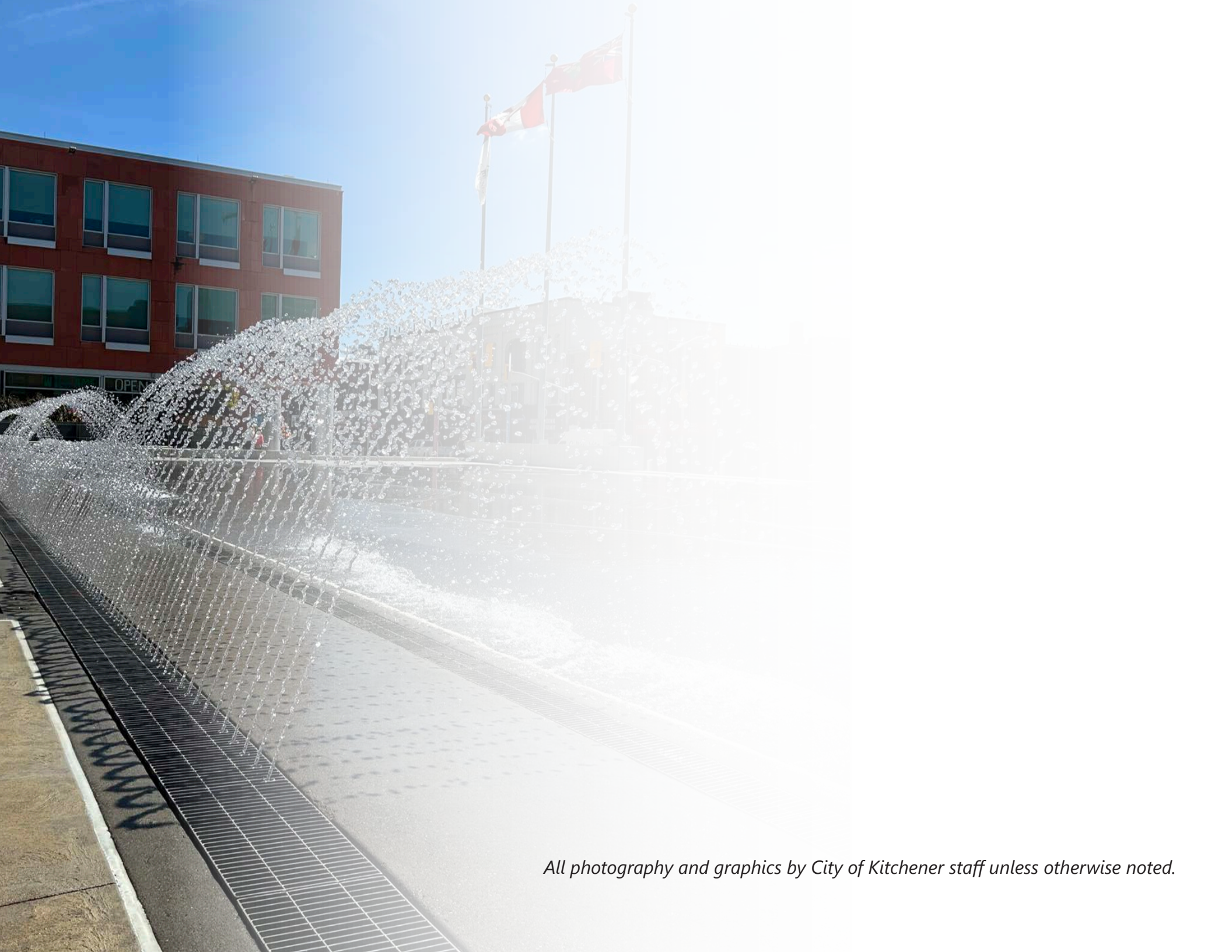




Downtown Kitchener

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan



All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.



Related sections

Places

Spaces

Community Health & Wellness

Dogs

Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation

Park Design Approach

Signature & Feature Parks

Splashpads

Trails & Lighting

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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. 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, Métis, and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.



Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

When considering park space in Kitchener's downtown core, the focus has historically been on Victoria Park, the city's signature park space. Victoria Park dominates the downtown experience and is often promoted as a reason to visit the city's commercial core. Other spaces downtown which add to the public experience include parkettes and urban squares that have supported the commercial, employment, and local residential population over the past 50 years.

