

REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: August 11, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Rosa Bustamante, Director Planning and Housing Policy/City Planner, 519-783-8929

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: July 30, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2025-318

SUBJECT: Kitchener 2051 - Preferred Approach to Growth

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Preferred Approach to Growth as presented in Report DSD-2025-318 be used to inform the development of a draft Official Plan (Kitchener 2051).

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the Preferred Approach to Growth to be used to inform the development of a draft Official Plan.
- There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- Kitchener 2051 includes a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan. The development of the Preferred Approach to Growth is the result of the evaluation of three approaches to growth based on a set of Community Parameters, shaped by the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group, Council, community and collaborator input as well as Technical Evaluation Criteria.
- The preferred approach to growth:
 - Makes efficient use of existing infrastructure;
 - Builds on existing strategic areas of growth including around the City's ION LRT stations (Protected Major Transit Station Areas) and nodes and corridors;
 - Continues to protect the natural heritage system and prime agricultural lands;
 - Continues to recognize and plan for growth in all neighbourhoods across the City, including the new community being planned through the Dundee Secondary Plan;
 - Plans for people living closer to community facilities like parks, community centres, grocery stores, and frequent transit stops; and

- Leverages opportunities to plan for new community facilities through 4 new urban centres through tools such as Community Planning Permit Systems and Community Improvement Plans.
- This report supports **Building a Connected City Together: Focuses on neighbourhoods; housing and ensuring secure, affordable homes; getting around easily, sustainably and safely to the places and spaces that matter.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As Kitchener grows to become a city of up to 450,000 residents by 2051, a new Official Plan is needed. A new Official Plan will guide where people live and work and shape the way that neighbourhoods evolve and change over time. As part of the development of a new Official Plan, three approaches to growth were developed using a set of core assumptions (outlined in [DSD-2025-091](#)). 35 technical evaluation criteria were developed that were used to analyze each approach to growth. Additionally, a series of Community Parameters were developed with input and collaboration by the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group and informed by the Community Values. The Community Parameters were used by the community through an interactive approaches to growth event, to evaluate the approaches to growth.

All three approaches to growth had similar technical evaluation results and feedback from the community showed an almost equal preference across the three approaches. Based on the technical analysis and community input, each approach to growth works for Kitchener and positions the City well for the future.

Since each approach performed similarly and had support from the community, the best elements of each of the approaches are recommended to be combined into a Preferred Approach. The Preferred Approach directs the most people and jobs to four new “urban centres” across the city (River Road East/Ottawa Street North; Block Line Road/Strasburg Road; Highland Road West/Fischer Hallman Road; land within the Dundee Secondary Plan area). The Preferred Approach also directs people and jobs to lands on the periphery of the city’s Protected Major Transit Station Areas, as well as along new and existing intensification corridors along Ottawa Street, Weber Street East, and Fischer Hallman Road, and existing and new intensification area nodes near Conestoga College Doon Campus and Homer Watson Boulevard/Pioneer Drive.

Directing people and jobs to these areas reflects the evaluation results by enabling more homes in areas where people are close to community facilities and amenities, contributing to a high quality of life, minimizes potential land use compatibility issues, and directs people and jobs to areas with existing or planned frequent transit service. While the areas outlined above are proposed to accommodate a significant share of growth, all neighbourhoods will continue to grow and change to meet the needs of the people who live, or who may want to live there.

The Preferred Approach will inform the ongoing development of a draft Official Plan which will be the focus of engagement this fall.

BACKGROUND:

As Kitchener grows to become a city of up to 450,000 residents by 2051, a new Official Plan is needed. A new Official Plan will guide where people live and work and shape the way that neighbourhoods evolve and change over time. It will be ambitious and intentional as we plan for the Kitchener of 2051.

On March 17, 2025, two reports were brought forward to the Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee:

- DSD-2025-084 “Evaluating Approaches to Growth” presented the Community Parameters and Technical Evaluation Criteria; and,
- DSD-2025-91 “What We Heard in Fall 2024 and Upcoming Engagement on Approaches to Growth” highlighted the key takeaways from community and collaborator engagement that occurred in 2024 and further engagement that were to occur on three approaches to growth.

Engagement was undertaken on approaches to growth through the Speaker Series Event at St. Mary’s High School on April 5th, the Approaches to Growth Event at City Hall Rotunda on May 1st, the interactive Community Conversation Kits, and the EngageWR online survey which ran from April 17th to June 8th.

