KITCHENER

Places

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

KITCHENER

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Related sections

Spaces
Community Gardens
Community Health & Wellness
Dedication
Dogs
Downtown Kitchener
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Play
Signature & Feature Parks
Splashpads
Sports & Games
Trails & Lighting
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Team

The development of Places, part of the Parks Master Plan was made possible through the efforts of the City of Kitchener Parks and Open Space Design and Development team in collaboration with Openly consulting services.

This work would not have been possible without the ongoing meaningful input from many individuals, groups, organizations, and community partners. We would like to extend a sincere thank you to all who shared their perspectives to support the development of this Parks Master Plan.

City of Kitchener:

Denise McGoldrick, Project sponsor

Jeff Silcox-Childs, Project sponsor

Mark Parris, Project director & author

Rebecca Roy, Project manager & author

Cara Lozano, Project support & author

Sukhman Sanghera, Project support & author

Sabiha Syed, Project engagement lead

Meghan MacKinnon, Project engagement support

Openly:

Eve Nadler: Director

Cheryl Luptak, Strategic implementation lead

Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Executive Summary

The **Places and Spaces Parks Master Plan** is an update to the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan for the City of Kitchener.

This Parks Master Plan is made up of two parts: **Spaces**, which addresses the quantity of park space, and **Places**, which focuses on the quality of park experiences.

The Spaces part of the Parks Master Plan update was approved by Council in August of 2022.

An extensive period of rich engagement occurred from 2021 to 2023 to properly understand how residents felt about the quality of their park experiences in Kitchener. It took time to begin to build trust-based relationships with numerous community groups, neighbourhoods, organizations, and individuals. For nearly three years, through one-on-one interviews, online polls and surveys, focus groups, pop-up events, and meetings, the City sought to hear the public's perspective on their needs and experiences in parks and open spaces.

Major themes of accessibility, environmental sustainability, equity, health and wellbeing, inclusion, information, partnerships, and safety arose naturally again and again throughout the engagement. The engagement findings highlight the value and importance of a welcoming and connected parks and open space system for the community.

Taking into consideration findings from all data sources, 50 recommendations are contained in **Places.** The recommendations are prioritized for implementation and grouped into four impact areas.

Places recommendations will be implemented in a way that prioritizes engagement while considering their meaning and impact on Kitchener's vision to "build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us - and each other".

These four themes serve as core impact areas to organize recommendations in **Places** and guide the work of communicating Kitchener's vision:

Parks for everyone

Connecting park experiences

Planning parks for the future

Responsive park spaces

The Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan is organized into topic-based booklets.

Places
Spaces
Community Gardens
Community Health & Wellness
Dedication
Dogs
Downtown Kitchener
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
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Signature & Feature Parks
Splashpads
Sports & Games
Trails & Lighting
Winter Use

Because of the complex inter-relationship between topics and findings related to parks and open spaces, the booklets work together to guide the future of parks and open spaces in Kitchener.

Introduction

The **Places** part of the Parks Master Plan will serve as the guide for the development of the parks and open space system in Kitchener for the next ten years with a focus on providing quality park experiences for the Kitchener community.

Places also draws on other approved City strategies and plans that share a commitment to fostering sustainability and a sense of belonging in parks and open spaces.

Positioning this Parks Master Plan update within local community context was achieved through community engagement. The community asked for a Kitchener-specific approach to issues being faced in the city's parks settings. Responding to this feedback was critical to the development and maintenance of relationships through all stages of engagement.

The following section describes an overall approach that recognizes the interrelation and overlap of park use with other strategic City initiatives, and acknowledges the impacts of decisions affecting parks and open spaces on the public.

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Overall approach

This Parks Master Plan is made up of two parts: **Spaces**, which addresses the quantity of park space, and **Places**, which focuses on the quality of park experiences.

The Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan is part of Kitchener's vision to:

Build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us – and each other.

Parks are public spaces. Taking an approach that amplifies voices disproportionately impacted by policies related to Kitchener parks contributes meaningfully toward achieving this vision.

Continuing to seek input from those who are marginalized in our community through the implementation of the Parks Master Plan recommendations remains a commitment when engaging with residents across the city. Belonging is for everyone, and safety, health, and wellbeing will look different for different people.

The City of Kitchener acknowledges that in order to realize and maintain this vision, effort, trust, intentionality, and partnerships are needed.

Connected strategies

The City of Kitchener is made up of five departments, each containing multiple divisions that provide distinct services to residents. Within these divisions, formal strategies guide present and future priorities. Beyond the City of Kitchener, the Region of Waterloo and key partners have their strategies too. It is important to understand how the **Places** part of the Parks Master Plan connects and interacts with these overlapping approved strategies. In some cases, other strategies may support addressing gaps identified through Places. In other cases, Places may address gaps that exist in connected strategies.
Understanding how these strategies interact supports the implementation of the recommendations in Places. Where insights and feedback gathered through the implementation of Places recommendations are out of scope for parks, it will be shared with the appropriate City divisions.

The City of Kitchener commits to integrating the Parks Master Plan with the other relevant strategies where possible to efficiently achieve shared objectives.

See Appendix A for the full list of relevant connected strategies.

Methods

Engagement

To create the foundation on which the vision for Places could be built, an extensive period of rich engagement to occurred from 2021 to 2023. The purpose of the engagement effort was to understand how residents felt about the quality of their park experiences in Kitchener. It took time to begin to build trust-based relationships with numerous community groups, neighbourhoods, organizations, and individuals.

For nearly three years, through a layered and extensive engagement effort including conversations with hundreds of community members, over thirty groups, organizations, committees and classrooms, the City actively sought to hear the public's perspective on their needs and experiences in parks and open spaces. Through one-on-one interviews, online polls and surveys, focus groups, pop-up events, and meetings, major themes of accessibility, environmental sustainability, equity, health and wellbeing, inclusion, information, partnerships, and safety arose naturally again and again.

The recommendations made in Places are directly informed by engagement.

See Appendix C and D for the list of engagement tools and sources.

Engagement stages

Engagement for Places & Spaces partially overlapped, taking place incrementally over three stages:

1. Relationship initiation and development;
2. Active engagement; and,
3. Validation and feedback.

A summary of **Spaces** engagement is included in the Council-approved document.

Stage one - relationship initiation and development 2021

Before the launch of the Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan project, the City of Kitchener initiated relationship development with a wide variety of equity-deserving community groups and partners. Trust had to be built from the ground up, and reciprocal relationships established before any true project engagement could take place. Leaning on existing relationships and gentle introductions led to community connections which, in turn, supported introductions with more community groups and partners.

Stage two - active engagement 2021-2023

As relationships initiated in stage one with community groups continued to grow, Places & Spaces engagement formally launched using a multi-faceted approach.

To chart the path toward creating a welcoming and connected park and open space system for the city, the **Places** engagement effort asked three key questions:

1. How are parks currently experienced?
2. How do we create parks that serve the community?
3. How do we create parks that are welcoming and responsive to all?

Stage two of the engagement process focused on topic-specific virtual engagement through 16 surveys, 10 idea boards, and four online polls. Surveys, idea boards, and polls spanned a wide range of park-related topics, from winter use to sports courts, natural areas, accessibility, and more. Topic-specific engagement was launched through a series of topic groupings over a span of nearly two years to encourage ongoing public engagement.

Stage three - validation and feedback 2022-2023

Taking into consideration work already planned and conducted by the City of Kitchener, with support from Openly, a social purpose consultancy, a third stage of deeper engagement with equity-deserving communities was organized.

Timelines for engagement with equity-deserving community groups were guided by those community groups. By being flexible and hearing issues important to community groups, as well as meeting when, where, and how community members identified as most appropriate helped to build trust. Over one and a half years, City of Kitchener staff were part of ongoing conversations with hundreds of community members, and over thirty groups, organizations, committees, and classrooms. Focusing on building relationships and listening enabled a pop-up park in Kitchener to be shaped by local community partners that hosted a series of activities during the event. Allowing time and space for these relationships to develop served as a foundation for meaningful conversations with equity-deserving community groups throughout Kitchener about parks and open spaces.

This final stage of engagement was also informed by input from the Equity, Anti-Racism, and Indigenous Initiatives (now Equity, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation) team. The purpose of engagement during this phase was to share information gathered to-date to ensure feedback received was accurately reflected, and to provide opportunities for further in-depth conversations. All community groups were invited to share more feedback, and connections took place at the pace of the partner.

Engagement concluded with topic-based internal workshops with City of Kitchener staff, similar to engagement conducted with the public through surveys. The purpose of the workshops was to understand staff experience with park development and operations and to identify synergies among overlapping City strategies and plans to amplify shared impact and support decision-making.

Findings

Major themes

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. These themes helped to describe the big picture, or deeper meaning in the data. The following major themes cut across several data sets and engagement methods. Each topic-based booklet discusses the engagement findings that related to each of these major themes.

Accessibility

Designing parks and open spaces to eliminate barriers for individuals with disabilities, ensuring meaningful participation in the park environment by including features such as seating, tables, washroom facilities, playground equipment, trail surfaces, maintenance practices, and more.

Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability includes protecting, maintaining, and expanding biodiversity, considering building materials and methods, and enacting climate change mitigation measures including water conservation efforts in parks and open spaces.

Health and wellbeing

Recognizing that health and wellbeing will look different for different people, many community members recognized the physical, social, and mental health benefits provided by parks and open spaces

Inclusion

Inclusion is focused on fostering an environment where everyone feels welcome, safe and included in parks and open spaces by having access to washroom facilities, spaces to play, opportunities to connect, and more.