Parks are a critical component of city living. Changing development trends, introduction of ION light rail transit, increased housing, and a new modern planning framework have led to a significant shift from primarily manufacturing and employment uses in Downtown Kitchener to a mixed use, growing community with increased housing units. Downtown will continue to modernize and evolve into a high-density mixed use area that will include places for people to live, work, and play. This booklet intends to profile the park spaces downtown, tie in existing and future policies that influence downtown, and provide a vision for downtown park development.



Existing parks and opportunities

There are seven parks within Downtown Kitchener excluding Victoria Park. Though just outside of the commercial core, it is well recognized that Victoria Park serves as the open space anchor for all activities in the downtown area, from commercial interests to events, and residential development.

As the commercial core continues to become more intensified with housing units, profiling each City park helps to understand needs and gaps.

Of the seven locations downtown that are operated and classified as park spaces, three offer potential to be re-imagined as modern spaces: Civic Centre Park (6,250 m²), Market Green (1,170 m²) and Francis Green (1,130 m²). These parks have largely been unchanged for two decades or more, and are the three largest park properties within the downtown community.

Map legend:

Park spaces

- 1 Civic Centre Park
- 2 Market Green
- 3 Francis Green
- 4 Oktoberfest Platz
- 5 Cenotaph Green
- 6 Vogelsang Green
- 7 Speakers Corner
- 8 *Victoria Park*

Alternative open spaces

- A Carl Zehr Square
- B Gaukel Street
- C Rotary Plaza
- D Kitchener Market
- E Regional Courthouse
- F Goudies Lane

--- Limit of downtown boundary



1 Civic Centre Park

Size: 6,250 m²

Style: Passive (no programming or activities), parkette

Features:

Since 2005, Civic Centre Park has been home to “Protecting the Memory”, a memorial donated by the Kitchener Professional Firefighters Association. A September 11th Memorial was added in 2012. The memorials have become the focal point of the space, and are surrounded by open green space with almost complete canopy coverage of large stature trees, seating and a small playground.

Opportunities:

The park’s cover of large stature trees offers a well shaded passive park experience. These large trees are important to protect and restrict any full scale renovation designs. Therefore, a re-imagined park renovation is unlikely until significant tree replacements are necessary.



2 Market Green

Size: 1,170 m²

Style: Passive, parkette

Features:

This green space at the south end of downtown has largely been untouched for over 30 years. It is a green respite bordered by Duke and Scott streets, featuring almost 50% large stature tree canopy coverage, seating and feature shrub and flower displays.

Opportunities:

Market Green is small in size and located on the perimeter of the downtown core. It is currently a passive park that features large trees on its southern edge and horticultural beds that frame the green space in from the road. Its small size and peripheral location make a re-imagined park renovation a lower impact to the downtown community.



3 Francis Green

Size: 1,130 m²

Style: Passive, parkette

Features:

Francis Green is most notable for its prominent displays of restored industrial artifacts, five in total. The park was expanded in the early 2000's to include part of the former Charles and King street intersection, and was re-developed in 2003 to what it is today - a passive seating area featuring a mix of green and hardscape.

Opportunities:

Francis Green is a relatively small sized park, located more centrally in the downtown core. The park features more hardscape and industrial artifact settings and is intended for passive use. The park is surrounded by high density residential development, and at the time of writing this master plan, the park is subject to be re-imagined in response to these developments.



4 Oktoberfest Platz

Size: 280 m²

Style: Passive, urban square

Features:

The smallest of the downtown parks, Oktoberfest Platz has seen the most change in modern times. The former location of the Oktoberfest Maypole, the space was reconstructed in 2002 and again in 2017 through the development of the Region of Waterloo's Light Rail Transit system.

Opportunities:

At the time of writing this master plan, the park is once again under transformation in partnership with the redevelopment of the former Oktoberfest Haus. The building will be adapted to a four storey office building with ground floor retail. Oktoberfest Platz will be reconstructed to suit the future demand of the building to a modernized plaza space in keeping with the design of Vogelsang Green.

Image by Logical Landscaping, 2022



5 Cenotaph Green

Size: 790 m²

Style: Passive, urban square

Features:

Cenotaph Green is a national monument site owned by the federal government and operated as a park space by the City of Kitchener. The area was renovated in 2018 as part of a larger road reconstruction and placemaking effort. The renovation refreshed the design which remains centered around the monument honouring Canadian Armed Forces.



