

REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: August 11, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Garrett Stevenson, Director of Development and Housing Approvals, 519-783-8922

PREPARED BY: Simon Latam, Parks Planning & Development Project Manager, 519-783-8030

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: July 24, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2025-331

SUBJECT: Parkland Acquisition Strategy

RECOMMENDATION:

That staff be directed to develop a Parkland Acquisition Strategy and report back to Council prior to March 31, 2026, as outlined in DSD-2025-331.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to;
 - Launch the Parkland Acquisition Strategy project with Council,
 - Share early draft criteria for parkland acquisition, and
 - To solicit early feedback from Council for staff to consider in the development of the strategy.
- There will be no financial implications for this year. Staff will review the budget in 2026 and report back prior to the 2027 budget.
- 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.**

BACKGROUND:

The City of Kitchener is experiencing sustained population growth and increasing urban intensification, particularly in our protected major transit station areas (PMTSAs). As development continues, the availability of suitable, well-located land for park acquisition is diminishing. With this comes increased difficulty in meeting the community's growing need for accessible, high quality green spaces. This challenge is intensified by parkland distribution, with some neighbourhoods being currently underserved, resulting in critical needs areas. *Bill 23: More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022* has introduced substantial

reductions to the Planning Act provisions related to parkland dedication rates and imposed new caps on cash-in-lieu contributions.

Given the continued growth anticipated, and the limited parkland dedication fees expected through development applications, there is a need to develop a parkland acquisition strategy that intentionally plans for future parkland acquisition that supports a healthier, more equitable and climate resilient city. This strategy will build off the baseline parkland provision analysis and criteria for parkland acquisition established in Spaces (2022) and the Development Manual, allowing the City to fulfill the need to pursue acquisitions more purposefully and creatively, and ultimately meeting the objectives set out in the Council endorsed Parks Strategic Plan. A comprehensive Parkland Acquisition Strategy will identify priority areas for park investment, develop a financial model for acquisition, develop a system of weighted criteria for staff to use to balance location, size, and construction and operational priorities for assessing acquisition opportunities and garner alignment across various internal departments for efficient decision making on future park opportunities, so that staff can act strategically when opportunities arise.

REPORT:

Parkland Acquisition Strategy Launch

Staff have now begun work to develop a new Parkland Acquisition Strategy, which is listed as an action item in the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan under Cultivating a Green City Together. The Strategy is expected to provide a clear, evidence-based framework to guide how and where the City acquires new parkland. It will also provide the framework necessary for Council to make informed, prioritized park investment decisions, respond strategically to funding and land constraints, and strive for equitable access to park space across all neighbourhoods; particularly in high-growth and underserved areas. The strategy will also explore new and innovative approaches to acquiring and leveraging land, enabling the City to build a resilient, connected, and inclusive park system.

A Project Advisory Team has been established with internal staff members from various Divisions, including Housing and Planning Policy, Development and Housing Approvals, Economic Development, Parks and Cemeteries, Legal and Corporate Services.

Mechanisms to Acquire Parkland

As part of the strategy development, staff are currently exploring various mechanisms for the City to acquire and/or establish more park land, including, but not limited to;

- Acquiring new lands through development applications,
- purchasing privately owned lands,
- repurposing existing City-owned lands,
- entering into long-term lease,
- establishing partnerships with the GRCA, school boards and other branches of government,
- gifted or donated lands, and
- Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS).

Draft Evaluation Criteria

Staff have also drafted criteria for evaluating lands for parks purposes, which will be utilized to evaluate lands through any acquisition mechanism including, but not limited to those listed above. There are four levels of criteria: Mandatory, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary:

- Mandatory criteria must be met for any acquisition mechanism,
- Primary and Secondary criteria will receive a weighted score and include a threshold that must be met for lands to be considered.
- Tertiary criteria will not be weighted, however the criteria will be considered as an asset to the overall acquisition and will assist in meeting other City goals and initiatives.

The draft criteria is attached below. Please note that primary, secondary, and tertiary criteria may be weighted differently across our land acquisition mechanisms, in response to variation in anticipated timelines and budget implications.

Category	Criteria	Benchmark
Mandatory	Programmable, tablelands* (Yes or no) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lands that are outside of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hazardous or flood prone lands ○ Wetlands and woodlots retained for conservation purposes ○ Steep or unstable slopes ○ Any land having unsuitable or unstable soil conditions ○ Valley lands, watercourse corridors, environmental constraint lands, setbacks and buffers <p><i>*while non-table lands may be considered for passive recreation, they do not meet the City's criteria for park land</i></p>	YES / NO
	Free and clear of all encumbrances*, in current or remediated state <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any land containing an easement, encumbrance, encumbrance on title, contaminants, restrictive convenance, long term obligations and/or agreement or right-of-use that limits or restricts the City's use of land, including but not limited to utilities infrastructure <p><i>*consideration will be given to encumbered lands where alternative arrangements may be made to resolve constraints</i></p>	YES / NO
If both criteria are 'yes' proceed to primary criteria		

