

Where and How we will Grow Our DRAFT City Structure

What is a City Structure?

A City Structure puts our Shared Vision Values and Future into action by illustrating where and how we will accommodate 128,000 new residents and 54,000 new jobs by 2051, all while protecting the natural systems, green spaces, agricultural lands and waterways that are integral to our resilience.



Kitchener 2051 Phase 4 What We Heard Report

April 2026

Prepared by Urban Strategies for the City of Kitchener





Territorial Acknowledgement

The City of Kitchener is situated on the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee People's. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Metis and Inuit in Kitchener today.

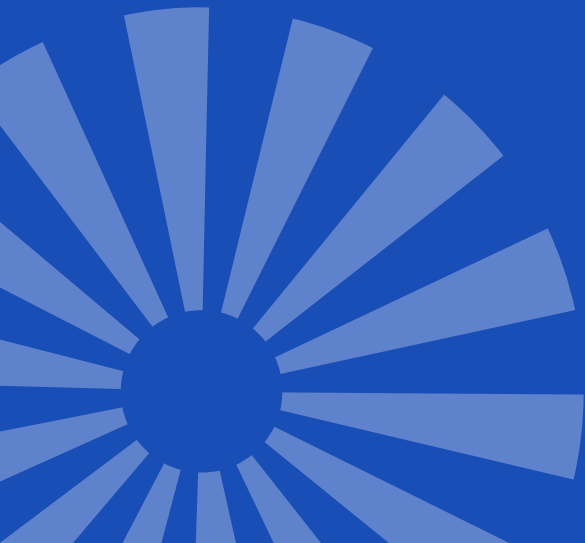


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Section 1 Introduction



1.1 Kitchener 2051 Overview

The City of Kitchener has prepared a new Official Plan (OP) – known as Kitchener 2051. An OP is a document that shapes planning and development in our City, including:

- Directing growth and change, related to how land and buildings are used;
- Guiding decisions on land use, development, transportation, physical and community infrastructure, and more;
- Implementing the City’s vision, established through the Strategic Plan; and
- Providing direction for implementing tools like the Zoning By-law

Kitchener 2051 will positively shape growth and development across the City over the next decade and respond to our City’s current and future needs and trends. Kitchener is growing fast and is facing city-building challenges like the housing crisis, inequity, climate change, social isolation, and aging infrastructure and City services. The City has an opportunity to leverage new mobility technologies, a young and highly skilled workforce, strong neighborhoods and communities, a rich and diverse culture, and a growing desire for urban connection.

Kitchener 2051 will conform with relevant Provincial policy and legislation and the Region of Waterloo’s Official Plan, while supporting recently completed plans for the City including the Housing for All, Places & Spaces, and Cycling & Trails Master Plan – setting out a forward-thinking and contemporary City-wide policy framework.

Kitchener 2051 is about the people who call Kitchener home today and in the future.

This includes Indigenous people, newcomers, long-time residents, business owners, and entrepreneurs. It’s about our community today, and the people of tomorrow. This includes the young people who will grow old in our community, the families looking to move to Kitchener, or the students who will call our community home after graduation. Kitchener 2051 looks at how we move around the places we live, work, and play. It is about what we need to grow, adapt, and succeed as a resilient and complete city – together.

Kitchener 2051 has considered a full range of perspectives to ensure that the OP reflects the needs of everyone. This includes communities that are often underrepresented in engagement processes, like equity-seeking communities, renters, and people who have experienced homelessness, poverty, and housing precarity.

Over the last year, we have learned lessons about who we are, what we value, and the Kitchener that we can become.

1.2 Kitchener 2051 Process Timeline

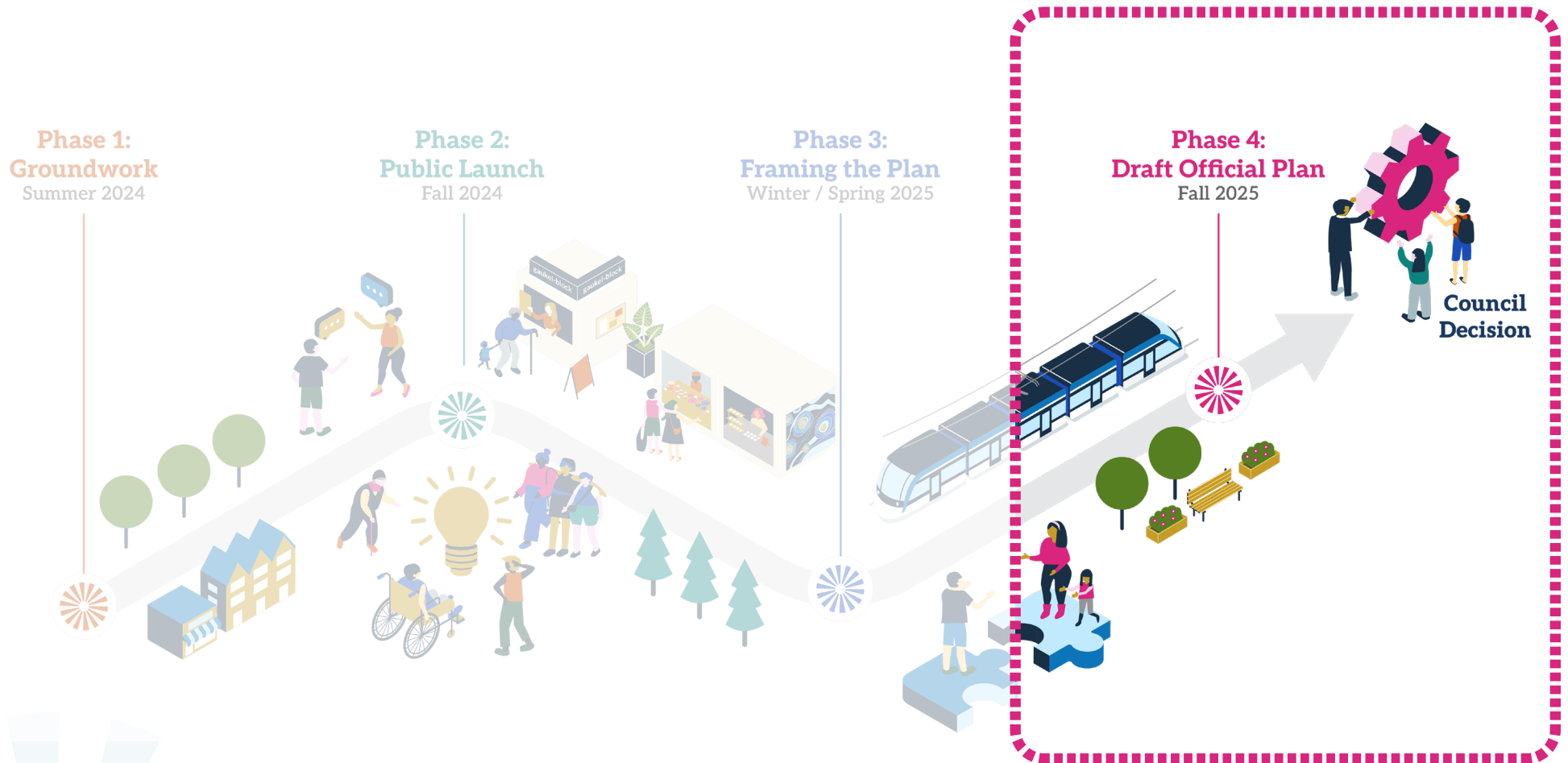


Figure 1: Illustration showing the Kitchener 2051 timeline by phase. Phase 4, the focus of this report, is highlighted.

1.3 About this Report

This **Phase 4 What We Heard Report** outlines the engagement goals, objectives, values, and approaches guiding the Kitchener 2051 process, as well as the engagement opportunities provided between September 2025 and February 2026. Phase 4 saw the launch of the DRAFT Official Plan along with associated engagement opportunities to introduce and gather input on the plan.

Overview of Phases 1-3

Phase 1 - Groundwork: conducted between June and August 2024, was a pre-engagement phase centred around audience identification and mapping, process design, objective and approach setting, and strategy development.

Phase 2 - Public Launch: conducted from September to December 2024, was used to introduce the process and the four key themes to the broader community. The Public Launch phase provided 21 engagement opportunities designed to gather high-level input, ideas, and aspirations from the public and interest holders about Kitchener’s future.

Phase 3 - Framing the Plan: conducted from December 2024 to June 2025, was used to introduce the framing for the new Official Plan to the broader public. This included introducing and gathering feedback on the big ideas and focus areas that begin to frame early Official Plan policy directions as well as introducing and gathering feedback on the different ways Kitchener might Grow in the future.

What follows is an overview and summary of key findings gathered through multiple engagement opportunities, including Community Working Group sessions, pop-up events, development industry webinars, Open House and Speaker Series Event #3, advisory committee and key interest holder presentations, Indigenous community engagement, and a city-wide online survey.

