and participate in community engagement by providing advice on the Community Engagement Plan;

- reviewing ideas and insights shared by the community to ensure they're considered in the drafting of the new Official Plan;

- sharing reflections about their experiences, expertise, and desires for their neighbourhoods and the City as a whole;

- acting as champions for this project as ambassadors in their respective communities; and

- and reporting back to City Council on the group's progress at key points in the process.

3.2 Phase 2: Public Launch

Advisory Committee Presentations - Fall 2024

Between August and December 2024, the project team presented to and gathered input from 8 City Advisory Committees including the Active Transportation & Trails Advisory Committee; Equity & Anti-Racism Advisory Committee; Compass Kitchener Advisory Committee; Economic Development Advisory Committee; Arts & Culture Advisory Committee; Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors; Kitchener Youth Action Council; and the Lived Expertise Working Group.

Kitchener 2051 Block Party - Saturday October 5th

The Kitchener 2051 Block Party marked the public launch of the Kitchener 2051 process. Held on the Gaukel Block, between Charles Street and Joseph Street, this drop-in style, open-to-everyone event presented information about Kitchener 2051, introduced the four key themes, and provided interactive opportunities for guests of all ages to provide input, feedback and to share their ideas for the future.

Figure 3: Kitchener 2051 presentation and activity with the Compass Kitchener Advisory Committee.

Figure 4: Block Party Welcome Stationactivity.

The Block Party was organized around the four key themes, with each theme set up in a dedicated area, or 'station', on Gaukel Block. Each station included interactive information panels and theme-specific activities designed to gather input in new and creative ways. Each station provided space for community and City partners to share information, gather input on related initiatives, or provide services that aligned with the corresponding theme. City staff were able to engage with the commuity on four city-building projects in one event.

To encourage participation at each station, event 'stamp books' were handed out at the Welcome Station - and stamps were given when guests participated in a station activity. Once all stamps were collected, guests could trade their completed stamp books in for a treat.

The Block Party was promoted through a wide range of channels including paid and organic social media, on the cover of the Kitchener Life magazine (distributed to 60, 000 households), radio ads, and direct invitations to community groups and neighbourhood associations. Music, art, food-trucks, interactive displays and engagement activities helped create a fun, dynamic, and high-energy atmosphere. Over 1200 people attended the Block Party between 11am and 6pm.

Figure 5: Block Party Thriving City Mural Station

Figure 6: Participants at the Block Party event.

A Connected City

To introduce 'A Connected City', a set of information panels was presented. This provided an overview of the theme and its elements, transportation, mobility and growth, by sharing key background information, highlighting related City policy and directions, and offering an interactive opportunity to share what **'a connected city that benefits everyone could look and/or feel like'**.

Staff from the City's active transportation team had an interactive booth set up to share information about and gather feedback on the Wayfinding and Branding for Walking, Cycling and Rolling initiative, and volunteers from Red Raccoon Bike Rescue, a local not-for-profit, were set up providing free bike tune-ups for Block Party attendees at the event.

Figure 7: Block Party participants at the Connected City station.

How We Grow Map Activity

To help participants to explore the connections between how we move and how we grow, a large-scale, 10'x15' vinyl map of the City was developed and set-up at the event. Participants were asked to identify locations throughout the City where new growth could be focused by placing stickers on the map to show where new housing, parks and open spaces, shops, services and amenities, community facilities, and jobs should go. Stickers for new housing were scaled to the map size and reflected a range of built forms,

like the approach taken through the Growing Together project. The map did not provide specific constraints for where stickers should be placed, or not placed, to allow for open conversations with community about where growth and development should occur within the City. For example, participants placed many buildings in locations along the Grand River floodplain which are not developable, but which may broadly indicate a desire for a stronger connection and access to the river and natural areas.

Figure 8: Block Party participants placing stickers on the How We Grow map.

Figure 9: Block Party participants placing stickers on the How We Grow map.

A Thriving City

To introduce 'A Thriving City', a set of information panels was presented. This provided an overview of the theme and its elements, housing, liveable neighbourhoods, economic prosperity, and cultural vibrancy, by sharing key background information, highlighting related City policy and directions, and offering an interactive opportunity to share what **'a thriving city that benefits everyone could look and/or feel like'**.

Local food trucks were set up at the Thriving City station, along with a DJ Booth and outdoor dining area. The City provided free meal vouchers from the food trucks for the first 400 Block Party participants to visit each of the theme area stations.

Figure 10: Block Party participants at the Thriving City station.

Block Party Collaborative Board Game

A collaborative board game was developed to help participants understand the opportunities, challenges, and trade-offs that arise when planning for a 'complete community'. In the game, players are tasked with collaboratively creating a complete community by placing cards representing different uses (housing, parks, shops, jobs) on the game board. Complicating this task, is that each player is working towards a 'secret' objective (e.g. culturally vibrant, family-friendly, sustainable, employment focused) forcing players to problem solve, compromise, and collaborate to achieve the best possible outcome.

Figure 11: A group playing the Block Party boardgame.

Figure 12: Photo of the Block Party boardgame in action.

Thriving City Mural

A large-scale 30' collective mural painting activity was set-up along the side of a shipping container for participants of all ages to paint their vision(s) of Kitchener in 2051.

Figure 13: Photo of the Thriving City Mural at the Block Party.

A Green City

To introduce 'A Green City', a set of information panels was presented. This provided an overview of the theme and its elements, sustainability, climate resilience, green energy, and parks and open spaces, by sharing key background information, highlighting related City policy and directions, and offering an interactive opportunity to share what **'a green city that benefits everyone could look and/or feel like'**.

Staff from the City's Parks and Cemeteries team had an interactive station set up at the new Gaukel Parkette on the north side of Charles Street to share information and gather input on the ongoing Places and Spaces project.

City staff also set up a hands-on water table activity with materials provided by the Waterloo Wellington Children's Groundwater Festival, a local not-for-profit that educates the community about the importance of groundwater.

Figure 14: Block Party participants taking part in the Climate Pledge activity.

Climate Pledge Tree

Participants were asked to make a personal climate pledge by writing something they could personally do towards addressing climate change, sustainability, or increasing community resiliency on a leaf cut out of seed paper. The seed paper leaves were then hung on a large plywood tree for others to read and be inspired by. The seed paper leaves will be planted in the spring. 248 Climate Pledges were shared at the event.

Figure 15: Photo of the Climate Pledge Tree.

Upcycled City

The Upcycled City activity offered a hands-on collaborative building activity using recycled materials, including cardboard boxes, tubes, egg-cartons, and plastic containers. Participants of all ages were asked to help build their ideal City by creating homes, shops, community facilities, parks, City infrastructure, public spaces, and other elements of a complete community out of recycled materials. As each piece was created, they were placed on a vinyl base map representative of a typical Kitchener neighbourhood – resulting in a collaboratively designed 'complete' cardboard community.
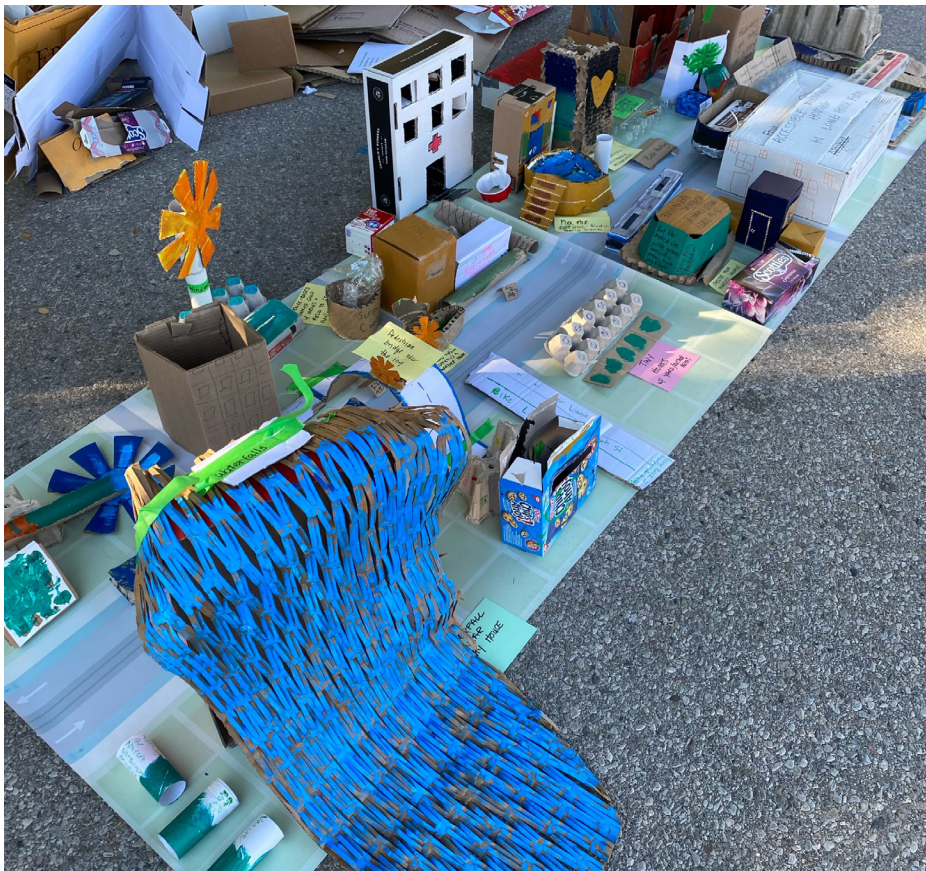
Figure 16: Photo of the completed Upcycled City.

Figure 17: Children painting their Upcycled City creations.

A Caring City

To introduce 'A Caring City', a set of information panels was presented. this provided an overview of the theme and its elements, community well-being, social connectivity and belonging, inclusion, equity, and reconciliation, by sharing key background information, highlighting related City policy and directions, and offering an interactive opportunity to share what **'a caring city that benefits everyone could look and/or feel like'**.

Figure 18: Participants at the Caring City Station at the Block Party.

Your Voice, Your City - Speakers Corner

A Speakers Corner was set up inside one of the Gaukel Block shipping containers. Outfitted with a video-camera, stool and backdrop, this activity was designed as a way for participants to share their thoughts, stories, and ideas on camera. Participants could choose to be filmed sharing their idea or story, or they could write their idea on a speech bubble shaped whiteboard and have a photo taken. Video and images captured at the Speakers Corner will be used to create a short video that will be used throughout the Kitchener 2051 process to help build awareness.

Community Pantry

A community pantry was set up at the Caring City station as a mutual care resource for event participants offering non-perishable food items and fresh produce. Participants were able to donate to or take from the pantry during the event as desired. Items remaining at the end of the event were donated to the Waterloo Region Food Bank and Community Fridge.

Figure 19: Screenshots from the Speaker Series video activity.

Figure 20: Snapshot of the Community Pantry Information Panel

Phase 2 Online Engagement

Survey Tool: Kitchener 2051 City-Wide Survey

The City-wide survey deployed on the City's engagement page introduced the Kitchener 2051 process, offered an overview of the 4 key project themes, and provided an opportunity for the public to provide high-level input on priorities and ideas related to the overall process and each of the four theme areas.

540 people started the survey, and 306 completed surveys were submitted.

Places Tool: Where We Grow Mapping Activity

Mirroring the large-scale physical mapping activity offered at the Block Party, this online activity asked participants to drop different coloured pins on a map of the City to identify potential locations for future growth – helping to illustrate where new homes, offices, parks and open spaces, local-serving shops, services and amenities, community facilities, and employment and manufacturing uses should be located. Beyond placing a pin, participants had to provide commentary explaining their decision and could up-vote others' suggestions.

258 people visited the mapping activity, 215 pins were placed with commentary, and 2 up-votes were cast. The input gathered from this activity is shown alongside the How We Grow Map Activity from the Block Party.

Figure 21: Snapshot from the City-wide Online Survey.
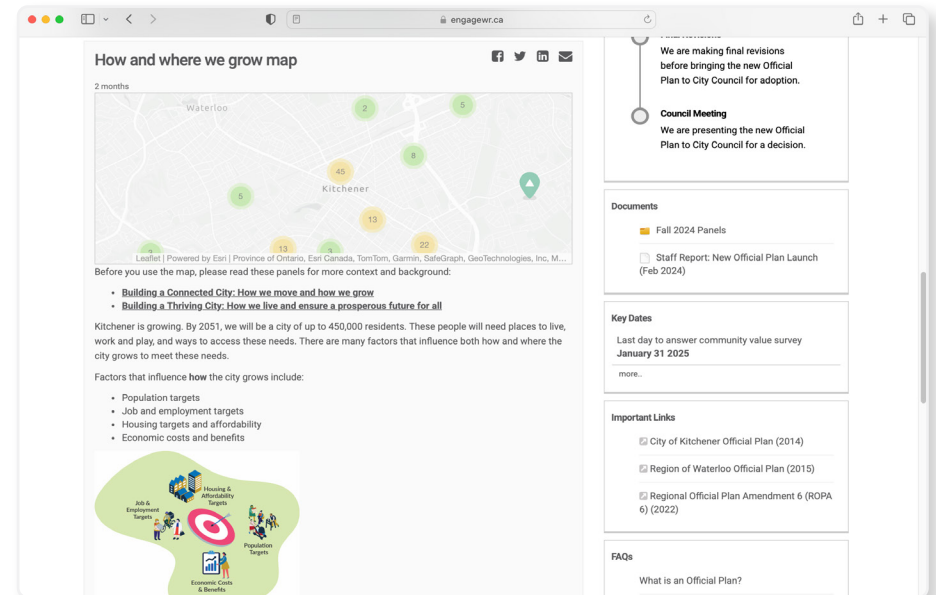
Figure 22: Snapshot of the How We Grow Places Tool.

