

# Staff Report



Corporate Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Special Council

**DATE OF MEETING:** February 2, 2026

**SUBMITTED BY:** Nicole Amaral, Digital Kitchener Innovation Lab Director

**PREPARED BY:** Nicole Amaral, Digital Kitchener Innovation Lab Director, 519-783-8175  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All

**DATE OF REPORT:** January 26, 2026

**REPORT NO.:** COR-2026-007

**SUBJECT:** Strategic session: Digital Kitchener and Corporate-Wide Data strategies

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## RECOMMENDATION:

That report COR-2026-007 council strategic session for corporate technology projects be received for information.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide background information to inform the council strategic session for corporate technology projects.
- The key finding of this report is that the engagement phases have been completed for the Data Governance and Digital Kitchener strategies and now staff are seeking input, based on the engagement results, from council to further inform the actions and initiatives.
- There are no financial implications arising from the report.
- Significant community engagement took place through three phases of the Digital Kitchener strategy in addition to sharing and receiving engagement feedback through other current corporate projects, such as the Newcomer Strategy
- This report supports the “stewarding a better city together” strategic plan theme and these associated actions:
  - Digital Kitchener strategy review
  - Implement a city-wide data strategy

## BACKGROUND:

As a result of community engagement for the 2023–2026 City of Kitchener Strategic Plan, two technology-focused themes emerged, leading to the launch of two corporate initiatives under the ‘Stewarding a Better City’ goal: City-Wide Data strategy and the Digital Kitchener Review.

## Digital Kitchener Strategy:

\*\*\* This information is available in accessible formats upon request. \*\*\*  
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

In 2024, council and senior leaders prioritized a refresh of the Digital Kitchener strategy as an initiative for the new Innovation Lab Director to begin in 2025.

The goal of the refresh is to ensure the City’s technology initiatives remain aligned with current stakeholder priorities and emerging trends.

The project includes:

- Assessing progress under the four strategic themes: connected, innovative, on-demand, and inclusive.
- Providing recommendations to support strategic objectives.
- Researching how other cities use technology for service improvements.
- Consulting staff, community, and stakeholders to confirm alignment.
- Exploring new objectives, including AI integration.

**City-Wide Data Strategy:**

In 2022, the City of Kitchener joined the Bloomberg Philanthropies City Data Alliance. A deliverable of this alliance was a Citywide Data Strategy Action Plan, a three-year vision and actionable plan designed to advance the City of Kitchener’s use of data.

Since that engagement, the following work has occurred:

2024	2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital funding included in budget “for the implementation of a city-wide data strategy to build organization-wide data practices to deliver better services for residents”</li> <li>• Internal secondment filled</li> <li>• Project charter and engagement plan endorsed by CLT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement plan implemented</li> <li>• Staff input collected, engagement report developed and shared with respondents</li> <li>• CLT strategic session</li> <li>• 2025-2028 City-Wide Data strategy endorsed by CLT</li> <li>• Additional 18-month secondment approved and filled</li> </ul>

In February 2026, staff will facilitate a strategic session with CLT to support the adoption of the proposed corporate data governance framework, guidelines for staff, staff competencies framework and launch communication plan.

**REPORT:**

**Digital Kitchener Strategy:**

As a part of the Digital Kitchener review, a three-phased engagement approach was implemented with each phase building on insights from the previous stage. At every step, feedback was analyzed and shared with stakeholders, ensuring transparency and accountability.

The engagement results highlight a shared commitment to building a city that is inclusive, efficient, and future-ready. Through extensive research and engagement, four interconnected priorities have emerged:

- recognizing improvement opportunities
- creating local partnerships and collaborations
- exploring new technology and projects
- prioritizing digital equity, accessibility, and literacy

These priorities reflect the voices of residents, staff, and the local tech community, and they form the foundation for actionable strategies that will guide Kitchener's digital evolution.