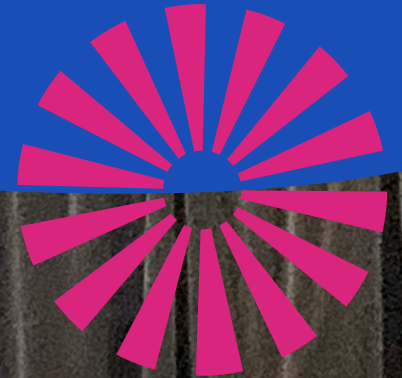
First Nations and Local Indigenous community engagement is being undertaken in a separate, yet parallel process, with the intention to build stronger relationships with First Nations Rights Holders, those with historical and continued interests in the lands and waters of the City of Kitchener, and local Indigenous community members.

Engagement with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation follow consultation and accommodations protocols established by each respective Nation and will not be included in this document. It is important to keep these processes separate to respect the understanding that the First Nations are Rights Holders, and their involvement is uniquely positioned as such.

Engagement with the Local Indigenous community has been

Section 2

Engagement Overview



In February 2024, Kitchener City Council directed staff to initiate the work on a new Official Plan, founded on engagement principles to guide how community members and collaborators would be included in the process. These principles were then used as a starting point for the Kitchener 2051 Community Engagement Strategy.

The Community Engagement Strategy for the Kitchener 2051 process:

- outlines the project background, overall engagement goals, objectives, and values guiding the process;
- identifies the different audiences who will be engaged throughout the process;
- provides a high-level plan, timeline, and approaches for how the City will engage with each audience; and
- includes a list of strategies and tools for removing barriers to participation in support of equitable, accessible, and inclusive engagement.

To supplement this Strategy, a Community Engagement Plan has been prepared for each phase of the process. Each Engagement Plan provides a detailed overview of the engagement program within that phase, including its phase-specific objectives, targets, audiences, and methods to better define what is being engaged on and how input will be gathered and integrated.



2.1 Overall Engagement Goals & Objectives

The overarching goal of Kitchener 2051’s engagement strategy is:



Through meaningful engagement, the new Official Plan and elements of the planning process such as data analysis, forecasting, and the work of policy experts, will be anchored in and shaped by the voices and experiences of those who live, work, and play here.



To help achieve this goal, five overarching engagement objectives were developed:



1

Provide meaningful opportunities and seek substantive input to help shape the OP



2

Build awareness and capacity for informed engagement



3

Build trusting relationships



4

Strive for equity and representation



5

Elicit a broad range of ideas and go deep on the interesting ones

2.2 Overall Engagement Values

These 5 key values guided the Kitchener 2051 engagement:

1. Inclusive

This means sound engagement practices that are welcoming and accessible for all, providing safer and appropriate opportunities for community members to express their views and share ideas.

2. Equitable

This means reducing barriers for those who may have challenges to participation and including those outside traditionally recognized structures and processes.

3. Respectful

This means listening first and engaging from a place of regard and intention, and valuing lived / living experience and community expertise.

4. Meaningful

This means being clear and transparent about what we're engaging on – what is open to change / input and what is not.

5. Responsive

This means engaging with community members in ways they'd like to be engaged and being open to feedback on methods to meet their needs / interests.



2.3 Phase 4 Engagement Goals & Objectives

The goal for Phase 4: DRAFT Official Plan was to:



To share the DRAFT Official Plan, and its expected benefits, in accessible formats, and to gather focused input to inform final revisions to the plan.



Phase 4 Objectives:

- 1. Share the DRAFT Plan with the Community**
Introducing and gathering feedback on the DRAFT Official Plan, clearly linking core policy directions to community values, priorities, and Big Ideas.
- 2. Continue to Enhance Collaboration**
Working closely with other City departments including teams working on the Transportation Master Plan and Natural Heritage Systems Plan to identify opportunities for alignment, efficiency, and shared learning.
- 3. Continue to Build Trusting Relationships & Closing the Loop**
Demonstrating responsiveness and transparency by clearly explaining how input has shaped the DRAFT Official Plan and how feedback will inform final refinements.

Reconnecting with individuals and groups engaged throughout the process to share the DRAFT Official Plan, validate what we heard, and confirm how perspectives are reflected in the document.

Engagement undertaken in Phase 4 helped introduce the DRAFT Official Plan and to demonstrate the connections between community values, Big Ideas and Directions established during Phases 2 and 3 and the DRAFT Plan elements.

A full DRAFT of the Official Plan was posted online on November 13th, 2025 - and was accompanied by a shorter 'Official Plan Highlights' document for those not interested in or able to read the entire 226-page document.

Phase 4 engagement activities were designed to gather feedback on and gauge sentiment related to the DRAFT plan. Ultimately, what we learned in Phase 4 will help the team refine the DRAFT Plan before bringing it to Council for approval in the coming months.

2.4 Phase 4 Engagement by the Numbers

Between September 2025 and February 2026, there were over 20 opportunities to engage during Phase 4 of the Kitchener 2051 process, reaching over 350 members of the community.



Over **20** opportunities to engage in-person and online.



24 completed 'Did We Get it Right?' online surveys were submitted



240 attendees participated in 7 community-focused pop-up events.



In-person engagement in different Wards **4**



9 interactive workshops with council-appointed Advisory Committees.



4 Community Working Group Meetings



1 On the Land Gathering with **4** local Indigenous organizations



Over **50** attendees participated in an additional housing-focused pop-up co-hosted with members of the Lived Experience Working Group

2.5 Phase 4 Engagement Approach

A key priority of the Phase 4 engagement approach was to provide accessible ways to learn about and engage on the DRAFT Official Plan. To achieve this, we provided the DRAFT Official Plan document in two forms: the full 226-page policy document and a condensed 26-page Official Plan Summary document that provided a detailed overview of the Plan and its core elements. This approach allowed participants to engage in a scalable way, offering opportunities to read about the the Plan and provide input on the areas that were the most important to them. Rather than requiring an understanding of every single policy, key themes and sections of the Plan were summarized to provide a level of detail that was more accessible and understandable for all readers.

The document was organized into five key sections based on the structure of the DRAFT Official Plan (Figure X):

1. **Shared Vision, Values, and Future**, which form the foundation of the Plan, grounded in community priorities and aspirations.
2. **Where and How We Grow**, which highlights a new City Structure that organizes Kitchener into Places to Grow, Protect, and Focus to illustrate where and how we'll accommodate new resident and jobs by 2051.
3. **Our Building Blocks**, which summarizes the the core policy chapters of the Official Plan through key themes and policy snapshots.
4. **Our Land Use Designations**, which breaks down each City Structure component into sub-categories which allow different types of uses and built forms.
5. **Implementation**, which outlines the tools and monitoring approaches that will be used to achieve our Shared Vision.

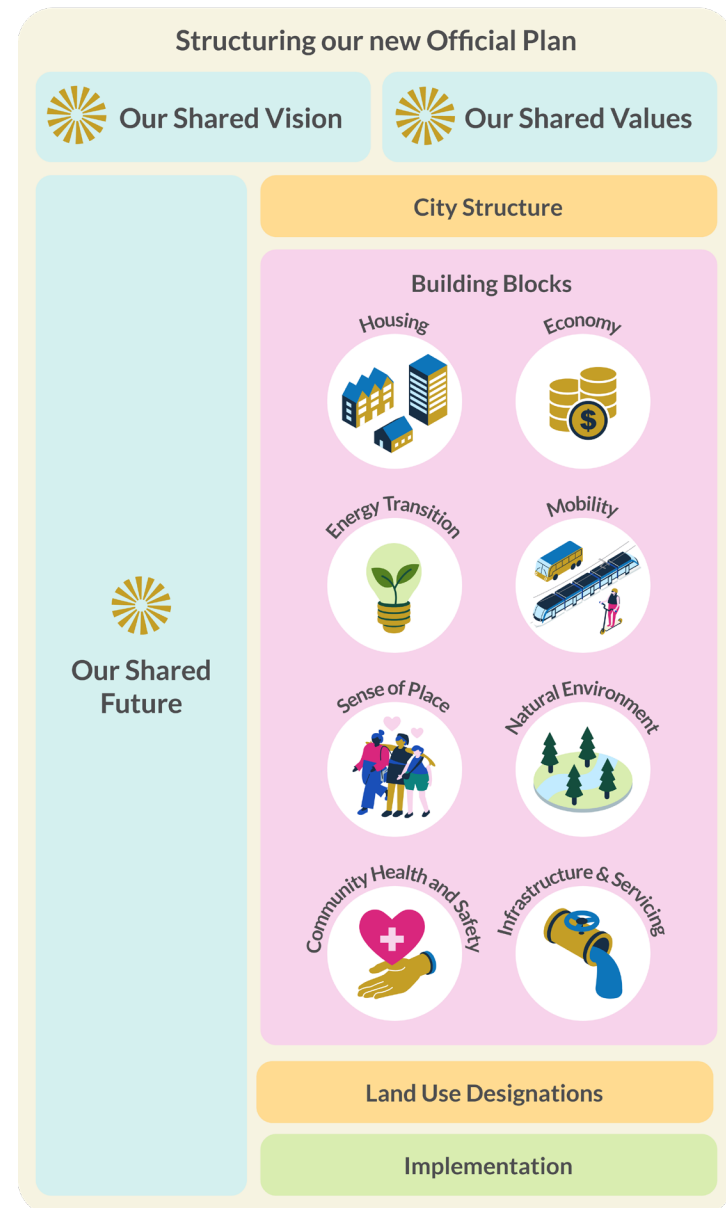


Figure 2: Structure of the Draft Official Plan



Our Shared Vision

See Chapter 1 of the Draft Official Plan

“Building a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us and each other.”

