

# Staff Report

Chief Administrator's Office



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**REPORT TO:** Finance and Corporate Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** August 11, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Dan Chapman, Chief Administrative Officer

**PREPARED BY:** Margaret Love, Director, Strategy and Corporate Performance

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

**DATE OF REPORT:** July 31, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** CAO-2025-312

**SUBJECT:** Strategic Plan Check-in Report: Insights & Adjustments at the Midway Mark

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## RECOMMENDATION:

That the following adjustments be made to initiatives contained within the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan as outlined in the jointly authored report between the City of Kitchener and KerrSmith Design, titled Kitchener's Strategic Plan Check-in: Insights and Adjustments at the Midway Mark, dated July 24, 2025 and attached to staff report CAO-2025-312:

**(1) Sport and Recreation Master Plan and (2) City-led Recreation & Leisure Program Review – REMOVE AND REVISIT AS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2027-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN**

**(3) Make it Kitchener 2.0 Scoped Refresh – Supporting Economic Resiliency and (4) Implementation of the Downtown Safety & Security Action Plan – ADD**

And that staff be directed to take the following actions aimed at addressing additional strategic plan midway check-in insights, including: (1) further exploring the theme of social resilience, (2) supporting innovative and cost-effective service delivery through targeted Lean training and prioritized Innovation Lab projects, and (3) improving strategic goal reporting via refined indicators.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to share key insights and recommended strategic adjustments from the midway check-in on the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.
- The key finding of this report is that the current strategic plan remains highly relevant with opportunities for refinement in five areas: (1) sharpening the focus on economic resiliency through the addition of two new strategic plan initiatives, (2) removing two strategic plan initiatives due to limited funding, resource constraints, and the need for

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clearer understanding of evolving needs, (3) further exploring the emerging theme of social resilience, (4) balancing innovation with operational efficiency and cost-effective service delivery, (5) improving the communication of progress toward strategic goals, and.

- There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. However, it is anticipated that there may be future costs associated with two new initiatives. For the Make It Kitchener 2.0 refresh, this would be primarily in the area of economic modeling and data analysis. For the Downtown Safety & Security Plan, any significant new funding or staffing requests would be brought forward to Council for approval.
- Community engagement included a variety of direct and indirect methods (e.g., All Advisory Committee Meeting workshop, staff workshops, 2025 budget survey, listening through other engagement processes and various public opinion polls).
- This report supports all five strategic plan goal areas.

## **BACKGROUND:**

As part of the adoption of the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, staff made a commitment to check-in at the midway mark to ensure that the plan remains responsive to a rapidly changing world and aligned with the needs of the Kitchener community. This process allowed staff to evaluate progress on the implementation of the first 30 actions, identify emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges since approval of the plan, and determine if there are any gaps in our strategic plan that require additional adjustments. By proactively adapting to change and refining our priorities, we can strengthen our commitment to effective governance and ensure our strategic plan continues to drive positive outcomes for the city.

## **REPORT:**

### 1. Introduction, reason for check-in and methodology

The mid-point check-in was conducted to fulfill a commitment made to council to ensure the strategic plan remains relevant and responsive to the dynamic needs of the Kitchener community. The check-in process employed a strategic foresight approach to anticipate future needs and ensure adaptability.

Various engagement methods, including a community survey, stakeholder workshops, expert consultations, public opinion polls and listening through other projects informed the check-in process.

Central questions guiding this check-in included: How are we doing on implementing the first 30 actions? What has changed since the plan was adopted in August 2023? Are there emerging community needs or shifts in the operating environment we should be addressing? This assessment explores progress to date, identifies gaps in the current strategic actions, and considers whether adjustments or new initiatives are needed to ensure the plan remains responsive, relevant, and aligned with community priorities.

## 2. Current plan progress overview

Implementation of the strategic plan has maintained a disciplined and phased approach. The initial years focused on building momentum, with the plan reaching operational maturity in 2025. Over half of the initiatives are complex, multi-year efforts, intentionally structured for phased outcomes. Delays have been minimal.