Ideas Tool: Climate Pledge

Mirroring the climate pledge activity offered at the Block Party, this online activity asked participants to share their personal and/or household commitments towards mitigating climate change, increasing community resiliency, and/or integrating sustainability practices into their everyday lives by submitting them on a digital 'sticky note'. 49 people visited the climate pledge, 3 pledges were submitted, 2 up-votes were cast, and 1 comment was left.

Stories Tool: Speakers Corner

Mirroring the 'Your Voice, Your City' Speakers Corner activity offered at the Block Party, this online activity asked participants to share personal thoughts, anecdotes, and/or stories about community care, resilience, and aspirations for Kitchener into the future. 16 people visited the stories tool, and 3 stories were shared.
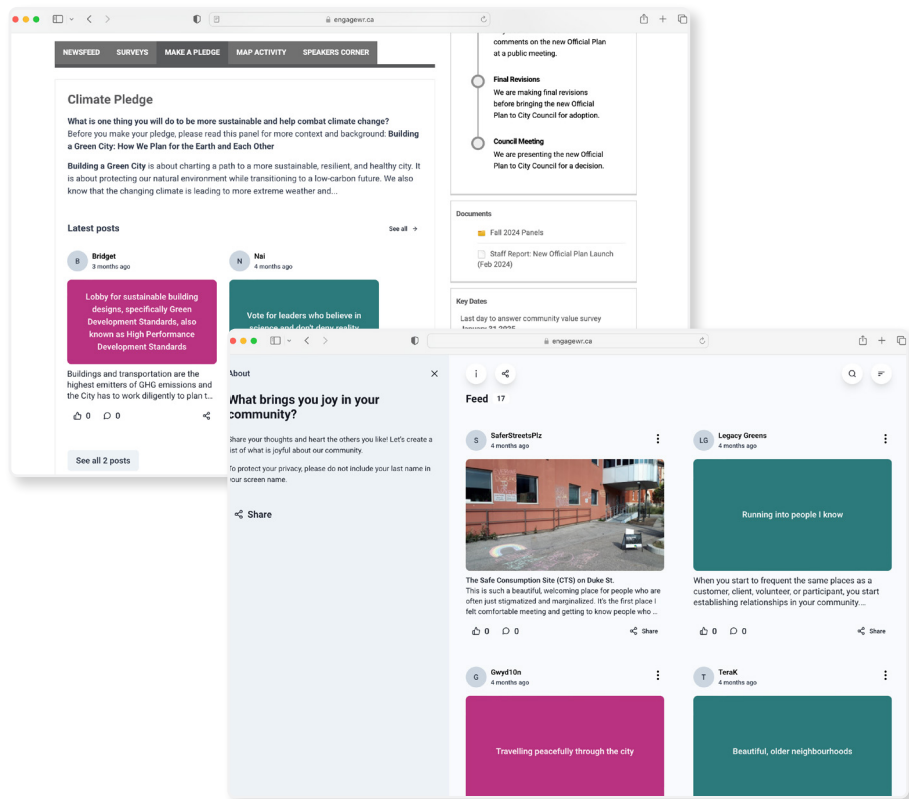
Figure 23: Snapshot of the Climate Pledge Ideas Tool.
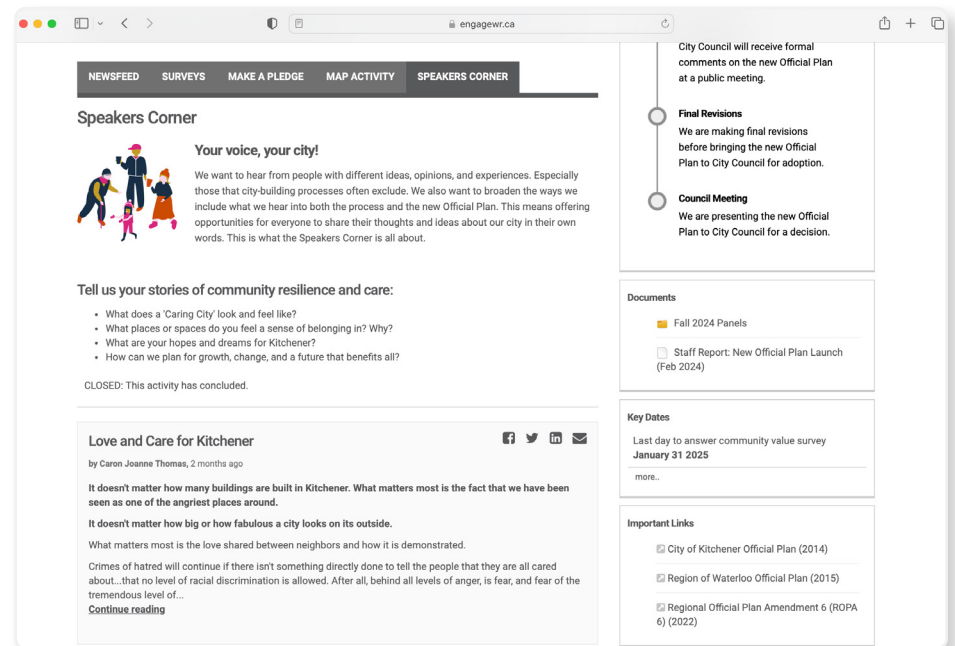
Figure 24: Snapshot of the Speakers Corner Stories Tool.

Speaker Series Event #1 – Ability & Mobility (A Connected & Caring City)

On November 19, 2024, the City of Kitchener hosted the first event in a 3-part Speaker Series designed to provide an engaging forum for subject matter experts and local community members to share diverse perspectives and lived/living experiences related to the 4-key themes. Each event will cover a different topic inspired by two of the project themes – in a variety of conversational formats.

Event #1 was a panel discussion moderated by Olivia Curtis, the City's Inclusion Services Coordinator, exploring the themes of A Connected City and A Caring City exploring these themes through the lenses of ability, mobility, neurodiversity, mental health, and equity. Panelists included Dr. Samantha Biglieri, a professor whose research explores planning issues related to aging, living with dementia, disability and accessibility; Dr. Robin Mazumder, an

environmental neuroscientist with a focus on how urban design impacts individual, community, and societal well-being; and Kathleen Vanderlinden, a local resident diagnosed with vascular dementia and early onset Alzheimer's disease at 54. Kathleen is also a co-researcher on several projects including the 'Dementia-Capable Communities Waterloo Region' project; and Simon Garcia, a local resident and frequent public transportation user.

Attendees had an opportunity to share their thoughts on an interactive panel and ask questions of the presenters. 109 people attended the event. The City partnered with KW Habilitation to identify community members interested in joining th epanel, co-design the discussion, and promote the event.

Figure 25: Speaker Series panelists on stage.

Figure 26: Director of Planning and Housing Policy, Rosa Bustamante, opening the Speaker Series Event.

Technical Study Workshops

Non-Residential Workshops #1 & #2

On October 10, 2024, collaborators from the non-residential sector, including ddevelopers, owners and operators of non-residential developments (including mixed-use, office, retail, industrial, and employment), attended one of two invitation-only virtual workshops to learn about the Kitchener 2051 process and to provide input on a series of sector-specific questions.

In Workshop #1, participants discussed the opportunities, challenges, and locational considerations related to mixed-use, office and retail development in Kitchener, and provided input on potential additions and/or refinements to the new Official Plan that could help the sector deliver mixed-use, office, and retail development in the City.

In Workshop #2, participants discussed the same topics and provided input on the same questions, with a focus on industrial and employment use development.

Climate & Energy Workshop #1

On December 17, 2024, subject matter experts and collaborators from the climate, resilience and green building sectors, including developers, builders, academics, researchers, and community leaders attended a virtual workshop to learn about the Kitchener 2051 process and to provide input on a series of sector-specific questions.
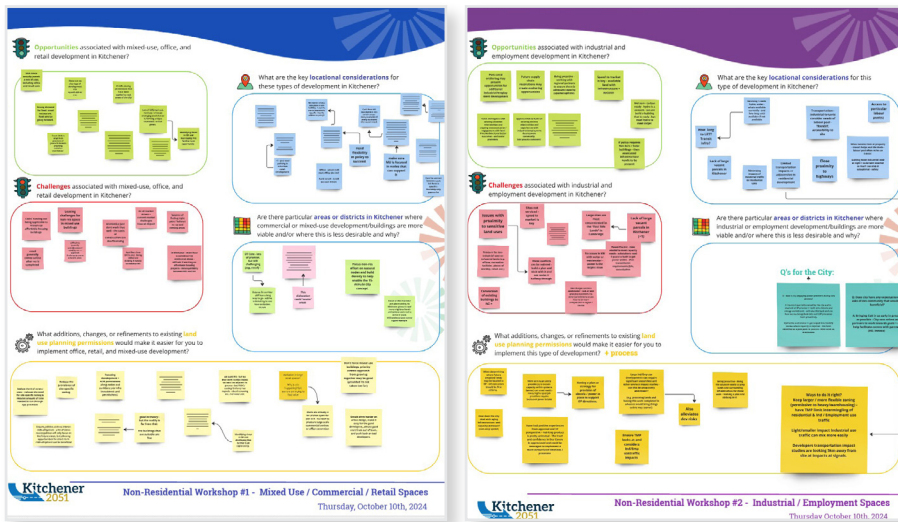
Figure 27: Snapshots of the online Miro Workspaces from the Non-Residential Workshops.
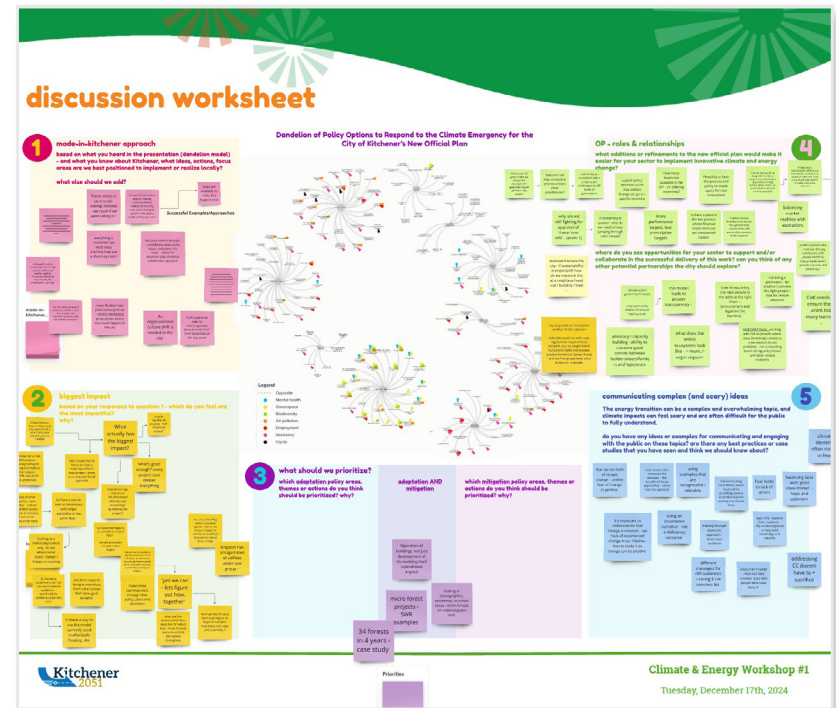
Figure 28: Snapshot of the online Miro Workspace from the Climate & Energy Workshop #1.

Section 4
What We Heard
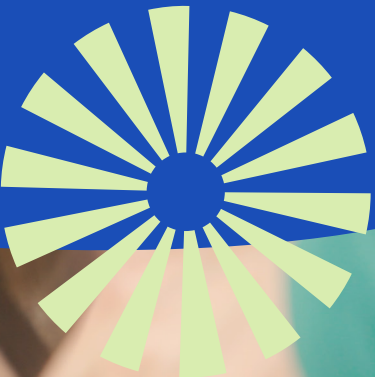
During Phase 2, over 2,200 open ended comments, ideas, and suggestions were gathered at events, meetings, workshops, and through online engagement opportunities. This input, along with the quantitative data gathered through the survey and Block Party, was used to develop the Community Values (see Section 6), which will be used to help shape the early policy directions and approaches to growth that will be introduced and explored in Phase 3: Framing the Plan.