Kitchener's future depends on both what we build and how we care for one another. Fostering inclusion and belonging is an ideal for our residents in our homes, jobs, and schools. When people feel connected, respected, and that their voices are heard, they are more engaged and more resilient. Kitchener 2051 builds on the City's Vision for 2031, as established in our Strategic Plan, to achieve this.

The theme of A Caring City was identified by residents as being fundamental to the future of Kitchener. This is about welcoming residents of all ages, backgrounds, and lived experiences, and reflecting and responding to our past while planning and creating for a future residents will cherish, including, inclusion, and belonging. The new Official Plan considers and addresses future needs across all policy areas to embrace this future.

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Our Shared Values

See Chapter 1 of the Draft Official Plan

Our Shared Values are shaped by the ideas, experiences, and aspirations shared by community members during the Kitchener 2051 process. Together, they respond to the challenges our community faces, and reflect the principles of a safe, equitable, connected, and resilient Kitchener.

- Accessibility**
- Access & Inclusion**
- Thoughtful & Resilient Growth**
- Safe & Sustainable Mobility Options**
- Mutual Care & Belonging**

Our Shared Future

Our Shared Future captures the three big ideas at the heart of the Plan.

Our Neighbourhoods will be vibrant, connected, and inclusive places where people of all ages, incomes, and abilities can live, work, learn, play, connect, and move around safely and conveniently.

Our Economy will be an engine for the city that supports, builds an inclusiveness of all types in its neighbourhoods and across the city. People and goods will get where they need to go quickly, efficiently and sustainably, and renewable energy and infrastructure investments will create a more competitive, economically resilient city.

We will value, protect, and restore Our Environment, enabling smart and green economic growth and leading innovation in a smart, resilient, and secure city.

We will foster and strengthen our community where everyone can be healthy, safe, and lead active lives for generations to come.

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Our Building Blocks

What are Building Blocks?

The Building Blocks are the core policy chapters of the Kitchener Official Plan. They translate our Shared Vision, Values, and Future into the practical directions that guide how the City plans for and invests in housing, transportation, parks, community spaces, and infrastructure.

Across all 8 Building Blocks, the themes of Caring City and Climate Action are woven carefully throughout:

- Policy snippets marked with a heart ❤️ support a city where all people can access the resources they need, feel welcome and included, and live safe, healthy homes in vibrant, well-connected neighbourhoods.
- Policy snippets marked with a leaf 🌿 encourage smart growth, climate-resilient design, active mobility options, and the protection and restoration of natural areas.

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Housing: Making Kitchener a Home for Everyone

What does it mean to Kitchener?

In 2025, Kitchener is a city where everyone has a place to call home, where housing is as diverse as the people who live here, and every neighbourhood is vibrant, connected, and welcoming. Safe and stable housing of every kind – rented, ownership, supportive, family-oriented, affordable at every income level – will be part of every neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods will continue to evolve, creating a connected network of jobs, where people can get down roads, and lead their futures.

Objectives and Highlights

See Chapter 3 of the Draft Official Plan

Objective Overview	Policy Overview	Our Shared Future Impacts
Attractives, making sure there is a right balance of affordable and market housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain robust supply for affordable land within the city, with goals of adding 2,000 new homes per year. Support 9% of new homes to be affordable, rentable, and 22% affordable, rent-free. Attractively, affordably, and conveniently located affordable housing units, including those within designated areas like the OSW and OS. 	Our Neighbourhoods
Protect and encourage a mix of housing types, sizes, and uses across the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect all forms and forms and being arrangements in all neighbourhoods in the City. Require that 50% of larger developments apply to use include housing-oriented design and use across all areas. 	Our Neighbourhoods
Minimize the impact of changing land uses as a part of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When land uses are to be lost, the change from used will be necessary through consideration of alternatives. Continue to monitor the qualitative impact and provide replacement for lost to encourage maintaining affordable housing through housing. Expand support services, including public information and consultation. 	Our Neighbourhoods
Build homes where people want to live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure homes close to community services such as schools, libraries, healthcare, transit, parks, and transit. Create smart, connected communities with a diverse mix of uses that allow for residents to live and play their best lives. 	Our Neighbourhoods Our Environment Our Economy
Support efforts in building more of the homes we need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage innovative building practices, the pre-qualification and certification. Seek opportunities to continue to building certain development approvals like pre-approved building design and plans. Continuing the work done through Housing for All, Kitchener Housing Strategy. 	Our Neighbourhoods Our Economy

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Figure 3: Draft Official Plan Summary Document

Section 3

Summary of Phase 4

Engagement Opportunities



There were over 20 opportunities to engage on the DRAFT Official Plan, including both in-person events and online activities. The Official Plan Summary document was used as the basis for engagement for several of these touchpoints.

What Matters Most to You? Online Survey – Summer 2025

Community Conversation Kits were prepared in Phase 3 of the Kitchener 2051 process to share the Big Ideas and Focus Areas of the Official Plan and gather the community's thoughts and priorities about growth.

An online survey, titled "What matters most to you?", was established in July 2025, early in Phase 4, based on the Community Conversation Kit to continue gathering feedback on Big Ideas and Focus Areas for the Official Plan while City Staff were drafting its policies. The survey presented 18 emerging directions for the Official Plan and asked respondents to distribute 100 points amongst the directions to prioritize those most important or meaningful to them. It came with a set of reflection questions to help us better understand responses.

The survey remained open for a month, gathering 56 responses to supplement the 70 gathered in Phase 3.

Workshops with Key Partners (External) – Fall 2025

Social Service Providers - September 3, 2025

City Staff invited Social Service provider organizations to discuss the draft Official Plan Housing policy chapter. Invitees reviewed policies and helped shape its implementation. Their input ensured the draft housing policies reflect the realities of those facing housing precarity.

Energy & Climate Experts - September 5, 2025

City Staff invited together industry leaders, technical experts, and key interest holders in climate-related sectors to learn more about the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan process and the City's climate adaptation and mitigation background study findings. Their feedback helped inform the direction of the climate policy work.

Advisory Committee Presentations – Fall 2025

Between September and December 2025, City Staff presented to and gathered feedback on the DRAFT Official Plan from nine (9) City Advisory Committees including the 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; the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee; the Kitchener Youth Advisory Committee; and Climate Change and Environment Committee.

City Staff shared policies from sections of the DRAFT Official Plan that pertained to each Committee's scope, explaining how what had been shared in previous phases were accounted for in the draft policies. Advisory Committee members shared their thoughts and provided feedback for City Staff to consider as they finalize the Official Plan.

Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group – Fall 2025

Monthly meetings with the Community Working Group (CWG) continued as a pathway to share key project information and gather feedback on core elements of the DRAFT Official Plan in addition to ideas and insights related to the broader Kitchener 2051 process.

The following key topics were discussed across the four meetings in this phase:

- September 4, 2025: CWG members went on a field trip through Kitchener’s Schnieder Creek. Environmental planners from the City shared information on the on-going project to create more flood fringe and developable area and led a tour of the watershed. The session ended at a local restaurant where the group discussed draft food policies of the Official Plan.
- October 2, 2025: CWG members provided feedback on the Introduction and Vision for the DRAFT Official Plan. City Staff shared an update on the progress of how the DRAFT Official Plan will be framed and the areas of proposed changes.
- November 6, 2025: Members were asked to review and provide feedback on DRAFT Official Plan chapters related to Energy, Mobility, Neighbourhoods and Open Spaces, the economy and industrial uses, Strategic Growth Areas and commercial areas, institutional uses and community infrastructure, and servicing.
- December 4, 2025: Members were asked to review and provide feedback on DRAFT Official Plan chapters related to housing, placemaking and placekeeping, and land use designations. City Staff also provided a presentation on technical aspects of the DRAFT Official Plan such as sourcewater protection, and agricultural policies.

“Did We Get It Right?” Online Survey – November to December 2025

Between November 13 and December 14, 2025, the City asked community members to review the DRAFT Kitchener 2051 Official Plan and share feedback through an online survey hosted on the City’s Engage page.

Participants were invited to reflect on how well the DRAFT Official Plan reflects Kitchener’s shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas, and whether key components of the Plan, including the DRAFT City Structure and Building Blocks were clear and easy to understand. 24 completed surveys were submitted.