6 Vogelsang Green

Size: 790 m²

Style: Passive, urban square

Features:

Vogelsang Green was modernized as part of a larger downtown road reconstruction and placemaking effort in 2018. The park space has been adapted to suit a larger residential cohort in Downtown, and accommodate small scale events. The park has a design palette that will be replicated in other downtown park spaces - overhead string lights, iconic vertical entries, bench, and counter seating.



7 Speakers Corner

Size: 680 m²

Style: Passive, urban square

Features:

Speakers Corner is an expanded boulevard that is classified as park space because of its function as a passive seating area. The space is a central feature in Oktoberfest ceremonies and is home to the Oktoberfest Glockenspiel. The space was last renovated in 2009.



8 Victoria Park

Just outside of the downtown core is Victoria Park, the city's Signature Park. Victoria Park is the anchor green space for new developments in the downtown core. It continues to be a central feature of not only downtown but all surrounding communities, and the city as a whole. Increased population density in this area has caused increased pressures on Victoria Park. There is a need to examine not only the park itself, but the network of parks within the downtown to alleviate these pressures.

Efforts are currently underway to update the Victoria Park master plan, using modern technologies to document where, when and how people use the park. As development continues in urban areas, the City can use this data to project increases in park use, both in Victoria Park and the surrounding downtown park network.



Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Alternative open space:

A Carl Zehr Square

The second largest (approximately 3,200 m²) and one of the more prominent public spaces downtown, Carl Zehr Square, is an important public space in downtown Kitchener. It is home to many annual events and festivals including Oktoberfest and the Christkindl Market.

The space was re-constructed in 2023 to update the event space and parking garage below. The featured fountain was re-imagined as an interactive splash pad, adding to the city's inventory, while maintaining its function as a maintained ice rink in the winter.

B Gaukel Street

Gaukel Street was temporarily closed beginning in 2020 to support a residential tower construction. The idea of a permanent closure of the roadway began to gain traction and as of 2024, Gaukel Street has been converted to a fully pedestrianized space. A featured play structure was added directly to the road surface, opening in 2024.



Photo by Eve Nadler

Alternative open space:

C **Kitchener City Hall: Rotary Plaza (Duke St. Entrance)**

By size, the outdoor public space “behind” City Hall is the third largest downtown public space (approximately 2,000 m²). Though secondary to the King St. side of City Hall, the open space provides passive seating areas, well-shaded courtyard entries, public art, structured planting beds and terraced plaza space.

D **Kitchener Market**

Kitchener’s Farmer’s Market is one of the oldest continuous local farmer’s markets in Canada, originally founded in 1869. The Market moved to its current location at 300 King Street in 2004. The Market features an outdoor, public patio space approximately 1,400 m² in size, and a public fountain facing Eby St. N.

E **Waterloo Region Courthouse**

The Waterloo Region Courthouse is the entire city block at 85 Frederick Street between Weber, Frederick, Scott and Duke. Constructed in 2014, it is a public facility with over 3,000 m² of courtyards and seating areas providing a passive, public open space setting.

F **Goudies Lane**

Goudies Lane is an award winning placemaking project featuring impressive murals, string lighting, and ample seating. In the summer, residents enjoy the live music performances it facilitates.



Existing downtown park planning framework

Growing Together (2024)

Building on the recommendations of the Planning Around Rapid Transit Stations (PARTS) Plans, the Growing Together project created an entirely new land use planning framework for Kitchener's Protected Major Transit Station Areas (PMTSAs), which includes Downtown Kitchener. This framework introduces new Strategic Growth Area land uses and zones to permit high-density mixed use development along the ION light-rail system. Growing Together was approved in March 2024. Kitchener's PMTSAs are intended to accommodate a large portion of Kitchener's future growth, including residential and non-residential uses. Downtown Kitchener will intensify significantly in the coming years and park space and public realm has emerged as a priority. Downtown Kitchener is also to be planned as the City's primary focal point for public gatherings and events. Through the PARTS and Growing Together process, several public space recommendations were made including:

- Animate laneways such as Goudies and Halls Lanes.
- Close Breithaupt Street to traffic and create a shared street on Gaukel Avenue.
- Consider new park opportunities through re-development. As new local business development occurs, intentional projects will need to improve public spaces for everyone to enjoy. "Attention needs to be paid to creating streets and laneways that in themselves can become destinations" (PARTS Central, 2016).
- Encourage mid-block pedestrian connections, suggesting through use of privately owned public spaces (POPS).
- Enhance connections to existing neighbourhood parks including Sandhills, Mike Wagner Green, and Kaufman Park.
- Implement a neighbourhood park within PARTS Central in the Innovation District Area.
- Revitalize under-utilized spaces: Cenotaph, Vogelsang, Francis and Stabler Greens, specifically.
- Support the development of the multi-modal transit hub trail connection to the Iron Horse Trail.

