

REPORT TO: Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: May 12, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Jeff Silcox-Childs, Director, Parks & Cemeteries

PREPARED BY: Rebecca Roy, Landscape Architect,
Mark Parris, Manager, Parks and Open Space Design and Development

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All wards

DATE OF REPORT: March 17, 2025

REPORT NO.: INS-2025-142

SUBJECT: Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Parks Master Plan - Places, as provided in Attachment A, be approved; and,

That staff be directed to carry out the recommendations as outlined by the near-, mid-, and long-term implementation framework.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- This report presents the Parks Master Plan, Places, which establishes a vision for and approach to developing a parks and open space system that is responsive to an evolving social, environmental, and economic context so that quality park experiences are provided for everyone.
- Implementation of recommendations in this master plan are projected within a fiscally responsible 10-year framework of near-, mid-, and long-term priorities funded entirely by forecast budgets.
- A rich and extensive community engagement effort took place in three stages from 2021 to 2023. A detailed summary of all engagement activities is included as Attachment B.
- This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Parks Master Plan – Places, consists of a set of 15 user-friendly documents containing 50 recommendations directly informed by extensive engagement with the Kitchener community and City staff. The Places Parks Master Plan presents the background, engagement findings, and recommendations for park-specific themes and infrastructure to support the City's strategic vision within a fiscally responsible implementation framework over the next 10 years.

BACKGROUND:

In 2021, Council resolved to direct staff to complete an update of the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan. The new Parks Master Plan is titled Places & Spaces.

Spaces

Approved by Council in August 2022 and recognized as the City's Park's Plan pursuant to the requirements of the Planning Act, Spaces reflects a strategic focus on the location and number of parks today and in the future and provides strategic context for securing new parks. Spaces informed the update to the Park Dedication By-Law and policy; the tools the City has historically relied on to secure new parkland or cash-in-lieu of parkland through development. Advancing a Parkland Acquisition Strategy to assess opportunities for meeting parkland needs in neighbourhoods that are below the parkland targets is one of the key recommendations of Spaces.

Following Council approval of Spaces, the Province initiated changes to the Planning Act through Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, receiving Royal Assent in October 2022. Appeals which were filed on the new by-law were withdrawn in August 2024. With the conclusion of the appeals process and City organizational restructuring to respond to the objectives of Bill 23, staff in Development and Housing Approvals will resume the development of the Parkland Acquisition Strategy.

Places

The second part of the Parks Master Plan, and the subject of this report, Places reflects a plan to enhance the quality of park experiences through a responsive approach to evolving needs, changing social, economic, and environmental contexts, enabling the City of Kitchener to build and shape parks and open spaces for improved community outcomes. The 50 recommendations in Places are directly informed by an extensive and rich engagement with the Kitchener community and City staff, taking place from 2021 to 2023.

Places & Spaces documents are produced by City staff with strategically scoped consultant support. Together Places & Spaces completes the Parks Master Plan update, representing a bold vision for the future of parks and open spaces rooted entirely in Kitchener.

REPORT:

The Parks Master Plan – Places (Places), establishes a vision for and approach to developing a parks and open space system that is responsive to an evolving social, environmental, and economic context so that quality park experiences are provided for everyone. This master plan update has been directly informed by engagement with the community and reflects a made-in-Kitchener approach.

Document structure:

Due to the complex and interconnected nature of the value of parks to a community with their programming and infrastructure, rather than a single comprehensive document, Places is comprised of a set of 15 user-friendly topic-based documents. Each document addresses

park-specific themes or infrastructure and works with other documents where themes or infrastructure may overlap.

Places is comprised of the following 15 documents listed by title and summary of their content:

Title	Description
Places	An overarching document describing the engagement methods and findings, the development of the recommendations, a complete list of recommendations, and the implementation framework. Relevant connected strategies, a glossary of terms, and lists of engagement tools and sources are appended.
Community Gardens	Community gardens are a key part of a strong local food system. This document describes the history of City-administered allotment gardening in Kitchener, its present, and the recommendations for continued City support of community gardening into the future.
Community Health & Wellness	Many turn to parks and open spaces to maintain an active lifestyle and to support their mental health. This document explores the impact that parks and open spaces have on physical and mental well-being and provides recommendations to support their role during times of crisis or emergency.
Dedication	The opportunity to memorialize a loved one in a public space is important to Kitchener residents. This document describes the revised Tree and Bench Dedication program.
Dogs	Parks and open spaces are popular places to walk, run, or play with the family dog. This document looks at the increasing desire for dedicated spaces for dogs in parks and open spaces and includes recommendations that support the anticipated growth in dog ownership.
Downtown Kitchener	The core of the city presents unique opportunities and challenges for public park space. This document explores the limitations on creating new parks and open spaces downtown and makes recommendations to explore other ways of creating park experiences in the urban core.
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Parks and open spaces play an important role in climate adaptation and connection to nature. This document looks at how parks and open spaces might support other approved climate-adaptive plans and strategies already underway and how to strengthen the connection to and along the Grand River.
Park Amenities	Enough of the right kinds of benches, tables, and shade can enhance a person's experience in a park. This document establishes updated standards for providing functional amenities while looking at strategies to assess public washrooms and drinking water in parks.

