

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: April 20, 2026

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

PREPARED BY: John Zunic, Senior Planner 519-783-8952

WARD(S) INVOLVED: ALL

DATE OF REPORT: April 7, 2026

REPORT NO.: DSD-2026-151

SUBJECT: Kitchener 2051 New Official Plan Second Draft

RECOMMENDATION:

That staff consider the submissions provided on the second draft Official Plan attached to report DSD-2026-151, including submissions made at the April 20, 2026, committee of council meeting, in the preparation of the final new Official Plan.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the comments that were provided on the first draft of the Official Plan (released on November 13, 2025) and how they have been considered and addressed through the preparation of the second draft.
- 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 second draft Official Plan is the culmination of 2 years of conversations with First Nations, community, collaborators, the community working group, and technical assessments.
- 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 existing and future people live and work, and shape the way that the City evolves and changes over time.

Kitchener 2051 included a 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan and was guided by five principles that guided conversations with community and collaborators.

The first draft of the Official Plan was released on November 13, 2025. This draft was informed by community values, big ideas, and a preferred approach to growth. Thousands of community members and collaborators provided input on these areas throughout the early phases of this project.

Community and collaborator feedback on the first draft included:

- requests to carry forward land use planning permissions in Employment Areas;
- concerns with the proposed city structure and land use designations in the Westmount neighbourhood;
- requests for greater clarity on the Commercial First land use policies; and,
- requests to expand Strategic Growth Areas where they were not identified in the first draft.

This report includes a second draft Official Plan that responds to comments on the first draft.

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 existing and future people live and work and will shape the way that the City evolves and changes over time.

Kitchener 2051 was based on a 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan.

Phase 1 took place between June and August 2024 and defined a set of community values. These values formed a bridge between the community's aspirations for the city and the draft big ideas and focus areas that have formed the basis of the draft new Official Plan. Initial engagement milestones like the Gaukel Block launch party and establishing the Community Working Group occurred during this phase. There were over 21 opportunities to engage during Phases 1 and 2 of the Kitchener 2051 process, reaching over 2,000 members of the community through in-person events and online surveys. A summary of what we heard during this phase is captured in the [Phase 1 & 2 What We Heard Report](#).

Phase 2 took place from September to December 2024. This phase was used to introduce the process and the four key themes to the community: a Connected City; a Green City; a Thriving City; and a Caring City. The 21 engagement events that took place during this phase validated these thematic areas, including a strong emphasis on Caring City as an overarching theme. Engagement events during phases 1 and 2 included the first of three Speakers Series events featuring a panel discussion on ability and mobility, along with topic-specific technical study workshops with collaborators. A summary of what we heard during this phase is captured in the [Phase 1 & 2 What We Heard Report](#).

Phase 3 took place from December 2024 to June 2025. This phase introduced and gathered feedback on the big ideas and focus areas that framed early policy directions of the first draft Official Plan. Engagement undertaken in Phase 3 helped to inform early policy directions and potential approaches to growth. Key themes that emerged during this phase included:

- **Mobility and accessibility** - Many participants expressed interest in using alternative modes of transportation, particularly walking and biking, but raised concerns about convenience, safety, and associated travel time. Accessibility also emerged as a key theme, with several comments highlighting the need for improved

infrastructure and services that better support older adults and those with mobility challenges.

- **Mixed-use neighbourhoods and small businesses** - Participants shared support for neighbourhoods that bring homes, shops, and services closer together, making daily life more convenient and walkable. There was also strong appreciation for small and local businesses, with several responses noting a preference for these over larger chain or big box stores.
- **Housing affordability** - The cost of housing came up frequently, with participants calling for a wider range of housing types to meet diverse individual and household needs. Many emphasized the importance of ensuring that housing remains accessible for people at different life stages and income levels.
- **Greenspace** - The value of greenspace was a consistent theme, with participants stressing the importance of having accessible parks and natural areas nearby, where they can relax, recharge, and connect with others.
- **Resistance to change** - While many participants were open to new ideas, some expressed hesitation or concern about change, particularly related to new growth and intensification. These responses reflected a mix of personal uncertainty and observations of broader community sentiment
- **Equity across communities** - A desire for fairness and balance was evident in many responses. Participants noted the importance of distributing amenities, services, and investments more equitably across Kitchener so that all neighbourhoods, regardless of location, can thrive.