Methodology

All open-ended responses gathered during in-person events and via the online tools was transcribed (when necessary), coded, analyzed and summarized. Coding open-ended responses involves reading through each comment and assigning a primary (and secondary, if necessary) 'code' or theme. Similarly coded responses are then grouped together and analyzed to help identify patterns, overarching themes, as well as shared ideas and sentiments.

Closed-question, or quantitative responses from both the in-person events (interactive information panels) and online tools (e.g. multiple choice, ranking, and Likert scale survey questions) were calculated and converted to chart form where possible.

Responses that were vulgar, or illegible were given a code of N/A and not included in the results.

Important note on data inclusion:

In alignment with the Kitchener 2051 project objective of fostering an inclusive and respectful engagement process, comments which contained offensive, harmful, or inappropriate language, or comments targeting individuals or groups, have been omitted from this summary. This ensures that the outcomes reflect the shared values and priorities of our community.

Presentation of Results

'What we Heard' will be presented under the four theme areas - A Connected City, A Thriving City, A Green City, and A Caring City, with theme-based content separated into two categories:

- **In-Person** – a synthesis of feedback and ideas gathered during in-person events, meetings, and workshops; and

- **Online** –a high-level synthesis of feedback and ideas gathered through the online survey, online engagement tools, and via social media.

What We Heard Summary

A Connected City

A Connected City prioritizes safe, accessible transportation options, including separated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and roads designed to reduce conflicts. While over 60% of Kitchener residents rely on cars, there is strong interest in sustainable alternatives—but convenience, distance, and time savings remain key factors in mode choice. Support for transit-oriented growth highlights the need for compact, mixed-use development near transit to make walking, biking, and public transit more practical. Residents also emphasized the need for reliable, well-maintained infrastructure, including better sidewalks, cycling facilities, and transit service. By investing in safe, efficient, and competitive alternatives, Kitchener can reduce car dependency and create a more accessible, sustainable city.

A Thriving City

A Thriving City prioritizes safe, accessible, and vibrant public spaces, including parks, greenspaces, and community hubs where residents of all ages, abilities, and incomes can connect. While almost 70% of Kitchener residents plan to stay in their neighbourhoods long-term, one in five remain uncertain, suggesting that improvements could enhance livability and retention. Housing emerged as the most urgent priority, with strong support for diverse, affordable options that accommodate different needs and life stages. A top priority is access to everyday essentials—especially grocery stores—within a short walk, roll, or bike ride, along with cafés, small-scale retail, and health services, reflecting a strong desire for walkable, complete communities. Residents also emphasized the importance of green spaces, tree canopy preservation, and well-maintained public areas that support active transportation and gathering. These findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that prioritizes housing, local amenities, and inclusive, connected public spaces.

A Green City

A Green City prioritizes vibrant, accessible, and interconnected green spaces, parks, naturalized areas, and tree-lined streets and green corridors that link neighbourhoods. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, residents support expanding the tree canopy, increasing parks and green spaces, and promoting energy-efficient buildings that generate clean energy. Other key strategies include improving walking and cycling routes and advancing transit-oriented development to reduce car dependency. Respondents also emphasized the importance of sustainable building practices, renewable energy adoption, and active transportation infrastructure. Many also advocated for policies that limit urban sprawl, prioritize climate-resilient infrastructure, improve stormwater management, and promote local food systems to enhance climate resilience. These findings highlight strong community support for nature-based solutions, sustainable development, and long-term strategies that balance urban growth with environmental responsibility.

A Caring City

A Caring City prioritizes diverse, safe, affordable, and accessible housing solutions, alongside low-barrier access to healthcare, social supports, and mobility options. Most respondents feel a sense of belonging in Kitchener, trust their community, and believe in collective action to improve wellbeing. Respondents emphasized that belonging is closely tied to housing stability, safe mobility, employment, and green spaces. Over 40% identified affordable housing as the most critical action the City can take to strengthen belonging, followed by support for cultural and community programs, inclusive public spaces, and better access to City services. Many called for intentional action to address homelessness, immigration, mental health, and addiction to ensure all residents feel welcome and supported. These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach that fosters inclusivity, connection, and equitable access to essential services.

Overall Direction

When asked where the City of Kitchener should focus its efforts when developing the new Official Plan, survey results showed strong alignment on key priorities, with survey respondents expressing clear support for initiatives that promote well-being, affordability, and housing. Promoting community well-being received the highest level of support, with 91% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreeing. Similarly, keeping costs affordable (89%) and creating more affordable housing options (87%) were strongly endorsed, reflecting a shared community vision for fostering social and economic inclusivity and creating vibrant, connected neighbourhoods.

While there was broad support for many priorities, some areas saw more varied opinions. For example, making it easier to get around without a car and reducing climate change impacts received strong overall support but also included higher proportions of neutral or disagreeing responses, reflecting differing perspectives on these topics. Similarly, ensuring fair access to housing, parks, and community services garnered significant agreement but also revealed areas for further dialogue. These results suggest the community values a balanced approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental goals while addressing diverse needs. Moving forward, these insights can guide the City in refining its focus areas and ensuring the Official Plan reflects the community's shared vision.

4.1 A Connected City

In-Person Engagement

Input gathered from Block Party participants responding to the question **'What does a Connected City that benefits everyone look and feel like?'** focused on five main topics (in order of frequency):

- **Prioritizing active transportation;**
- **Enhanced public transit;**
- **Equity & access;**
- **Thoughtful planning & design; and**
- **Parking.**

Figure 29: A volunteer from Red Raccoon Bike Rescue providing free bike repairs at the Block Party.

Block Party participants shared that *A Connected City that benefits everyone prioritizes an expanded active transportation network with safe and connected infrastructure including separated bike lanes, wider, well-lit sidewalks, paths and trails, and roads designed to minimize conflicts between different user groups.*

There was a strong call for improved public transit service, with a focus on affordability, frequency (including weekend GO Transit service) and improved connections to key destinations within the City, throughout the region, and beyond. Many participants wanted to see expansion or improvements along critical bus routes as well as expansion of the ION line.

Participants also expressed a strong desire for the new Official Plan to prioritize equitable access to spaces, services, and mobility options in the community. Many stressed the importance of removing both physical and financial barriers through the inclusive design of buildings and public spaces, and the provision of low- or no-cost spaces, services, amenities, and mobility options for vulnerable populations. To help in these efforts, participants stressed the importance of engaging directly with vulnerable and equity-seeking communities to better understand their needs as plans and policies are developed.

Many comments emphasized the need for more accessible, affordable, and safe housing options for all, alongside creating walkable neighborhoods where essential services like groceries, schools, and libraries can be accessed without a private vehicle. Suggestions including locating increased density at transit hubs and making streetscapes more inviting and comfortable - with trees and green spaces and designing buildings that connect better with sidewalks to create a more welcoming and walkable environment.

Several participants envisioned a future car-light Kitchener, that could be realized by downsizing roads and implementing measures such as parking management and car-use charges in the downtown core. Conversely, a small number of participants offered suggestions encouraging more (free) parking downtown to support local businesses.

Figure 30: A Connected City interactive information panels on display at the Block Party - 174 comments were captured on the panel during the event.

- Time (87)
- Convenience (67)
- Access to Public Transportation (64)
- Cost of Public Transportation (56)
- Destination (56)
- Lack of Safe / Comfortable Cycling Infrastructure (54)
- Comfort (43)
- Lack of Safe / Comfortable Walking Infrastructure (33)
- Cost of Car Ownership (32)

Figure 31: Results of the Block Party interactive voting activity for A Connected City asked which factors most influenced their transportation mode choice, participants ranked time and convenience as the strongest influences, with access to public transit, distance to the destination, and cost of public transit rounding out the top five.

How We Grow Mapping Activity

Key themes that surfaced through the How We Grow Mapping Activity (in-person and online) included the following:

A strong **desire to see new and enhanced parks and open space opportunities within and close to Downtown Kitchener** – including the conversion of surface parking lots to park space and adding car-free or car-light areas throughout downtown creating opportunities for public plazas and programmable spaces for outdoor dining, events, festivals, and informal gathering.

A clearly articulated **need for new community facilities, cultural spaces, transit and active transportation infrastructure**, with a desire to see new community centres, recreation facilities, sports fields, courts, and play areas, enhanced walking, cycling, and transit infrastructure (e.g. secure bike parking, wider sidewalks, safer crossings, and park & rides), in both Kitchener's new and/or fastest growing neighbourhoods.

Showed an **opportunity for more shops, services, and amenities in areas around the City**, including in west Kitchener, and along popular trails (e.g. Iron Horse Trail) and near parks and greenspaces, encouraging people to grab a coffee or a meal to enjoy in a local park, or to run errands while walking, rolling, or cycling.

There is **strong support for more housing options** including low-rise infill (e.g. townhouse), mid-rise, and mixed-use development throughout the City and higher-density forms within the City's major transit station areas. Much attention was focused on several key locations, including the area near Conestoga College, in new suburbs, and on sites that currently do not have homes, such as golf courses, vacant sites, shopping cetnres, and surface parking lots.

"Downtown is begging for more public space. Car-free areas, public plazas, double-width sidewalks everywhere. Right now this is seemingly built for cars instead of people."

"Convert Rockway golf course into public green space and add low/medium density housing around it."

"This whole section of the plaza should have the former Target demolished and be replaced with higher density housing with a park "

Figure 32: Block Party participants providing input on the large scale How We Grow Map.
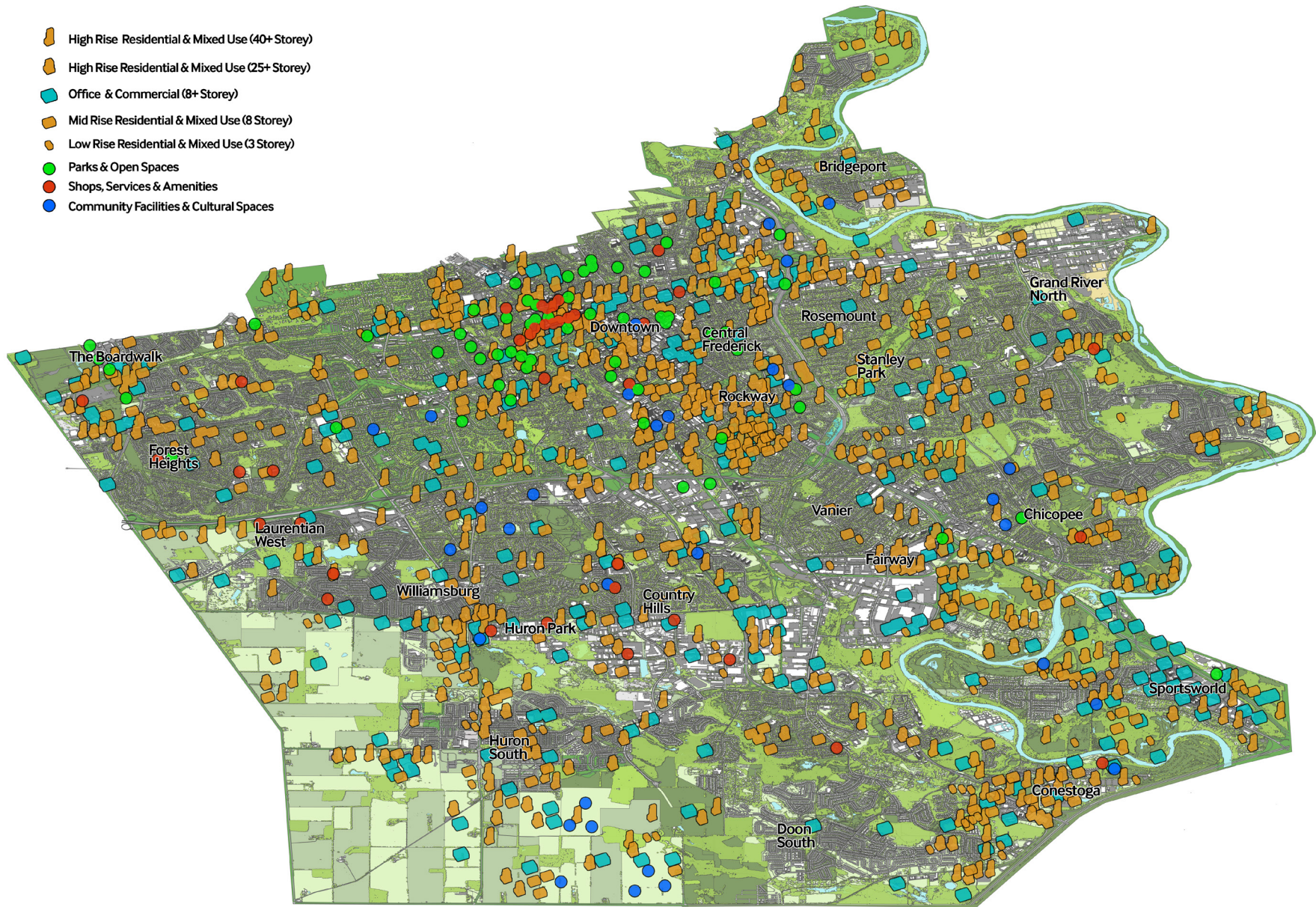
Figure 33: Diagram showing inputs received through the in-person and online How and Where We Grow Mapping activities.