Title	Description
Park Design Approach	There are over 275 maintained parks across the city. This document explores how parks and open spaces are organized and designed across Kitchener and makes recommendations to help create a connected network of unique and complementary park experiences.
Play	There are almost as many traditional play structures as there are parks in Kitchener. This document describes play infrastructure in Kitchener and how it can be re-examined and designed to support joy, play, and connection for people of all ages and abilities.
Signature & Feature Parks	Kitchener has five unique and distinct parks that offer novel experiences for Kitchener residents and beyond. The vision for a sixth along the Grand River is underway. This document looks at their value to and impact on the community over time and into the future.
Splashpads	Splashpads offer local opportunities for recreation and relief from the summer heat. This document includes recommendations that support construction of new splashpads in areas of need, and how the City can incorporate more efficient water use.
Sports & Games	Parks are home to the majority of the city's outdoor sportsfields, sport courts, and games. This document establishes updated standards for sportsfield and sports court facilities and recommends ways they can be effectively designed in public park spaces.
Trails & Lighting	A connected trail network enhances access to and through parks and open spaces. This document makes recommendations to support greater accessibility and connectivity across the city and along the Walter Bean Grand River Trail
Winter Use	Winter conditions change how parks are used. This document explores recommendations to support continued winter use and how that use is adapting to the realities of climate change.

Recommendations:

The Places part of the Parks Master Plan contains a total of 50 recommendations that will result in the development of policies, strategies, or capital projects. Of those, 13 that are initiated or are already underway as part of Council-approved connected strategies and policies or are a result of legislated requirements, have been formalized in this master plan. The remaining 37 recommendations are prioritized to guide the timing of their implementation within the 10-year forecast period.

Including community engagement, a total of twelve data sources were used to inform the development of recommendations for Places:

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies

- Comparative analysis
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Relevant data sources are listed with each recommendation on pages 40-55 of the Places overarching document, included as Attachment 'A'.

Major themes:

Seven major themes surfacing consistently across data sources have been used to organize and present findings that inform Places recommendations. Because major themes interrelate with one another, each has a positive association with the others, where positively impacting one theme is likely to have a positive impact on another theme.

- Accessibility
- Health and wellbeing
- Information
- Safety
- Environmental sustainability
- Inclusion
- Partnerships

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.** Implementation of actions from the parks master plan is referenced specifically.

More broadly, the 2023-2026 Strategic plan themes and goals served as the foundation to evaluate and prioritize the recommendations for implementation. Each criterion inspired by strategic themes was weighted in keeping with Kitchener's vision to ***"build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us – and each other."***

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Staff reviewed the 50 recommendations in Places against the anticipated 10-year financial forecast. Implementation of recommendations in this master plan are projected within a fiscally responsible 10-year framework of near-, mid-, and long-term priorities funded entirely by forecast budgets.

By prioritizing Places recommendations, the City of Kitchener is well-positioned to seek additional grant funding to support an accelerated implementation where appropriate.

Outcomes of recommended strategies or specific park master plans are not projected within the 10-year capital forecast and will require additional funding requests or re-prioritization of capital funds through the annual budget process as they are completed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