Information

The need to communicate relevant information about all parks and open spaces, including updated, bolstered, and diversified signage, communication, and education opportunities.

Partnerships

The strategic alignment of resources between two or more organizations to provide a shared benefit to the community. Thoughtful relationship development and engagement processes with community members and partners underline all the conceptual themes as a way to effectively deliver diverse, publicly available recreational opportunities in parks and open spaces.

Safety

The experience of a park visitor in relation to their feeling of physical, mental, and emotional security within that space. The importance of feeling safe day and night, year-round, arose from the engagement

Interrelation of major themes

Each of the major themes is intertwined with the others. For example, ensuring terrain is made of **accessible** and well-maintained material contributes to the **safety** of community members moving through parks and on trails. Similarly, sharing **information** regarding natural spaces can better support **environmental sustainability** through fostering a sense of stewardship. Further, supporting **inclusion** by investing in **partnerships**, culturally relevant sports, activity spaces, and games contributes to the social and physical **health and wellbeing** of community members.

Because major themes interrelate with one another each has a positive association with others. Positively impacting one theme is likely to have a positive impact on another theme, which will then positively impact another theme, and so on.

Parks for everyone

Kitchener's vision to "build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us – and each other" inspires us to carefully consider the voices, feedback and experiences of those who have not traditionally been considered in how our city is planned and built.

By creating parks and open spaces that are accessible, promote environmental sustainability, offer free or low-cost activities, and consider the safety of those who feel the least safe in public spaces, we can ensure that all people are able to fully participate in city parks and open spaces without barriers.

Beyond the findings that surfaced through engagement and highlighted the major themes, additional data was sought on each topic area. The following pages outline all data sources used to gain a thorough understanding of each topic to inform the development of the recommendations.

Data sources

This section highlights the sources of data and information used to inform recommendations for Places.
A total of 12 sources, including all forms of engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations.

Legislation

Relevant laws that may impact or inform the current Parks Master Plan and decisions made about parks and open spaces.

Equitable engagement

Engaging with the intent of inviting, including and amplifying the voices of those who historically experience inequitable experiences in parks and open spaces.

Engagement with the broader community

A multi-stage process of surveys, idea boards, and polls used to understand the perspectives of those who visit or may like the opportunity to visit Kitchener parks and open spaces.

Engagement with City of Kitchener departments

A cross-collaborative view from all five City departments to coordinate ideas, plans, connected strategies and understand perspectives that impact or are impacted by parks and open spaces.

Engagement with partner organizations

Directed efforts to connect with public organizations within service delivery fields that related to parks and open spaces.

Comparative analysis

A side-by-side comparison of options within a municipal or regional context to understand how they are similar and different from each other.

External research

Other municipal, regional or provincial policies/ guidelines or publications that are relevant to Kitchener park implementation.

Policy

Formal guidelines established to influence actions, behaviors, decisions and recommendations made for this Parks Master Plan. Policies provide consistency, compliance, and alignment with the City's objectives and legal responsibilities.

City of Kitchener strategies

It is important to understand how the Places Parks Master Plan connects to and interacts with other strategies. In some cases, other strategies may already address gaps identified through the Places strategy. In other cases, Places may address gaps identified through other strategies.

Region of Waterloo strategies

Similar to City of Kitchener strategies, this includes formal strategies created by the Region of Waterloo that align with or support initiatives by the City. Understanding how the Parks Master Plan may interact with these plans is key to creating well-coordinated strategies and services in parks and open spaces.

Best practices

Methods that have been most effective and have impact in a specific context.

City of Kitchener staff experience

Informed by City staff with extensive knowledge and experience regarding designing and maintaining parks and open spaces.

Recommendation Development

Prioritizing recommendations

Based on all of the engagement findings and review of other data sources, a comprehensive set of **50 recommendations** emerged as the key action items for the Places part of the Parks Master Plan.

Considering the City's capacity to efficiently and meaningfully implement recommendations, they need to be prioritized over time and in a way that considers feasibility along with their individual and collective impact.

The criteria developed to prioritize the implementation of each of the recommendations was centered around the following question:

What strategic considerations need to inform prioritizing insights and recommendations?

Ideas were brainstormed independently and then the project team discussed how different ideas might be grouped and created those groups by consensus. The team then gave each group a title, adjusted these titles as needed to reflect the ideas, and arrived at six evaluation criteria. These criteria are closely tied to the five goals outlined in the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan:

Building a connected city together
Cultivating a green city together
Creating an economically-thriving city together
Fostering a caring city together
Stewarding a better city together

Each criterion was then weighted in keeping with Kitchener's vision to **"build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us - and each other".**

Equity, meaningful impact, and environmental sustainability carried the greatest weight, resource availability and context informed were weighted next, and time to implement was weighted the lowest.

Prioritization criteria

Equity
Considering those who are historically excluded from opportunities on the basis of one or more identity characteristics, who have a greater need, and who are often met with barriers to create change.

Meaningful impact
Community members experiencing an improvement to their quality of life.

Environmental sustainability
Building parks & amenities with climate-positive choices and longevity in mind.

Resource availability
Access to existing people, materials, and money.

Context informed
The extent to which the recommendation is informed by local needs, strategy, accountability, politics, and policy.

Time
How long implementation takes.

Prioritization process

A City of Kitchener staff group including individuals from cross-sectional departments with expertise and valuable knowledge about community context was formed to score each recommendation using the weighted criteria. The group was comprised of staff representing several divisions including Parks and Open Space Design & Development, Neighbourhood Programs and Services, Sport, Development Approvals, and Equity Anti-Racism and Reconciliation.

The group met in person for orientation to the prioritization process and review of the list of recommendations. Scoring involved individuals anonymously rating each criterion. Weights were averaged across the group. A group discussion followed about whether the results were as expected based on the shared understanding of the workshop objectives, current context, and strategic considerations. The scoring exercise and workshop discussion resulted in a prioritized list of recommendations.

Impact areas

Based on feedback gathered from the criteria scoring workshop, the list of recommendations was reviewed and four main areas of impact emerged consistently:

Parks for everyone
Connecting park experiences
Planning parks for the future
Responsive park spaces

These four groups serve to support the communication about the implementation and impact of the recommendations and are described as follows:

Parks for everyone

The ranking exercise confirmed the essential importance of the City's role in fostering a sense of belonging in parks. Recommendations that have a primary focus on inclusion and belonging for all naturally fit into this group.

Connecting park experiences

This group of recommendations focuses enhancing the parks and open space system by looking at novel ways to create park experiences outside of traditional park spaces while prioritizing a balance of park uses in existing parks.

Planning parks for the future

Recommendations in this group are focused on the long-term sustainability of parks and open spaces through planning for community growth and changing demographics, considering the longevity and environmental impact of infrastructure investments, reviewing emergency response protocols, and more.

Responsive park spaces

This group of recommendations involves thinking creatively about park programming by examining how parks, trails, and open spaces are currently enjoyed and how they might evolve to adapt to future needs.

The natural emergence of the four distinct impact areas highlights the complex nature of the role that parks and open spaces play for Kitchener residents and, subsequently, the importance of a multi-layered approach to making meaningful progress toward Kitchener's vision to "build a city for everyone where, together, we take care of the world around us - and each other".

Topics

The Places part of the Parks Master Plan is comprised of individual, topic-based booklets that work together. Each booklet includes the relevant background information, engagement findings, and recommendations on the topic. Booklet titles and descriptions are listed here alphabetically.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are a key part of a strong local food system. This booklet describes the history of city-administered allotment gardening in Kitchener, its present, and the recommendations to support community gardening into the future.

Community Health & Wellness

Many turn to parks and open spaces to maintain an active lifestyle and to support their mental health. This booklet explores the impact that parks and open spaces have on physical mental wellbeing, and recommendations to support their role during times of crisis or emergency.

Dedication

The opportunity to memorialize a loved one in a public space is important to Kitchener residents. This booklet describes the revised Tree and Bench Dedication program.

Dogs

Parks and open spaces are popular places to walk, run, or play with the family dog. This booklet describes the increasing desire for dedicated spaces for dogs in parks and open spaces and includes recommendations that support the anticipated growth in dog ownership.

Downtown Kitchener

The core of the city presents unique opportunities and challenges for public park space. This booklet explores the limitations on creating new parks and open spaces downtown and makes recommendations to explore other ways of creating park experiences in the urban core.

Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation

Parks and open spaces play an important role in climate adaptation and connection to nature. This booklet looks at how parks and open spaces might support other approved climate-adaptive plans and strategies already underway and how to strengthen connection to and along the Grand River.

Park Amenities

Enough of the right kinds of benches, tables and shade can enhance a person's experience in a park. This booklet establishes updated standards for these functional park amenities while also looking at strategies to assess public washrooms and drinking water in parks.

Park Design Approach

There are over 275 maintained parks across the city. This booklet explores how parks and open spaces are organized and designed across Kitchener and makes recommendations to help create a connected network of unique and complementary park experiences.

Play

There are almost as many traditional play structures as there are parks in Kitchener. This booklet describes play infrastructure in Kitchener and how it can be re-examined and designed to support joy, play, and connection for people of all ages and abilities.

Signature & Feature Parks

Kitchener has five unique and distinct parks that offer novel experiences for Kitchener residents and beyond. The vision for a sixth along the Grand River is underway. This booklet looks at their value to and impact on the community over time and into the future.

Splashpads

Splashpads offer local opportunities for recreation and relief from the summer heat. This booklet includes recommendations that support construction of new splashpads in areas of need, and how the City can incorporate more efficient water use.