Legend:
- High Rise Residential & Mixed Use (40+ Storey)
- High Rise Residential & Mixed Use (25+ Storey)
- Office & Commercial (8+ Storey)
- Mid Rise Residential & Mixed Use (8 Storey)
- Low Rise Residential & Mixed Use (3 Storey)
- Parks & Open Spaces
- Shops, Services & Amenities
- Community Facilities & Cultural Spaces

Online Engagement

City-wide Survey

When asked how they currently travel around the City and what factors most influence their mode choices, respondents shared the following:

Private Automobile (66%)

Walk, Roll, Scoot, Wheel (13%)

Public Transit (11%)

Bicycle (8%)

Taxi or Ride Share (1%)

Other (1%)

Bike Share or Scooter Share (.5%)

Car Share (.33%)
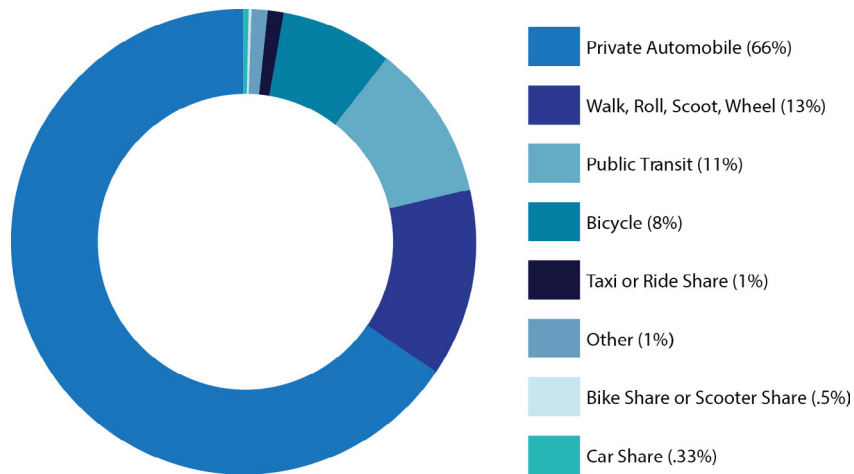
Figure 34: % responses to the survey question - How do you travel around Kitchener most often?

Convenience
Distance to Destination
Time Saving
Availability of Adequate Public Transit
Comfort
Cost or Affordability
Lack of Safe /Comfortable Walking and Cycling Infrastructure
Health and Fitness Benefits
Luggage or Load Size
Environmental Impact
Family or Group Size
Traffic Conditions
Physical Accessibility
Other

Figure 35: What are the most important factors influencing your choice of transportation mode?

Kitchener residents continue to rely heavily on private automobiles (66% list their car as primary mode of transportation), but there is clear interest in exploring more sustainable transportation options. Convenience, distance to destination, and time savings, were identified as the top factors influencing decisions around mode-choice, highlighting the importance of efficiency and accessibility when encouraging shifts to more sustainable transportation modes such as transit, cycling, walking, and rolling.

The strong support for transit-oriented growth and active transportation investments demonstrates that residents see thoughtful land use planning and infrastructure improvements as key to reducing car dependency. While financial incentives were a lower priority, they could still play a role in shifting transportation habits. To encourage sustainable transportation, the City must improve the reliability and convenience of alternatives, ensuring that walking, biking, and transit are safe, efficient, and competitive with driving.

When asked to rank different ways the City could encourage sustainable transportation use respondents provided the following:
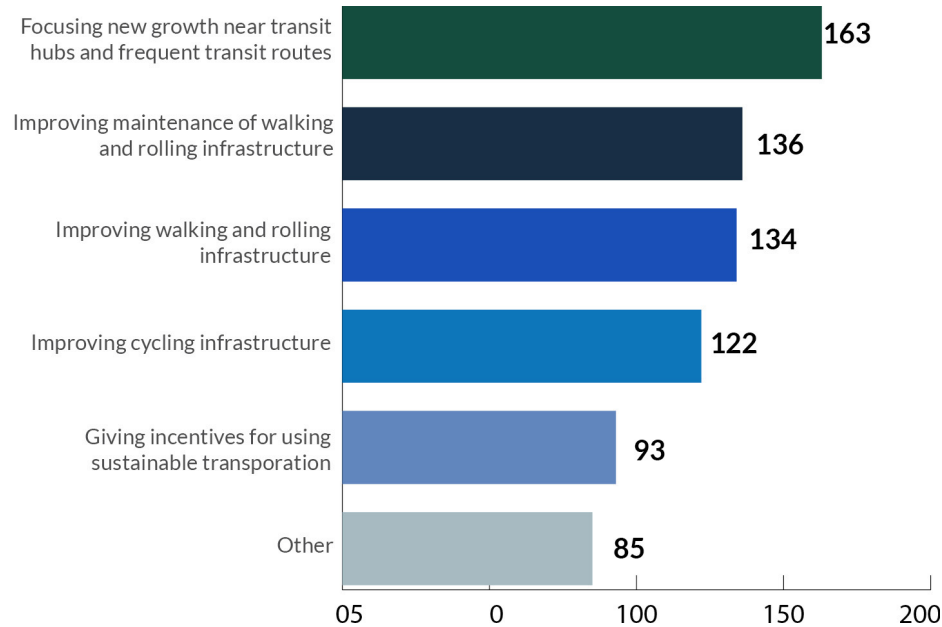
Figure 36: What do you think the City could do to encourage more people to choose a more sustainable form of transportation?

Relationship between Land Use and Transportation:
The top-ranked priority—focusing new growth near transit hubs, reinforces the connection between growth and sustainable mobility, suggesting that residents recognize that compact, mixed-use development near frequent transit can make walking, biking, and public transit more practical, reducing the need to drive a car.

Transportation Infrastructure Improvements are Critical:
There was strong support for transportation infrastructure improvements that prioritize the comfort, accessibility, and safety of all road users. This included improving sidewalks, paths, trails, and cycling facilities; improving maintenance and snow removal; and providing safer, more comfortable plazas, sidewalks and crossings. The emphasis on maintenance, lighting, landscaping, and overall comfort shows that safety and accessibility play a significant role in whether people choose to walk, bike, or use other active transportation.

Public Transit Needs to Be More Reliable and Convenient:
While not a 'priority' offered for ranking, comments provided under the category of "other" highlighted significant concerns about the reliability, frequency, and accessibility of public transit in Kitchener. Calls for better inter-city transit, off-peak and weekend service, and integration with cycling infrastructure indicate that for many residents, transit is not currently a viable or attractive alternative to driving.

Balancing Incentives and Disincentives:
Residents not only want better infrastructure and services but also policy changes that make sustainable transportation the easier choice. Suggestions like increasing parking fees to fund transit, offering incentives such free or reduced transit fares or rebates for not owning a car, and prioritizing mixed-use development near transit reflect a willingness to explore different incentives and disincentives as tools to help shift transportation habits.

Snapshot of Usage and Satisfaction by Mode Type

Private Vehicle, Carshare, Taxi or ride-share

In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Kitchener by Private Vehicle, Carshare, Taxi or ride-share?

■ Yes 89%
■ No 11%

How does it feel travelling in Downtown Kitchener by car?

How does it feel travelling in your neighbourhood by car?

How does it feel travelling on major City roads by car?

How does it feel travelling to other cities by car?
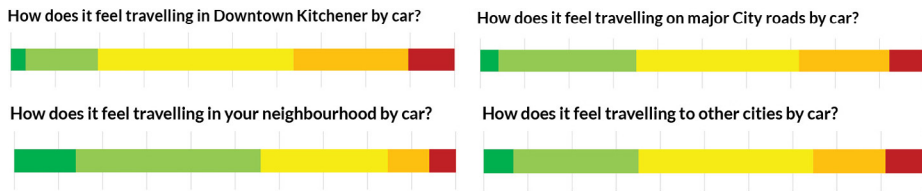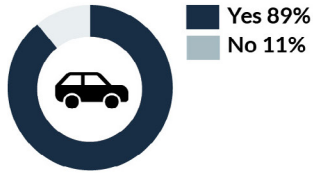
Figure 37: The majority or respondents feel neutral or positive about driving everywhere - with stronger feelings of positivity felt when driving in their neighbourhood.

Public Transit

In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Kitchener by Public Transit?

■ Yes 62%
■ No 38%

How does it feel travelling in Downtown Kitchener by transit?

How does it feel travelling in your neighbourhood by transit?

How does it feel travelling on major City roads by transit?

How does it feel travelling to other cities by transit?
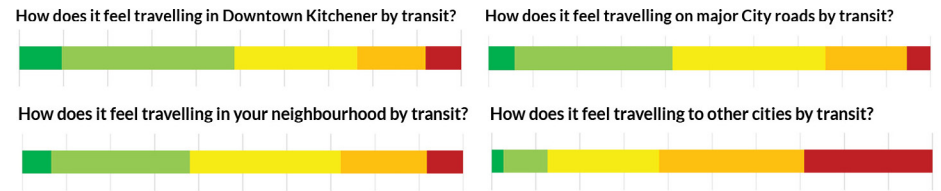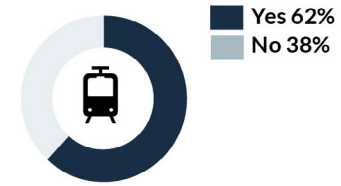
Figure 39: Respondents generally have positive or neutral feelings about taking transit, except when taking transit from Kitchener to other cities - where the majority feel unhappy or very unhappy.

Bike, e-bike, and Scooter

In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Kitchener by bike, e-bike, or scooter?

■ Yes 50%
■ No 50%

How does it feel travelling in Downtown Kitchener by bike, e-bike, or scooter?

How does it feel travelling in your neighbourhood by bike, e-bike, or scooter?

How does it feel travelling on major City roads by bike, e-bike, or scooter?

How does it feel travelling to other cities by bike, e-bike, or scooter?
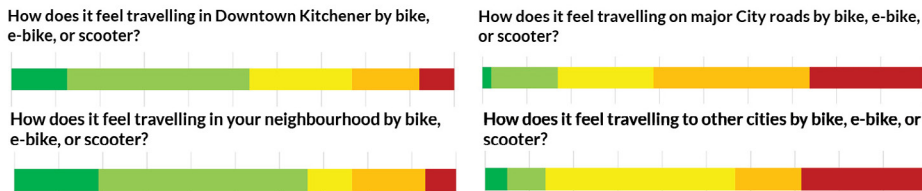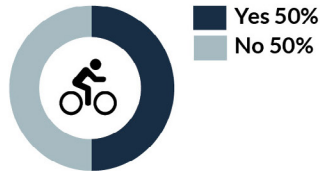
Figure 38: Respondents have positive or neutral feelings when cycling or scooting downtown or in their neighbourhoods. and feel unhappy or very unhappy on major roads, and traveling to other cities.

Walking or Rolling

In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Kitchener by walking or rolling?

■ Yes 87%
■ No 13%

How does it feel travelling in Downtown Kitchener by walking or rolling?

How does it feel travelling in your neighbourhood by walking or rolling?

How does it feel travelling on major City roads by walking or rolling?

Figure 40: Respondents generally feel positive when walking or rolling downtown or in their neighbourhood but have negative feelings when traveling along major city roads.

4.2   A Thriving City

In-Person Engagement

Input gathered from in-person event participants responding to the question **'What does a Thriving City that benefits everyone look and feel like?'** focused on five main topics:

- **Community spaces & social infrastructure;**
- **Mobility;**
- **Housing for all;**
- **Local economic development & employment; and**
- **Community health & well-being.**

Figure 41: Block Party Mural Activity.

Block Party participants shared that *A Thriving City that benefits everyone prioritizes safe, accessible, and vibrant public spaces, with parks, greenspaces, gathering places, and community hubs where residents of all ages, abilities, and income levels can come together.* Ideas shared at the event emphasized the need for inclusive design and accessible, 4-season, multipurpose community spaces that are accessible year-round – including spaces for winter activities, cultural events, and informal gatherings.
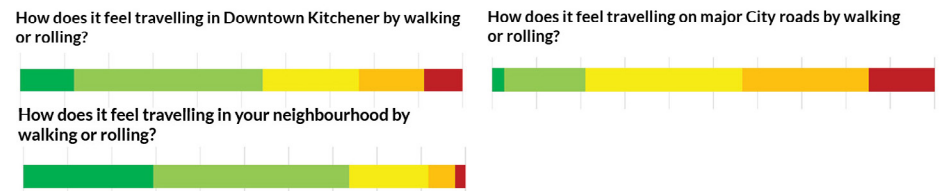
Participants underscored the important role of public spaces in fostering a sense of belonging and connection, particularly for those from marginalized and equity-seeking communities. Participants shared a strong desire for more walkable and bikeable neighbourhoods serviced by affordable, and frequent public transit that connects efficiently to key destinations in the City, surrounding region, and beyond.