The 2026 outlook is dedicated to completing existing work, with no new initiatives starting in 2026 – signaling a disciplined close-out phase and a focus on delivering tangible results before the next strategic plan cycle.

While data is being tracked for the majority of the city's 27 strategic goal indicators, assessing progress remains challenging as targets are still under development for approximately 50% of them. Indicators demonstrate a mixed performance with some economic indicators showing modest gains of 1-3% and others showing regression (e.g., unemployment rose from 6.6% to 8.2% in 2024). Gains were also made in customer satisfaction ratings related to the ease of accessing city services as well as the number of older adult-focused programs across city neighbourhoods and HR indicators; however, transportation related injuries – minor and serious – rose from the previous year.

## 3. Top 5 themes and alignment with council feedback and current strategic priorities

As part of the check-in process, council members were interviewed and asked to reflect on the changes they've observed since the adoption of the strategic plan. They were also invited to identify areas where the City may need to adjust or broaden its focus to address any potential gaps in the plan. Their responses, alongside other stakeholder input and expert insights, helped surface five key themes - listed in order of importance below - that reflect the most significant opportunities and challenges facing Kitchener today. The top two themes – the economy and housing - dominated both stakeholder insights and council feedback. Social resilience emerged as a recurring theme among council feedback, with roughly a third of members signaling its importance.

The top 5 themes should not be read as a set of new strategic priorities for the City. The insights from the check-in process affirms that the City is on the right track - there is strong alignment between the top themes and the City's current strategic plan, reinforcing the relevance and responsiveness of the current plan. The following summary outlines the top 5 themes, alignment with current strategic plan actions, and alignment with council feedback:

1. **Economic growth, resiliency and prosperity**, with emphasis on supporting local enterprise, workforce development, downtown renewal, and cultural opportunities

- Emerged as one of the top two most pressing concerns. The strategic plan directly supports this priority through 8 targeted initiatives (see Attachment A for details).
- Strongest councillor alignment: 2/3 of councillors identified economic development, particularly downtown revitalization as top issues.

## 2. **Housing accessibility and affordability**, including tenant protections and diverse, inclusive housing options

- Emerged as one of the top two most pressing concerns. The strategic plan directly supports this priority through the Building a Connected City Together strategic plan goal area with 2 targeted initiatives: Kitchener 2051 and the Housing for All Strategy.
- Strongest council alignment: 2/3 of councillors identified housing affordability and homelessness as top issues.

## 3. **Social resilience**, especially in support of youth, vulnerable groups, and intergenerational and culturally inclusive communities

- Being actively supported through four initiatives under the Fostering a Caring City Together strategic plan goal area: the Municipal Newcomer Strategy; Enhance the City's Engagement Practices, Community Centre Operating Model, and Community Grants Review.
- Council alignment: 1/3 of councillors emphasized the role of faith-based communities in fostering belonging and wellbeing.

## 4. (a) **Public health and wellbeing**, spanning health access, senior services, quality of life and wellbeing (tied with 4b)

- A cross-cutting priority supported by multiple strategic plan goal areas. Existing efforts to enhance inclusion and social connection (Fostering a Caring City Together), sustainable development (Cultivating a Green City Together), and housing (Building a Connected City Together) are expected to contribute positively to overall health outcomes. Addressing access to healthcare and mental health services and healthcare workforce shortages are outside of the City's direct service mandate.
- Councillors did not identify a gap in the current strategic plan related to this theme that is within the City's service delivery mandate.

## 4. (b) **Sustainable development**, balancing growth with climate action, green infrastructure, accessibility, and economic/affordability considerations (tied with 4a)

- Being advanced through six initiatives under the Cultivating a Green City Together strategic plan goal area. These initiatives focus on enhancing park

- spaces and tree canopy cover, planning for energy transition, and implementing corporate climate action strategies.
- No related theme emerged from Councillor feedback.