Sports & Games

Parks are home to the majority of the city's outdoor sportsfields, sport courts, and games. This booklet establishes updated standards for sportsfield and sports court facilities and recommends ways they can be effectively designed in public park spaces.

Trails & Lighting

A connected trail network enhances access to and through parks and open spaces. This booklet makes recommendations to support greater accessibility and connectivity across the city and along the Walter Bean Grand River Trail.

Winter Use

Winter conditions change how parks are used. This booklet explores recommendations to support continued winter use and how that use is adapting to the realities of climate change.

Photo by GoneFlying Photography and Media

Recommendations

This section includes the comprehensive list of all recommendations including their description, implementation status or priority, data sources, action type, impact area and booklet reference for more information on the recommendation.

Data sources legend

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

See p. 26-27 for data source descriptions

Impact area legend

- Parks for everyone
- Connecting park experiences
- Planning parks for the future
- Responsive park spaces

See p. 33 for impact area descriptions

Recommendations underway

The Places part of the Parks Master Plan contains a total of 50 recommendations. Of those, 13 formalized in this Parks Master Plan update have been initiated or are already underway as part of Council-approved connected strategies or policies, or are a result of legislated changes implemented since the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan.

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources											Action type	Impact area
	A vision for Grand River Park Continue with the Grand River Park strategy as identified in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.	Signature & Feature Parks							√	√				Policy	
	Grow the urban tree canopy Use parks and open spaces to help implement the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy tree canopy targets.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation		√	√	√		√				√		Policy	
	Engagement-informed design Tailor park experiences and amenities to the communities that use them and as supported through equitable community engagement.	Park Design Approach		√		√						√	√	Policy	
	Walter Bean Trail support Support the pursuit of a continuous Walter Bean Grand River Trail and complete the feasibility study of the entire corridor to determine the long-term viability of the trail.	Trails & Lighting				√				√		√	√	Policy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
✓	**Consider water conservation systems for splashpads** Design all splashpads as single-use systems with the option to become recirculation or hybrid systems where applicable. Include water conservation features such as isolated timers, motion sensors, and lower volume play features.	Splashpads			√	√			√		√			√	Policy	»
✓	**Plan whole play spaces** Resource new and renovated playground projects to provide suitable play experiences and supporting amenities such as seating, shade, playground curbing, and barrier-free infrastructure that support play, caregiving, and maintenance activities.	Play		√	√	√								√	Policy	☼
✓	**Acquire floodplain lots for open space network** Continue or initiate active pursuit of properties in targeted floodplain areas.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation					√			√	√			√	Policy	↔
✓	**Pursue strategic master planning for select parks** Create development plans for identified parks or park networks impacted by multiple connected strategies, initiatives, asset needs, and future recreational opportunities.	Park Design Approach				√					√			√	Strategy	»

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
✓	**Faster playground replacement** Resource a sustained increase in the playground replacement rate at priority locations to address the current backlog.	Play	√			√							√	√	Policy	»
✓	**Continue Grand River access improvements** Prioritize and improve Grand River canoe launch access points to established standards.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation					√			√	√				Capital project	⌂
✓	**Introduce a revised dedication program** Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench and tree dedication program.	Dedication		√	√	√		√	√	√			√	√	Policy	»
✓	**More shade and seating in parks** Establish standards to support an increase in seating and shade options in parks.	Park Amenities		√	√					√			√	√	Policy	☼
✓	**Long term plans** Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.	Signature & Feature Parks				√							√		Strategy	»

Prioritized recommendations

The list of 37 recommendations below is in order of priority and will act as a guide for implementation. Refer to the Implementation Framework section of this booklet for the near-term, mid-term, and long-term implementation plan for policies, strategies and capital projects.

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources											Action type	Impact area
01	**Prioritize parkland as a use of current City-owned properties** For suitable City-owned lands located in areas identified in Spaces as High or Critical Needs, prioritize parkland when considering land-use modification to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets when assessed in accordance with the City-Owned Land Disposition Framework (DSD-2024-044).	Downtown Kitchener	√			√				√	√				Policy	↔
02	**Create a park washroom and hydration strategy** Develop a strategy to assess existing inventory, renovations, adaptations, future growth, alternative delivery methods, operating and staffing needs, all rooted in inclusive and accessible design at the lowest lifecycle cost.	Park Amenities		√	√	√			√				√		Strategy	☼

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
03	**Review existing Parks By-Law** Establish a cross-departmental team to complete a review and update of the existing Parks By-Law.	Community Health & Wellness		√		√					√	√	√		Strategy	
04	**Alternative spaces** Pursue opportunities for recreation beyond park property boundaries. Continue cross-departmental re-imagination and adaptation of spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.	Downtown Kitchener	√		√	√					√				Policy	
05	**Public drinking water in parks** Support a pilot project to provide public drinking water at three locations and monitor their use, cost, and staff time implications. Incorporate findings from public drinking water pilot project into the park washroom and hydration strategy.	Park Amenities		√	√			√	√				√		Capital project	
06	**Change the way we play** Establish play design standards for new and renovated parks that describe fun and play for all ages and abilities, and that allow a responsive approach to evolving local and broader trends.	Play	√	√	√	√	√		√				√	√	Strategy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
07	**Local park networks** Design local parks as networks of unique and complementary park experiences to deliver a variety of services while avoiding redundancies.	Park Design Approach			√	√			√				√	√	Policy	
08	**Park lighting standards** Establish park lighting criteria and policies to determine park eligibility and standards for pedestrian lighting.	Trails & Lighting		√	√	√			√	√	√		√	√	Policy	
09	**Public use of outdoor sportsfields facility program** Support the development of a public drop-in program for outdoor bookable sport facilities within public park settings.	Sports & Games											√	√	Policy	
10	**Increase biodiversity in parks** Using an asset management approach, identify strategic parkland areas that can be transitioned to naturalized areas through park renovation projects. Design plantings to mimic nature as much as possible in species diversification.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation		√	√	√							√	√	Policy	
11	**Resource relationship-building** Resource engagement for and in-between projects and in alignment with the outcomes of the corporate engagement review.	Park Design Approach				√		√			√		√	√	Strategy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
12	**Ensure community gardens are barrier-free** Expand the Corporate Accessibility Fund mandate and budget to enable grant projects to meet accessibility requirements identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).	Community Gardens	√	√	√	√							√		Policy	
13	**Match playgrounds to their parks** Establish standards for traditional playground size and complexity in alignment with park size and classification.	Play				√							√	√	Policy	
14	**Standard agreements for POPS** Develop a standard policy to outline the public use, design, and maintenance agreements for privately owned public spaces (POPS), consistent with the Park Dedication By-Law and Policy.	Park Design Approach	√			√				√			√		Policy	
15	**Evaluate the playground inventory** Establish data-informed evaluation criteria to create a playground inventory management plan. Invest resources into increasing the size and improving the quality of traditional playgrounds at strategic locations and consolidating playgrounds where supported by engagement.	Play	√			√							√	√	Strategy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
16	**Active uses downtown** Encourage the development of active park uses in downtown parks. Consideration should be made for sport, play, activities and games during redevelopment opportunities.	Downtown Kitchener				√								√	Policy	
17	**Power in parks** Include publicly available outlets at each new or renovated shade structure, where possible to do so.	Park Amenities		√	√	√								√	Policy	
18	**Trail surfaces in parks** Establish that all new and renovated park developments include stable, firm surfaces of asphalt or concrete, unless otherwise required to be stonedust for environmental reasons.	Trails & Lighting	√	√	√	√				√			√	√	Policy	
19	**Connect operating and life-cycle planning to capital works** All reporting and budget planning for capital park development to include recognition of changes to maintenance procedures and future life-cycling requirements including funding, labour, and equipment needs.	Park Design Approach				√							√		Policy	
20	**Less intensive turf** Diversify turf species to improve biodiversity and reduce cutting rotations.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation				√							√	√	Policy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
21	**Grow a city gardening hub** Explore a cross-departmental pilot program to re-introduce a City-coordinated garden located in an area of need as identified through engagement. Program to support food security through opportunities for gardening, food literacy programming, community gathering, and demonstration.	Community Gardens		√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√	Strategy	
22	**Green infrastructure integration in existing parks** Establish integrated design and development standards and criteria for retrofit stormwater management adaptations, natural assets, and low-impact development (LID) in park spaces.	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation				√			√		√			√	Policy	
23	**Comprehensive court strategy** Conduct a complete asset management review and demand analysis for all sport courts in parks to inform the strategic renovation, replacement, or addition of sport courts.	Sports & Games	√	√	√	√							√	√	Strategy	
24	**Consider exercise equipment in parks** Monitor existing exercise equipment locations for usage rates to determine if infrastructure should be expanded.	Play			√	√								√	Strategy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
25	**Install permanent waste receptacles** Establish a suite of standard above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles appropriate to park classifications, uses, and need. Prioritize locations for the installation of preferred waste management improvements.	Park Amenities			√	√							√	√	Capital project	
26	**Refrigerated skating area** Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.	Winter Use			√	√			√					√	Strategy	
27	**Data-driven capital forecasting** Employ evaluation criteria to prioritize park renovations. Criteria to include community priority, park asset conditions, and accessibility.	Park Design Approach				√							√	√	Policy	
28	**Align new grant infrastructure with park capital planning** Where possible, align grant-led placemaking projects in parks with capital project forecasts to optimize budgets and infrastructure that support their implementation and maintenance.	Community Gardens				√							√		Policy	
29	**More splashpads** Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.	Splashpads		√	√	√		√						√	Capital project	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
30	**Review existing dog facilities** Audit existing fenced dog parks to assess accessibility needs, waste management, and general improvements to user experiences.	Dogs	√		√	√							√	√	Strategy	
31	**Expand small-scale commercial licensing in parks** Permit occasional, small-scale commercial use of park space.	Community Health & Wellness			√			√	√				√		Strategy	
32	**Rubberized surfacing in each ward** Identify and resource one playground per ward to receive rubberized surfacing in a location with greatest access in the community.	Play	√	√	√	√	√						√	√	Capital project	
33	**Pilot off-leash areas** Create a pilot project to use select hydro corridors and park space as designated off-leash areas. Establish permanent off-leash areas throughout Kitchener informed by the results of the pilot project.	Dogs			√		√	√	√				√		Capital project	
34	**Strategic locations for sportsfield lighting** Continue or support future initiatives to install sportsfield lighting in parks that enable increased programming. Priority given to City Wide classified parks with available parking and meaningful separation from residences.	Sports & Games				√			√		√		√		Policy	