Participants also envisioned housing solutions that prioritized affordability and providing a variety of housing options, including more mixed-use development, missing middle housing, and supportive housing for vulnerable populations. Small-scale, local-serving shops, services and amenities were identified as an essential component of a thriving community as were sustainable, living-wage jobs near transit and where people live.

Safe and equitable access to health and social services, including urgent care clinics, mental health support, and safe consumption sites, were identified as key priorities for community health and well-being. Additionally, there was a strong desire to see cleaner, safer, and healthier neighborhoods, with improved maintenance and waste management protocols, as well as better lighting and design in parks, plazas, sidewalks, and trails.

132 Grocery & Produce Stores

104 Health & Wellness Services

95 Cafes & Restaurants

76 Arts & Cultural Spaces

74 Plazas & Gathering Spaces

66 Small Scale Retail

45 Corner Stores

19 Financial Services

Figure 42: Results of the Block Party interactive voting activity asking which amenities they would like to have within a short walk, roll, or cycle from their home - answers shown by number of votes.

Figure 43: A Thriving City interactive information panels on display at the Block Party - 136 comments were captured on the panel during the event.

Block Party! Collaborative Boardgame

The Block Party! Collaborative boardgame was designed to replicate the objectives, decisions, barriers, and trade-offs that are faced when planning for complete communities. In the game, players were each given a secret objective (housing, employment, mobility, and sustainability targets) and were then tasked with creating a complete community by taking turns placing different types of housing, shops, services, parks, open spaces, jobs, and community facilities onto the gameboard – all while advancing their competing objectives.

After they finished the game, the players were asked the following questions:

- Did you meet your secret objective – and if so, how hard was it to achieve?

- What do you like about the neighborhood you created, and what would you improve?

- Would you like to live in this neighbourhood? Why or why not?
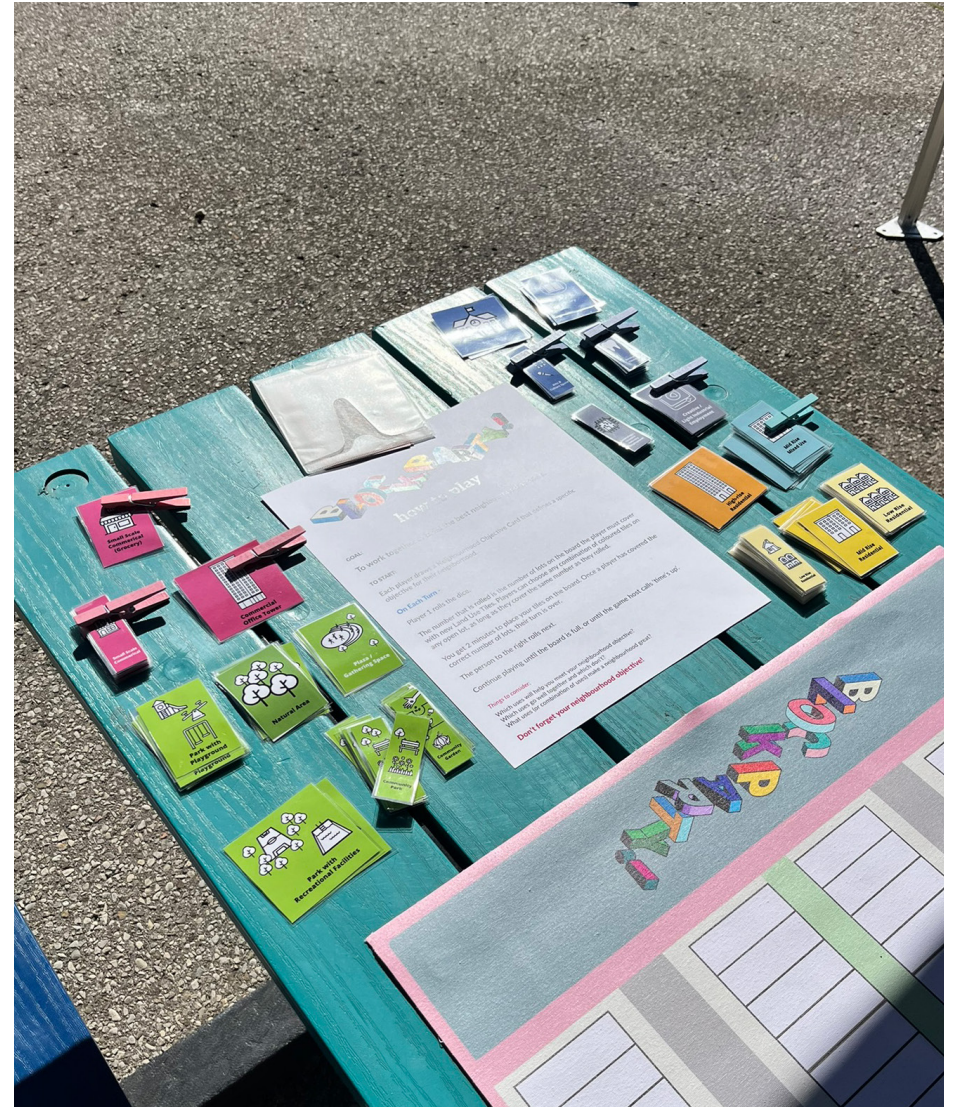
Figure 44: Block Party boardgame set-up.

Key Takeaways:

- Even when satisfied with a game's outcome, many participants were still able to identify areas of improvement or gaps that could be filled to better meet all residents' needs. Commonly identified improvements included:

  - A more deliberate inclusion of arts and cultural spaces;

  - Additional community-supporting services; and

  - Rethinking community layouts to improve social and physical connectivity.

- The games revealed a consistent desire by players to find the right balance of mixed-use development and green space - with most players preferring outcomes where green spaces, natural areas and residential uses were seamlessly integrated;

- Players also favoured game outcomes that offered jobs near transit service, and those that co-located family-supportive uses (schools, libraries, parks, community centres) close to residential uses;

- Game outcomes that prioritized active transportation and public transit helped players envision the potential to enhance walkability and livability by reducing reliance on private vehicles;

- Many players found it difficult to create communities that adequately reflected diverse cultures and demographics, especially when tasked with advancing unrelated objectives; and

- Many participants, while happy with how they met their objectives, shared a real concern that the communities they were creating would be unaffordable to the average Kitchener resident.

Figure 45: Group of players taking turns playing the Block Party boardgame.

Game Snapshot #1:

In this game, players focused on creating a family-oriented, walkable community with a balance of jobs and housing. They said they would like to live there because of the proximity to amenities, green spaces, and jobs. Suggestions for improvement included more diverse places to dine and socialize.
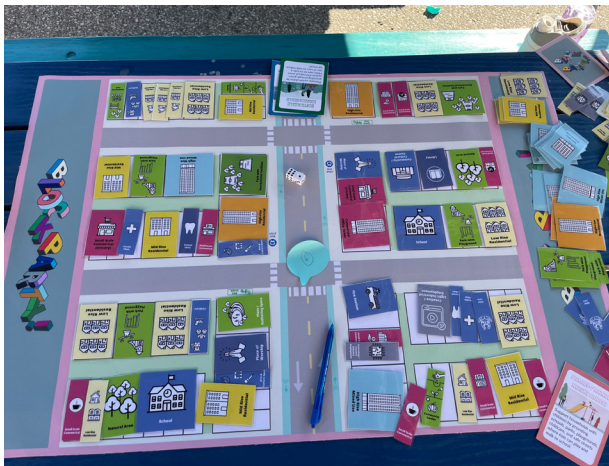
Game Snapshot #2:

In this game, players expressed a need for more mixed-use buildings, better transit access, and more arts and culture spaces, jobs, community services, and small-scale retail choices. They also expressed skepticism on whether the housing in their community, as designed, would be affordable.

Game Snapshot #3:

In this game, players focused on culture, employment, housing, and sustainability while creating their community. They were generally enthusiastic about the prospect of living in this community, however, their reflections on what could be improved included more eldercare, healthcare services, and more diverse leisure and recreation opportunities.

Figure 46: Snapshots of 3 of the completed gameboards from the Block Party event - each illustrating a different outcome.

Non-residential Technical Study Workshops

Jobs and economic prosperity are key components of A Thriving City. In order to better understand some of the more technical aspects related to these, two invitation-only virtual workshops were held with designers, owners, and operators including mixed-use, office, retail, industrial, and employment development. These workshops were designed to share information about Kitchener 2051, the technical work being completed as part of the process, and to gather sector-specific input and ideas related to the technical work underway.

Non-residential Workshop #1:
Mixed-use, Office, and Commercial Uses

Workshop #1 participants emphasized the need for the City to continue to leverage Kitchener's permissive zoning framework—particularly the progress made through Growing Together—to ensure that policy isn't limiting opportunities for non-residential development. Participants felt that simplifying zoning by reducing the number of zones and/or permitting a broader range of uses in each zone could help streamline the development application process and minimize the need for site-specific amendments.

Participants shared that while there is no shortage of potential development sites in the City, there remains a misalignment between demand for commercial/retail or office space on the ground floor of buildings and actual market demand. Rather than relying solely on city-wide policy permissions, participants felt that City efforts should focus on encouraging mixed-use development in nodes and centers that can support it. To reinforce this idea, they shared that the Kitchener-Waterloo area is a growing target for national retail and service commercial investment because of its emerging sub-markets and distinct neighborhoods. Participants felt that these areas of opportunity should be identified in the Official Plan.

When asked how the new Official Plan could better support non-residential development, workshop participants felt it was essential for the plan to foster vibrant neighborhoods and centers with a strong sense of place, such as Williamsburg Town Centre. This could be achieved by requiring non-residential development to prioritize urban design, placemaking, and local character enhancement.

Non-residential Workshop #2:
Industrial & Employment Uses

Workshop #2 participants identified the potential for new opportunities to bring production back to local markets, driven by market shifts, geopolitical changes, and post-COVID supply chain disruptions, which could lead to an increased demand for industrial space as a key opportunity related to industrial and employment land development in Kitchener. It was noted that Kitchener's inventory of larger, available and developable sites is limited which poses a challenge to industrial developers.

Participants shared that proactive pre-zoning of employment lands could help accelerate investment but offered that similar forward-thinking approaches may be needed to help address and alleviate the burden (time, resources) caused by the required environmental and ecological impact studies. Additionally, cities that maintain strong, ongoing relationships with local First Nations experience smoother development processes and better project outcomes, making meaningful engagement an important consideration for industrial clients looking for development locations.

Participants identified site servicing—especially a reliable power supply—as a major factor in attracting high-quality employment uses. Delays in getting power infrastructure online can make or break investment decisions, emphasizing the need for close collaboration between the City and local utility providers to ensure system capacity can meet needs (short, medium, and long-term).

Transportation access is another critical factor for determining where businesses will locate, as employers prioritize locations where workers have easy transportation options including access to quality, reliable transit and easy highway access. Land use conflicts also present challenges, with industrial landowners facing pressure from non-industrial uses located in industrial areas such as recreation facilities and places of worship. Participants also stressed the need for proactive planning, particularly through the Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan, to minimize land use and traffic conflicts.

Additional Meetings

City staff held additional one-on-one meetings with Economic Development staff, school boards, the Kitchener Public Library, and Economic Development Advisory Committee ot inform the non-residential study.

Online Engagement

City-wide Survey

When asked if they plan on staying in their neighbourhoods and which shops, services or amenities they would like to have within a short walk, roll or cycle of their home, respondents shared the following:

Most residents feel connected to their neighbourhoods, with the majority (69%) seeing themselves staying long-term. However, 1 in 5 (20%) residents remain uncertain, which may suggest that neighbourhood improvements could enhance livability and influence folks to stay longer term.

When asked which amenities they would like to have close to home, many identified having access to everyday essentials—particularly grocery and produce stores—within a short walk, roll, or bike ride from home as critical. Cafés, small-scale retail, and health and wellness services were also highly desired, highlighting an interest in walkable, complete communities.

'Other' responses highlighted the desire for policies that enable more local-serving businesses within residential areas including community-focused spaces and businesses that prioritized local needs over corporate interests - advocating instead for small, independent, neighbourhood-serving stores. Other suggestions included requiring community amenities such as libraries, parks, and recreation centers to be equitably distributed throughout the City. Respondents also highlighted the need for neighbourhood spaces that support physical activity for children and youth with a focus on unstructured outdoor experiences, as the current model of organized sports often requires travel which can be inaccessible to families and promotes car dependency.