This input directly shaped the development of a preferred approach to growth ([DSD-2025-318](#)). The preferred approach to growth focuses on growth in four new urban centres and along key transit corridors, while supporting change across all neighbourhoods. This phase provided over 30 opportunities for First Nations and collaborator engagement, reaching over 700 people through in-person events and online surveys. Additionally, there were over 250 views of the Phase 3 launch video on the project webpage. A summary of what we heard during this phase is captured in the [Phase 3 What We Heard Report](#).

Phase 4 saw the release of the first draft Official Plan on November 13, 2025. This phase focused on introducing and gathering feedback on the draft Official Plan, and linked core policy directions to community values, big ideas, and focus areas. This phase involved further engagement with the community and City staff across divisions to support integrating and aligning this work with other city projects and plans. This phase provided 20 opportunities for community engagement, reaching over 400 people through in-person and online engagement events.

Phase 4 confirmed many key themes identified in the 3 prior phases and echoed that the community cares deeply about the city. Comments received on the first draft of the Official Plan indicated a desire to maintain existing land use permissions in Employment Areas, concern around the interpretation of policies specific to commercial lands, requests to expand Strategic Growth Areas, and opposition to the land use planning approach in the Westmount neighbourhood.

The four phases of Kitchener 2051 were based on five principles that guided conversations with community and collaborators.

1. **Inclusivity:** provide opportunities to meaningfully provide input on the plan, particularly to those who have historically been underrepresented in planning processes.
2. **Equitable:** reduce barriers for those who may have challenges to participate by building capacity for people to understand the planning process and the scope of influence at the municipal level.
3. **Respectful:** strengthen relationships through active listening, understanding how lived experiences differ across the city, and sharing engagement materials openly and transparently.
4. **Meaningful:** prioritize hearing from communities and groups that have typically been underrepresented in Official Plan processes, like equity-denied communities, renters, and people who have experienced homelessness, poverty and housing precarity, among others. It is acknowledged that voices that have historically influenced planning processes will continue to be considered. This will be done while ensuring that the voices of those that have traditionally been underrepresented have an equal opportunity for influence. Moving away from traditional engagement processes may be an uncomfortable, yet necessary part of an equitable engagement approach.
5. **Responsive:** engage with community that values quality and depth of conversations and be open to feedback on methods to meet their needs and interests.

REPORT:

After 2 years engaging extensively with First Nations, the community, and collaborators, working with numerous consultant teams on technical inputs, and developing policy content, the first draft of the new Official Plan, Kitchener 2051 was released on November 13, 2025. Kitchener 2051 is the long-term vision for the way Kitchener will grow and evolve to the year 2051. Guided by shared values and aspirations for the future, the new Official Plan will help the City tackle the challenges of today while building the resilience needed to adapt and thrive into the future. This will be done through clear directions and policies that will guide how and where we grow – helping to shape a future Kitchener that is connected, caring, and resilient. The second draft of the Official Plan is included in **Attachment A**. It reflects thousands of conversations across the city and aligns with the values that the community shared were important.

Comment themes from the first draft

Over 130 comments were received since the release of the first draft Official Plan on November 13, 2025. A summary of comments received, and accompanying staff responses, are included in **Attachment B**.

Comments received are broadly categorized into the following themes:

- Employment Area lands and accompanying land use permissions;
- Westmount neighbourhood city structure and land use permissions;
- Commercial First land use permissions; and
- Strategic Growth Areas permissions.