Priority	Recommendation	Booklet title	Data sources												Action type	Impact area
35	**Build a south-end dog park** Establish an off-leash dog facility located in one of the southern residential communities sized to accommodate the projected 20-year population growth in the area.	Dogs			√			√	√					√	Capital project	
36	**Dogs in community parks** Support “micro” dog parks in Community class parks, where brought forward by grassroots initiatives, grant programs, or supported by local consultation, and balanced with other recreational interests.	Dogs			√									√	Policy	
37	**Artificial turf for sportsfields** Continue to invest in the conversion of eligible natural turf sportsfields to artificial turf, subject to future demand analysis.	Sports & Games				√			√		√		√		Policy	

Implementation Framework

Forecasting implementation

Identifying action types for each recommendation is a key step in establishing an implementation plan that considers timelines, projected costs, and sets an order of actions over a period of time.

The three recommendation action types are:

1. Strategy
2. Capital project
3. Policy

Strategy

Strategic explorations establish a general plan or approach to work towards defined long-term goals or objectives. Strategies outline the City's overall direction and priorities, providing a framework to inform decision-making and resource allocation.

Capital project

Capital projects are defined investment projects typically involving the acquisition, development, or enhancement of physical assets such as buildings, infrastructure, or equipment. These projects are often characterized by significant financial investments and require long-term planning by the City.

All recommendations that have **strategy** and **capital project** action types will be identified and forecast through the City's annual budget process in order of their priority and efficient implementation. For example, a strategic exploration may precede a capital investment project to enable efficient use of projected budget resources.

Policy

Policies establish formal principles and guidelines to influence actions, behaviors, and decision-making. Policies provide consistency, ensure alignment with the City's objectives and compliance with legal responsibilities.

All recommendations that have a **policy** action type will result in the development of specific principles and guidelines to inform decision-making on any future projects as relevant opportunities arise.

The City of Kitchener uses a 10-year time frame to forecast its capital commitments through an annual budget process. The City's budget process is reviewed annually to adjust resources within the 10-year forecast based on the City's current financial position and overall priorities.

Using this 10-year model, the projected available resources, indicative cost and time estimates, overlaid with the established priority of each recommendation and its effective implementation, the following three tables represent their recommended ordering over a 10 year time period.

Recommendations that involve the development of a strategy will be resourced to develop the strategies but strategy outcomes may require additional funding to implement. Any unfunded recommendations will be considered through future budget processes.

The implementation priority may be subject to change caused by any resource adjustments and recommendation order should be considered a guide for each year's budget process.
Places recommendations requiring strategic exploration or capital investment have been forecast for implementation in the following tables. The near-term timeline is generally defined as within 1-3 years, mid-term within 4-6 years, and long-term within 7-10 years.

Near-term implementation

Priority	Recommendation	Near-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
✓	**A vision for Grand River Park** Continue with the Grand River Park strategy as identified in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.	Kitchener's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan	Signature & Feature Parks	Policy	»
✓	**Grow the urban tree canopy** Use parks and open spaces to help implement the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy canopy targets.	Tree planting initiatives in parks and open spaces	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Policy	»
✓	**Engagement-informed design** Tailor park experiences and amenities to the communities that use them and as supported through equitable community engagement.	Indigenous placemaking projects in Victoria Park and Huron Natural Area	Park Design Approach	Policy	☼
✓	**Walter Bean Trail support** Support the pursuit of a continuous Walter Bean Grand River Trail and complete the feasibility study of the entire corridor to determine the long-term viability of the trail.	Walter Bean Trail feasibility study	Trails & Lighting	Policy	»
✓	**Consider water conservation systems for splashpads** Design all splashpads as single-use systems with the option to become recirculation or hybrid systems where applicable. Include water conservation features such as isolated timers, motion sensors, and lower volume play features.	Chandler Mowat Community Centre splashpad, 2025	Splashpads	Policy	»

Priority	Recommendation	Near-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
✓	**Plan whole play spaces** Resource new and renovated playground projects to provide suitable play experiences and supporting amenities such as seating, shade, playground curbing, and barrier-free infrastructure that support play, caregiving, and maintenance activities.	Future playground renovations	Play	Policy	
✓	**Acquire floodplain lots for open space network** Continue or initiate active pursuit of properties in targeted floodplain areas	City of Kitchener Official Plan: A Complete & Healthy Kitchener, 2014	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Policy	
✓	**Pursue strategic master planning for select parks** Create development plans for identified parks or park networks impacted by multiple connected strategies, initiatives, asset needs, and future recreational opportunities.	Gzowski Park Kaufman Park Laurentian Park (and network) Lions Park Rosenberg Park Schaefer Park, Weber Park	Park Design Approach	Strategy	
✓	**Faster playground replacement** Resource a sustained increase in the playground replacement rate at priority locations to address the current backlog.	Idlewood Park, Kinzie Park,Oaten Park renovations, 2024; future park networks	Play	Policy	
✓	**Continue Grand River access improvements** Prioritize and improve Grand River canoe launch access points to established standards.	Feasibility study for Bridgeport area	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Capital project	
✓	**Introduce a revised dedication program** Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench and tree dedication program.	New Tree and Bench Dedication Program, 2025	Dedication	Policy	

Priority	Recommendation	Near-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
✓	**More shade and seating in parks** Establish standards to support an increase in seating and shade options in parks.	Alpine Park renovation, 2023; tree planting initiatives in parks	Park Amenities	Policy	
✓	**Long term plans** Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.	Victoria Park, Huron Natural Area, McLennan Park	Signature & Feature Parks	Strategy	
02	**Create a park washroom and hydration strategy** Develop a strategy to assess existing inventory, renovations and adaptations, future growth, alternative delivery methods, operating and staffing needs, all rooted in inclusive and accessible design at the lowest lifecycle cost	Assessment of current service levels city-wide	Park Amenities	Strategy	
03	**Review existing Parks By-Law** Establish a cross-departmental team to complete a review and update of the existing Parks By-Law.	Review of Chapter 270 Parks By-Law	Community Health & Wellness	Strategy	
04	**Alternative spaces** Pursue opportunities for recreation beyond park property boundaries. Continue cross-departmental re-imagination and adaptation of spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.		Downtown Kitchener	Policy	

Priority	Recommendation	Near-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
05	**Public drinking water in parks** Support a pilot project to provide public drinking water at three locations and monitor their use, cost, and staff time implications. Incorporate findings from the water pilot project into the park washroom and hydration strategy.	Three locations to be determined	Park Amenities	Capital project	
06	**Change the way we play** Establish play design standards for new and renovated parks that describe fun and play for all ages and abilities, and that allow a responsive approach to evolving local and broader trends.		Play	Policy	
08	**Park lighting standards** Establish park lighting criteria and policies to determine park eligibility and standards for pedestrian lighting.		Trails & Lighting	Strategy	
11	**Resource relationship-building** Resource engagement for and in-between projects and in alignment with the outcomes of the corporate engagement review.		Park Design Approach	Strategy	
15	**Evaluate the playground inventory** Establish data-informed evaluation criteria to create a playground inventory management plan. Invest resources into increasing the size and improving the quality of traditional playgrounds at strategic locations and consolidating playgrounds where supported by engagement.		Play	Strategy	

Priority	Recommendation	Near-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
21	**Grow a city gardening hub** Explore a cross-departmental pilot program to re-introduce a City-coordinated garden located in an area of need as identified through engagement. Program to support food security through opportunities for gardening, food literacy programming, community gathering, and demonstration.		Community Gardens	Strategy	
23	**Comprehensive court strategy** Conduct a complete asset management review and demand analysis for all sport courts in parks to inform the strategic renovation, replacement, or addition of sport courts.		Sports & Games	Strategy	
24	**Consider exercise equipment in parks** Monitor existing exercise equipment locations for usage rates to determine if infrastructure should be expanded.		Play	Strategy	
25	**Install permanent waste receptacles** Establish a suite of standard above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles appropriate to park classifications, assets, and need. Prioritize locations for the installation of preferred waste management improvements.		Park Amenities	Capital project	
29	**More splashpads** Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.	Location 1 Three locations to be determined through engagement	Splashpads	Capital project	

Mid-term implementation

No.	Recommendation	Mid-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
✓	**Continue Grand River access improvements** Prioritize and improve Grand River canoe launch access points to established standards.	Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area Access Point	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Capital Project	⌂
✓	**Long term plans** Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature Park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.	Rockway Gardens	Signature & Feature Parks	Strategy	»
✓	**Pursue strategic master planning for select parks** Create development plans for identified parks or park networks impacted by multiple connected strategies, initiatives, asset needs, and future recreational opportunities.	Heritage Park Budd Park Queensmount Park (and network)	Park Design Approach	Strategy	»
26	**Refrigerated skating area** Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.	Feasibility Study	Winter Use	Strategy	⌂

