Introduction

In 2010 the City of Kitchener authored and endorsed the Parks Strategic Plan. The plan was developed over two years and sought to direct the City’s investments and initiatives in the future planning, design, acquisition, improvement, management, programming and use of City parks. The plan called for a comprehensive review and update in 2020 to ensure the plan is “recast to reflect the consideration of the time period”.

Places & Spaces is that update, and will be Kitchener's Park strategy. It is the recasting of the parks plan to better reflect current demands of park space. It will re-evaluate all aspects of parks delivery in Kitchener down to the fundamental level - what makes a quality park in Kitchener?

The strategy does not stand in isolation. It will draw support from a wide range of strategies including but not limited to the Leisure Facilities Master Plan (2019), the Cycling and Trails Master Plan (2020), Kitchener Growth Management Plan (2019-2021), Kitchener Development Manual (2021), Stormwater Master Plan (2016), Kitchener Urban Forest Strategy (2019), and the City's Corporate Strategic Plan (2019)
Acknowledgments

Places & Spaces will be a document focused on parkland and the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Our parks are integral to communities, providing spaces that people connect with the environment within, share space together, play and build connections.

The City is in a unique position to be able to provide, care for, maintain and secure public access to parks and open spaces to all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples.

Land ownership in Canada is one of great challenge and fraught with broken promises between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. 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, Métis and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities will be respected and the vital role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation is valued and will be reflected in Places and Spaces.

This document does not address ownership of these public spaces. The City holds these lands for, and on behalf of, the community that calls Kitchener home and stewards almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open spaces system. Through the development of this document, the City hopes to better understand and address community needs and barriers to use of these spaces, with a goal to ensure all communities in Kitchener can feel welcome, safe and able to use parks and open spaces.
Foundations
Parks are important. This is a simple yet profound statement, and one that is recognized not just in Kitchener but cities everywhere. It is critical to understand their value in urban systems including ecological preservation, health and wellness support, and providing significant economic benefits.

Kitchener’s system of parks, open spaces, natural areas, greenways and trails account for over 14% of the total land area within the City boundary in over 500 parks and 1,900 hectares of land. Those parks contain some of the most iconic landscapes found within the City and Region, as well as significant natural preservation lands.

Parks are more than the sum of their parts. They may appear as simple grassed locations with playgrounds, trees, trails, benches and so on. However, they provide places for people to gather, unwind, exercise, socialize, play, celebrate, and enjoy. They are places to reconnect with the outdoors and the natural world. They are extensions of communities and contribute significantly to the community’s identity and the individuals’ connections within it. They contribute to the ecological and environmental functions within our city. They aide to reduce heat island effects, provide areas of stormwater infiltration, and establish habitat and food sources for various species.

These values were all key concepts of the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan and evident in the decade since its completion.
Purpose & Structure

Places and Spaces is an update to the existing Parks Strategic Plan adopted by City Council in 2010. More critically, the purpose of this document is to:

1. Re-affirm Kitchener’s vision and commitment to building and maintaining public parks;
2. Provide guiding principles and policy themes to inform future park development; and
3. Update the process of park acquisitions.

The title also lends itself to the structure of the document - a two parts as follows:

**Places**

Places looks at the **quality** of park space and provides a vision for parks in Kitchener. Places is be aimed at placemaking and creating diverse and functional spaces.

Places is presented in a series of policy statements exploring a wide range of themes in parks, including principles of design (e.g. equity, accessibility), environment & ecology (e.g. habitat, stormwater and climate change), and specific infrastructure planning (e.g. playgrounds, sportsfields, pets in parks).

**Spaces**

Where Places looks at the quality of park space, Spaces explores the **quantity** of parks in Kitchener, and the context of parks within the City. It details Kitchener’s current park inventory, looks at the definitions of park space, determines the amount of park space we need and where, and provides or updates the tools in which we acquire those spaces.
Guiding Principles

How does Kitchener achieve our vision for parks? Specific tools, including Council policy and amenity plans, will be developed as a result of Places & Spaces. The intent of this document is to provide the foundation for those tools in the form of recommendations. The following guiding principles will inform each recommendation and are critical in delivering this vision.