Employment Area lands

Several site-specific submissions have been submitted on lands identified as Industrial Growth Areas on Map 2 of the first draft Official Plan that seeks to carry forward existing permitted uses. The first draft Official Plan identifies Industrial Growth Areas as “Employment Areas” based on the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) definition. These are areas that have been identified within an Official Plan as being clusters of business and economic activities including manufacturing, research and development in connection with manufacturing, warehousing, goods movement, associated retail and office, and ancillary facilities. They do not allow for institutional and commercial uses, including retail and office not associated with the primary employment use listed above.

Staff have had an opportunity to connect with the consultants for landowners who made the submissions where clarity was provided that the concerns were related to the potential loss of currently permitted uses should the lands continue to be considered an “Employment Area” as per the 2024 PPS. Staff re-engaged city-retained consultants to do additional analysis to understand existing uses in the “Employment Areas” and how these uses align with direction from the Province. The consultant identified existing established uses primarily using North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes for all properties and cross-referenced them with permitted uses identified by the Province in the 2024 PPS.

Westmount neighbourhood

Comment submissions were received expressing opposition to the proposed land use planning approach for the Westmount neighbourhood, including how the “Strategic Growth Area” city structure component was applied to parts of the neighbourhood, the accompanying land use designations, and the associated permitted uses. The submissions requested neighbourhood-specific cultural heritage landscape policies, a 3-storey maximum building height, and a prohibition on non-residential uses (neighbourhood-compatible commercial uses).

In response to feedback received, heritage consultants were retained to confirm and validate aspects of the Westmount cultural heritage landscape (CHL), including the boundary and cultural heritage attributes. A neighbourhood “walkshop” was held on March 26 and included a consultant-led guided walking tour to gather input on the proposed CHL boundary, better understand the cultural heritage attributes of value, and desired conservation outcomes. Additionally, a survey was available on the Kitchener 2051 engage page providing an opportunity for the community to provide input on the proposed boundary and cultural heritage attributes of the Westmount CHL.

Commercial First land use designation

A number of submissions were received specific to properties designated Commercial First in the first draft of the Official Plan, which includes existing commercial properties. Many of the comments sought clarification on how to interpret the policies and how the policies would be implemented. Some comments indicated that changing market conditions may make it difficult to replace existing commercial floor space on properties with this land use designation in the future.

In response, staff met with numerous consultants representing landowners of applicable properties and provided clarification on the intent of this land use designation and how it may be implemented in the future. Staff further clarified that the intent of the land use

designation is to maintain the commercial function of the properties and that a requirement for mixed use buildings is not being proposed.

Strategic Growth Area permissions

Comments were received with property-specific requests to expand the “Strategic Growth Area” city structure component to areas not identified in the first draft Official Plan. The areas requested for expanded or new Strategic Growth Areas generally reflect properties that were identified as one of the “intensification areas” in the City’s 2014 Official Plan.

In response, staff met with consultants representing landowners looking to expand Strategic Growth Areas to their properties. Staff walked through the criteria used to identify and delineate Strategic Growth Areas and pointed to draft policies that would guide requests to expand this city structure element.

Strategic Growth Areas across the City are all within 800m from an ION Station, within 400m of the [Ottawa Street Regional Intensification Corridor](#), or within 400m of the [Grand River Transit Frequent Transit Network](#). Additionally, areas needed to meet two of the following four criteria to be considered as Strategic Growth Areas:

- 400m from the "City Spine" network component from the [Cycling and Trails Master Plan](#);
- 400m from Retail Spaces (specifically Community Shopping Centres, Neighbourhood Plazas, and Strip Plazas greater than 25,000 square feet as identified on Map 5 of [Report 1: Commercial, Office and Future of Work and Mixed-Use Study](#));
- 400m from a Food Store (specifically Food Stores greater than 5,000 square feet as identified on Map 8 of [Report 1: Commercial, Office and Future of Work and Mixed Use Study](#)); or
- 800m from an Urban Centre as shown on draft Official Plan map 2 – [City Structure](#).