Pie chart legend: ■ Very likely ■ Likely ■ Not sure ■ Unlikely ■ Very unlikely

Values: 47%, 22%, 20%, 7%, 4%
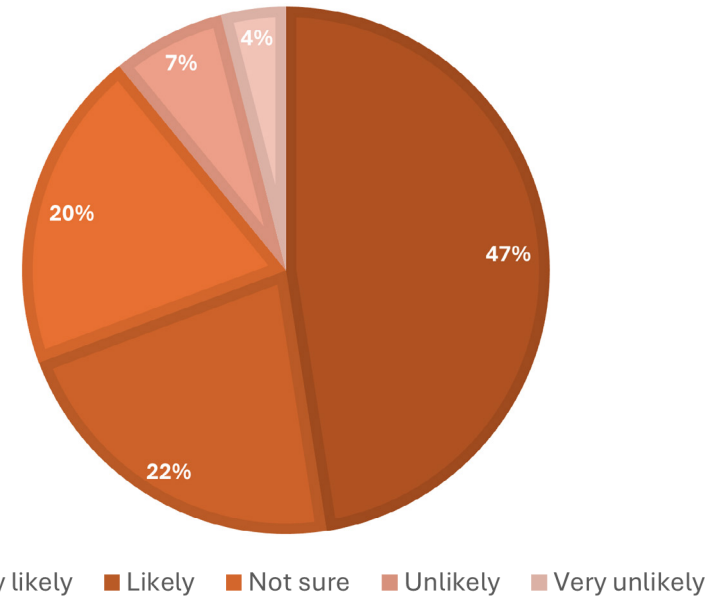
Figure 47: Responses when asked if they plan on staying in their neighbourhood - responses reflected the number of votes per option.

Bar chart values: 217, 167, 129, 102, 87, 67, 35, 30, 22

Legend:
- Grocery and produce stores
- Cafes and restaurants
- Small scale retail (boutique, bakery, barber)
- Health and wellness services (doctor, physiotherapist, yoga)
- Plazas and gathering spaces
- Arts and culture (theatre, live music, gallery)
- Corner stores
- Financial services (bank, credit union, insurance)
- Other

Figure 48: Responses when asked which shops, services or amenities they would like to have within a short walk, roll or cycle of their home.

When asked what would make their neighbourhoods even better, respondents shared the following:

Housing emerged as the most urgent priority, with strong support for a range of affordable options and diverse housing types that accommodate different life stages, needs, and household compositions. Beyond housing, respondents emphasized the importance of green spaces, tree canopy preservation, and public areas that support both active transportation and community gathering. Local-serving retail, including grocery stores and pharmacies, was also highlighted as a critical need, particularly in underserved areas.

While community and recreational facilities received moderate support, public safety and affordability were recurring concerns. Many advocated for policy measures such as rent control and non-market housing models to prevent displacement. Additionally, respondents expressed a desire for well-maintained, inviting public spaces. These findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that prioritizes housing while ensuring communities remain vibrant, green, connected, and inclusive.

- Affordable housing — 145
- Housing for a range of life stages, including families, seniors, and young people — 143
- Tree canopy, green spaces, and natural areas — 141
- Active transportation infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails) — 99
- Parks, plazas and public spaces that support community gathering and events — 93
- Vibrant local-serving shopping, dining, and retail areas — 80
- Community facilities (schools, libraries, childcare) — 67
- Recreational facilities (sportsfields, rinks, pools, splashpads) — 54
- Indoor amenity spaces including arts, culture and performance spaces — 32
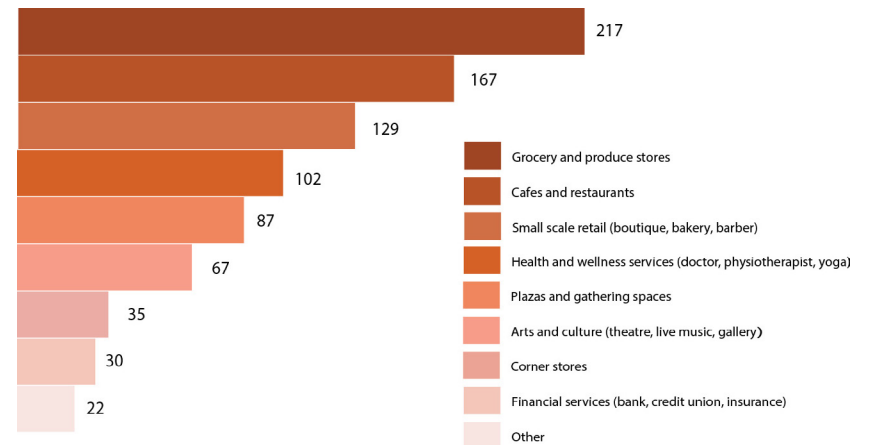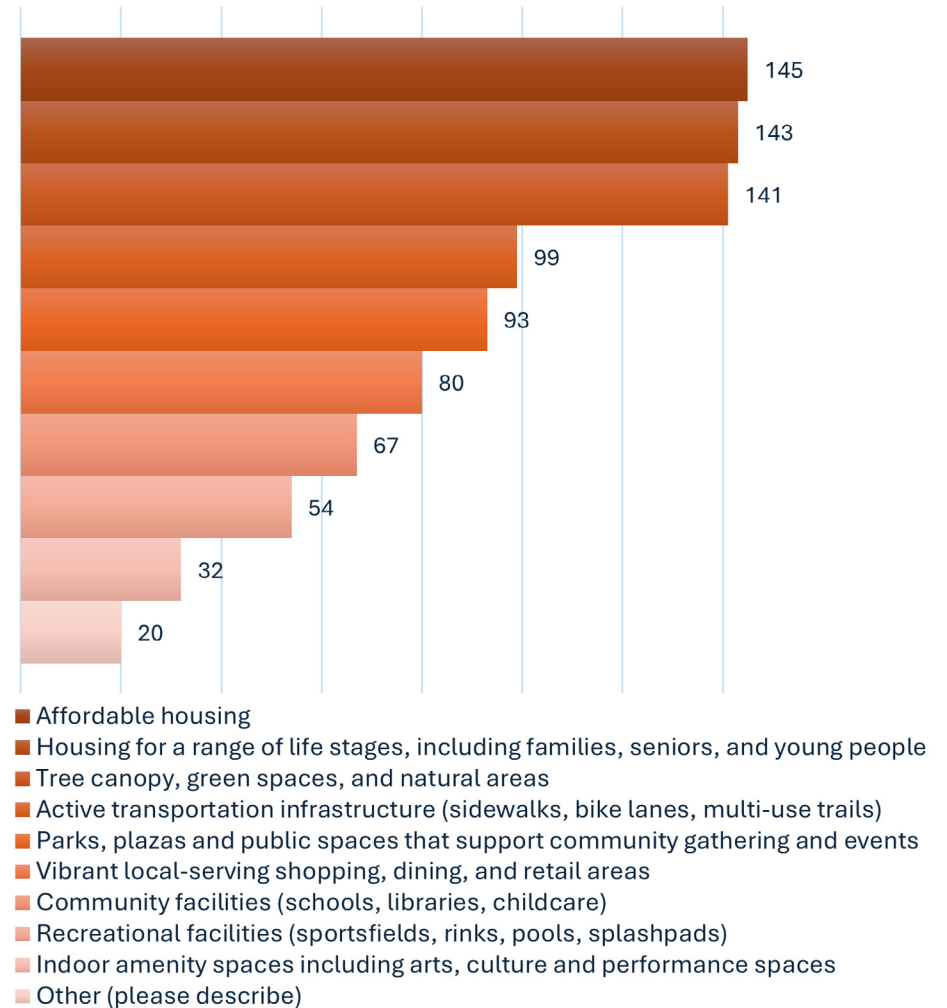- Other (please describe) — 20

Figure 49: Responses when asked to rank the top three things that would make their neighbourhoods even better - responses reflect the number of votes per option.

4.3 A Green City

In-Person Engagement

Input gathered from in-person event participants responding to the question **'What does a Green City that benefits everyone look and feel like?'** focused on five main topics:

- green spaces and tree canopy;
- active transportation;
- sustainability and climate action;
- housing and density; and
- community and equity.

Block Party participants shared that *A Green City that benefits everyone prioritizes vibrant, accessible, and interconnected green spaces, with tree-lined streets, parks, naturalized areas, and green corridors that connect neighborhoods.* Ideas shared at the event included expanding the tree canopy to provide shade, creating more urban trails and green spaces in low-income areas, and preserving natural habitats to promote biodiversity and long-term sustainability. Participants also highlighted the need to better integrate natural systems into urban environments, including stormwater management, green roofs, and restored ecosystems.

Figure 50: Photo of the Upcycled City's main street.

Figure 51: Photo of Upcycled City participants painting their creations.

Participants shared a strong desire for safer and more robust active transportation infrastructure. Enhanced cycling and walking networks, protected bike lanes, safer walking routes, and improved transit services were all seen as critical elements to reducing car dependency and improving overall mobility in the City. Calls for more integrated transit options, free or deeply affordable public transit, and better transit connections within and beyond the City were recurring priorities.

Figure 52: A Green City Station - 88 comments were captured on the interactive panel during the event.

Sustainability and climate action emerged as growing community concerns, with participants advocating for greener building practices, enhanced waste reduction and composting programs, and the reduction of emissions through better transportation options and improved infrastructure. Participants emphasized the need for long-term environmental planning, including banning natural gas in new development, promoting renewable energy, and managing air quality through tree planting and green buffers in urban areas. Collaboration with and learning from Indigenous leadership and embedding sustainability in daily life were also highlighted as essential for long-term community resilience.

Participants also envisioned housing solutions that balanced density, affordability, and sustainability. Calls for mixed-use zoning, complete communities, and prioritizing residential development near transit and essential services were prevalent, alongside suggestions to curb suburban sprawl. Participants wanted to see housing policy that aligns with environmental goals, including promoting intensification to preserve green space and reduce carbon emissions.

Finally, fostering equity and community connection within the community was identified as a key priority. This included the desire for accessible public spaces, urban farms, and programs that support marginalized and equity-seeking groups. Many participants highlighted the importance of exploring anti-colonial approaches to planning and development, advocating for more meaningful collaboration with Indigenous leaders and knowledge keepers, and the integration of Indigenous perspectives into both policy and practice.

Climate Pledge Activity

There were 248 climate pledges made by participants at the Block Party. The pledges demonstrated a commitment to addressing the climate crisis and integrating sustainability practices into their everyday lives.

The most common climate pledge themes were:

- Sustainable Transportation
- Reducing, Reusing & Recycling
- Energy Conservation
- Trees, Plants, and Greenspaces

Figure 53: Left: Photo of the Climate Tree with seed paper Climate Pledges. Right: Close-up images of the Climate Pledges.

Sustainable Transportation:

Many participants pledged to walk, bike or take transit more frequently, with some setting targets or parameters to help encourage the shift – including making commitments to walk or bike instead of drive for all trips under a certain distance or all trips to certain destinations (school, work, farmer's market); and setting monthly walking or cycling distance goals (e.g., bike at least 120km a month between May and October) or mode split goals (e.g., committing to using sustainable modes for 50% of all personal travel). Other commitments included advocating for improved transit infrastructure in the community and encouraging friends and family members to use public transit or bike instead of driving.

Reducing, Reusing, and Recycling:

Participants pledged to reduce waste and improve recycling practices, by avoiding single-use plastics, recycling properly at home, school, work and in public places, and committing to reduce packaging waste by limiting online shopping and using reusable bags, containers, and jars for shopping, eating, and food storage.

Trees, Plants, and Greenspaces:

Pledges related to enhancing the urban ecosystem included commitments to plant trees and steward their growth, supporting pollinators by planting native plants in gardens, yards, on boulevards, and on currently paved areas; transforming lawns into sustainable, regenerative and/or edible landscapes with shade trees and wildflowers; and advocating for more greenspaces in the community.

Energy Conservation:

Participants pledged to conserve energy by turning off lights, appliances, and electronics when not in use; keeping heating temperatures lower in winter and using fans instead of air conditioning in summer; transitioning to energy-efficient appliances; using rain barrels to water gardens instead of municipal water; and switching to public transit or walking to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel-powered vehicles.

Figure 54: Summary of Key Climate Pledge Themes.

Online Engagement

City-wide Survey

When asked to prioritize ways the City could best address greenhouse gas emissions, respondents shared the following:

Survey participants identified expanding the tree canopy, designing energy-efficient buildings that generate as much clean energy as they use, and increasing parks and green spaces as their top priorities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These findings suggest strong support for nature-based solutions and sustainable building practices as key climate mitigation actions. Other highly ranked strategies included improving walking and cycling routes with better connections to transit, supporting energy transitions such as electrification, and working with other levels of government on shared climate initiatives.

