

**REPORT TO:** Climate Change and Environment Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** June 19, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Natalie Goss, Manager Policy & Research, 519-783-8933

**PREPARED BY:** Mike Balch, Planner (Policy), 519-783-8928

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All Ward

**DATE OF REPORT:** June 3, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2025-280

**SUBJECT:** Kitchener 2051 Official Plan Climate and Energy Technical Background Study Update

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**For Information.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:**

- The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the Climate and Energy Technical Background Study prepared to support the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Kitchener is preparing a new Official Plan (OP) – referred to as Kitchener 2051. An OP is a document that shapes the way a city grows and develops. Provincial legislation, specifically 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.

As a part of this process a number of technical studies were conducted to provide staff with best practices and recommendations for policy development. Sustainable Solutions Group was retained to develop the Climate and Energy Technical Background Study and emissions modelling for the proposed growth scenarios.

## **REPORT:**

The City of Kitchener has ambitious goals of advancing community energy solutions in pursuit of climate, economic and energy security objectives. In 2018, the Region of Waterloo, area municipalities, and local energy service providers approved the Community Energy Investment Strategy (CEIS). Its goal is to improve the Region's economic competitiveness and quality of life through the coordination of targeted energy investments.

That year, Kitchener also endorsed TransformWR the region's collective community climate action plan which committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. The following year, City Council declared a Climate emergency. More recently in 2024, Kitchener has increased its corporate climate commitments to net zero emissions by 2050 and will be establishing a corporate climate adaptation plan through a subsequent part of its corporate climate action plan.

In July of 2024, planning staff retained Sustainable Solutions Group (SSG) through an RFP process to develop a Climate and Energy Technical Background Study. The intent of this study was to provide strategic direction on how the OP could be positioned to support a thriving community as we adapt to the changing climate and transition to a low carbon community.

The final study is attached to this report as Appendix A. The study provides a summary of the existing Kitchener, Waterloo Region, and Provincial policy framework, best practices in comparable municipalities, the current state of climate science, and recommendations for potential policy directions. This was supported by a database of policies that provide the City with a broad range of options in drafting Kitchener 2051.

### Study Findings and Recommendations

The Study concluded that climate change will result in widespread adverse impacts to people, the natural environment, and our infrastructure. These hazards are expected to continue, and worsen over time, and that the economic cost will similarly grow. The state of the science made clear that a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) is urgent, and policy solutions must address multiple challenges faced by the community, particularly residents with higher vulnerability.

It outlined that Kitchener has made steps towards addressing climate change, including through the declaration of a climate emergency, and a history of leadership in climate and energy. The City is unique in its ownership of the local gas distribution utility and its connection to the electrical distribution utility, which positions the organization for better coordination for energy and development planning.

While the city has historically had a dispersed development pattern, the study highlights the investment and focused growth within its existing boundaries, with an emphasis on the downtown core and major transit station areas (MTSAs). This form of development is conducive to not only district energy systems, but also transit and zero emissions transportation-oriented development.

With regard to the Official Plan, the study suggested that a systematic approach could be taken to climate planning, which can direct how the city will grow and change, while leveraging the various policy tools that are available. This connection to associated plans provides support and shows adherence to the goals and policies included in TransformWR, the CEIS, and the proposed High Performance Development Standards.

These findings were organized in the following "Big Moves":

- Municipal Leadership
- Natural Infrastructure
- Energy Transition

- Compact, Complete Communities
- Climate Ready Buildings
- Sustainable Consumption
- Resilience Hubs
- Preparing for Emergencies, and
- Learning While Doing

For the rationale and the associated policy recommendations please see the attachment documents.

### *Growth Scenario Modeling*

As a metric in the growth scenario evaluation, SSG was contracted to provide modeling which demonstrates the energy efficiency and associated GHG emissions for each scenario. The criteria evaluated included the following measures:

- General emissions/energy use
- Building energy/emissions (municipal, commercial, industrial, residential)
- Urban form (dwelling types/density)
- Transportation emissions
- Demographic elements (population, employment, personal vehicles and housing types)

This work will be considered along with other evaluation criteria as the recommended growth scenario is developed.

### Policy Development, Timeline and Next Steps

Kitchener 2051 has targeted a new OP to be presented to City Council for a decision in early 2026. The project timeline includes robust community and collaborator engagement throughout.

**2024** – In 2024, staff initiated the technical background studies, established the community working group, and undertook broad community engagement on the technical inputs of the Official Plan.

**2025** – In 2025, City staff have begun drafting climate policies for the Official Plan that will be informed by a community and collaborator conversation from 2024, the technical background study, broad community engagement, and comments from CCEC. A draft new Official Plan is anticipated to be available for community and collaborator conversations, including the CCEC, later in 2025.

**2026** – In early 2026, a new OP will be presented to Council for a decision.

**REVIEWED BY:**     **Janine Oosterveld, Manager Customer Experience and Project Management**

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A. Official Plan Climate and Energy Technical Background Study