GOUDIES LANE



Spaces (2022)

The Spaces part of the Parks Master Plan addresses the quantity of park space. It established targets and necessary tools to develop park space across the city.

Downtown Kitchener in particular was identified as a critical needs area. As a community, it is well below the city-wide average in park space (4.7 m² per person), it has a low average annual income, and has a high density of apartment dwellings (93%), indicating a greater reliance on public open space. Victoria Park is a critical asset to the surrounding area.

No targeted properties to acquire were suggested in the plan. However, it specifically detailed a need for park space planning in the downtown core and a need to secure additional park land within the community to support this growing population through a parkland acquisition strategy.

Planning Act and Bill 23 (2023)

The Provincial Planning Act enables municipalities to collect park space or cash-in-lieu of park space through developments within a city's boundary. The amount of park land calculated under the Act is either based on a percentage of land (2% or 5%) or an alternative rate of 300 hectares per number of residential units proposed, whichever is larger.

Over time and due to changing provincial legislation, the alternative rate has decreased from the original 300 hectares per residential unit, and was capped as recently as November 2022 (see next page for cap value). Decreasing the rate has added significant challenges to ensuring the public has adequate access to local park space. Two recent significant changes to the Planning Act are:

2016:

New alternative rate for cash-in-lieu applications only set at one hectare per 500 residential units

2022:

Alternative rates amended as follows:

- **Parkland:** One hectare for every 600 units
- **Cash-in-lieu:** One hectare for every 1,000 units
- **New cap:** All park dedication capped at a maximum of 10% of the total land area, up to 15% if greater than five hectares

Spaces (2022) illustrates that park dedication is the exclusive tool Kitchener has and continues to rely on to create modern park land. As the rates have been reduced and caps introduced, this directly affects the City's ability to provide park land. Downtown and high density areas will see the greatest impact – as much as an 85% reduction in park dedication in these areas.