Beyond these ranked priorities, respondents emphasized the importance of compact, transit-oriented development to reduce emissions by decreasing car dependency. Many supported policies that promoted mixed-use development, allowing homes, jobs, and daily needs to be located closer together. Encouraging sustainable building practices—was another recurring theme, with a focus on energy-efficient construction and the adoption of renewable energy systems. Additionally, respondents highlighted the role of active transportation infrastructure and better transit services in reducing reliance on private vehicles. Preserving and expanding green spaces, and encouraging tree planting and urban gardening, were also seen as an essential approach to supporting climate resilience at the local level.

- ■ Increase our tree canopy
- ■ Design buildings that produce as much clean energy as they use
- ■ Add more parks and green spaces
- ■ Add walking and cycling routes with connections to transit
- ■ Support the use of different energy types and conversion to electricity
- ■ Collaborate with other levels of government on shared climate issues
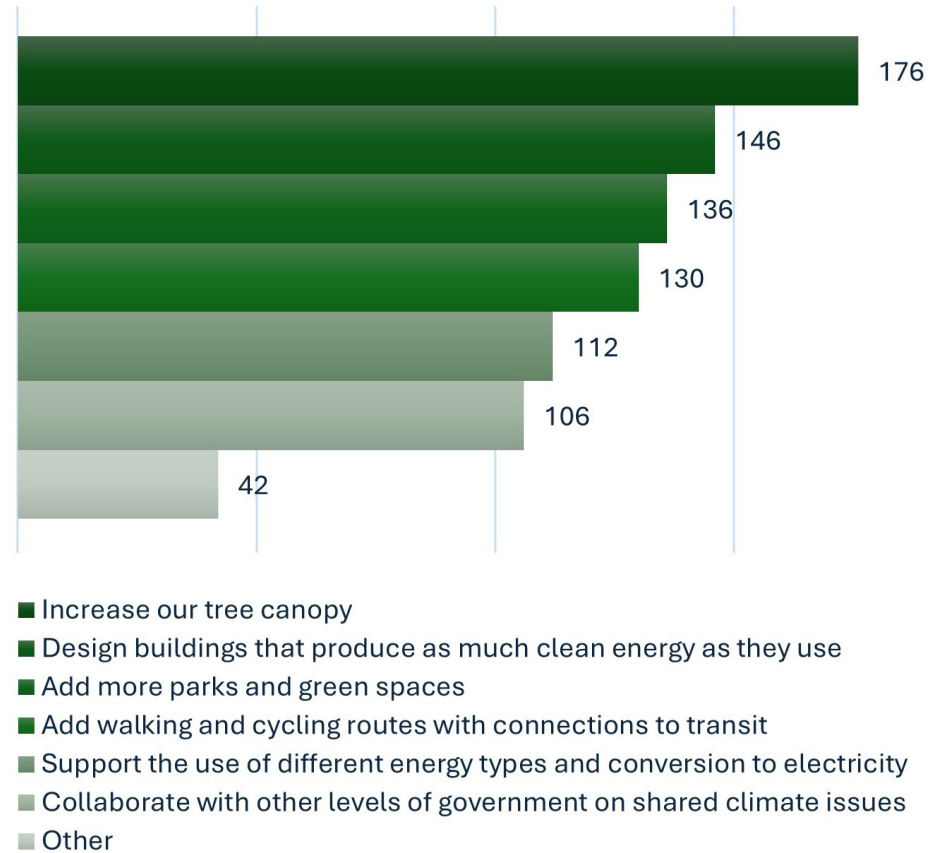- ■ Other

Figure 55: Chart of survey responses when asked to rank the top three ways the City could best address Greenhouse Gas Emissions - responses reflect the number of votes per option.

When asked which actions the City should take to adapt to warmer, wetter, wilder weather, respondents shared the following:

Survey participants identified climate-resilient infrastructure as the top priority for adapting to extreme weather, with strong support for designing buildings, roads, and storm sewers to withstand severe weather events. Other high-ranking actions included planting native and drought-tolerant species and expanding the City's tree canopy, highlighting the importance of nature-based solutions in managing climate impacts. Restoring streams and strengthening collaboration with other levels of government were also seen as viable strategies, alongside increasing access to food programs to support community resilience.

Beyond these priorities, respondents emphasized the need for broader, longer-term strategies such as protecting and expanding tree canopy and green spaces and reducing impermeable surfaces to improve stormwater management. Sustainable infrastructure and proactive emergency planning were also highlighted as crucial measures to help mitigate risks from extreme weather events such as flooding and heatwaves. Additionally, promoting local food systems through policies that support gardening and urban agriculture was seen as a way to enhance food security while reducing emissions from food transport. Finally, many respondents called for policies that limit urban sprawl and encourage more compact, transit-oriented development to preserve farmland, reduce infrastructure costs, and enhance overall climate resilience.

- 196 — Design buildings, roads, and storm sewers for severe weather events
- 158 — Plant native and drought tolerant plants
- 142 — Collaborate with other levels of government on shared climate issues
- 136 — Increase our tree canopy
- 129 — Restore our streams
- 85 — Create programs and services to support access to food
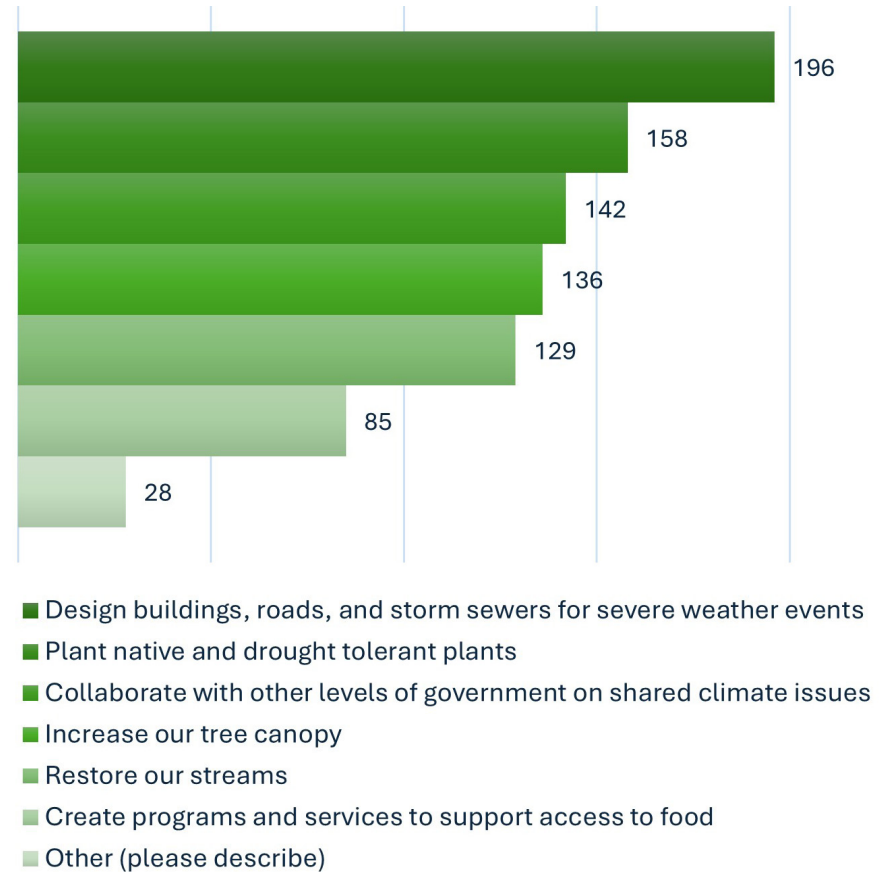- 28 — Other (please describe)

Figure 56: Chart of survey responses when asked to rank the top three actions the City could take to adapt to warmer, wetter, wilder, weather - responses reflect the number of votes per option.

Climate & Energy Technical Study Workshop

Climate and energy are key components of A Green City – and to better understand some of the more technical aspects related to these, an invitation-only virtual workshops was held with key interest holders, collaborators and subject matter experts, including designers, builders, owners, operators, and developers of sustainable (net-zero, LEED, Passive Haus) developments, academics, researchers, and sustainability leaders. The workshop was designed to share information about Kitchener 2051, the technical work being completed as part of the Climate & Energy Study, and to gather sector-specific input and ideas related to the technical work underway.

Climate & Energy Workshop

The workshop focused on the need for flexibility in processes and policies to foster innovation in addressing climate change and energy challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of setting performance targets rather than prescriptive ones, allowing for adaptability and creativity in achieving goals. The conversation highlighted the necessity of balancing market realities with aspirations, and the role of the City of Kitchener as a facilitator in removing barriers and streamlining processes across jurisdictions and sectors.

Participants also encouraged the City to explore new opportunities for collaboration between the public and private sectors, emphasizing the need for a multi-solving approach to addressing interconnected issues like carbon impact, climate readiness, and the housing crises at the same time. The conversation also highlighted the importance of fostering a shift in the organizational culture within the City to encourage progressive ideas and help build partnerships. Additionally, the need for clearer pathways to achieve climate goals was discussed, with participants encouraging the City to act as convenor - bringing together interest holders, collaborators and experts. The idea of an 'innovation sandbox' was proposed – with the City offering a 'pilot site' with relaxed regulations to encourage innovation, experimentation and cross-sector problem-solving. Overall, the workshop called for a holistic approach to climate action, leveraging incentives and resources from various levels of government and sectors.

4.4 A Caring City

In-Person Engagement

Input gathered from in-person event participants responding to the question **'What does a Caring City that benefits everyone look and feel like?'** focused on five main topics:

- Safe;

- Affordable & inclusive housing;

- Community health and social support;

- Safe, accessible, and green community spaces; and

- Transportation & mobility, and social connection & equity.

Figure 57: Participants getting their stamp books stamped at the Block Party.

Block Party participants shared that *A Caring City that benefits everyone prioritizes diverse housing solutions that are safe, affordable, and accessible; low- or no-barrier access to health and social supports, mobility options*. Participants envisioned a city where everyone's basic needs are met and where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued within their community.

Participants emphasized the urgent need for more housing supply, including "missing middle" options, transitional housing, and tiny homes for the City's most vulnerable populations, as well as planning policies that maximize the number of affordable units available. Participants also expressed strong support for a housing-first approach to address homelessness and highlighted the importance of wrap-around services for precariously housed individuals.

Equitable and low barrier access to community health & social supports was identified as a critical community priority. This includes low- or no-barrier access to healthcare services such as family doctors, mental health supports, and harm reduction initiatives (e.g. safe consumption sites).

Enhanced transportation & mobility infrastructure and options again emerged as a key theme, with participants sharing a strong desire for safer and more integrated active transportation networks; affordable and accessible public transit (including expanded LRT service and connectivity); and intentional traffic safety measures - reflecting the community's vision for inclusive and sustainable mobility options.

Calls for cleaner, well-maintained public amenities—such as more public washrooms, water fountains, and food security resources like community fridges and edible food gardens—reflected the community's desire to help meet fellow residents' basic needs through mutual care and support. Participants shared their desire for vibrant and accessible parks, green spaces, urban forests, and gathering places where all residents can find respite and connect with each other.

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of social connection and equity, calling for more programs and initiatives that engage and support marginalized and equity-seeking groups. A Caring City was described as one that fosters kindness and belonging through inclusive events, community-driven programs, and equitable access to services and amenities.
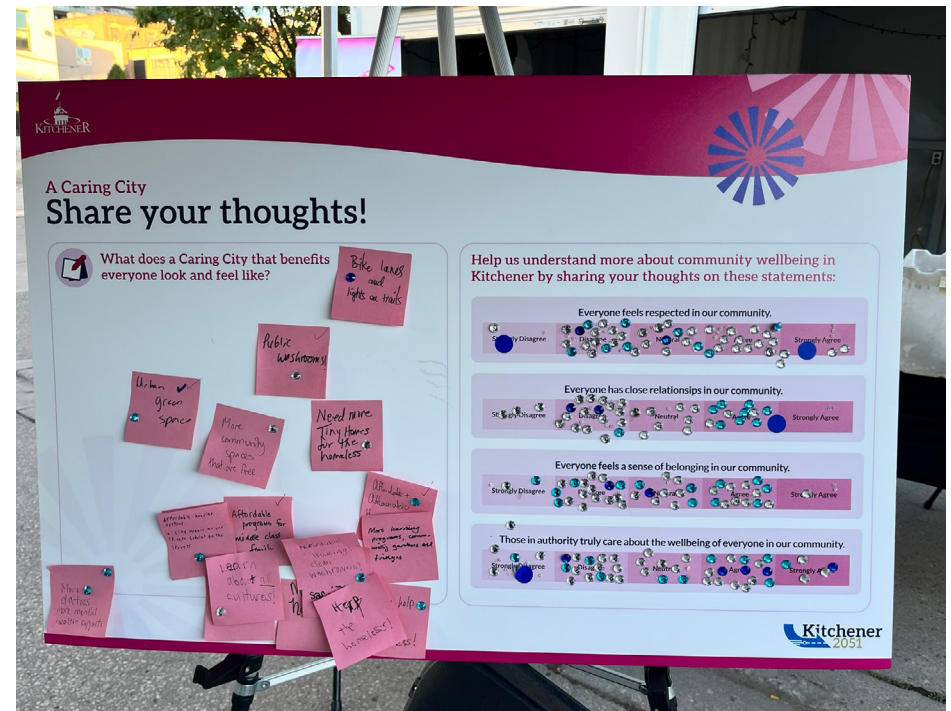

Figure 58: A Caring City interactive information panel on display at the Block Party - 240 comments were captured on the panel during the event.