### **City-Wide Data Strategy:**

Staff implemented a comprehensive engagement plan to learn about how staff use and want to use data. Based on the feedback collected through this process, research into data management best practices, leadership's prioritization and research into other municipalities' data management programs, staff developed the 2025-2028 City-Wide Data strategy and work plan.

This strategy includes three focus areas that support the development of a corporate data management program: setting the foundation, working in the open and developing our data culture.

The engagement phases have been completed for the City-Wide Data and Digital Kitchener strategies and now staff are seeking input, based on the engagement results, from council to further inform the actions and initiatives.

Staff will pose activity questions to be answered via Mentimeter with code provided at meeting:

City-Wide Data questions:

1. How much do you agree with the following statements? (scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree")
  - I get a lot of questions I wish I could answer with data
  - I know where to look to find the data or information I need
  - I know that the data I need exists
  - I trust that the data I can find is up-to-date and relevant
2. What data would be most helpful for you to better answer questions from the public (including customers, developers, investors or builders)?
  - Locations and repair timelines for potholes
  - Planned and actual timing for services (examples: grass cutting, tree trimming, leaf collection)
  - Parking enforcement data (compliance rates, ticket volume, trends)
  - Snow plow coverage and average time to clear snow from streets
  - Seasonal spending by program/service
  - Resolution time for resident inquiries/complaints

- How weather impacts service delivery
- Business licences issued this month/year
- Building permits issued this month/year

Digital Kitchener questions:

1. Which customer service challenges should we prioritize for improvement through technology or AI as part of the Digital Kitchener strategy?
  - Requesting or completing city services
  - Awareness of online services
  - Remembering multiple logins
  - Options for contacting staff
  - Finding city information
  - Having a service history that all staff can access
  - Invoices and payments
  - Internet access
  - Computer and printer access
  - Service barriers due to language
  
2. Where do you see the most potential for AI to help us innovate and streamline operations?
  - Track city assets and infrastructure for maintenance optimization
  - Automate data collection and analysis
  - Reduce the time spent on manual and repetitive routine tasks
  - Streamline service delivery
  - Virtual assistants for FAQs, triage, and multilingual support
  - Scan and validate applications for compliance and completion
  - Match residents and businesses with municipal resources
  - Analyze social media to identify issues and improve communication
  - Model growth scenarios and support sustainable development
  - Monitor energy use in facilities and optimize for efficiency

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports Stewarding a Better City Together: Focuses on City employees as stewards of Kitchener; responsive, innovative, diverse & accountable public servants working together to serve residents; removing barriers and championing a better city and a better world.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There are no financial implications arising from the report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

Note: the City-Wide Data Strategy is an internal-facing strategy and staff were engaged. Its implementation is supported by two internal pilot committees: the Data Governance Working Group and Data Community of Practice.

#### INFORM:

- This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the council/committee meeting.
- Throughout the strategy review, communication efforts included posting updates and reports on the City's website, sharing information via online platforms, and providing regular feedback to participants at each stage. These efforts ensured transparency and kept all stakeholders informed about engagement opportunities and project progress.

#### CONSULT

- **Surveys:** Broad online and paper surveys were conducted with municipalities, residents and staff to gather feedback on digital service challenges, opportunities for data governance improvement, and the use of AI in municipal operations.
- **Focus groups and interviews:** Targeted sessions with customer-facing staff and community centre supervisors helped identify barriers and co-develop solutions.
- **Analysis and reporting:** Feedback from each phase was analyzed and reported back to participants, demonstrating how input shaped recommendations.

#### Interested parties consulted:

- Kitchener residents
- Technology community
- Under-represented communities
- City staff
- Corporate leadership team
- Senior management teams
- Community organizations and business partners

#### COLLABORATE:

- In-person sessions with staff, residents, and tech community members prioritized challenges and collaboratively developed ideas for solutions

#### PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- COR-2026-007: AI education session with Communitech

**APPROVED BY:** Victoria Raab, GM – Corporate Services

#### ATTACHMENTS:

None