Figure 4: xxx

DRAFT Official Plan Pop-Up Event Series - November 19 - 26, 2025

Throughout November, four pop-up events were held across Kitchener as a way to spread awareness about the status of the Kitchener 2051 process and gather feedback on the DRAFT Official Plan. These pop-up events allowed City Staff to reach a broader and more diverse audience, including those from underrepresented or equity-deserving communities who may not be able to participate in planning events due to barriers. Being present in community spaces also provides more opportunities for informal, face-to-face conversations, which can feel less intimidating and more conducive to honest, open dialogue.

More specifically, events were held at the following locations:

- November 19: City Hall
- November 24: Stanley Park Community Centre
- November 25: Huron Community Centre
- November 26: Country Hills Community Centre

City Staff interacted with over 80 people across these four sessions, using the DRAFT Official Plan Summary document as a basis to have conversations about sections of the plan that were important to attendees.

In addition to these events, City Staff hosted three more pop-up events in the community in February 2026 to increase reach and opportunity. These events engaged over 150 people across Kitchener:

- February 24: Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre
- February 25: Victoria Hills Community Centre
- February 26: Bridgeport Community Centre



Figure 5: Map of the seven Draft Official Plan pop-up locations across the city

Development Industry Webinar and Lunch & Learn – November 20 and 21, 2025

City Staff met with over 12 representatives from the development community to share the DRAFT Official Plan and walk through key areas including land use designations, energy policies, and policies pertaining to the development application processes.

Local Indigenous Organization Land-Based Gathering – November 28, 2025

The Kitchener 2051 Project Team organized and co-hosted a land-based gathering with Crow Sheild, an Indigenous healing and education space rooted in the Seven Grandfather Teachings of Respect, Truth, Wisdom, Honesty, Humility, Courage, and Love. It featured drumming and a talking circle with discussions about the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan in relation to interests and ideas shared by the organizations through one-on-one conversations held in Phase 3. This all took place inside Crow Lodge’s training room and outside in the Lodges outdoor shaptuaan/shaputuan with a sacred fire.



Figure 6: Images from gatherings and events at Crow Sheild Lodge (Image Credit: <https://www.crowshieldlodge.com>)

Development Review Forum (Internal) – December 3, 2025

City Staff gave a presentation to representatives from 13 City divisions about the DRAFT Official Plan, highlighted potential connections to the respective departments and changes from the existing Official Plan. The purpose of the session was to inspire City Staff to think beyond the day-to-day development review, which is often immediate and reactive to ‘now’ problems, and consider how we can work to achieve our overarching goal of creating a thriving city and a caring city through development.

The discussion focused transportation systems, buildings, infrastructure, parks, and public places and asked the following questions:

- How can we centre our development practices on creating a caring and thriving city?
- What does this mean?
- Why is it important?

DRAFT Official Plan Open House & Speaker Series Event #3 – December 3, 2025

A combined statutory Open House and Speaker Series event was held at the Conrad Centre for Performing Arts between 6:00 - 8:30pm on December 3, 2025. The purpose of this event was to introduce and gather feedback on the Draft Official Plan and host unstructured dialogue on what it means for creating a Caring and Thriving City.

A series of panels summarized the key components of the DRAFT Official Plan. Copies of the Summary Document and full Official Plan were also available to facilitate the discussion. An interactive set of panels asked the following questions about the DRAFT Official Plan:

- What are you most excited about in the new Official Plan?
- What do you want to make sure we've thought about?
- If you could embed one sentence into Kitchener's Official Plan, what would it be?

The Speaker Series portion of the event was moderated by Hall of Fame Musician and Public Speaker Bob Egan, who facilitated a dialogue with panelists from different organizations and institutions across Kitchener: Dr. Nadine Ibrahim, Associate Professor and Turkstra Chair in Urban Engineering at the University of Waterloo; Sam Nabi, a Project Coordinator with One Million Neighbours WR; Kelly De Fogain, Founder & Executive Director of Afropolitan Canada; and Jason Sweers, Partner with Martin Simmons Sweers Architects.

The panel discussed how policies and implementation of our Official Plan can create vibrant communities for all, and how we can all come together to advance wellbeing within our city.



Figure 7: Pictures from the Draft Official Plan Open House and Speaker Series discussion

The Voices of Lived Experience: Shaping the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan Event – December 8, 2025

City Staff hosted a special housing-focused pop-up where members of Kitchener’s Lived Expertise Working Group (LEWG) shared their stories and ideas about housing and related matters through presentations, a photo project, and a panel discussion. The LEWG is comprised of members of the community that have experienced homelessness or housing precarity. Members advocate for the priorities of underrepresented communities in the City’s decision-making process around housing and homelessness and help inform the development of City initiatives such as the Housing Needs Assessment, Housing for All 2.0 and the Kitchener Official Plan.

This event was held at Kitchener’s Central Public Library, running from 3:00pm to 4:30pm with over 50 attendees who came to learn how these experiences have shaped the DRAFT Official Plan and share their own thoughts.

Emails, Letters & Other Correspondences – November 2025 to March 2026

Project staff have received 129 comments via emails, letter or other forms of correspondence related to the DRAFT Official Plan as of March 25, 2026. These communications were read, transcribed, with individual comments categorized by theme, and incorporated, where possible, into the revised Official Plan. Of the comments received, 115 were from the public, seven (7) from agencies, four (4) from City departments, and three (3) from Kitchener 2051 Community Working Group members.

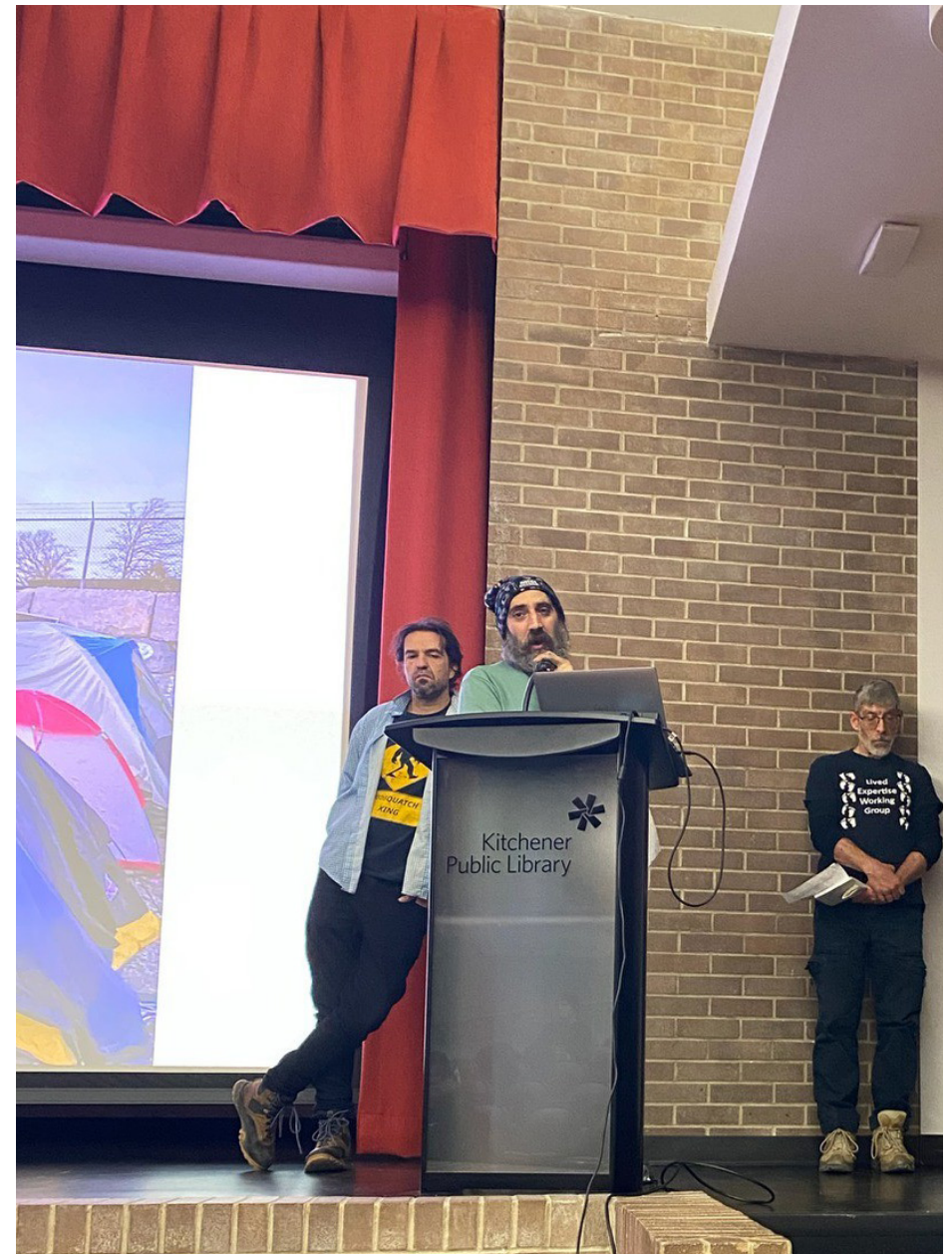


Figure 8: Presentation at the Voices of Lived Experience event




Kitchener 2051
Speaker Series and Open House
 Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts
 December 3, 2025

Waiting for the panel to start? Visit www.kitchener.ca/Kitchener2051 to sign-up and stay involved!