The following are the guiding principles for Places & Spaces:

**Include** everyone by providing spaces that are accessible for people of all ages, genders, religions, cultures, abilities, and incomes.

**Expand** the parks system strategically with a focus on community level park services and existing gaps in that service level.

**Improve** existing parks and the recreational components within them.

**Integrate** environmental, ecological and climate change actions within park planning and improvements.

**Adapt** park uses to suit current and future needs of established and growing communities.

**Connect** all types of parks within the system through planning, physical, visual and environmental & ecological connections.
Values

The value of a park space can be relative to each individual experiencing the space, however it is clear that parks have long- been fundamental building blocks to communities, and often become the most identifiable feature of the City. Here’s how parks contribute to the City:

**Wellbeing**

Parks are recreational, activity, and sporting hubs that are home to more than the vast majority of the City’s sportsfields, sports courts, playgrounds, splashpads, skateparks, and pools. They promote physical activity and healthy living, and support a variety of active and passive outdoor uses that appeal to a wide range of individuals and groups.

Parks are essential to the health and wellbeing of communities. By fostering outdoor activity, parks can contribute to the physical and psychological health of each community by simply providing the opportunity and means to access nature, passive & active exercise, exploration & play, social interactions and opportunities for respite.

Access to park space and shade provided by mature tree canopy can also provide significant relief from sun exposure and heat as climate impacts continue to become more frequent and severe.

They provide the means for accessible leisure facilities, both individual and organized, serving as the location for some of the Region’s most important outdoor and indoor recreational opportunities.

**Social Wellness**

A Park space is often the focal point of a community, fostering community involvement, activity, safety, and awareness of its neighbourhood. They can deepen people’s sense of belonging, and connect diverse neighbourhoods. They provide opportunity for social interactions, relationship building, and support community cohesion. They are canvases for placemaking opportunities like public art, gatherings, social clubs, festivals and events, and other cultural programming, often evoking a sense of personal responsibility from each community.

From complex connections like community heritage and cultural history, to simpler ones like a favourite tree, playground, or field - each resident may have a personal connection or story with a park, and collectively those stories shape the importance of each space.

**Environment**

Parks and networks of park systems provide the vast majority of habitat for urban wildlife and vegetation. They allow for the conservation and protection of ecosystems and maintain biodiversity within a city’s boundaries. This comes in the form of naturalized spaces within planned and maintained parks or dedicated parcels of land for the purpose of preserving wildlife habitat, corridors, and all natural system conservation.

Parks are the green assets of the City, serving a valuable role to manage stormwater and are home to the majority of the City’s large stature trees. They are then critical in the City’s effort to adapt to climate changes like increasing rate of high intensity storm events, mitigating rising urban heat effects and extreme weather events.

They also connect people and residents of the community to those natural systems, allowing demonstration and education of environmental systems and climate change protections in action.
**Economy**

Parks most often provide passive economic benefits such as enhancements to residential property values and attractiveness for investments in business, industry and housing developments.

They can provide large scale cost reductions in climate change impacts. They increase the City’s resiliency to extreme weather events, reduce heat island effects of prolonged heat waves, and reduce stormwater filtration and collection infrastructure. As a result, they defer or eliminate costs and overall public risks related to watershed erosion and flooding.

More directly, parks can boost local tourism particularly through iconic landscapes, festivals, and entertainment or sporting events. The ripple effect of more people visiting the City can increase traffic to local stores, shops, accommodations, restaurants, transit, and so on.

**Quality of Life**

A city’s quality of life is shaped by its communities and the amenities that are offered. Communities that are livable, environmentally resilient, facilitate connection to nature and amenity-rich are where people want to live and work.

Amenities by definition are the elements of a city or region that contribute to desirability of place. What a community offers, including its local cultural, historical, natural, and recreational amenities, improve the perceived quality of life that a city provides.