The three approaches to growth included in DSD-2025-091 have been evaluated based on the criteria outlined in DSD-2025-084. The best elements of all of the three approaches to growth were selected to shape the Preferred Approach to Growth (Preferred Approach), along with an assessment of the trade-offs between different elements of each approach.

This Report provides an overview of the Preferred Approach, how it was derived, and seeks Council’s endorsement of it to inform the development of a draft Official Plan.

REPORT:

Approaches to Growth

Three approaches to growth were developed as part of this exercise using a set of core assumptions included in DSD-2025-091. The three approaches are illustrated in Figure 1 and include:

- Supporting Transit Approach – emphasizing growth generally within Kitchener’s existing mixed use Nodes & Corridors structure from the 2014 Official Plan;
- New Urban Centres Approach – focusing growth within four new urban centres, generally at the intersections of Ottawa St. N & River Rd. E, Strasburg Rd. & Block Line Rd., and Highland Rd. W. & Fischer-Hallman Rd, and on the periphery of Major Transit Station Areas; and
- Evolving Neighbourhoods Approach – enabling growth on properties within neighbourhoods where it can fit comfortably from a built-form perspective and without the need to assemble too many lots to make a new building happen.

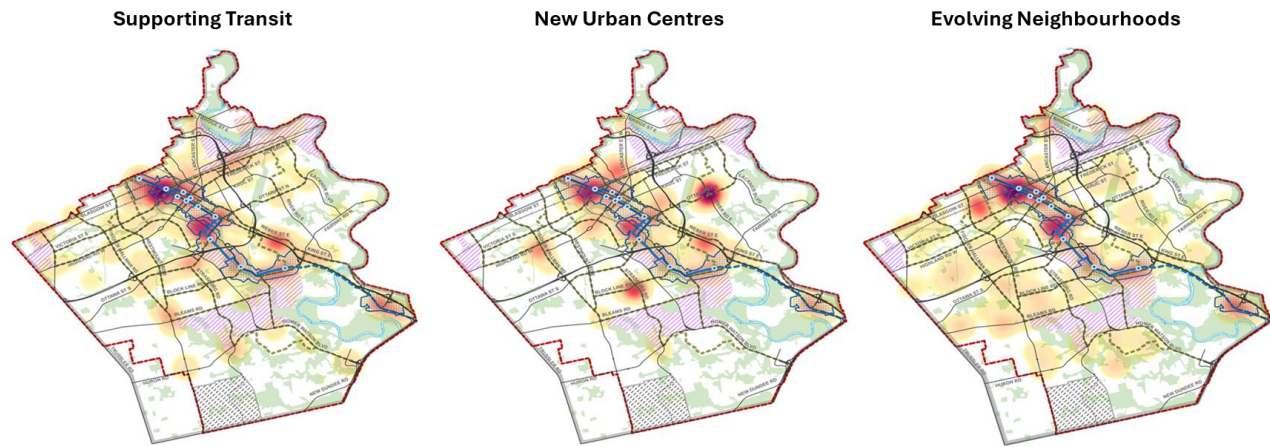


Figure 1: Three approaches to growth that were developed and evaluated

Evaluating Approaches to Growth

The Preferred Approach has been shaped by multiple inputs, including community parameters, technical evaluation criteria, Council direction & cross-divisional staff priorities, and feedback from the community.

The Community Parameters were prepared with direct input and collaboration with the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group and informed by the Community Values. The Community Parameters served as the basis for the Phase 3 community and collaborator engagement activities, including:

- Approaches to Growth Event & Speaker Series at St. Mary's High School on April 5, 2025;
- Approaches to Growth Event at City Hall Rotunda on May 1, 2025;
- Interactive Community Conversation Kits; and
- Online approaches to growth engagement survey.

The Phase 3 Engagement Summary will be available on the [Kitchener 2051 EngageWR project webpage](#) in August.

The initial set of core assumptions used to develop the approaches to growth were refined to develop a series of five objectives reflecting community priorities:

1. Be future focused;
2. Support Kitchener's economy;
3. Minimize impacts to Source Water Protection Areas (groundwater);
4. Plan for change across the City; and
5. Greater integration of places, systems, and networks.