Scan me! 



Section 4

What We Heard



During Phase 4, over 300 open ended comments, ideas, and suggestions were gathered at events and through on-line engagement opportunities. This input, along with the quantitative data gathered through the survey, will be used to refine the DRAFT Official Plan and inform approaches to implementation and monitoring of its success into the future.

Methodology and Results

All open-ended responses gathered during in-person events and via the online tools was transcribed (when necessary), coded, analyzed and summarized. Coding open-ended responses involves reading through each comment and assigning a primary (and secondary, if necessary) 'code' or theme. Similarly coded responses are then grouped together and analyzed to help identify patterns, overarching themes, as well as shared ideas and sentiments.

Closed-question, or quantitative responses from both the in-person events (interactive information panels) and online tools (e.g. multiple choice, ranking, and Likert scale survey questions) were calculated and converted to chart form where possible.

Responses that were vulgar, or illegible were given a code of N/A and not included in the results.

The following presents a synthesis of feedback and ideas gathered during in-person events, meetings, and workshops, as well as through the online survey.

Important note on data inclusion:

In alignment with the Kitchener 2051 project objective of fostering an inclusive and respectful engagement process, comments which contained offensive, harmful, or inappropriate language, or comments targeting individuals or groups, have been omitted from this summary. This ensures that the outcomes reflect the shared values and priorities of our community.

4.1 What Matters Most to You? Online Survey

In this online survey, each participant was given 100 points to distribute across 18 emerging policy directions, encouraging meaningful reflection on priorities and trade-offs. Participants were then asked to reflect on the exercise and how they approached it, providing open-ended comments on their thoughts on the emerging directions more broadly.

Part 1: Priority Allocation Exercise

While every direction received some level of support, the results show clear patterns in what people feel should guide Kitchener's future. Participants shared a strong and consistent desire for a city that is inclusive, accessible, and supported by a mix of uses.

The most highly supported direction focused on active mobility: "Build safe, accessible walking rolling and cycling routes". This direction received more points than any other, pointing to a widespread desire to make daily trips without the use of a car. Several other directions related to meeting daily needs locally and/or without the use of a car scored high as well. These include:

- "Plan for growth that brings shops, transit, and homes closer together", which ranked third across all responses;
- "Allow small-scale shops and services in neighbourhoods", which ranked fourth across all responses; and,
- "Locate major office near ION and frequent transit", which ranked ninth across all responses.

Closely related to these priorities was the desire to "Foster social connection through neighbourhood design", which was the sixth most highly supported direction. Similarly, the direction to "Support all housing types in all neighbourhoods" surfaced as an

important direction. Together, these preferences along with the ones previously mentioned indicate support for policies that will result in complete and connected communities: from the ways we move, to the ways we live, and the ways in which our built environment can support social connection.

"Protect and celebrate Kitchener's Natural Heritage System" was the second most highly supported direction. Related to this was a desire to prioritize local food systems, including urban agriculture and to use climate risk data to guide infrastructure decisions. Across these priorities, there is a clear desire to plan for resilience and increase connections with the natural world.

Directions related to economic development also fared well, with strong support for policies that "Attract new industries and jobs by building on Kitchener's strengths".

Part 2: Open Discussion

Participants expressed strong support for the emerging directions, noting their interconnectedness and potential to enhance livability through the creation of complete and connected communities. While there is shared desire to use more active modes and make better use of large surface parking areas, some participants asked that this be balanced with the reality of needing a car, and the space to accommodate one, for some trips. Some participants felt there was too much focus on housing and that more attention was needed on employment opportunities and small-businesses, as well as recreation and gathering opportunities to make Kitchener attractive, desirable, and self-sufficient, and ensure it does not grow into a "bedroom community".

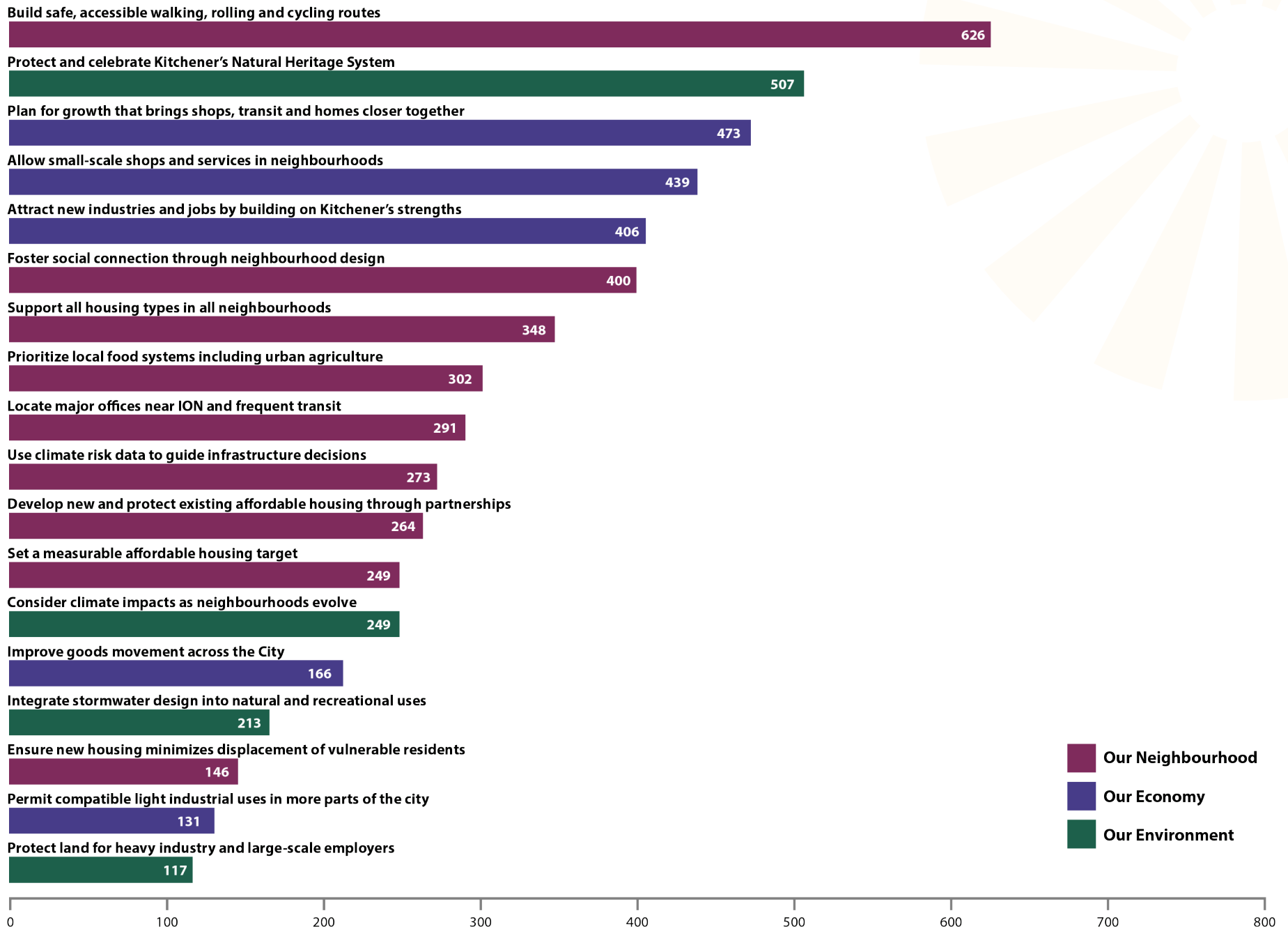


Figure 9: What Matters Most to You?

4.2 Local Indigenous Engagement

A number of important themes emerged from the dialogues shared at the Land-Based Gathering, many of which relate to what was previously shared by community organizations representing the diverse local Indigenous community in Phase 3 of this process. Not all topics discussed have been recorded and summarized below given the ceremonial nature of the gathering.

Creating Pathways to a Sense of Belonging

The themes of “belonging”, “community”, and “connection” were present throughout the discussion. Participants emphasized the need for the Official Plan to create pathways to foster a sense of belonging for the Indigenous community. They articulated that this belonging and connectedness comes from participating in ceremony on the land and in community, and having a deeper relationship with the land given its connection to ancestors and Indigenous culture.

These sentiments related to Phase 3 discussions regarding the desire for physical spaces which facilitate learning, gathering, and collaboration, including land-based learning and healing, fire and ceremonial spaces like Crow Sheild Lodge, community centres or hubs for Indigenous organizations, and food bank or food-share programs.

Relationship-Building as an Essential Component of Increasing Access to Land

Phase 3 discussions underscored the importance of free and open access to land, including the need for dedicated Indigenous cultural and gathering spaces. Participants agreed that the first step in improving access is through continued relationship-building between the City and community organizations in order to find a way forward. They felt that discussions through the Kitchener 2051 process have begun to establish a foundation and understanding between the City and participating organizations, which the City should build on as they implement their new Official Plan. This commitment to continued relationship-building should be recognized and reflected in the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan, as an essential requirement for achieving its Shared Vision.