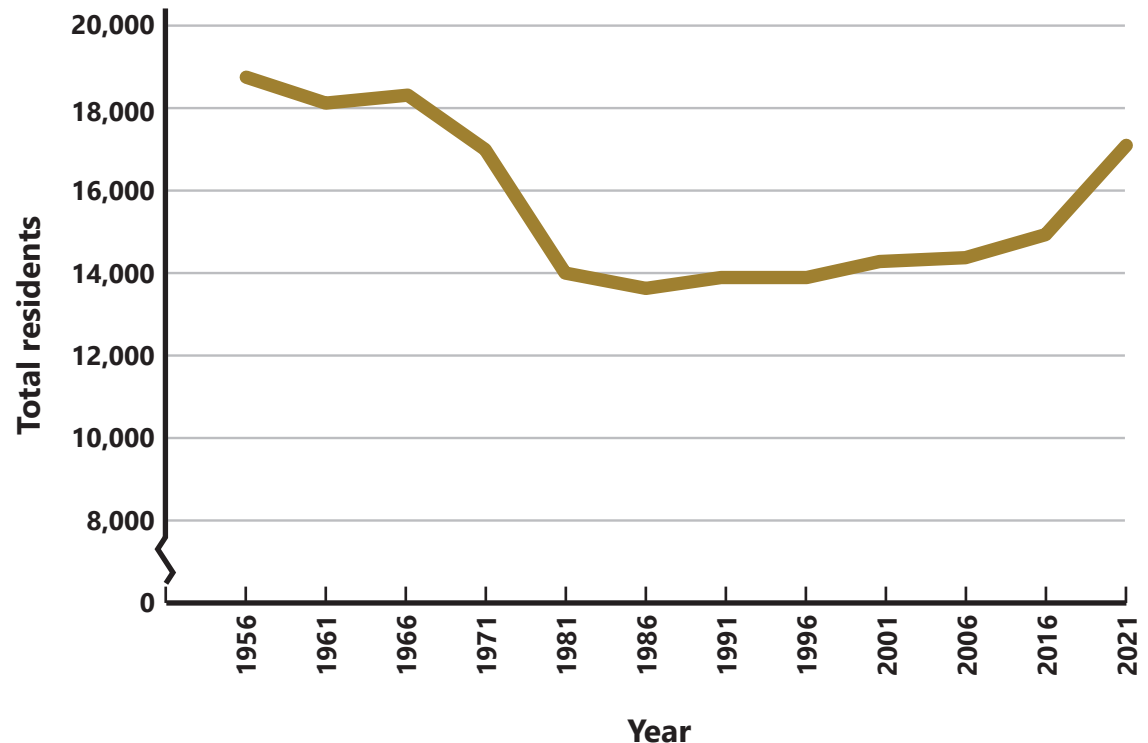
Downtown growth

The park spaces downtown have largely been in place since the 1970s with small expansions as early as the 2000s.

Looking at past development can help put into context modern pressures on existing park space and creating new parks. This is not intended as a complete record of the historical eras of Downtown Kitchener, but rather to illustrate the modern pressures on park land.

Population profile

At the time of writing this master plan, there are 13 active high rise residential towers under construction within the downtown core. Development in downtown has surged, particularly over the past decade. The assumption could be made that the city has been growing quickly over several decades. However, census data shows that the steep increase in population downtown occurred from 2016 to 2021 and is only returning to the previous generation of total residents. A steady decline in population occurred between 1966 and 1981, likely due to a boom of suburban growth.



Early downtown development

As the population began moving toward to the suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s, downtown development slowed. There was simply no market to create living spaces and the focus shifted to commercial opportunities. At this time, the downtown core was geared to offices and shopping centres. Places to spend a lunch break or have a coffee became the most common public open space. Nearly all of the park spaces developed at this time were passive green spaces.

This downtown era lasted until the City's creation of the Economic Development Investment Fund (EDIF) in 2004 and the resulting re-investment in significant developments.

The first major investment was the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy. The downtown Kitchener campus opened in 2008, leading to further development opportunities as the market for downtown investment opportunities was re-ignited. Just across the intersection of King and Victoria, Kaufman Lofts turned a former industrial space into residential lofts. Other renovations followed such as the Lang Tannery and the launching of Communitel, further influencing and increasing interest in downtown living.

From 2016 - 2018, the first modern high rises were under development at 1 Victoria, City Centre Condos, and 100 Victoria. They are each between 18-27 storey condos.

Downtown Kitchener Community Improvement Plan (2008-2019)

To re-imagine downtown development and to compete with other cities for development investment, Kitchener allowed all development, including high rise buildings, to be developed with no City-levied development charges or park requirements. This exemption was in place until 2019 for development charges, and 2022 for park dedication.

LRT development (2015-2019)

The announcement, construction, and opening of Region of Waterloo's Light Rail Transit (LRT) System in 2019 led to larger, more dense residential developments. Property values began rising dramatically, particularly in areas around the transit stations as the economics of development were aligned. Interest rates remained low while demand for land steadily increased. Victoria Park was much more widely accessible as the primary open space for park and recreational needs downtown. Use of the park further increased as a result of growing population.



COVID-19 and the housing crisis

Economic conditions that sparked the boom of development through the LRT construction reached a peak during the COVID-19 and housing crises, and were experienced well beyond downtown. Lending rates reached near zero percent interest, and demand for housing skyrocketed leading to never-before-seen property value increases.

From a parks perspective, the downtown park dedication exemption remained in place during the majority of this time, yielding only a handful of opportunities to create new publicly owned park space through adjacent developments.

Growing Together: 2024 and the future

Development in the Downtown has slowed following the recent peak. However, demand for housing remains. Kitchener has implemented a new modern planning framework known as Growing Together for the Downtown and surrounding Protected Major Transit Station Areas to guide and permit new development as the area continues to evolve into a contemporary high density mixed-use transit supportive community. These policies set expectations, guide developments, and enable responsible growth to enable more housing.



Residential profile

The increasing trend of downtown residences is changing the reliance on public park land. Smaller living units are being developed as a response to the cost of building and living in those spaces. Zoning permissions are changing to allow significantly less parking. The built form and amenities that support them impact those who can comfortably live there.

While there are many families with children downtown and their numbers are expected to grow, most of the new households moving downtown do not have children. This shapes park and recreational needs. Changing cultural diversity also needs to be reflected in all park spaces including those downtown.

A shift in park land development is therefore needed to design for those living downtown. Similarly, planning park space as it relates to public transit is important.

