



## **Kitchener Citizens for Liveable Development**

### **Parks Report Delegation Notes – May 26, 2025**

Respected Mayor and Councillors, my name is Peggy Nickels and I'm here to speak to you on behalf of Kitchener Citizens for Liveable Development. Our group grew out of the previous Downtown Development Committee, led by Hal Jaeger. Our membership numbers a little over 80 residents, most of whom live in 8 neighbourhoods in and surrounding downtown Kitchener.

As urban neighbourhoods, our purpose is to work collaboratively with one another, City staff and Council, developers, and other stakeholders for planning and development that builds livable, affordable, sustainable, socially inclusive neighbourhoods in and around Downtown Kitchener.

Our goals are to:

- Provide a networking forum for planning and development issues
- Identify, educate and inform members and neighbourhoods about planning issues
- Establish a central website for planning information, contacts, and other useful resources
- Share expertise in addressing planning issues
- Develop ways to collaborate with local government, planners, developers, and other stakeholders
- Act collectively on common concerns, when appropriate
- Promote neighbourhood engagement in development issues, when appropriate

We were so please to read the Parks Report, even if it's over 600 pages long! It's comprehensive, informative, and well-documented. In spite of its length, its very readable, and the booklets allow us as citizens to easily address the areas of greatest interest to us. We read

the main body of the report and focused most on the sections related to Downtown Kitchener and Natural Spaces and Climate Adaptation.

It's important to emphasize that members of our group, like other downtown residents, have chosen urban life because we love the vibrancy, diversity, walkability and many other benefits of downtown living. We can walk to the Market, easily take in local festivals, bike to school and the library, shop at local stores, and dine out without having to find parking. With that, we also accept and even appreciate the other aspects of living in the core: more sirens, busier traffic, more people, and yes, more development. Our goal is to ensure that development includes all the elements essential to healthy urban living, including adequate the green spaces and tree canopy that we know are so essential to our well-being and to environmental sustainability.

Now, more than ever, urban living needs to be green. The role of parks as essential for community health and wellbeing was highlighted by our experience of living through COVID. As our summers grow hotter, the need for more green space and trees to offset the heat island effect, especially in the downtown core, becomes even more crucial to our desire and ability to be outside. The fact that two booklets in the Places Report – Community Health and Wellness, and Natural Spaces and Climate Adaptation – indicate that the City is well aware of this, too.

that's why we were very happy to see a recommendation in the DTK booklet that calls for prioritizing parkland as a use of current City-owned properties, particularly in areas identified in the Spaces Report (approved by Council in 2023) as High or Critical Needs. The Place Report also points out that this is necessary to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets.

A second recommendation in the DTK booklet is to consider alternate spaces where park space is limited to pursue recreational opportunities. We are invited to re-imagine and adapt spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.

Gaukel Street and Goudies Lane are already great examples of how this can be done. In addition, we would like to see these areas "greened" to the maximum possible. A boulevard could be planted on Gaukel and trees could be planted in the centre to provide additional shade to an area that is extremely hot in the summer. There could still be space for picnic tables, existing container stalls, and pedestrian walkways, and the public would appreciate and benefit from the additional shade and softening of the hard streetscape. An idea for greening laneways is green walls, using non-invasive vines that would be appropriate for brickwork, help cool buildings, and add greenery to the lanes where trees can't grow.

We also support the third recommendation, to encourage the development of active park uses in downtown parks and public spaces. Consideration should be made for sport, play, activities

and games during redevelopment opportunities. There are not enough outdoor play spaces in DTK, especially for teenagers.

On page 28, the report poses the question: “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?” Their answer is that “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.”

We do not think the expectations of what a park should be need to change. The Report has already stated the importance of green space for people’s health and wellbeing, and city’s health in terms of climate change. We can’t just adjust the notion of what a park is for those living in the downtown. If the City is truly committed to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, it needs to make green space available to ALL of its residents, not just those who can afford to live in suburban single family homes, which already have private green space in the form of their front and backyards.

On page 38, the Parks Report states: “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.”

This statement suggests that the vision for Bramm Yards is to provide concrete public space, rather than green public space. When 20 citizens of Victoria Park and Cherry Park met with City officials in the Fall of 2023, VPNA strongly recommended that a significant part (40%) of this 8 hectare site be green space. Maybe that was too idealistic, but to see no mention of green space by the Parks department, not the Economic or Planning Department - is very disheartening. This area provides the City with an opportunity to showcase an ideal mix of commercial, residential development, and green space. When you have the chance, why not imbed the 4.7 sq. m./person of green park space that you aspire to, including the 30 % tree canopy that is your goal for 2050

There are many opportunities for the City to engage citizens in parks improvements by partnering with Neighbourhood Association around tree planting and stewardship; Local parks projects such as naturalization, pollinator gardens, rain gardens; and promotion of these engagement opportunities.

We’d like to end by thanking staff and council for your commitment to making this a liveable city, and thank you for your consideration of our comments.