Parks are one of those community amenities, and also contain, connect and enhance many more. The value parks provide further improves a community’s quality of life while continuing to foster a sense of place.
Global Direction

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015 the United Nations adopted a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). The plan is inclusive of 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets. The goals and targets reflect a balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

How do Kitchener’s parks contribute to these goals? Here are the strongest links between Places & Spaces and the UN Sustainable Development Goals:

**Clean Water and Sanitation**

Parks systems and amenities increasing water-use efficiency, and promote the participation of local communities in improving water management within parks.

**Responsible Consumption & Production**

Employ use of sustainable and durable materials in park construction and maintenance.

**Affordable and Clean Energy**

Parks amenities and buildings focusing on three season design or elimination of natural gas to increase the reliance and usage of renewable energy.

**Climate Action**

Continue to implement low-impact stormwater solutions in park settings to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters.

**Reduced Inequalities**

Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status through parks design and consultation efforts.

**Life on Land**

Continue the practice of acquiring naturalized lands and environmental features for the purpose of protection and preservation of flora and fauna.

**Sustainable Cities and Communities**

Fostering adequate park space for established urban forest canopy, reducing the adverse environmental impact of cities with attention to air quality.
Schedule

**Council**
- Council Update

**Spaces**
- Report & By-Law
  - Spaces Document & Park Dedication By-Law
  - Spaces Final & By-Law
- Engagement
  - Target
  - Public

**Places**
- Engagement
  - Gathering
    - Initial surveys
  - Parks Topics
    - 7 topic groupings, variety of methods
  - Places topic development, coordinated with grouped consultation efforts
- Confirmation
  - By-Law Required
  - September 2022

- Council (Final)
- Spaces Document & Park Dedication By-Law
- Spaces Final & By-Law

- By-Law Required
- September 2022

- Gathering Initial surveys
- Parks Topics
  - 7 topic groupings, variety of methods
- Confirmation
  - Results verified

- Places topic development, coordinated with grouped consultation efforts

Foundations

Spaces
Introduction & Foundations
June & August 2021
Staff will introduce the project, outline the need for the study and outline the methodology planned. Direction and commentary from Council will be sought to confirm the approach presented. External stakeholders will be notified of the project prior to the Council session, and consulted.

Spaces Document & Park Dedication By-Law
June 2022
Final documents to be provided and presented to Council, including Spaces, Park Dedication By-Law and engagement results. June 13th and June 20th 2022 are the targeted Committee and Council dates for presentation and approval of Spaces and draft Park Dedication By-Law.

Project Update
December 2022
An update will be provided to Council following approval of the park dedication by-law and on-going development of Places, including draft documents to date, public consultation update and forecast completion prior to 2023.

Places Documents
Q4 2023
Targeted final approval from Council in quarter 4 of 2023. Final dates to be determined.
Spaces: Framework
Spaces will explore the quantity of parks in Kitchener, and parks context within the City. It will detail Kitchener’s current inventory, look at the definitions of park space, determine the amount and location of park space we need, and provide or update the tools in which we acquire those spaces.

The structure of spaces will be a singular document following a logical sequence of the what, why and how of park properties and acquisitions. The categories below will form sections within the final document:

- **State of Parks**
  - Defining Parks in Kitchener
  - Categorizing our Parks
  - Recognizing Alternatives
  - Measuring Park Provisions
  - Critical Needs and Park Gaps
  - Growth

- **Park Planning**
  - How Parks are Planned and Acquired
  - Kitchener’s Park Dedication By-Law

- **Strategy**
  - Establishing Park Provisions
  - Addressing Critical Gaps
  - Leveraging Park Dedication
  - Additional Sources

- **Dedication By-Law Update**
  - Provincial Context
  - Comparing Provisions
  - Revisions to the By-Law
  - Context within Development Charges
Places: Framework
Report Structure

Places will be presented in a series of policy statements exploring a wide range of themes in parks which are outlined below. The final collection of policies will evolve through the development and public consultation process.

This is a working list and will continue to grow over time. A variety of engagement strategies will be used to inform these topics, including broad public engagement, specific stakeholder engagement, equity deserving community outreach, focus groups and phone surveys. Engagement methods will be utilized to best suit each topic.

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<td>• Green Infrastructure &amp; Sustainability</td>
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