## 5. **Responsible innovation**, ensuring responsible adoption of emerging technologies while ensuring cost-effective service delivery

- Being championed through three initiatives under the City's Stewarding a Better City Together strategic plan goal area: Digital Kitchener Strategy, City-wide Data Strategy and Procurement Innovation. These initiatives aim to modernize services and enhance the City's capacity to adapt and lead.
- No related theme emerged from Councillor feedback.

## 4. Recommended strategic adjustments informed by check-in findings

Through a gap analysis, the key finding of the check-in process is that the current strategic plan remains highly relevant with opportunities for refinement in five areas (see Attachment A for details):

- (1) Sharpening the focus on economic resiliency through the addition of two new strategic plan initiatives that focus on the core priorities of business attraction and outreach/support for local enterprises and supporting downtown revitalization:
  - i. Make It Kitchener 2.0 Scoped Refresh – Supporting Economic Resiliency
  - ii. Implementation of the Downtown Safety and Security Action Plan
- (2) Removing two strategic plan initiatives due to limited funding, resource constraints, and the need for clearer understanding of evolving needs:
  - i. Sport and Recreation Master Plan (formerly Leisure Facilities Master Plan), and
  - ii. City-led Recreation & Leisure Program Review
- (3) Further exploring the emerging theme of social resilience as it was a prominent theme in the feedback and a perceived gap by some community members.
- (4) Balancing innovation with operational efficiency and cost-effective service delivery through: (i) the expansion of the City's 2026 Lean training program to up to 50 management staff, (ii) adjusting the scope of the Digital Kitchener Strategy to prioritize Innovation Lab projects that drive efficient and cost-effective service delivery, and (iii) exploring new possibilities with community organizations aligned with strategic priorities, aiming to uncover collaboration and/or knowledge-sharing opportunities and reduce duplication.
- (5) Improving the communication of progress toward strategic goals through the addition of 10 new, outcome-based strategic plan indicators; finalizing targets for 13 remaining indicators; and, improving public transparency through clear data sources.

All remaining themes identified during the check-in process are believed to be sufficiently addressed by current strategic plan initiatives.

## 5. Conclusion

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- The check-in affirms the strategic plan's strength and relevance while recommending targeted refinements to deepen impact and responsiveness.
- The insights gathered provide momentum and direction for the 2027–2030 strategic planning cycle, reinforcing that refinement of the current plan – not reinvention – is likely an appropriate path forward.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports **all strategic plan goal areas**.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. However, it is anticipated that there may be future costs associated with two new initiatives.

The Make It Kitchener 2.0 refresh will likely incur some costs related to economic modeling and data analysis. This will inform strategic, data-driven decisions as part of the Make It Kitchener 2.0 refresh, with a focus on enhancing economic resilience. Any significant investments emerging from this initiative are expected to be supported through the Economic Development Investment Fund (EDIF).

The implementation of the Downtown Safety & Security Action Plan does not require immediate funding. However, as detailed implementation plans are developed for the 47 actions, some actions may have budget implications that cannot be absorbed through existing approved budgets. Any new funding requests will be presented to Council through a formal report.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

**INFORM** – This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

**CONSULT** – 176 Kitchener residents were surveyed as part of the 2025 budget process. Questions were focused on satisfaction with current investments related to the strategic plan and which strategic plan goals are most important to invest in moving forward (Nov 2024).

**COLLABORATE** – 41 community members participated in a workshop to check-in on the strategic plan using a strategic foresight lens as part of the Spring 2025 All Advisory Committees meeting.

## **PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

- [CAO-2023-337](#) 2023-2026 Strategic Plan Development – Proposed Strategic Plan Content
- [CAO-2024-220](#) Strategic Plan Update – April 2024 Implementation

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- [CAO-2024-412](#) Strategic Plan Update – August 2024 Implementation
- [CAO-2025-033](#) Strategic Plan Update – Winter 2025 Implementation
- [CAO-2025-214](#) Strategic Plan Update – Spring 2025 Implementation

**APPROVED BY:** Dan Chapman, Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – Kitchener's Strategic Plan Check-in: Insights and Adjustments at the Midway Mark