Speaker Series Event

Early in the process, we realized that the connections between the themes was an integral part of the conversations that we were having in community – particularly when it came to A Caring City and its core elements. The first Speaker Series event, Ability & Mobility (A Connected & Caring City), was designed to help amplify these connections and provide a venue for the community to come together to listen to, learn from, and challenge each other as we look towards a collective future that benefits everyone.

Figure 59: Speaker Series Panelists & Moderator.

When asked how we can build a Caring City & plan for growth that benefits all, participants responded:

Building a Caring City and planning for growth in a way that benefits everyone will require thoughtful planning and design; the prioritization of walking, rolling, cycling, and public transit; and a collaborative, cross-jurisdictional/region-wide approach to solving complex city-building problems.

Participants envision a future that includes innovative planning policies and approaches; opportunities for growth that reflect existing community character and values; medium-density housing designed to promote social connectivity; transportation infrastructure that prioritizes moving people, not just cars; safe, connected transportation network that accounts for people of all ages and abilities – including planning for movement and end of trip facilities / storage for bikes, strollers, walkers, wheelchairs, scooters, wagons, and other mobility devices; and better policy alignment and clarity related to roles, responsibilities, and jurisdiction between the City and Region.

Panel Discussion and Q&A

Panelists and audience members shared personal experiences and anecdotes related to mobility, growth and community connection. Many shared examples of having to overcome invisible barriers daily – providing an important reminder that spaces, buildings, and streets that are perceived as 'accessible' by many can pose challenges to some in our community. This includes crosswalks that do not provide enough time for all users to cross, ramps designed to meet aesthetic needs before access needs; 'accessible' building entrances that lead to interior corridors or the rear of buildings; and poorly maintained sidewalks, roads, and paths that can pose serious safety hazards.

Some spoke about challenges faced by those without access to personal vehicles, particularly when coupled with a lack of access to frequent or reliable transit. These challenges can impede individuals' ability to participate in community events, access services, and exercise autonomy. Others shared thoughts related to conscious community building, including a desire to see spaces across the City geared towards specific demographics, while also welcoming everyone. Several participants questioned how to preserve a sense of community, while anticipating a growing number of new neighbors. Some proposed that planning through human-centred design could help preserve a sense of belonging while making room for new people, homes and amenities.

Figure 60: Panelist Kathleen speaking to the audience.

Figure 61: Panelist, Simon, speaking to the audience.

Online Engagement

City-wide Survey

When asked to share their thoughts about community wellbeing in Kitchener, respondents shared the following:

The majority of respondents shared that they feel respected in the community, trust others in the community, feel that they contribute to the wellbeing of others in the community, and feel a sense of belonging.

An overwhelming majority (86% of respondents) agreed with the statement "Our community can do more with everyone together than we could individually" - reinforcing the sentiments of community care, equity, and social cohesion heard consistently throughout Phase 2 engagement.

"Make it easier to walk and bike for work, services, and leisure. You meet people and greet them face to face. This is a powerful way to feel connected, and grow a sense of belonging."

"Zoning laws and other bylaws must change to support community-building projects such as urban gardens, community art spaces/murals, etc. Additionally, the design and layout of new buildings needs to form beautiful and cohesive spaces in which people would want to gather."

When asked what the most important action the City could take to ensure all residents feel a sense of belonging would be, respondents shared the following:

Affordable housing emerged as the most important action the City could take to foster a sense of belonging, with 44% of respondents identifying it as the top priority. Additional support for cultural and community programs was the next most significant action, followed by creating more inclusive public spaces and improving access to City services. These findings highlight the strong link between safe and stable housing, social connection, and inclusivity in the community.

Respondents reinforced that belonging is deeply tied to broader quality-of-life factors, including access to housing, safe and sustainable mobility options, stable employment, and green spaces. Many called for the City to ensure everyone has access to neighbourhoods where walking and cycling are safe, natural spaces are protected, and housing is both accessible and affordable. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on the City taking intentional steps to address growing tensions related to hmelessness, immigration, mental health and addiction, ensuring that all residents feel welcome and supported.

4.5 Tying it all together

The survey responses to the question **"What does a Connected, Green, Thriving, and Caring City that benefits everyone look and feel like? Share your vision with us"** reflect a diverse range of ideas and visions for the future, but all share a foundation of common community values.

Safe, affordable, and accessible housing for all was a central theme that emerged. Respondents envisioned a city where all residents, regardless of income, can live comfortably and maintain a sense of community. As one respondent shared, **"It would include a variety of housing types in all neighbourhoods so that we have a better chance of facilitating complete communities with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, not only people that can afford [single family] homes. We would support the most affordable housing options by investing money and using City-owned land to leverage into affordable housing."**

Many responses highlighted the need to prioritize access & inclusion – ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, ability, income level or status, has access to critical services, programs and resources including culturally appropriate childcare, health and mental health care, fair wages for care workers, and low- or no-barrier access to resources for marginalized populations. This is underscored by calls ensuring **"all residents have access to timely, truly affordable, culturally sensitive resources."**

Similarly, safe & sustainable mobility emerged as a key priority, with numerous calls for affordable, frequent public transit and enhanced active transportation infrastructure. A commenter envisioned a future where, **"Every neighbourhood has interconnected parks and trails allowing people to access other neighbourhoods. Every home is just 2-3 blocks from a GRT bus stop or ION station."**

Equally significant is the emphasis on thoughtful & resilient planning and growth with many imagining a walkable, bike-friendly city with fewer cars, more trees, interconnected greenspaces, alongside vibrant spaces for cultural events, local businesses, and recreational activities. Many responses highlighted the connection between community wellbeing and environmental health – **"envisioning the restoration of natural ecosystems and creating a city connected by trails"**. While many had aspirational visions of the future, concerns were shared about the pace of growth, changing demographics, and local government response to the housing crisis, homelessness, public safety and decreased civic engagement.

The theme of mutual care & belonging was also a recurring theme. Respondents envision a future Kitchener where everyone prospers, and no one is left behind - with one respondent sharing **"I'd like Kitchener to be a place in which people help each other - I want us to find ways to support the unhoused population without imposing patriarchal notions of "aid" that do not consider the voices of the people we are helping..."** and other stating that they would like to live in a city where **"everyone is provided the assistance they need to feel respected and feel they are part of the community. This would benefit everyone in our community."**

These common community values illustrate a shared desire for a future Kitchener that is equitable, connected, and resilient, with a strong committment for its people and environment.

Section 5
Community Values

5.1 Community Values

Distilled from the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions gathered during Phase 2, the following community values illustrate a shared desire for a future Kitchener that is equitable, connected, and resilient, with a strong committment for its people and environment:

Affordability

We know that affordability and the rising cost of living are major challenges. Housing costs are rising across the entire housing continuum, along with food, energy, and transportation expenses. Many Kitchener households are feeling these pressures and are struggling to cover basic needs, leading some to question if they can afford to stay in the City. Kitchener 2051 is an opportunity to plan a city where everyone, regardless of income, can live, work, and play.

Access & Inclusion

It is important to provide equitable access throughout Kitchener's neighbourhoods to public spaces, parks, shops, jobs, and community facilities and programs. Kitchener 2051 is an opportunity to ensure safe, low-barrier, and equitable access to these places for all.

Thoughtful & Resilient Growth

Where and how we grow requires thoughtful balancing of current issues, such as the housing crisis, climate emergency, and an aging population, with a focus on the future. Kitchener 2051 should reflect how city building topics, like housing, transportation, climate and aging populations, are all connected - and require a thoughtful and coordinated problem solving approach.

Safe & Sustainable Mobility Options

Where we live, work, and play and the distance in between has significant impacts on how we move around the city. Kitchener 2051 should focus on safe and sustainable wats to get around for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers throughout the city and beyond.

Mutual Care & Belonging

Imagine a city where everyone prospers and no one is left behind. Kitchener 2051 should establish a new model of equitable, compassionate, and caring city building where, together, we take care of each other and the world around us.

5.2 Conclusion

One thing we heard consistently throughout Phase 2 engagement was that the theme of A Caring City was too important and cross-cutting to be considered in isolation. It was clearly articulated that the theme and its core elements - equity, inclusion, and belonging - needed to be thoughtfully integrated into each of the three other themes.

In response, Phase 3 engagement will be structured around the themes of A Connected City, A Thriving City and A Green City, with the elements of A Caring City, running across each.

The Community Values, which align closely with Kitchener's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan goals, will be carried forward as a touchstone into Phase 3 of Kitchener 2051 - where the aspirational visions of Phase 1 and 2 turn into actions.

Phase 3 of Kitchener 2051 will explore the big ideas, early policy directions and the different approaches to growth that will help us realize our vision of a future Kitchener where everyone prospers, feels a sense of belonging, and no one is left behind.
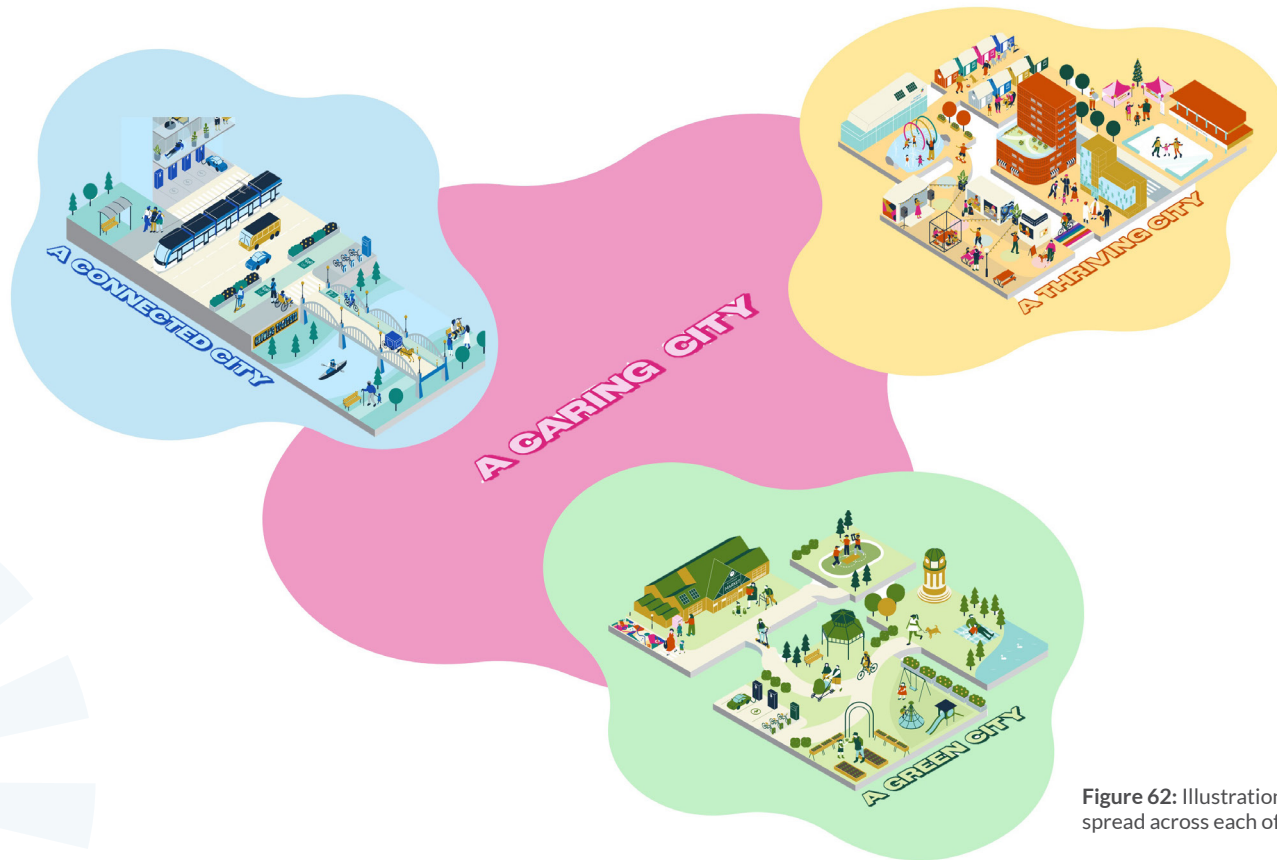

Figure 62: Illustration showing A Caring City spread across each of the other themes.