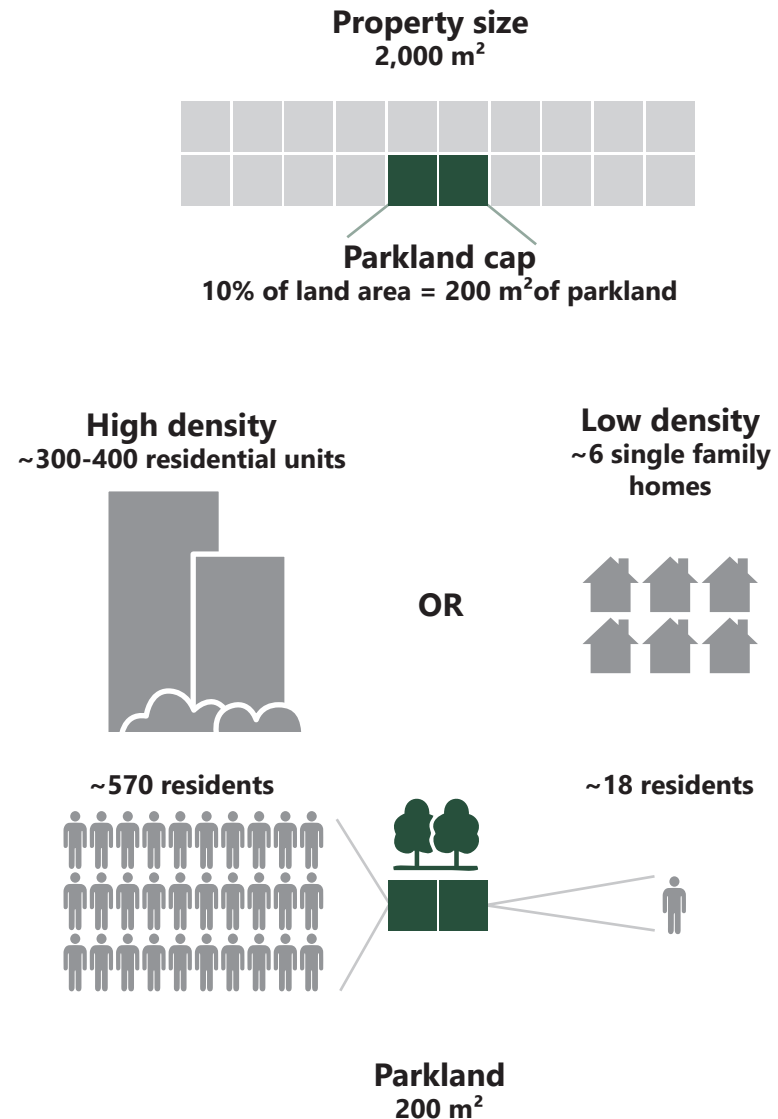


Addressing growth

Under current planning regulations, park space and park land development requirements in dense residential areas has been greatly reduced from previous requirements. Conversely, the lowest density developments yield the highest amount of park land per person. Downtown Kitchener is almost exclusively an area of intense growth and increasing residential densities. No matter how high or small units are developed, park land is capped at one tenth the land area. This means the opportunity to develop park land in dense areas is severely limited.

There is a fundamental disconnect between encouraging intensification and the Planning Act tools available to provide public park space to support it. Park dedication regulations cannot be relied on as the exclusive way to develop parks any longer.

To illustrate this point, the graphic to the right demonstrates the difference in the number of people that can reside in approximately 2,000 m², and the impact of park dedication limits on the delivery of park space in a high density and low density development scenario.



Future opportunities

How can the City continue to provide adequate, quality, and sustainable public park land amidst new developments, competition for land, and with fewer resources to build parks? The simple answer is: the City has to adjust expectations, parkland area targets, funding sources, property inventory, and even the notion of what a park is in the downtown context.

Acquisition strategy

Efficiently and effectively directing funding is key. An acquisition strategy was recommended in Spaces (2022) and endorsed by Council. Due to shifting Provincial policies and park dedication by-law appeals, this initiative had to be paused until the appeal process concluded.

The park dedication tool was historically relied on almost exclusively to provide park land. It is critical to update the park dedication by-law to reflect current legislative framework, better understand its limitations in delivering downtown park requirements, and make recommendations on funding and resources towards to meet downtown park objectives.