The group also discussed the opportunity to create partnerships where City-owned land is used to improve access and provides spaces that reflect Indigenous culture. An example was planting of traditional medicines on City-owned land.

4.3 DRAFT Official Plan Open House & Speaker Series

The Draft Official Plan Open House and final Speaker Series event sought to share key highlights from the new Plan and better understand the community's sentiments towards it. Three interactive panels were created to gather feedback, in addition to informal dialogues held around information-based panels. The interactive panels asked:

- Which parts of the draft Official Plan feel the most promising or exciting to you?
- What's ONE thing you want to make sure we've included or thought about as we finalize Kitchener's new Official Plan?
- In 5-10 years, how will we know if the Official Plan is working?

Participants responded with excitement toward the small-scale commercial permissions that the new Official Plan introduces within neighbourhoods. They also shared their support for growth in areas with access to amenities. Topics that participants wanted to make sure were included in the new Official Plan included: proactive, holistic, and compassionate solutions that address the issue of homelessness, housing affordability, and cost of living, support for local arts and entertainment including access to affordable studio space for artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs, space for spontaneous programming, strategies that address sensory and micro-climate impacts of growth and create comfortable public spaces, amongst others. Many referenced measuring and monitoring outcomes of the Plan as a critical component for understanding if it is achieving its vision and objectives; community surveys and citizen assemblies were mentioned as ideas for undertaking monitoring. Other indicators of success included the number of cars per household, the amount of community organizations, and feelings of safety and comfort on active transportation commutes.

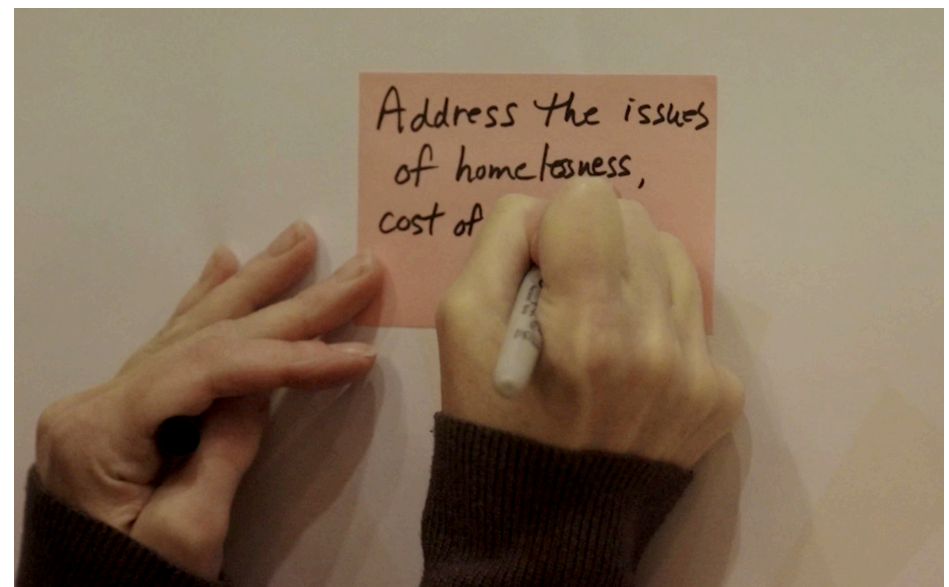


Figure 10: Pictures from the Draft Official Plan Open House and Speaker Series

Through the Speaker Series discussion, the diverse set of panelists provided insights into how implementation of the new Official Plan can and should create a Thriving and Caring City.

- When asked what the key elements are for vibrancy within public spaces and the city more broadly, panelists discussed comfort, human-scale building design, trees and shade, and a diversity of uses and people on every street and in every neighbourhood.
- When asked what belonging means in a city like Kitchener and how it shows up in spaces, places, programs, and experiences, panelists spoke to accessibility in a broad sense. They agreed that when people can't access the city — whether that means being able to afford transit or housing, understand signage and wayfinding, participate in programming — they are being excluded by design. They shared that allowing people to participate in these ways fosters belonging, and that when we design for the most vulnerable or those often excluded or on the margins, we are inevitably designing for everyone.
- Panelists agreed that protecting and maintaining resources while we grow, and planning for a changing climate in a holistic manner were both important for creating a Thriving and Caring City. They discussed the natural environment and food security in particular, which are both addressed through the draft policies of the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan.
- On the topic of implementation, panelists discussed how a multi-solving approach may be beneficial to achieving the vision and objectives of the Official Plan. This means advancing interventions that solve multiple problems or achieve multiple goals at once.



The multi-solving approach is a way to look at complex problems with optimism.

Sam Nabi, Project Coordinator,
One Million Neighbours WR



Kitchener's growth should be guided by policies that protect dignity, strengthen belonging, and ensure equitable opportunities for everyone.

Kelly De Fogain-Taylor,
Founder & Executive Director, Afropolitan Canada



4.4 DRAFT Official Plan Pop-Ups

The pop-up events shared information about the Official Plan process and provided an opportunity for staff to offer additional context and information about the Draft Official Plan, particularly in regards to the city structure land use designations. Pop-ups happened across the city as a chance for all members of the public to participate and provide feedback. Information about the Official Plan process, draft mapping and chapters were displayed on panels for participants to review. Staff provided context, additional information and collected feedback.

Conversations during early pop-up sessions remained educational. Attendees, in most cases, asked questions about the Official Plan, what it meant and the process. Staff mainly explained the plan, the expected population growth, and how these changes will be reflected in land use, employment, and other components of the new Official Plan. Feedback was generally positive.

In the winter 2026 sessions, participants expressed concerns with changes to specific neighbourhoods in the city that may result from the draft city structure and land use designations. Conversations particularly focused on the Westmount neighbourhood: participants were concerned with the delineation of this neighbourhood as a Strategic Growth Areas and the resulting application of land use designations, including expansion of non-residential use permission; some requested that the area be established as a Heritage Conservation District.

In response to comments received regarding the Westmount neighbourhood, City Staff hosted a neighbourhood “walkshop” on March 26th, 2026. The range of comments requested neighbourhood-specific cultural heritage landscape (CHL) policies, a 3-storey maximum building height, and a prohibition on non-

residential uses (neighbourhood-compatible commercial uses). The neighbourhood walkshop included a consultant-led guided walking tour to gather input on the proposed CHL boundary, understand the cultural heritage attributes of value, and desired conservation outcomes to better contextualize the comments received.

Across all pop-up discussions, participants were broadly supportive of continued connectivity, accessibility, and safety in the city’s mobility network. Housing emerged as a high priority for many individuals, with participants raising concerns about housing affordability and availability, including the need for a broader range of housing options to meet the needs of different household sizes, ages, and incomes.



Figure 11: Pictures from the Draft Official Plan Community Pop-Up Events

4.5 Did we Get it Right? Online Survey

Familiarity with the Plan, Process & Role of the Official Plan

When asked which document they had read in order to provide feedback, 54% of respondents had read only the Official Plan Summary document, 42% had read both the full DRAFT Official Plan and the Official Plan Summary document, and 4% had read only the full DRAFT Official Plan document.

When asked how familiar they were with the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan process, 80% of respondents stated they were 'Very Familiar' or 'Somewhat Familiar' with the process and 20% stated that they were 'Not Familiar / Not at all Familiar' with the process.

When asked how well they understood the role of the new Official Plan in Kitchener's future growth and development, 83% of respondents felt they understood the role of the Official Plan, 'Very Well' or 'Mostly Well', 8% understood it 'Somewhat Well', and 8% stated 'Not Well' or 'Not at all'.

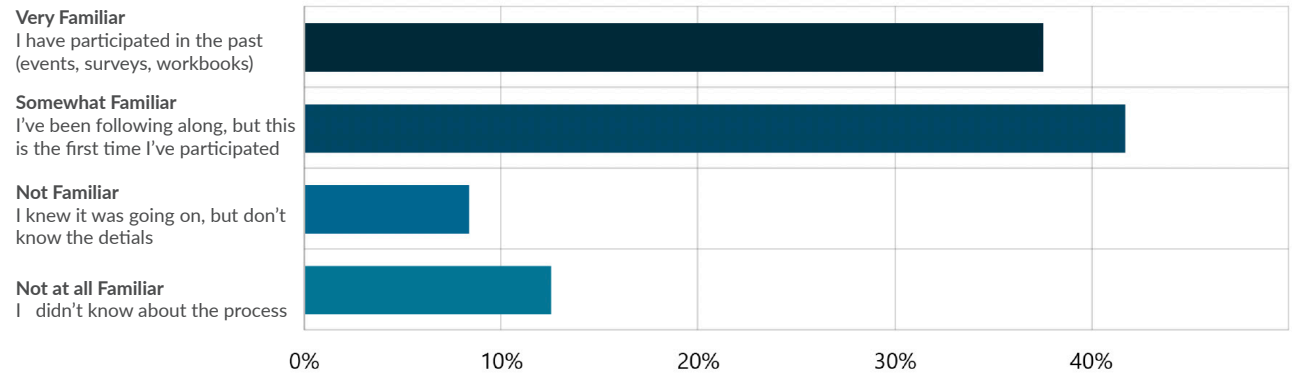


Figure 12: How familiar are you with the Kitchener 2051 Official Plan process?