No.	Recommendation	Mid-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
29	**More splashpads** Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.	Location 2	Splashpads	Capital project	
30	**Review existing dog facilities** Audit existing fenced dog parks to assess accessibility needs, waste management, and general improvements to user experiences.		Dogs	Strategy	
31	**Expand small-scale commercial licensing in parks** Permit occasional, small-scale commercial use of park space.		Community Health & Wellness	Strategy	
32	**Rubberized surfacing in each ward** Identify and resource one playground per ward to receive rubberized surfacing in a location with greatest access in the community.	Seven locations to be determined through engagement	Play	Capital project	
33	**Pilot off-leash areas** Create a pilot project to use select hydro corridors and park space as designated off-leash areas. Establish permanent off-leash areas throughout Kitchener informed by the results of the pilot project.	Hydro corridor location	Dogs	Capital project	

Long-term implementation

No.	Recommendation	Long-term initiatives	Booklet title	Action type	Impact area
✓	**Continue Grand River access improvements** Prioritize and improve Grand River canoe launch access points to established standards.	Freeport Access Point	Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation	Capital project	⌂
✓	**Long term plans** Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature Park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.	Kiwanis Park RBJ Schlegel Park	Signature & Feature Parks	Strategy	»
29	**More splashpads** Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.	Location 3	Splashpads	Capital project	⌂
35	**Build a south-end dog park** Establish an off-leash dog facility located in one of the southern residential communities sized to accommodate the projected 20-year population growth in the area.	Location to be determined through engagement	Dogs	Capital project	⌂

Appendix A:
Connected Strategies

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Title	Acronym (where applicable)	Web address (where available)
Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment	AODA CoKUDM DOPS	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_UD_5.0_Accessibility_Standards_For_The_Built_Environment.pdf
Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act	Bill 23	ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-23
Chapter 270 Parks By-Law		lf.kitchener.ca/WebLinkExt/DocView.aspx?dbid=0&id=1412612
Chapter 273 Park Dedication By-Law		kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Park_Dedication_By-Law_2008-93.pdf
Chapter 599 Licensing and Regulation of Businesses		lf.kitchener.ca/WebLinkExt/DocView.aspx?id=1789212&cr=1
City of Kitchener Official Plan; A Complete & Healthy Kitchener	OP-2014	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_City_of_Kitchener_Official_Plan_2014.pdf
City-Owned Land Disposition Framework		lf.kitchener.ca/WebLinkExt/DocView.aspx?id=2073195&dbid=0&repo=CityofKitchener&searchid=ac4de0a9-4745-4acb-8878-e383d008218c&cr=1
Community Engagement Policy	GOV-COU-2010	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/COR_COMM_Community_Engagement_Policy.pdf
Cycling and Trails Master Plan	CTMP	kitchener.ca/en/strategic-plans-and-projects/cycling-and-trails-master-plan.aspx
Emergency Response Plan and Emergency Management By-Law	ERP & EMP	lf.kitchener.ca/WebLinkExt/DocView.aspx?id=2073220&dbid=0&repo=CityofKitchener&searchid=c8671c20-0f61-4886-a067-d4b8a44b2751
Housing For All: A blueprint for a more caring community		kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Housing_For_All_Kitchener_Housing_Strategy.pdf

Title	Acronym (where applicable)	Web address (where available)
Integrated Stormwater Master Plan, and Implementation Plan	ISWM-MP	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_ENG_Stormwater_Master_Plan_Implementation_Plan.pdf
Kitchener, Changing For Good; Our corporate climate action plan for sustainability	CorCAP	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_Kitcheners_Corporate_Climate_Action_Plan.pdf
Kitchener's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan		kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/CAO_2023-2026_Strategic_Plan.pdf
Kitchener's Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy 2019-2028	SUFS	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/INS_PARKS_Urban_Forest_Strategy.pdf
Leisure Facilities Master Plan	LFMP	lf.kitchener.ca/WebLinkExt/DocView.aspx?dbid=0&id=1741532&page=1&cr=1
Love My Hood Neighbourhood Strategy and Matching Grant	LMH	lovemyhood.ca/en/tools-money/neighbourhood-matching-grant.aspx
Park Dedication Policy		kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Park_Dedication_Policy_2012.pdf
Parks Strategic Plan, 2010	PSP	kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/INS_PARKS_ParksStrategicPlan-September2010.pdf
Racialized and Indigenous Supports for Equity Fund	RISE Fund	kitchener.ca/en/taxes-utilities-and-finance/rise-fund-racialized-and-indigenous-supports-for-equity.aspx
Spaces		kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/INS_PARKS_Places_and_Spaces_Spaces.pdf

Appendix B: **Glossary**

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

This appendix provides definitions for terms used throughout the Parks Master Plan.

Active programming
Recreational activities typically found in Planned parks that are encouraged through the use of specific infrastructure (e.g., playground, seating areas, sports courts, sports fields). Also referred to as "programmed" parks.

Alternative open space
Defined in Spaces as open spaces located within the city that contribute to outdoor recreation and leisure activities, including but not limited to golf courses, cemeteries, conservation lands, privately owned public spaces (POPS), hydro corridors, school grounds, Chicopee Ski & Summer Resort, other public spaces such as Carl Zehr Square, Gaukel Street, and Market Square.

Climate change adaptation
Taking actions to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Climate change mitigation
Taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and impacts of climate change.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
A site design approach that uses the built environment to promote natural surveillance by the community to minimize the need for traditional security measures.

Embodied carbon (CO_2e)
Greenhouse gas emissions caused by manufacturing, transportation, installation, maintenance, and disposal of building materials.

Innovation District
The Innovation District is at the northwestern end of the Downtown and centred around the intersection of King Street and Victoria Street. This district is characterized by many large, old industrial buildings which have already been converted or have the potential for conversion to loft style office, residential, and other uses. The Innovation District will continue to turn into a dense, modern, urban setting through high-tech and health science-related office uses, as well as new post-secondary and research-related institutional uses. This area is different from the rest of the Downtown as Victoria Street carries through traffic not necessarily

destined for the City Centre. Primary uses permitted in the Innovation District are:

- Complementary commercial uses such as restaurants and bars, personal services, craftsman shops, commercial entertainment, specific types of retail, and those uses that service the office sector and residential uses will also be permitted
- Exhibition and/or conference facilities
- Existing light industrial employment
- Institutional
- Offices, particularly research and high-tech offices and creative industry
- Residential
- Studios

Natural lands

Undeveloped land with a purpose of preserving and protecting natural features and ecological habitats.

Park classification

Applied to Planned parks and made up of categories representing park type, size, and function, park classification provides a framework for assessing needs for each Planning Community and the city as a whole.

1. City parks: Planned parks containing high-intensity programming for City and Region-wide activities (e.g. pools, arenas, stadiums, community gardens, permanent washroom facilities)
2. Community parks: Local Planned parks containing enhanced outdoor features, community gathering facilities and amenities, (e.g., splashpads, community gardens).
3. Neighbourhood parks: Local Planned parks containing various outdoor active uses with direct connection to immediate neighbourhood (e.g., playgrounds, sports courts).
4. Signature or Feature parks (formerly Legacy parks): Planned parks or open spaces containing unique landscapes with significant natural, cultural, or heritage value; may also contain high-intensity programming.

Park network

Defined as a group of several local parks of various sizes often within walking distance from one another and generally in the same Planning Community.

Park programming

A collection of recreational and functional amenities in a Planned park environment to engage visitors. Park programming can encourage active or passive uses, or a combination of both.

Passive programming

Recreational activities typically found in all park and open space settings that do not have a pre-determined action or specific recreational infrastructure. This can include general park uses such as walking, viewing, sitting, or picnicking. Also referred to as unprogrammed parks.

Planning community

Defined in the City's Official Plan (2014) as locations that are planned, designed, developed, and monitored as a group. These areas should have a variety of land uses, housing types, and transportation options, but will often not each fully make up a complete community on their own.

Planned park

A traditional park space created, constructed, and managed with the intent to serve as a recreational amenity. Planned park sizes include:

- Micro park: A Planned park that is less than 0.1 hectare in area.
- Parkette: A Planned park that Is 0.1 - 0.5 hectares in area.
- Small park: A Planned park that Is 0.5 - 1.5 hectares in area.
- Medium park: A Planned park that is 1.5-3.0 hectares in area.
- Large park: A Planned park that Is 3.0 - 10.0 hectares in area.
- Vast park: A Planned park that is greater than 10.0 hectares in area.

Resource lands

Land with a primary function of resource management, typically stormwater ponds and engineered creek channels.

Urban Growth Centre (Downtown)

The purpose of the Urban Growth Centre (Downtown) is to handle a large portion of the city's and region's future population and job growth. It is meant to be the main area for building more homes and for new investments in public services, businesses, offices, recreation, culture, and entertainment.

Urban plaza

Public spaces that can provide recreational opportunities that mirror park experiences and are generally located in the downtown core (e.g., Carl Zehr Square, Gaukel Street, Market Square).