These objectives, along with Kitchener 2051 technical studies and modelling, were used to define the technical evaluation criteria. 35 criteria were developed to align with the objectives. The criteria enabled analysis of each approach to growth and identification of opportunities or constraints needing to be addressed. The focus was to discuss trade-offs between the three approaches to develop a composite Preferred Approach, rather than selecting one of the three approaches.

Evaluation Results

The evaluation of the three approaches showed that they performed similarly across most criteria and broadly align with the evaluation objectives outlined below. This was likely as a result of the core assumptions that were the same across all approaches, with those assumptions having a significant impact on determining where and how new people and jobs will be accommodated in the city. However, there were also some notable differences between the approaches. The following provides an overview of the evaluation results summarized by the five objectives focusing on the criteria where notable differences were observed. Detailed evaluation results are included in **Attachment A**.

Be future focused

The objective of being future focused assessed how the City's existing water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure would be able to support more people and jobs. It also looked at how each approach could make use of existing community facilities such as schools, parks and sports fields, libraries, and community centres. And finally, this objective looked at how much energy would be used for each approach if we were to grow that way.

The three approaches were comparable in their ability to have planned people and jobs supported by existing infrastructure. The Evolving Neighbourhoods approach had the lowest amount (91%) of planned people and jobs able to be supported by existing water infrastructure, compared to 98% for the other two approaches. The Evolving Neighbourhoods approach would be the most likely to require infrastructure investment to accommodate planned people and jobs. From a community facilities standpoint, the New Urban Centres and Evolving Neighbourhoods approaches broadly plan for more people and jobs to be close to existing and planned community facilities, relative to the Supporting Transit approach. Finally, all three approaches had negligible differences in energy consumption and efficiency as well as the split between different ways that people can travel.

Support Kitchener's economy

The criteria that were assessed as part of supporting Kitchener's economy broadly looked at land use compatibility, the distribution of jobs across the city, the ability for people to get to employment areas by transit and identify impacts on truck routes based on where growth is planned across the city.

Among the criteria assessed, there was a significant difference between the approaches in terms of the planned growth within 300m of Industrial Areas. For this criteria, fewer people living close to Industrial Areas is preferred in order to minimize land use compatibility issues, such as people being exposed to industrial noise, odours, vibrations, and accompanying truck traffic. More people living close to Industrial Areas can also negatively impact the ability for the businesses to operate effectively, knowing that certain uses may result in noise, odours, and vibrations. The Supporting Transit approach directs more people to areas within 300m of designated Industrial Areas (16,148), compared to the New Urban Centres approach which directs the fewest people (3,060), followed by the Evolving Neighbourhoods approach (3,181).

For the other criteria, the results were very similar across the three approaches, with the New Urban Centres approach performing slightly better than the others.

Minimize impacts to Source Water Protection Areas (groundwater)

The objective of minimizing impacts to source water protection areas assessed each approach to growth against the amount of growth within Surface Water Intake Protection Zones and each Wellhead Protection Sensitivity Area (WPSA) zone. Minimizing the amount of people and jobs and industrial and manufacturing uses in these areas is important to protecting our shared groundwater resources.

The Evolving Neighbourhoods approach directs the least amount of people and jobs, particularly industrial manufacturing jobs, to Surface Water Intake Protection Zones and the New Urban Centres approach directs the least amount of growth to WPSAs. The New Urban Centres performed the best overall as it redirects jobs away from the most sensitive surface and groundwater areas.

Plan for change across the City

The objective of planning for change across the City evaluated criteria focusing on areas of the city that can support a grocery store and the amount of people that live close to community facilities and amenities.

The Supporting Transit approach results in more areas of the city having enough people within a neighbourhood to support a grocery store, compared to the other approaches. Living close to a grocery store contributes to a high quality of life by having access to fresh foods and minimizing the time it takes to access food.

The New Urban Centres approach plans for more people being located close to existing community facilities and amenities such as places of employment, transit stops, childcare, grocery stores, health services, libraries, pharmacies, schools, and parks.

Greater integration of places, systems, and networks

The objective of planning for greater integration of places, systems and networks across the City assessed criteria focused on proximity to transit stops, express transit routes, all ages and abilities trail network identified in the Cycling and Trails Master Plan, total vehicle-kilometres travelled, access to the Kitchener GO station, and proximity to existing commercial nodes in the City.