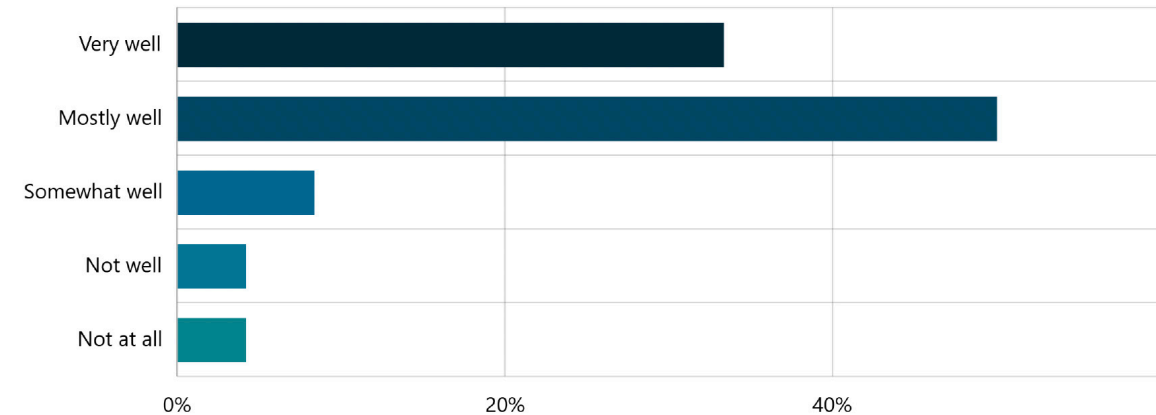


Figure 13: How well do you understand the role of the new Official Plan in Kitchener's future growth and development?

How well do you think the draft Official Plan reflects our shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas?

Overall, respondents expressed strong support for the direction of the draft Official Plan. Most (92%) felt it reflects our shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas 'Very Well' or 'Mostly Well', while a small number (8%) felt it reflected them 'Not Well' or 'Not at All'.

When asked how the new Official Plan could more clearly reflect Kitchener's Vision, Values, and Big Ideas, many emphasized the importance of thoughtful integration of growth into neighbourhoods, ensuring the city remained sensitive to local context and the pace and location of new development.

While participants felt the vision is strong, but asked for clearer connections between values, policies, and how decisions will be made and implemented over time. Respondents also called for clearer guidance on how the Plan will balance competing priorities, particularly economic growth and environmental protection.

Other feedback highlighted opportunities to strengthen economic diversity, broaden accessibility beyond minimum standards, and improve everyday mobility and public amenities, including transit, safety, and public infrastructure.

How well does the draft City Structure help you understand how and where future growth and development might occur?

Most respondents (91%) said the DRAFT City Structure helped them understand 'Very Well' or 'Mostly Well' how and where future growth may occur, with only 9% stating that they felt it could be more clear.

When asked what would make the DRAFT City Structure more clear and/or easier to understand, several respondents would like to see clarity related to areas identified for future study, particularly regarding how farmland will be protected and how potential long-term urban expansion may be considered. Some noted uncertainty about how growth areas outside the core might be supported by reliable public transit and cautioned against higher-density development without strong frequent transit connections.



It is evident that there was thoughtful decision-making put into the design of the SGAs. The plan allows entire neighbourhoods on the periphery of the MTSAs to intensify, rather than only permitting mid-rises on car sewers.



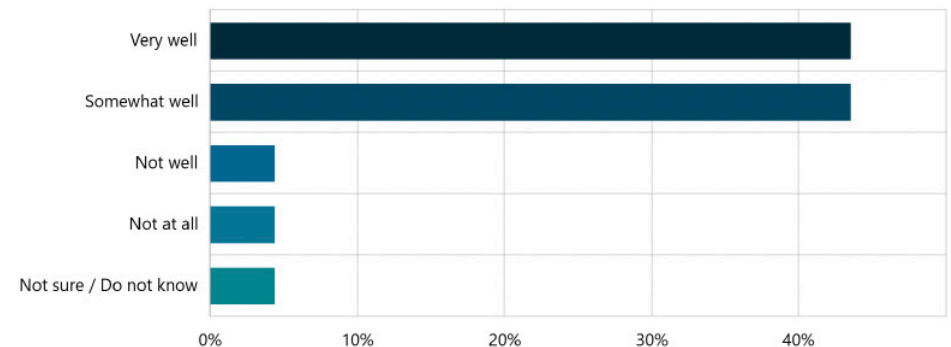
How well do the Land Use Designations help you understand how different areas of the city might look and feel in the future?

Most respondents (87%) said the DRAFT Land Use Designations helped them understand how different areas of the city may look and feel in the future, while 9% stated that they did not find them helpful, and 4% were unsure.

When asked how the DRAFT Land Use Designations could be clearer or easier to understand, several respondents suggested that additional photos or graphics would help. Others emphasized the importance of clearer transitions between non-residential and residential areas, noting concerns with allowing auto-oriented commercial uses next to neighbourhoods and expressing a preference for mixed-use or “commercial-first” approaches.

How well do the draft City Structure and Land Use Designations reflect our Shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas?

Most respondents (87%) felt the City Structure and Land Use Designations together reflected the shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas “Very Well” or “Somewhat Well”, while a small percentage (9%) stated that they did not reflect them well or at all, and 4% were unsure.



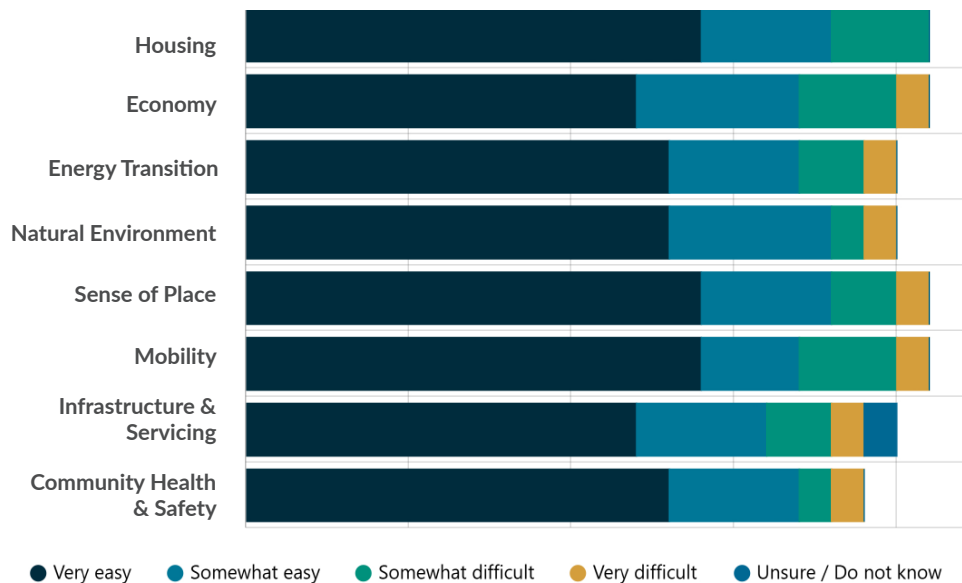
While the overall vision for a denser, more vibrant city was supported, some respondents questioned how well it will translate into equitable, livable outcomes on the ground.

Respondents generally supported mixed-use development and intensification, but raised concerns about the pace and location of growth, and the need for stronger links between areas of intensification and new parks, green spaces, community services, and amenities. Others repeated concerns about car-oriented uses, transit reliability, and equity, noting that intensification should be matched with strong public transit, local services, and accessible green spaces.

How easy was it to understand the draft purpose, objectives, and policies for each Building Block?

Most respondents found the Building Blocks sections easy to understand, those related to Housing, Mobility, Sense of Place, and Community Health & Safety. However, more technical sections were harder to follow and would benefit from clearer language and examples.

When asked what would make the DRAFT Building Block sections more clear and/or easier to understand, some felt the economy and mobility sections could benefit from clearer, more tangible goals, and from better explaining how certain targets are measured (for example, in the housing section: by number of units rather than number of applications).



For each Building Block, please tell us how well the draft objective and policies reflect our Shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas.

Across all Building Blocks, most respondents felt the draft policies reflect Kitchener’s Vision, Values, and Big Ideas “Very Well” or “Somewhat Well”. Sense of Place (90%) and Mobility (85%) showed the strongest alignment, followed by Infrastructure and Servicing (85%), Community (85%), Natural Environment (80%), and Housing (81%).