Second Draft Official Plan

The second draft of the Official Plan includes changes in response to comments submitted and based on further dialogue with community and collaborators through ongoing engagement that occurred throughout February and March.

The second draft of the Official Plan includes new and modified content that directly responds to all categories of what we heard since the first draft was released last fall. Changes include:

- New cultural heritage landscape policies specific to the Westmount neighbourhood;
- Additional policies that provide guidance on how the implementing bylaws (e.g. zoning) will be applied to the Mixed Use and Neighbourhoods land use designations;
- A City-wide re-evaluation of the Strategic Growth Areas delineation to ensure a consistency with identified criteria outlined above;
- Added context and interpretation clarity specific to the Commercial First land use designation;
- Revised mapping that consolidates source water protection information, city structure and land use changes following additional technical review, and minor administrative changes; and,

- Enhanced brevity throughout the document including the removal of duplicate content across chapters, reduced jargon and technical language where appropriate, and a greater emphasis of explaining planning concepts in plain language.

As a result of the re-evaluation of “Employment Areas” identified in the first draft of the Official Plan, all properties within Industrial Growth Areas were confirmed to meet the PPS definition of an “Employment Area”, with the exception of the Bingemans property (425 Bingemans Center Drive). This property is recommended to be removed from an “Employment Area” due to existing conditions that did not lend themselves to aligning with the Provincial direction for these areas.

The re-examination of the Strategic Growth Area city structure component resulted in the removal of lands that did not explicitly meet the assessed criteria referenced earlier in this report. A new assessment criterion to determining Strategic Growth Areas was added in response to Provincial direction around “Employment Areas”. The new criterion prohibits the application of Strategic Growth Areas within 300 metres of an Industrial Growth Area (“Employment Areas” per the 2024 PPS) and aligns with Provincial direction to direct sensitive uses away from “Employment Areas”.

Next Steps

Select technical studies and reports are in the process of being finalized. These technical studies as well as submissions made on the second draft Official Plan, including those made at the April 20th Committee of Council meeting; comments received by the Provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing as part of their legislated 90-day review; and ongoing conversations with First Nations will be reflected in the final new Official Plan. Additional revisions to enhance brevity are expected to make the final new Official Plan as accessible and easy to understand as possible.

The Region of Waterloo identified a water supply capacity constraint in late 2025. The City continues to receive and evaluate development proposals while the Region of Waterloo works through interim solutions. The City is carefully reviewing all development applications on a case-by-case basis, proceeding with those that do not result in increased water demand. The City acknowledges that some aspects of a development proposal may not be able to proceed until water capacity is confirmed by the Region of Waterloo. Kitchener 2051 and the resultant new Official Plan is planning for growth longer-term - to 2051. It is important that work continues on Kitchener 2051 as it is essential to manage growth, infrastructure investments, and community needs over the next 25 years. Further revisions to the second draft Official Plan may be required in response to the water supply capacity constraint.

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:

CONSULT and COLLABORATE – Kitchener 2051 included a robust 4-phase community engagement process that builds on the Strategic Plan. 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, as well as the City’s social media accounts and emailed to the project email list. Phase 4 introduced the first draft Official Plan to the community, collaborators, and First Nations. As such, engagement touchpoints were designed to gather feedback on the draft Official Plan.

Highlight of Phase 4 Community Engagement Touchpoints

As part of engagement on the first draft Official Plan:

- Over 350 members of the community were reached through in-person and online engagement events;
- Over 18 opportunities to engage in-person and online, including surveys, workshops, 7 pop-up events throughout the city, development industry webinars, a local Indigenous Organization land-based gathering, a forum with 13 City divisions, an Open House and Speakers Series event, a housing-focused pop-up, and a Westmount neighbourhood walkshop;
- 6 meetings with the Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group to discuss and shape policy directions of the first draft Official Plan;
- Over 130 comments via emails, letters or other forms of correspondence related to the draft Official Plan;
- 9 interactive workshops with Council-appointed Advisory Committees; and
- A summary of what we heard during this phase is included in **Attachment C**.