Privately owned public spaces

Few Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) exist in Kitchener. Spaces and its Park Dedication Policy classify these as Alternative Open Spaces intended to augment the public park system. Typically, these spaces are linked to high density residential areas, for example, on top of parking garages or decks.

POPS can be effective in otherwise vacant open spaces. Up to 25% of a proposed POPS is eligible to be considered as part of the required park dedication area. This accurately reflects Kitchener's position that these spaces are supportive only and do not replace public park space.



Downtown parks portfolio

Opportunities to redevelop existing parks in the downtown core will emerge either through capital budget planning or re-development partnerships, as laid out by the PARTS Central plan. Oktoberfest Platz is being re-constructed as part of a developer-build owners agreement with the former Oktoberfest Hall. Gaukel Street has been in the process of a full pedestrian conversion since 2019.

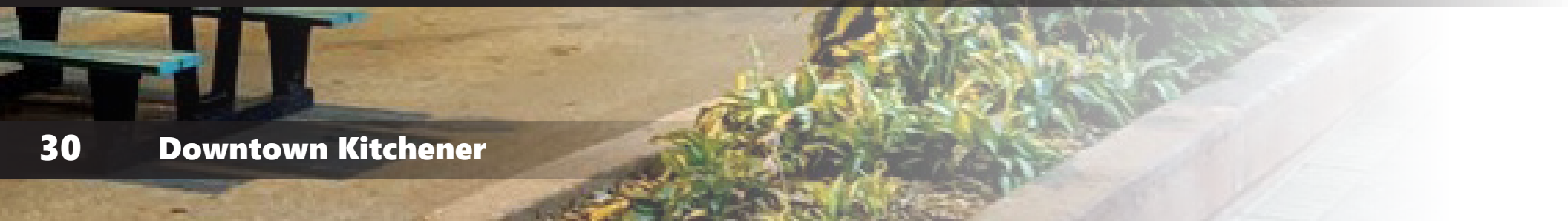
At the time of writing this master plan, only three of the identified parks and supporting public spaces have not been renovated within the last 15 years: Francis Green, Market Green and Civic Centre Park. The latter two locations share similar features of open green space and large canopy cover, both on the fringe of downtown.

Francis Green is expected to be re-constructed as part of an agreement with the 30 Francis Street development. This will allow the space to offer an engaging and welcoming park experience downtown in a small 1,000 m² park space.





Data Sources



This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.



Legislation



Equitable engagement



Engagement with the broader community



Engagement with City of Kitchener departments



Engagement with partner organizations



Comparative analysis



External research



Policy



City of Kitchener strategies



Region of Waterloo strategies



Best practices



City of Kitchener staff experience



Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

When presented with downtown development options, parties participating in engagement ranked their importance in the following order: 1) creating fewer but larger park spaces, 2) improving existing park spaces, 3) creating more but smaller parks, and 4) expanding Victoria Park.

Inclusion

Engagement participants shared visions for downtown parks now and in the future. Visions desired parks to have:

- Connectivity between public spaces;
- Green and natural elements;
- Places to relax and unwind;
- Social opportunities;
- Variety of and unique elements and reasons to be at the park;
- Welcoming spaces;
- Year-round options.

These spaces should be inclusive, creative, innovative, and accessible in all designs.

Future park spaces in Downtown Kitchener will be intentionally designed to meet the variety of needs of residents by offering year-round, welcoming, and social green spaces.

"Downtown park spaces should be creative and innovative public spaces that make the most of what we have, are accessible, part of a connected network, people-focused, and animated by diverse, inclusive programming"

Health and wellbeing

Recent residential growth in the downtown core was seen as negative in the engagement data. Specifically, respondents thought spaces were too crowded and wanted more parks and green spaces as population increases and intensifies.

“The parks aren’t getting any bigger but there are more and more people wanting to spend time outdoors and near trees”

Key considerations suggested for downtown Kitchener parks included:

- Committing to building high quality outdoor spaces for residents living in densely populated environments;
- Creating multi-purpose spaces;
- Ensuring resources are available to create and maintain meaningful spaces;
- Re-imagining the potential of gray (alternative) spaces;
- Understanding how community members would prefer to use public spaces with an emphasis on equitable engagement.

Partnerships

Recognizing that expanding and building new parks can take a long time and space is limited downtown, top short-term ideas include closing roads to create pedestrian plazas, developing partnerships between parks and urban plazas, and creating temporary pop-up park programming.