Feedback was more mixed for Economy (86%) and Energy Transition (76%), where a greater share of respondents indicated they were “Not Well” or “Not at All” aligned, suggesting opportunities to clarify the purpose and intent of these sections, and to potentially strengthen policy direction in these areas.

When asked how the DRAFT Building Blocks could more clearly reflect Kitchener’s Vision, Values, and Big Ideas, several respondents raised concerns about the gap between the Plan’s vision and how it will be implemented, particularly around housing affordability, the energy transition, and environmental protection.

Respondents also called for stronger, clearer commitments to reducing fossil fuel use, improving transit, and protecting natural areas, and emphasized the need for these priorities to be consistently reflected in decisions as the city grows.

Are there other indicators or metrics the City should be tracking to ensure our Shared Vision, Values, and Big Ideas are achieved?

Participants suggested a range of additional indicators related to the themes of housing, belonging, the environment, and mobility.

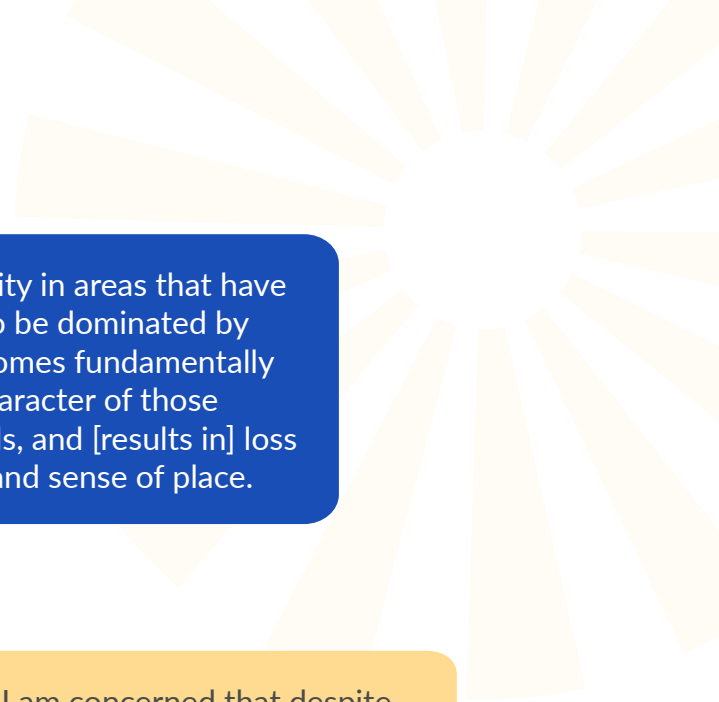
These included:

- Measuring how trends re housing insecurity and food insecurity are changing;
- Measuring sentiments of rootedness and belonging through change, particularly within neighbourhoods;
- More indicators related to “Our Environment”, to supplement “access to recreation” and “reduction in greenhouse gas emissions” which are already captured;
- More indicators related to Parks to supplement the tree canopy and parkland metrics, such as measuring the success of parks as places for gathering and habitat;
- Improving the frequency and reliability of transit, and reducing the time it takes to make daily trips on transit; and,
- Indicators related to infrastructure and safety, such as the amount of car collisions and fatalities in different neighbourhoods across the city.

What is the one thing you like the most about the DRAFT Official Plan? What is one thing you’re concerned about?

Overall, feedback reflected pride in the city’s direction and confidence that the draft Official Plan provides a strong foundation as it moves toward the next phase. Participants appreciated the Plan’s ambitious and integrated vision, particularly its focus on climate resilience and preparedness, decarbonization, housing affordability and diversity, mixed-use development, and intensification that protects the countryside. Respondents also highlighted the emphasis on complete, inclusive, and accessible communities, reliable public and active transportation, and a clear commitment to green space, natural area protection, and learning from Indigenous teachings. Several noted that the Plan is well organized, clearly written, and forward-looking, with a strong focus on transit-oriented growth and long-term sustainability.

When asked about their concerns, several respondents raised the lack of certainty around what could be built within neighbourhoods given increased height permissions, and the fear that increased density would result in a change in character and sense of belonging in these areas. Others mentioned they were concerned the Plan’s policies would not result in its intended outcomes due to political decisions, power imbalances, and other factors out of the Plan’s control. Some mentioned they were concerned the Plan’s growth targets may conflict with its climate targets and aim to protect the natural environment. There was also mention of services and facilities within the city not being able to keep up with the rate of growth and change.



I am proud of the vision the city has toward housing. I am excited to be able to live in a city with a diverse mix of housing forms. One where aging family members have mobility within their neighbourhood.

Increased density in areas that have long planned to be dominated by single-family homes fundamentally changes the character of those neighbourhoods, and [results in] loss of rootedness and sense of place.

[I like] the acknowledgement that green space and natural areas will be prioritized and preserved. This is a beautifully treed city with phenomenal trails and rivers. An unwavering commitment to preservation is fantastic.

I am concerned that despite clear policies in this Plan, that matters of environment tend to be overwhelmed by matters of economy when it comes time to make

I love the ambitious vision of decarbonizing and getting to net-zero by 2050. It's important for our quality of life and for Kitchener's part in fighting climate

It is surprisingly bold and visionary. I like that it is unequivocally clear that mixed-use zoning is the policy from now on, with upzoning and transit oriented development prioritized.

The rate of growth, especially in MTSAs, challenge of ensuring that housing meets the needs of those with the least choice, and the sense that development in our City is being driven by forces beyond our control [are all of

4.6 Emails, Letters, and Other Correspondences

The following are key themes from what was heard across 100+ emails and letters from the public, and additional one-on-one verbal and written communications in relation to their comments.

Employment Area permissions

Participants asked to carry forward existing land use permissions from the 2014 Official Plan for Employment Area lands. Feedback emphasized maintaining current permissions and introducing added flexibility for property owners. City Staff reconnected with participants to provide clarity regarding the revised land use permissions, and re-engaged consultants to do additional analysis to understand existing uses in Employment Areas and how these uses align with in-force policy directions from the Province.

Commercial First land use designation

Feedback included concerns regarding the proposed commercial replacement policies within the Commercial First land use designation. Participants expressed concerns about requirements to replace commercial floor space when existing commercial properties are redeveloped, noting potential impacts on redevelopment feasibility and the ability to adapt sites to changing market needs. City Staff reconnected with participants to provide clarity on the intent of this land use designation and how it may be implemented in the future.

Strategic Growth Areas

Participants requested that the delineation of Strategic Growth Areas be expanded to some areas that were not identified in the draft Official Plan. This feedback reflected a desire to carry forward select areas that were identified as intensification areas in the City's current Official Plan but that did not broadly meet the criteria for Strategic Growth Areas in the draft Official Plan. City Staff reconnected with participants to re-share the criteria used to identify and delineate Strategic Growth Areas and discuss draft policies that allow for requests to expand this city structure element.

Westmount neighbourhood

In the Westmount neighbourhood, participants opposed the draft City Structure and land use designations specific to the neighbourhood. Key requests included adding neighbourhood-specific cultural heritage landscape policies, restricting building heights to a maximum of three storeys, and prohibiting non-residential commercial uses.



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Kitchener 2051

KITCHENER

Personal Use and Other Buildings look and use
DRAFT Land Use Designations

Kitchener 2051
Draft Official Plan

KITCHENER
Land Collection Program 2022

Community City Building Elements
DRAFT Building Blocks

Planning and Policy
Kitchener 2051

KITCHENER

Section 5

Takeaways and Next Steps



Phase 4 of the Kitchener 2051 process confirmed that residents care deeply about the city they live in and want to prioritize thoughtful growth. Many voiced support for the directions of the Draft Official Plan, with suggestions on how to make them stronger or easier to understand. Some voiced concerns with specific elements of the Draft Official Plan. City Staff have considered all of this feedback in revising the Plan for Council’s consideration.

Based on public feedback, the Kitchener 2051 Project Team made changes to the DRAFT Official Plan that include:

- A citywide re-evaluation of the Strategic Growth Areas delineation to ensure a consistency with identified criteria;
- Additional policies that provide guidance on how the implementing bylaws will be applied to the Mixed Use A, B, and C, and Neighbourhoods land use designations;
- New cultural heritage landscape policies specific to the Westmount neighbourhood;
- Additional context and interpretation clarity specific to the Commercial First land use designation, particularly for policies applying to both Mixed Use and Commercial First land use designations;
- Revised mapping that consolidates source water protection information, city structure and land use changes following additional technical review, and minor administrative changes; and
- Improved brevity throughout the document including the removal of duplicate content across chapters, reduced jargon and technical language where appropriate, and a greater emphasis on explaining planning concepts in plain language.

Next Steps

The Kitchener 2051 Project Team will be presenting the second draft of the Official Plan at the City of Kitchener’s Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee on April 20, 2026. This non-statutory public meeting will provide the public an opportunity to share their feedback. Following Council’s direction, City Staff will initiate the preparation of a third and final draft of the Official Plan for Council’s consideration. Along with comments from the Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee and the general public, the third and final draft of the Official Plan will reflect on-going dialogue with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation, and comments received from the Provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 90-day review.