Phase 4 – List of Engagement Touchpoints

#	Date	Group/Event	Location
1	Summer 2025	“What matters most to you?” survey (feedback on Big Ideas and Focus Areas)	Online
2	September 3, 2025	Social Service Providers (feedback on early draft)	Online
3	September 5, 2025	Energy and Climate Experts (feedback on early draft)	Online
4	Fall 2025 (multiple dates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active Transportation & Trails Advisory Committee;• Equity & Anti-Racism Advisory Committee;• Heritage Kitchener Advisory Committee;• Economic Development Advisory Committee;• Arts & Culture Advisory Committee;• Mayor’s Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors;• Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee;	Online and in-person

#	Date	Group/Event	Location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchener Youth Advisory Committee; • Climate Change and Environment Committee 	
5	June 5, July 3, September 4, October 2, November 6 and December 4, 2025	Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group meeting (shared key project information and got feedback on core elements of the draft Official Plan)	Kitchener City Hall
6	November to December 2025	“Did we get it right?” survey (reflect on draft Official Plan components)	Online
7	November 20 and 21, 2025	Development Industry Webinar Lunch & Learn (share draft Official Plan and hear feedback)	Online
8	November 19, 2025	Pop-Up Event Series (spread awareness of draft Official Plan and gather feedback)	City Hall
9	November 24, 2025	Pop-Up Event Series	Stanley Park Community Centre
10	November 25, 2025	Pop-Up Event Series	Huron Community Centre
11	November 26, 2025	Pop-Up Event Series	Country Hills Community Centre
12	November 28, 2025	Land-Based Gathering (drumming and talking circle discussing the draft Official Plan with local Indigenous Organizations)	Crow Shield Lodge, Kitchener
13	December 3, 2025	Development Review Forum (Internal - session to discuss the draft Official Plan with 13 City divisions)	Conrad Centre
14	December 3, 2025	Speaker Series Event #3 (share and gather feedback about the draft Official Plan, and a moderated discussion)	Conrad Centre
15	December 8, 2025	Housing-focused discussion panel with members of the Lived Expertise Working Group	Kitchener Public Library Main Branch
16	February 24, 2026	Pop-Up Event Series (Second round)	Doon-Pioneer Park Community Centre
17	February 25, 2026	Pop-Up Event Series (Second round)	Victoria Hills Community Centre
18	February 26, 2026	Pop-Up Event Series (Second round)	Bridgeport Community Centre
19	March 26, 2026	Westmount neighbourhood Cultural Heritage Landscape walkshop and online survey	Westmount neighbourhood

#	Date	Group/Event	Location
20	November 2025 – April 1, 2026	137 comments received via email, letters and other forms of correspondence related to the draft Official Plan	Multiple communication modes

A full range of perspectives were considered to ensure that Kitchener’s new Official Plan reflects the needs of all and includes communities often underrepresented in these processes, like equity-seeking communities, renters, and people who have experienced homelessness, poverty, and housing precarity.

Attachment B provides staff responses to feedback received and notes any changes reflected in the updated draft Official Plan in response to those comments. While additional engagement has been undertaken, it is important to reiterate the project’s objectives and guiding values, that are grounded in equitable engagement practices. Engagement opportunities throughout Phases 1 through 4 were designed such that no single group can disproportionately shape outcomes, particularly where some have historically influenced planning processes in an inequitable way.

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
- [DSD-2025-318](#) – Kitchener 2051 – Preferred Approach to Growth

REVIEWED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager, Policy & Research

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Kitchener 2051 Official Plan second draft
- Attachment B – Kitchener 2051 Official Plan first draft comments/staff responses
- Attachment C – What We Heard Report Phase 4