Photo by Amy Martin



Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Along with many other municipalities in Ontario, Kitchener is shifting the way it creates new park spaces, particularly in highly urban environments. In the past, Kitchener has relied on developments to require new park land; however, as the downtown population grows, this approach will not keep up with the demand for public park land.

While downtown is not the only community in Kitchener without enough park space, it is representative of how the City can adjust and respond to a new era of park and city development. The recommendations developed here directly address existing downtown park concerns, though the principles can be applied to other Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) as they continue to develop.



01: Prioritize parkland as a use of current City-owned properties

For suitable City-owned lands located in areas identified in Spaces as High or Critical Needs, prioritize parkland when considering land-use modification to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets when assessed in accordance with the City-Owned Land Disposition Framework (DSD-2024-044).

Bramm Yards

The Bramm Yards is a City-owned parking lot in Downtown Kitchener. At eight acres in size, it is the largest City-owned land parcel that can be used to support future employment land use. Prior to becoming a parking lot, it was one of the City's Satellite Operations facilities. All city operations activities were centralized 2011, making the Bramm Yards redundant. The Bramm Yard facility was decommissioned, demolished, and renovated as a parking facility in 2014.

In the City's Official Plan, the Bramm Yards are part of the Urban Growth Centre – an area of the city designated for higher intensity developments.

The lands are expected to accommodate a higher intensity, mixed-use development. The Bramm Yards are also part of the Innovation District and are expected to accommodate major office developments.

Master planning efforts are currently underway for this site. Although it will not be exclusively park space, a well-designed public space is the basis for its future design. This will likely be in the form of publicly accessible passive space similar to the Kitchener Market and Regional Courthouse. As the design progresses, pursuing active and unique recreational opportunities is the priority for downtown open spaces.

Rockway Golf Course

Rockway Golf Course was built in 1935 by renowned Canadian golf course architect, Stanley Thompson. The course is built on 44 hectares, touching Courtland Avenue and Schneider Creek. Approximately 35% of the course is on floodplain lands and zoned Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC-1). The remaining property is zoned as Open Space and Recreation (OSR-2). The course is one of two municipally owned and operated golf courses. The other is Doon Valley Golf Course at the south end of the city, touching Highway 401 and the Grand River.

Publicly owned golf courses provide open space value to the community. Spaces recognizes them as Alternative Open Spaces, generally available and accessible in the shoulder seasons. In a sense, they provide this open space at no cost to the community during these shoulder seasons, albeit limited by its primary use as a golf course during peak season.

Rockway Golf Course is in a unique location within the core of the city's "Central Neighbourhoods". Rockway's vast open space could meet current and future park land needs for all central communities as the population intensifies. Downtown is not directly connected to Rockway, but it can be accessed by existing LRT connections between communities. It is thought of as a transit connected corridor.

As long as the golf course continues to operate, its value for community recreation should continue to be promoted, explored, and maximized where feasible to blend the land uses.

04: Alternative spaces

Pursue opportunities for recreation beyond park property boundaries. Continue cross-departmental re-imagination and adaptation of spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.

The city's downtown road network and transportation demand on those roads has changed dramatically since the city was established. The City has explored the possibility of converting roads to pedestrian-first spaces downtown. The temporary closure of a section of Gaukel Street in 2020 to support a residential tower construction spurred the idea of a permanent closure. Gaukel Street has since been converted to a fully pedestrianized space. As of June 2024, an additional play structure was added to Gaukel Pocket Park.

In October 2022, a temporary park was created for one week on King Street, closing the roadway to vehicle traffic and adding pop-up games, play structures, gathering spaces, and seating areas.

These initiatives can be looked to as examples for other roadways or laneways, such as Goudies, Bell, and Halls lanes. As park space is more challenging to develop Downtown, it is recommended that opportunities to develop recreation options in non-traditional spaces be prioritized where possible.



16: Active uses downtown

Encourage the development of active park uses in downtown parks. Consideration should be made for sport, play, activities and games during redevelopment opportunities.

Park spaces within the downtown core primarily offer passive recreation. As it stands, there is a lack of active use opportunities within downtown park spaces. This recommendation aims to encourage the consideration of active uses during downtown redevelopment opportunities.



Recommendations summary

01: Prioritize parkland as a use of current City-owned properties

For suitable City-owned lands located in areas identified in Spaces as High or Critical Needs, prioritize parkland when considering land-use modification to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets when assessed in accordance with the City-Owned Land Disposition Framework (DSD-2024-044).

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