

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: January 5, 2026

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

PREPARED BY: Tanya Roberts, Project Manager, Planning, 519-783-8945

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: November 20, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2026-003

SUBJECT: Kitchener's Great Places Awards 2025 Program Update

RECOMMENDATION:

For Information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide a recap of the 2025 Kitchener Great Places Awards program to recognize winning projects and volunteer jury panelists.
- The key finding of this report is acknowledging the 14 awards given to 11 exceptional projects that have shaped the community since the last awards were hosted in 2023.
- There are no financial implications associated with this report. The Awards program is funded through the Capital Budget.
- Community engagement for this report included the posting of the report on the City's website.
- This report supports the delivery of core services.

BACKGROUND:

Kitchener's Great Places Awards program recognizes outstanding development projects that demonstrate a commitment to design excellence and innovation in the areas of urban design, sustainability, affordable housing and heritage conservation and contribute to a built environment that enhances our quality of life.

The awards program began in 1988 when Council endorsed the idea of presenting Urban Design Awards to development projects that demonstrate outstanding design. In 1997, the Mike Wagner Heritage Awards were established to pay tribute to property owners and businesses who had contributed to the conservation of cultural heritage resources. Since 2011, the Urban Design Awards and Mike Wagner Awards have been celebrated in a joint ceremony.

In 2015, with the adoption of the City’s Official Plan, the program was expanded to recognize a broader range of categories to become the current Great Places Awards. In 2025, a new award category, the Affordable Housing Solutions Award was added to reflect our focus on housing and particularly affordable housing. This award highlights and celebrates projects that incorporate affordable housing. Sharing the story of their success can encourage others to leverage the City’s incentives while exploring innovative models, programs, and partnerships to create more affordable housing in our community.

REPORT:

This report provides an overview of the 2025 Great Places Awards program, including program updates and key outcomes.

Many new projects have shaped the community since the last time these awards were hosted in 2023. Looking back at the previous nominees and winners of these awards demonstrates how many great spaces were created that are still enjoyed today. Reflecting on the collective effort of making a better city for the future and how the City of Kitchener works in collaboration with the development industry to get homes built faster. This is signaled by the fact that collectively we’ve worked to meet and exceed the Province’s Building Faster Fund targets. All of this was achieved while continuing to advance housing for all in the community.

Jury Panels

With external jury panelists selected from an open call for jury panelists in March of 2025, we would like to thank the professionals who volunteered their time to critically evaluate nominated projects to select winners, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: 2025 Jury Panelists (External & Internal)

Name	Background/Expertise
Urban Design Excellence Awards – High-rise, Civic categories	
Dayna Edwards	Lecturer, University of Waterloo and Partner, Q9 Planning + Design
Angel Bancale	Landscape Planner, Dillon Consulting
Rosa Bustamante	Director, Planning and Housing Policy
Paul Singh	Councillor
Urban Design Excellence Awards – Placemaking, Low-rise categories	
Debbie Chapman	Councillor
Rosa Bustamante	Director, Planning and Housing Policy
Samantha Leger	PhD Candidate and Lecturer at University of Waterloo
Sifei Mo	Project Lead, Fabrik Architects

Mike & Pat Wagner Heritage Award	
Jean Haalboom	Chair, Heritage Kitchener
Susan Tienhaara	Quality Manager, Govan Brown
Garett Stevenson	Director, Development and Housing Approvals
Sustainable Kitchener & Affordable Housing Solutions Award	
Natalie Goss	Manager, Policy & Research
Anna Hohenadel	Representative from Climate Change and Environment Committee.
Mariam Lawani	Founder/CEO Greenhill Recycling
Martina Braunstein	Team Manager, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, Dillon Consulting
Matthew Day	Executive Director, WR Community Energy
Alison Carlyle	Project Manager, Active Transportation
Susan Tienhaara	Quality Manager, Govan Brown
Rosa Bustamante	Director, Planning and Housing Policy
Schmalz Award for Design Leadership	
Rodney Gill	Representative from Compass Kitchener
Oliver Frayne	Doctoral Student, University of Waterloo
Cory Bluhm	Executive Director, Economic Development
Justin Readman	General Manager, Development Services
Berry Vrbanovic	Mayor

2025 Great Places Awards Ceremony

The awards ceremony took place on Wednesday October 29, 2025, with attendees including community members, nominated project representatives, development industry, jury panelists, members of Council, and staff.

Joined by several members of Kitchener City Council, Mayor Berry Vrbanovic kicked off the event, which named 14 winners across a variety of categories. Several members of Council presented awards. The event was held at the Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts.

To further enhance the event, the award ceremony featured local artists 'The Michael Wood Trio' and keynote speaker Leia Minaker, the inaugural Director of the Future Cities Institute founded by Caivan at the University of Waterloo, and an Associate Professor in the School of Planning in the Faculty of Environment. Minaker's keynote, '**What matters: getting the future Kitchener we want**' discussed the trade-offs we need to accept and the trust that we need to build for a successful future city that is focused on outcomes rather than process.

2025 Winning Projects

The following is the list of award-winning projects by category:

Urban Design Excellence Awards

- Low-Rise: 26 King Street East – Narrow Building
- High Rise: 55 Duke Street West - Young Condos
- Civic: 1 Wilson Ave - Montgomery Creek Restoration

Placemaking Award

- Winner #1: 27 Roy Street – Holly’s Café
- Winner #2: 193 Roxborough Avenue - Admiral Park Winter Lights

Sustainable Kitchener Award

- Winner #1: 66 Weber Street East - Civic 66
- Winner #2: 100 Rosenberg Way - Southwest Community Library

Affordable Housing Solutions Award

- Winner #1: 825 King Street West - St. Mark’s Place
- Winner #2: 292 Sheldon Ave N - Thresholds Homes and Supports

Mike and Pat Wagner Heritage Awards

- Preservation / Restoration: Winner #1 – 171 Frederick Street - Suddaby Public School
- Preservation / Restoration: Winner #2 – 73 Queen Street N - Governor’s House Porch Restoration
- Rehabilitation / Adaptive Re-Use: 825 King Street West - St. Mark’s Place

People’s Choice Award

- 27 Roy Street – Holly’s Café

Schmalz Award for Design Leadership

- 825 King Street West - St. Mark’s Place

Congratulations to all the winners of Kitchener’s 2025 Great Places Awards. For more information about the awards program and to view a video of the award-winning projects, visit www.kitchener.ca/greatplaces

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – This event is funded through the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – There are no financial implications to 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.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- CSD – 15-083 Urban Design Awards Program Update
- DSD-2025-067: Kitchener’s Great Places Awards 2025 Program Update

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS: N/A