The Supporting Transit and New Urban Centres approaches to growth were most preferred across most of the assessed criteria. These two approaches place the most people and jobs closer to existing transit, high-frequency transit, and the all ages and abilities transportation network.

The New Urban Centres approach plans for the least amount of car usage (183,475 vehicle kms) compared to the Supporting Transit approach (185,098 vehicle kms) and Evolving Neighbourhoods (187,629 vehicle kms).

Community Engagement Results

As part of the approaches to growth workshops in April and May, community members were asked to provide input on the three approaches to growth through an interactive “Choose Your Own Adventure” style activity offering a chance to navigate a set of eight short ‘day-in-the-life’ scenarios – making decisions based on the future city they most wanted to experience. In order to have participants consider the needs and/or choices of community members who may experience the city in a different way, each participant was also assigned an ‘Avatar’ or alternate persona to consider as they complete the activity.

Feedback from the community through the approaches to growth workshop revealed that overall, there was almost equal support for the three approaches to growth. When community members completed the exercise as themselves there was slightly stronger support for the Supporting Transit approach and slightly less support for the Evolving Neighbourhoods approach. Whereas when asked to adopt an ‘Avatar’ to experience the future of the city in someone else’s shoes there was almost equal support for all three approaches. Insight gained through this exercise revealed that people experience the city in many different ways depending on their abilities, preferences and desires. To achieve a city for everyone there needs to be flexibility and choice across the city in where and how we live, shop, work, and play. Key themes that emerged were:

- Mobility and Accessibility – many expressed a desire for more transportation options, specifically frequent public transit and safe, convenient active transportation routes, as part of how they move around the city.
- Mixed-use neighbourhoods & Small Businesses – There was support for neighbourhoods that bring homes, shops, and services closer together.
- Housing Affordability – a call for a wider range of housing types to meet diverse individual and household needs ensuring that housing remains accessible for people at different life stages and income levels.
- Greenspace – the importance of having accessible parks and natural areas nearby.
- Change – there was an openness to new ways to add more homes and people across the city together with a feeling of uneasiness about what this may change about neighbourhoods and the city.
- Equity across communities – it is important to distribute amenities, services and investments equitably across the city so that all neighbourhoods, regardless of location, can thrive.

Key Takeaways

All of the three approaches to growth had similar evaluation results and broadly align with the objectives. The following table shows the best performing approach for each of the objectives.

Objective	Best performing approach
1. Be future focused.	Evolving Neighbourhoods/New Urban Centres
2. Support Kitchener's economy	New Urban Centres
3. Minimize impacts to Source Water Protection Areas;	New Urban Centres
4. Plan for change across the City	Supporting Transit/New Urban Centres
5. Greater integration of places, systems, and networks	Supporting Transit/New Urban Centres

Feedback from the community showed an almost equal preference for all three approaches to growth. There was an overwhelming desire for more frequent public transit and active transportation options and not wanting to feel dependant on a car. As a result, the Supporting Transit and New Urban Centres approaches were preferred by 35% and 34% of participants, respectively, because of new people and jobs being located closer to public transit and active transportation routes. Being able to access services, amenities, and community facilities easily and quickly was also an important theme shared throughout the engagement, which also translated to support for the Supporting Transit and New Urban Centres approaches, due to those approaches placing more people, jobs, amenities, and services close to public transit routes.

Based on the technical analysis, and community input, each approach to growth works for Kitchener and positions the City well for the future.

Preferred Approach to Growth

Developing the Preferred Approach began by understanding the evaluation results and identifying the best performing components of each approach, particularly as they respond to the big ideas that will form the new Official Plan: our neighbourhoods; our economy; and our environment. This included reviewing what we heard from the community as part of the Approaches to Growth workshop exercise, which embedded the Community Parameters in a number of "day in the life" scenarios where participants made decisions over the course of a day that aligned with how they may experience the City in the future based on the different approaches.

Since each approach performed similarly and had support from the community, the best elements of each of the approaches are recommended to be combined into the Preferred Approach. The best elements include:

- from the Supporting Transit approach, allowing people to more easily access a wide variety of services, amenities, and community facilities quickly, by public transit and active transportation by enabling more homes close to transit and active transportation routes.

- from the New Urban Centres approach, the urban centers themselves as they are aligned with all of the objectives providing access to a broad range of amenities, services, and community facilities to many people by transit and active transportation, and directs people and jobs away from sensitive groundwater areas and industrial areas.
- From the Evolving Neighbourhoods approach enabling more housing throughout the city allowing people to access services and amenities close to where they live.