Appendix C:
Engagement Tools

EngageKitchener surveys

Survey title	Number of respondents
Accessibility and Parks	59
All Ages Play in Parks	72
Downtown Parks	282
Kitchener Parks	1175
Natural Areas	90
Park Access, Community Use, and Welcoming	120
Park Dedications, Sponsorships, and Alternative Open Spaces	47
Parks and Food Access	51
Parks Maintenance	85
Parks Signage	77
Pets in Parks	305
Skateparks	16
Splashpads	93
Sports Fields and Sports Courts	34
Winter Use and Parks Education	266
Spaces	84

Ideas boards

Title	Number of respondents
How can we create park spaces that support community gathering and growth	25
How do we make a park that is pet-friendly	8
How might we create spaces where adults and older youth can play	30
How would you like to play in Kitchener parks	15
What alternative sports and recreation do you want to do	16
What can we do to help foster belonging in Kitchener parks	7
What does an accessible park space look like for you or your loved one	9
What makes a good park	25
What makes a great park in the winter	3
Which are the most accessible and welcoming parks you have visited	3

Polls

Title	Number of respondents
Are you interested in learning how to get involved in parks all year round	27
Are you willing to volunteer to maintain your local parks so they can remain open during the winter season	10
Do you think your use of public parks will continue in the post-pandemic new normal	11
How has your use of Kitchener's public parks changed during the pandemic restrictions	50

Appendix D:
Engagement Sources

- Accessibrand
- ACCKWA
- Active Transportation and Trails Advisory Committee
- Bridges to Belonging
- Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health (formerly KW Counselling)
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre Teen Drop-in
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre Teen Night Group
- City of Kitchener staff
- Coalition of Muslim Women
- Community advocates for a human rights approach to housing, including members from The Social Development Centre, The Unsheltered Campaign
- Community centre managers
- Carizon Family and Community Services
- EngageKitchener respondents
- Equity and Anti-Racism Advisory Committee
- Extend-A-Family
- Forest Heights School presentations and discussions
- Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee
- GreenHouse (University of Waterloo)
- Immigration Partnership
- Inclusive Playgrounds Author Melissa Martz
- Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre
- Kitchener Youth Action Council (KYAC)
- LGBTQ2S+ special interest group
- Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Senior
- Multicultural Center
- Nurture
- Q3 2022 Playgrounds Report
- One-on-one interactions with residents
- Rainbow Community Council
- Sanguen Health
- Six Nations of the Grand River
- Social Development Centre
- Spectrum
- Sunnyside Parks Survey
- Sunnyside School Places and Spaces survey feedback
- Unsheltered Campaign
- Waterloo Region Community Garden Network
- Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition

Thank you

The project team would like to sincerely thank every person, group, and organization who shared their time and valuable perspectives.
You input has had a direct impact on the Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan.

KITCHENER

KITCHENER

Community Gardens

Part of the Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

KITCHENER

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Health & Wellness
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Trails & Lighting

Content

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Recommendations ***24***

Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

Photo by Taylor Jones

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

> *A community garden is a group of people that get together to plant and harvest a garden.*
>
> ***Waterloo Region Community Garden Network***

Kitchener has a strong and growing community garden presence in the Waterloo Region. With more than 40 active volunteer-run community gardens on City-owned and privately-owned land all over the city, they are places where people grow non-commercial vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Community gardens on City-owned land make up roughly one hectare (1,000 m^2) of gardening area for the community with many in Kitchener in operation since the 1990s. Community gardens offer many benefits to gardeners beyond growing food. They support improved health and wellbeing, provide a place for people to connect with their neighbours, and offer opportunities to learn new skills.

Having access to land for growing food is also an essential part of a strong local food system, as are opportunities to learn about growing and preparing food. Community gardens play an important role in food security and independence by giving residents a place to grow fresh, affordable, and culturally relevant food. The essential role of community gardens in supporting food security was made even more apparent in 2020. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, gardens were permitted to re-open as part of an emergency order.

The overall demand for public use of parks and open spaces along with dedicated uses such as community gardens continues to grow as Kitchener's population increases. People continue to use parks more often than they did before the pandemic. This demonstrates that parks and open spaces play an important role in people's daily lives with an increasing need for parks and open spaces to address the importance of including these and other high-quality park experiences. Public parks and open spaces must contain a balance of amenities for everyone, including special areas like community gardens, off-leash dog areas, and programmed sports fields.

This is even more important when considering recent Provincial policy changes to the Planning Act that have made the task of creating new parks and open spaces more difficult. A deliberate approach to locating gardening opportunities on City-owned lands is critical to sustaining a long-term balance of park uses that continue to respond to evolving community needs.

A brief history of Kitchener's city-coordinated allotment gardens

For more than 30 years, from the 1980s to 2016, the City of Kitchener coordinated allotment-style gardens on City-owned land. Allotments provide plots of land for gardeners to grow food for their families and community. These City-coordinated gardens included Williamsburg Garden Plots and Huron Farms Allotment Garden.

Williamsburg Garden Plots (mid-1980s to 2009): The Williamsburg Garden Plots began as early as the mid-1980s on undeveloped lands that would become a cemetery. The size of the allotment garden expanded over time. At its largest, this garden area was around 3.2 hectares (32,000 m^2) containing roughly four hundred 20 by 20 foot (6 m x 6 m) plots (Figure 1).

A comprehensive plan for the future cemetery was created in 1990 for the entire parcel of land. The first phase of the cemetery development opened for use in 1995. As further stages of cemetery development progressed, the result was the gradual contraction of garden area on the site (Figure 2). Williamsburg Garden Plots closed permanently at the end of 2009 after more than 25 years at this location.

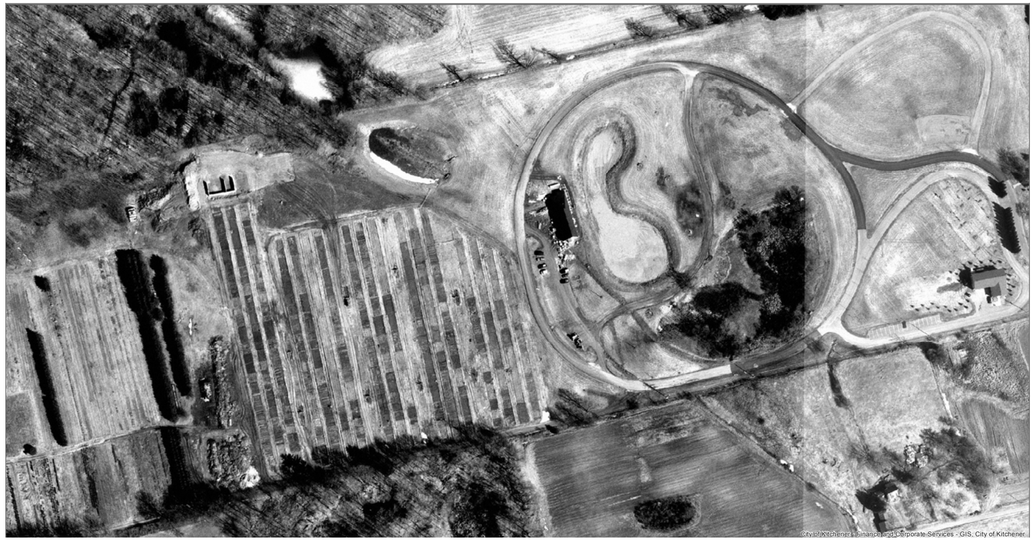


Figure 1. Williamsburg Garden Plots, aerial photo, 1997. This garden area represents the largest garden footprint on file, approximately 3.2 hectares, estimated to have contained up to four hundred individual plots at 20 foot x 20 foot size

Figure 2. Williamsburg Garden Plots, aerial photo, 2007. This garden area was approximately 1.2 hectares containing approximately 190 plots. The City's tree nursery is to the left of the garden.

Figure 3. Huron Farm Allotment Garden, aerial photo, 2012.

Huron Farms Allotment Garden (2010 to 2016): Following the closure of Williamsburg Garden Plots, the garden was moved to another City-owned site near Huron Road and Fischer Hallman Road in the spring of 2010 with the understanding that this, too, would be a temporary location. A future South Kitchener District Park, now RBJ Schlegel Park, was the vision for this location since the 1990s. Work to plan and implement the park vision began officially in 2013 following Council approval.

Huron Farms Allotment Garden was open from 2010 until the fall of 2016 when it closed permanently. The garden was approximately 1.8 hectares (18,000 m^2) of area containing over two-hundred 20 foot by 20 foot (6 m x 6 m) plots. (Figure 3). Construction on South Kitchener District Park, now RBJ Schlegel Park, began in 2017 in this space.

City-coordinated gardening

Garden registration information was advertised in Kitchener's recreation and activity guide, Leisure. Registration for garden plots opened annually in April. A small registration fee was collected for each plot to offset the City's operational costs. After the garden opened in May, any remaining plots were available for existing plot-holders to rent.

Garden plots were open annually from the long weekend in May until the long weekend in October. City staff would prepare the beds in the spring, and gardeners were expected to clean the beds before the seasonal closure. Water was supplied to gardeners by hand valves located at many points between garden rows. Hoses were not permitted; registrants were expected to carry water with a watering can or other vessel to their plots (Figure 4).

The City-coordinated allotment garden was a key piece of the overall garden network in Kitchener and was not relocated after Huron Farms Allotment Garden was closed. This closure represented a significant loss of community gardening space for Kitchener.

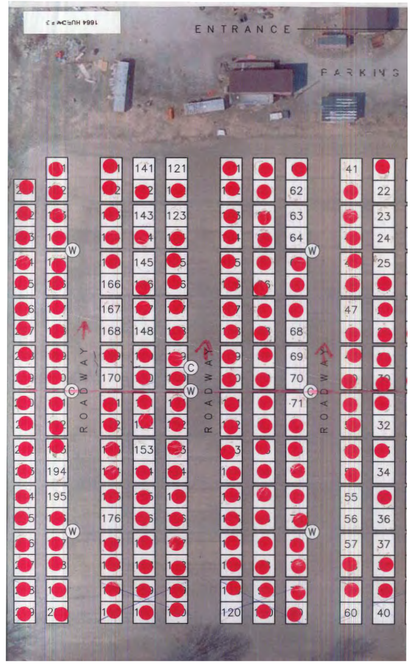


Figure 4: Huron Farm Allotment Garden allocation map and water service locations, 2011.