Category	Criteria	Benchmark
Primary	<p>Is the site within a Community with a park acquisition priority?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical - High - Medium - Low 	Score will be assigned to each category; Score will be weighted towards communities with higher priority
	<p>Is the site an appropriate size* to achieve one of five park size classification in the Parks Master Plan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micro (<0.1 ha) - Parkette (0.1-0.5 ha) - Small (0.5-1.5 ha) - Medium (1.5-3.0 ha) - Large (3.0-10.0 ha) <p><i>*Acquisition of vast (10.0 ha +) may be considered under a separate individual project and may require further consideration outside of this framework</i></p>	Score will be assigned to each category; Score will be weighted towards parcels that are sized based on desired park classification.
	<p>Does the site have frontage onto public roads?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Thresholds to be determined</i> 	Score based on proportion of site with public frontage that allows for views in and out of the future park and mitigates any CPTED concerns. Road typology to be considered in score.
	<p>Is there an opportunity to consolidate/aggregate with adjacent parcels?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - No 	Score will allow for parcels that don't meet size or frontage criteria to be considered further, or where additional lands can be consolidated with existing City-owned lands
<p>Note: These criteria must meet a certain 'score' based on weighted value to move on to secondary criteria. If 'score' is met, proceed to Secondary Criteria.</p>		

Category	Criteria	Benchmark
Secondary	Shape: Does the site configuration allow for programable park space? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Square or rectangle parcels are preferred for park programming 	Score provided higher for parcels with regular configuration/ease of programmability
	Grading: Is the site generally flat, well drained and graded in a way that is suitable for intended facilities and use by the public for play and recreation activities?	<i>Score to be determined.</i>
	Utility Connections: Does this site have access to services? If not, can servicing be provided? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to stormwater (Yes or no) - Access to water service (Yes or no) - Access to sanitary sewer (Yes or no) - Access to electrical service (Yes or no) 	<i>Score to be determined. Yes/no?</i>
Note: These criteria must meet a certain 'score' based on weighted value to move on to tertiary criteria. If 'score' is met, proceed to Tertiary Criteria.		

Category	Criteria	Benchmark
Tertiary	What is the existing use? Existing buildings or structures?	
	Does this site enhance existing natural or built features?	
	Does this site complement existing recreational features and assets within the community? - Can the site accommodate a facility that is needed per a strategic action or plan (ex. Parks Strategic Plan or Leisure Facilities Master Plan.	
	Suitable for future community needs? - Demographics? - What is the demand of this park?	
	Is this site located within an area with a high number of employees, students, or tourists?	
	Does the site have cultural significance?	
	Does the site currently have significant tree canopy? Will the site help to implement the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy?	
	Is this site located within a priority sub watershed area?	
	Is this site located within an area with high heat disparity?	
For tertiary, these criteria are desirable (nice to have) but not required. Consideration around a benchmark that 3 items must apply.		
Overall Score:		

Out of Scope

The new Parkland Acquisition Strategy will continue to focus on acquiring park land, as defined in the Park Dedication By-Law (Chapter 273) as lands for parks and other public recreational purposes. The strategy is not proposed to include an approach for acquiring open space lands which serve various environmental functions, as these lands do not typically meet the criteria for park land and there are other mechanisms (such as the Natural Area Acquisition Fund) to acquire these lands.

Additionally, the Parkland Acquisition Strategy will not include acquisition of non-park facilities, such as recreation centres or libraries. Detailed park design and programming, as well as operation and maintenance planning will also not be included within the scope of this project.

It is anticipated that the Parkland Acquisition Strategy will not include parcels over ten hectares in size, as classified as Vast in Spaces 2022. Parcels over ten hectares in size will be evaluated through a separate site specific process as a different level/type of analysis is required to properly consider such large parcels.

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.**

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – No impacts to the 2025 or 2026 Capital Budget are anticipated.

As part of the Parkland Acquisition Strategy, staff will be undertaking a full financial analysis of different funding models/options for further consideration which may include utilizing funding from the tax base, Provincial and Federal grants, public/private partnerships, as well as others. Staff will report back on recommendation financial tools with the Parkland Acquisition Strategy, which may be implemented through Budget 2027. The financial analysis will also include an evaluation of the impact of land prices on the feasibility of land acquisition and impacts to the overall park land reserve/budget. Further analysis is needed to define the target range of land costs to meet the City's parkland target based on a market value approach. In addition to market value land costs, there are additional costs to develop and maintain new parks.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the 2025 Operating Budget. Park improvements and ongoing operation and maintenance for new parks will have impacts on future operating budgets which will be further evaluated through the acquisition process.

The current balance of the Parkland Acquisition Fund is as of July 10, 2025 is \$18,885,343.00.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

The strategy will be part of the implementation of the Parks Master Plan which has undergone significant engagement.

Staff are proposing to engage Council through working sessions later this summer and fall as the full strategy is being developed. The strategy will be presented to Council for final consideration in Q1 of 2026.

Any financial considerations for the strategy will be included as part of Budget 2027.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- INS-2022-224 - [Places & Spaces – Park Strategic Plan and Park Dedication Update](#)
- CAO-2023-337 - [2023-2026 Strategic Plan Development – Proposed Strategic Plan Content](#)
- INS-2025-142 - [Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan](#)

REVIEWED BY: Sandro Bassanese, Manager, Site Plan
Mark Parris, Manager, Parks and Open Space
Jeff Silcox-Childs, Director, Parks and Cemeteries

APPROVED BY: Barry Cronkite, Acting General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 – Inventory of Existing Parks (Spaces, Parks Master Plan)