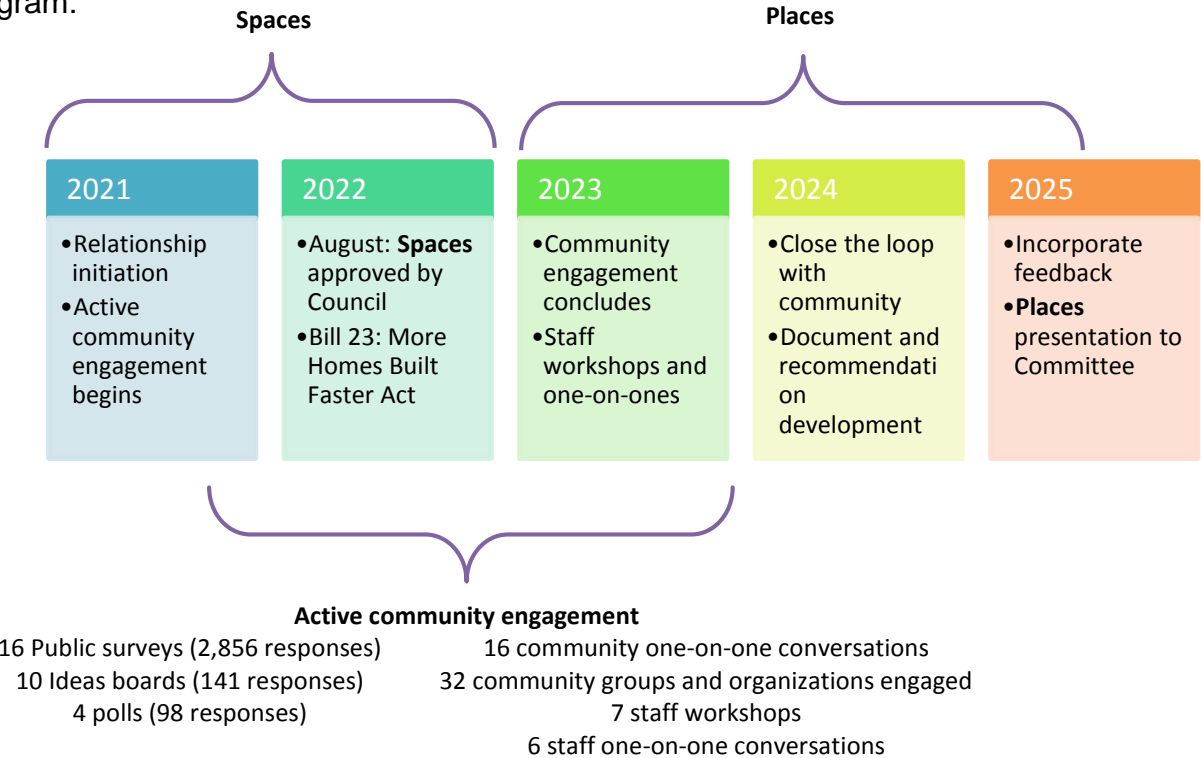
CONSULT - Engagement for the Parks Master Plan update began in 2021. Active community engagement took place from 2021 to 2023. The purpose of the engagement for Places was to understand how residents felt about the quality of their park experiences in Kitchener. The engagement effort asked three fundamental questions:

- 1. How are parks currently experienced?
- 2. How do we create parks that serve the community?
- 3. How do we create parks and open spaces that are welcoming and responsive to all?

For nearly three years through a layered and extensive engagement approach including in-person conversations with hundreds of community members and over thirty groups, organizations, committees and classrooms, focus groups, pop-up events, online surveys, polls, and digital engagement methods staff sought to hear the public’s perspectives on their experiences and needs in public parks and open spaces. Using a combination of in-person and digital tools and tactics, the overall engagement approach included three distinct active engagement stages:

- 1. Relationship initiation and development (2021)
- 2. Active community engagement (2021-2023)
- 3. Validation and feedback (2022-2023)

Key project milestones and public engagement activities are summarized in the following diagram:



A comprehensive summary of engagement tools and sources for Places is included on pages 78-83 in the Places overarching document (Attachment A). A detailed summary of Places & Spaces engagement milestones is included as Attachment B.

INFORM - This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the committee meeting. Engage subscribers were notified on March 17 of the date of the presentation of Places to the Committee. Email notifications were also sent to community groups and individuals who had participated in the engagement.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- INS-2022-281 Growth Related Funding Tools – Cumulative Impact Assessment
- INS-2022-224 Places & Spaces – Park Strategic Plan and Park Dedication Update
- INS-2021-05 Places & Spaces: A Parks & Open Spaces Strategy for Kitchener

APPROVED BY: Denise McGoldrick, General Manager of Infrastructure Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Attachment A – | Places Parks Master Plan:
Places
Community Gardens
Community Health & Wellness
Dedication
Dogs
Downtown Kitchener
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Play
Signature & Feature Parks
Splashpads
Sports & Games
Trails & Lighting
Winter Use |
| Attachment B – | Summary of Engagement Activities, 2021-2025 |
| Attachment C – | Places Parks Master Plan Recommendations Summary |