Community gardens in Kitchener today

Resident-led, City-supported

In addition to allotment gardens, the City has a long history of supporting volunteer-run garden groups on public and private land. In both cases, volunteers have organized local gardeners season after season. Gardens on public land are supported by the Neighbourhood Development Office in Community Services where a Project Coordinator assists each garden's operation and relationship with the City.

The LoveMyHood Matching Grant

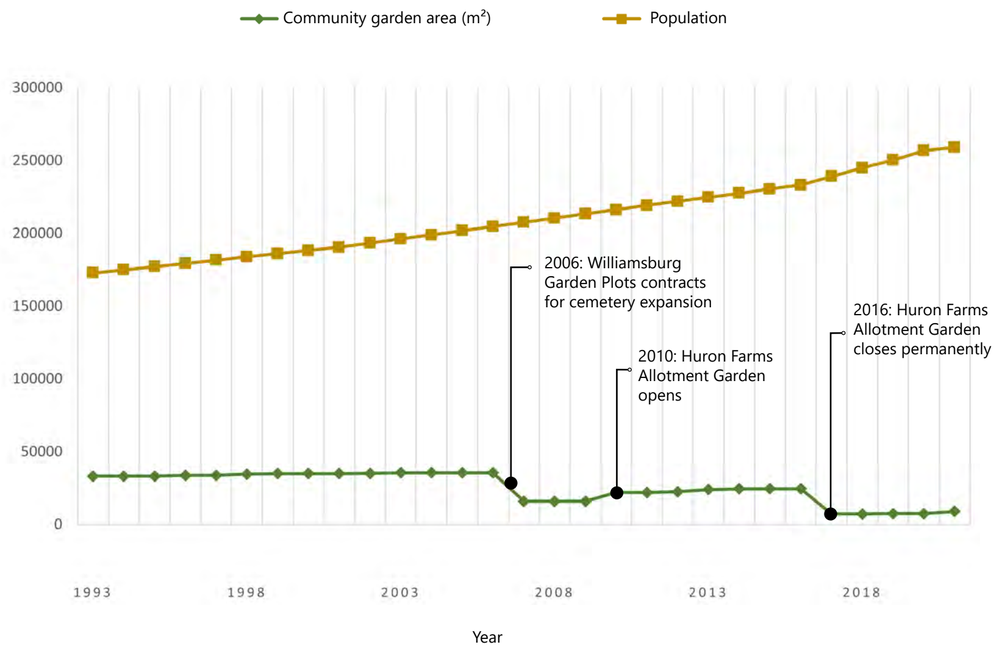
Community groups interested in starting a new garden can apply for the LoveMyHood Matching Grant program facilitated by Community Services. This grant supports new volunteer-led community gardens each year as well as other resident-led placemaking projects on City-owned and private land. This program enables volunteer garden groups to have agency over their own garden while meeting City standards. Different garden layouts and community gardening models are explored with each grant application.

This grant program continues to grow the community garden network in Kitchener with 11 new volunteer-run gardens on City land since the 2016 closure of Huron Farms Allotment Garden, representing an increase of approximately 4000 m^2 of garden space in eight years. This flexible program allows the garden network to grow in direct response to evolving community needs.

Resources and guides for food growing in Kitchener are available through the City, Region, and partner organizations:

- The Waterloo Region Community Garden Network
- Food System Roundtable of Waterloo Region
- LoveMyHood
- Region of Waterloo

Community garden area on City-owned land and total population 1992-2021



Increasing pressure on parkland

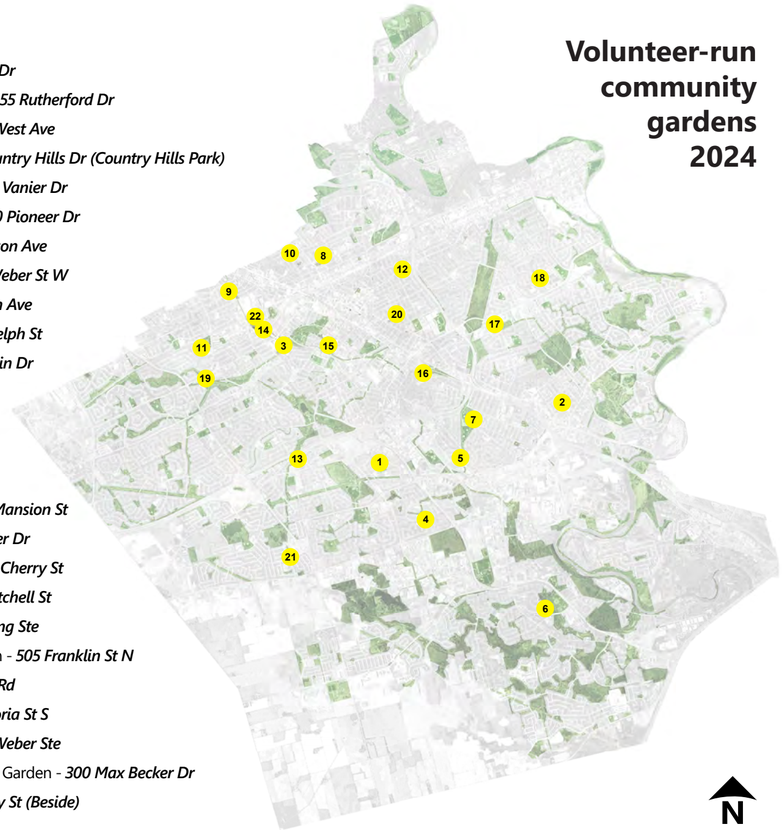
As Kitchener becomes more urban and densely populated and as the cost-of-living increases, demand on parks and open spaces continues to increase. People without private outdoor spaces rely on access to public spaces. Parks also help the environment, increase biodiversity, and are valued as shared community spaces.

Unfortunately, there are new Provincial policy and physical challenges to creating new park spaces. Before the Provincial government introduced new planning legislation in 2022, there was a relationship between the estimated population in a development and the public park space required in that development. Today, because of these changes to Provincial policy, the total area of park land is no longer tied to the population. Instead, it requires park land to be calculated as a percentage of the lot size. As a result, the greater the density of the neighbourhood, the less public park space is available per person. Removing shared park land for a dedicated community garden use can impact the whole community by limiting access to open park space and reducing the City's ability to meet its target of park land area per person in each neighbourhood.

Further, not all park space is suitable for a community garden. Distribution of parks, park classification, soil quality, water availability, underground utility conflicts, amount of space, and existing park project plans all need to be considered when choosing space for a new garden. While parks continue to be considered as locations for new volunteer-run gardens, parks cannot be the only option. Planning gardens in harmony with other park activities is critical and access to parks and open spaces for all must be maintained.

Volunteer-run community gardens 2024

1. Alpine Community Garden -***175 Kingswood Dr***
2. Centreville-Chicopee Community Garden - ***155 Rutherford Dr***
3. ComeUnity Roots Community Garden – ***98 West Ave***
4. Country Hills Community Gardens – ***365 Country Hills Dr (Country Hills Park)***
5. Courtland-Shelley Community Garden - ***329 Vanier Dr***
6. Doon Pioneer Park Community Garden - ***150 Pioneer Dr***
7. Fourth Ave Community Garden - ***72-80 Wilson Ave***
8. George Lippert Community Garden – ***200 Weber St W***
9. Gildner Green Community Garden – ***29 Eden Ave***
10. Guelph Street Community Garden – ***250 Guelph St***
11. Gzowski Park Community Garden – ***10 Chopin Dr***
12. Mansion Greens Community Garden – ***281 Mansion St***
13. North Six Community Garden – ***222 Chandler Dr***
14. Old Willow Green Community Garden - ***160 Cherry St***
15. Queen's Greens Community Garden – ***21 Mitchell St***
16. Rockway Raised Bed Herb Garden – ***1405 King Ste***
17. Sprout: The Stanley Park Community Garden - ***505 Franklin St N***
18. Tecumseh Community Garden - ***140 Indian Rd***
19. Victoria Hills Community Garden – ***785 Victoria St S***
20. Wallenberg Park Community Garden - ***160 Weber Ste***
21. Williamsburg Common Ground Community Garden - ***300 Max Becker Dr***
22. Willow Green Extension Garden – ***160 Cherry St (Beside)***



Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
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- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Barrier-free design means that regardless of ability, a person's opportunity for full participation is possible. Barrier-free access to garden plots and water sources as well as paths of travel to gardens surfaced as key to enabling accessible community gardens. While efforts to address this are underway, many existing volunteer-run community gardens are not yet barrier-free.

> *"Our neighbours who need the space the most need to be able to get to it easily and for those who are living with a disability need to be able to participate."*

Environmental sustainability

Community feedback showed strong support for an increase in local food production, and sustainable production. Both are important parts of food security and independence.

Inclusion

Public feedback showed flexibility in understanding a wide variety community garden models and approaches. This pairs well with the LoveMyHood program which supports creativity in volunteer-led community gardens.

Community gardens can bolster community and cultural connections as well as food security and have a positive impact on newcomers to Kitchener, and Canada.
To support food security, learning about different gardening methods, canning, cooking, and seed saving was requested. Similarly, greater access to community gardens without wait lists was needed. While wait lists persist, creative solutions include:

- Assigning garden plots based on need (e.g., food security and cultural connections to food).
- Giving lower priority to those who have access to private gardens.
- Planting fruit and vegetable plants in public spaces outside of community gardens.