A map of the Preferred Approach is included in **Attachment B**.

The Preferred Approach broadly directs the most people and jobs to the following areas:

- Four new “urban centres” at:
 - River Road East and Ottawa Street North;
 - Block Line Road and Strasburg Road;
 - Highland Road West and Fischer Hallman Road; and
 - Lands within the Dundee Secondary Plan area.
- Lands on the periphery of the City’s Protected Major Transit Station Areas;
- Along the Ottawa Street Regional Intensification Corridor, Weber Street East, and Fischer Hallman Road;
- Homer Watson Boulevard and Pioneer Drive;
- Conestoga College Doon campus; and
- Homer Watson Boulevard and Conestoga College Boulevard.

Directing people and jobs to these areas reflects the evaluation results by enabling more homes in areas where people are close to community facilities and amenities, contributing to a high quality of life. The Preferred Approach supports Kitchener’s economy by directing new people away from Industrial Areas, minimizing potential land use compatibility issues. It also directs people and jobs to areas with existing or planned frequent transit service, providing people with options on how they ultimately move around the city.

While the areas identified above are proposed to accommodate a significant share of growth, all neighbourhoods of the City will continue to grow and change to meet the needs of the people who live, or who may want to live there.

The Preferred Approach to growth supports the big ideas that form the foundation of the new Official Plan by:

- Making efficient use of existing infrastructure;
- Building on existing strategic areas of growth including around the City’s ION LRT stations (Protected Major Transit Station Areas) and nodes and corridors;
- Continuing to protect the natural heritage system and prime agricultural lands;
- Continuing to recognize and plan for growth in all neighbourhoods across the City, including the new community being planned through the Dundee Secondary Plan;
- Planning for people living closer to community facilities like parks, community centres, grocery stores, and frequent transit stops; and
- Leveraging opportunities to plan for new community facilities through 4 new urban centres through tools such as Community Planning Permit Systems and Community Improvement Plans.

Next Steps

Building on the work completed to date, the Preferred Approach will inform the ongoing development of a draft Official Plan. Preferred Approach will guide where and Kitchener will grow to 2051. Supporting policies and land uses that implement the Preferred Approach will be developed as part of the draft Official Plan and will integrate the Big Ideas, Focus Areas, Community Values, and Community Parameters. The draft Official Plan that incorporates all of these components will be the focus of engagement this Fall.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports **Building a Connected City Together: Focuses on neighbourhoods; housing and ensuring secure, affordable homes; getting around easily, sustainably and safely to the places and spaces that matter.**

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the Council / Committee meeting. Regular project updates are posted to Engage Kitchener.

CONSULT and COLLABORATE – Kitchener 2051 includes a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan. The Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group, alongside other Council, community, and collaborator input has helped to shape Community Parameters and Technical Evaluation Criteria which formed the basis of community engagement in Spring 2025 as part of evaluating approaches to growth.

Collaboration on Kitchener 2051 continues to occur regularly with the Community Working Group (CWG). The CWG includes a diverse group of individuals that represent the demographics of Kitchener (and look like the Kitchener of tomorrow). The CWG is learning about what the City needs to consider through a new Official Plan and collaborating with staff and consultants to meaningfully shape all aspects of the plan.

Engagement as part of the development of the Preferred Approach to growth included two in-person events on April 5th and on May 1st, as well as an online survey available from April 17th through June 8th that replicated the in-person events. Additionally, the development of a Community Conversation Kit was used to gauge the community's thoughts on the Big Ideas that will be used to inform the development of a new Official Plan, as well as a priority allocation exercise. This exercise saw participants distribute 100 points across 18 emerging policy directions as a means of identifying policy priority areas. In doing so, participants had to think about the trade-offs of allocating their points and considering what mattered most to them and their communities.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- [DSD-2024-077](#) – Building a Connected City Together: New Official Plan Launch
- [DSD-2025-061](#) – Council Strategic Session – Kitchener 2051
- [DSD-2025-084](#) – Kitchener 2051 – Evaluating Approaches to Growth
- [DSD-2025-091](#) – Kitchener 2051 – Engagement on Approaches to Growth

REVIEWED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager, Policy & Research

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Growth Scenarios Study Report

Attachment B – Preferred Approach to Growth Map