More than three quarters (78%) of public survey respondents felt it is very important to explore new ways Kitchener might better support reliable access to food, particularly in a way that supports those who need it most. In all cases, youth involvement was encouraged.

Health and wellbeing

Community gardens were identified as a practical means of supporting community food security, social wellbeing, and cultural connectedness which are all aspects of good health and wellbeing.

> *"With the rise of inflation and food insecurity, something needs to be done in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of ALL Kitchener residents, including housed and unhoused. If we can offset at least a little bit of the need it's worth it."*

Partnerships

Effective food security strategies depend on thoughtful relationship development and engagement. It is important for the City to listen to and implement ideas in collaboration with volunteers, community members, and partners.

Information

There is a desire for more information regarding where, when, and how to join or create a new community garden. Meaningful outreach to those who would benefit most was also highlighted through engagement.

Community gardens are a unique opportunity to share knowledge about gardening practices and food preparation. Respondents shared a strong interest in the City offering more food and gardening skills workshops, for example, canning, planting, composting, food security, pruning, cooking, or seed saving.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

12: Ensure community gardens are barrier-free

Expand the Corporate Accessibility Fund mandate and budget to enable grant projects to meet accessibility requirements identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).

As part of the City's responsibility to provide barrier-free access to gardens on City-owned land, a consolidated capital budget should be created to support legislated AODA requirements as they relate to LoveMyHood Matching Grant, and other grant-funded projects planned in parks and as identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC). There are significant costs associated with creating barrier-free garden spaces including paved surfaces and raised garden beds. These costs are frequently beyond the budget limits of a grant and are often addressed reactively. A staff team should be established to determine the annual value of the fund and how it is administered for consideration and approval.

21: Grow a city gardening hub

Explore a cross-departmental pilot program to re-introduce a City-coordinated garden located in an area of need as identified through engagement. Program to support food security through opportunities for gardening, food literacy programming, community gathering, and demonstration.

It is important to recognize the City's role in the future of Kitchener's community gardens. Both Williamsburg Garden Plots and Huron Farms Allotment Garden were temporary solutions to meet gardening demand until those spaces were developed for other purposes. All engagement audiences shared a strong desire for more urban community gardens and related supports such as bookable kitchens or meeting rooms. While the City offers grants to volunteer-run gardens, a significant and growing unmet need remains for more garden spaces. The solution is not to replicate the same temporary model as before but to explore alternatives that will support partners and volunteers and offer permanent, city-wide access to gardening, connections, and learning opportunities. Engagement with the community and prioritizing equity through implementation is foundational to the program's success.

The objectives for this program include but are not limited to:

- Reviewing and analyzing locations for the City-coordinated garden, considering:
    - Overall park provision and acquisition priority
    - Proximity to community facilities and supporting services (e.g., approved bookable kitchens or meeting rooms, transit, parking)
    - Soil quality
    - Water availability through a dedicated water service line near the garden area
    - Available gardening space
    - Demand
    - Need
    - Absence of underground utilities or other underground barriers.
    - Park classification
- Detailing specific programs that can be delivered including goals and outcomes (e.g., learning about seed-saving, growing practices, food preservation)
- Identifying resource needs, support roles, and impacts for consideration and approval by Council.
- Engaging and partnering with the local community to establish preferred sites and programs.
- Partnering with community services to use and program the space

A City-coordinated garden could also showcase demonstrations of alternatives to allotment growing models and support collaboration between City facilities and departments while directly responding to community desires identified through engagement. Equity should be prioritized through the program development, implementation, and evaluation of the pilot project.

Support for community gardens in Kitchener requires multiple approaches and partnerships to achieve long-term solutions. The benefits of community gardening are known; Kitchener must proactively plan for community gardening and support greater agency over food security choices for its residents. Finding a balance between garden space and park space is essential.

28: Align new grant infrastructure with park capital planning

Where possible, align grant-led placemaking projects in parks with capital project forecasts to optimize budgets and infrastructure that support their implementation and maintenance.

Infrastructure and garden startup requirements (e.g. dedicated waterline connection and soil testing) are costly and use grant funding quickly. Parks Design & Development completes several park renovations per year. Where a desire for a community garden exists at a park that will receive a renovation, capital project funding can cover these community garden startup costs as part of the scope of park improvements. Supporting volunteer-led community gardens this way where possible can maximize their grant funds. Further, designing for the holistic inclusion of community garden spaces in park spaces through renovation projects will enable the gardens to be well integrated into the overall park space.

Recommendations summary

12: Ensure community gardens are barrier-free

Expand the Corporate Accessibility Fund mandate and budget to enable grant projects to meet accessibility requirements identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).

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Photo by Taylor Jones

KITCHENER

KITCHENER

Community Health & Wellness

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.
Cover photo by Scott McQuarrie

KITCHENER

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Gardens
Downtown Kitchener
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Play

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Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

On January 25, 2020, the first case of the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus, called COVID-19 was reported in Canada. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and as of March 25, 2020, the virus had spread to more than 190 countries. The resulting worldwide pandemic and international public health emergency led to significant impacts both globally and locally.

This is not the first nor the last time a public crisis and state of emergency has elevated - and will elevate - the role of public parks. Parks themselves were originally envisioned to improve the health of a community. Generations later, they continue to serve a similar role. Park space remains directly linked to the health and well-being of its residents.

This booklet aims to document the role public parkland has played in recent times of crisis and how they can adapt for future times of need.

Origins of parks for public health

Historically, parks in North America gained popularity in part due to epidemics including yellow fever and cholera in the 1800s. The increased use of public parks during this time was driven by the belief that these diseases spread through polluted air, prompting a push for more green spaces in overcrowded cities. Fear of infection and disease kick-started the development of early inner-city parks and larger swaths of outdoor space for public use.

Birkenhead Park, built in 1847 in England, is considered the first publicly funded civic park in the world. It inspired one of the original North American landscape architects, Frederick Law Olmsted, to design Central Park—345 hectares (3,450,000 m^2) of public park space built in the middle of New York City in 1858. Olmsted also designed Mount Royal Park in Montreal, constructed in 1876 as a 280-hectare (2,800,000 m^2) public park. Victoria Park in Kitchener was established in 1896 at an original size of 11 hectares (110,000 m^2).

The origins of public parks in Kitchener are complex and have ties to public health—both as a refuge from disease and as places for respite for those living in urban areas. Although the assumption that yellow fever and cholera were airborne illnesses was incorrect, the connection between parks, public health, and times of emergency or crisis remains to this day.

> *"Foul air is often provocative in time of epidemics, of a panicky disposition to flee the town…where there were parks, they gave the highest assurance of safety, as well as a grateful sense of peculiarly fresh and pure air."*
>
> ***[Olmsted Trees, 2022]***

Victoria Park, c. 1896, Kitchener Public Library

The role of public parks in emergency response

The COVID-19 pandemic

As an airborne virus, strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the province included mask mandates, mandatory quarantining, testing and monitoring programs, and contact tracing for known cases. Four specific measures resulted in an increase in use of public parks in Kitchener more than any:

1. restrictions on indoor activity and capacity limits;
2. physical distancing practices (e.g., 6 feet or 2 meters of separation);
3. travel restrictions and closure of international borders; and,
4. Provincial stay-at-home orders preventing or impacting commercial and personal activities.

Combined, these four measures narrowed every person's social and recreational options to only a few. Large, outdoor, free-to-use parks became one of those few options for most.

Data on park usage, including digital tracking and survey responses, supports the idea that public park use and appreciation increased during and after COVID-19 measures were lifted, to levels that persist at the time of writing this master plan.

After moving through the COVID-19 pandemic and into an era of recovery and endemic state, many members of the public would like to change the way we view and use public park spaces, including (from Parks People):

- adding more washrooms in parks (50%);
- adding opportunities to experience natural spaces in parks (53%);
- closing roads/streets to use as pedestrian spaces (53%); and,
- moving indoor events/activities outdoors (e.g. fitness classes, gatherings, events) – (51%).

Locally, Kitchener responded to accommodate new park interests. Litter collection and parking controls became full time practices during pandemic restrictions, and litter collection remains at its pandemic levels. Increased wear and tear on park amenities, particularly in higher service level parks like Victoria Park, Huron Natural Area, and McLennan Park also challenged park service delivery as staff resources were reduced due other pandemic restrictions.

The increase in and change to park use means how the City designs each park may need to change. Needs and desires for more seating, covered gathering areas, and access to water and washrooms emerged. As businesses and indoor locations were unable to operate during peak pandemic restrictions, some used park space as an alternative venue to host commercial pop-up events like fitness classes. This, in turn, created a need for a licensing program to support these emerging program offerings.

The loneliness epidemic

As highlighted in the Canadian Social Survey (CSS) taken by Statistics Canada, Canadians are experiencing high rates of loneliness. The feelings of loneliness are particularly pronounced amongst younger individuals, people who are not married or in common-law relationships, and women. Out of those who express feelings of loneliness, many have poor mental health.

The article What is Causing Our Epidemic of Loneliness and How Can We Fix published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education describes loneliness as a major public health threat for individuals and society. Although the COVID-19 pandemic plays a part in the loneliness epidemic, half of the survey respondents reported that they had feelings of loneliness prior to the outbreak.

The article states that survey respondents identified the following factors as the cause of their loneliness:

- technology;
- insufficient time with family;
- being overworked, too busy or tired;
- mental health challenges impacting relationships with others;
- an overly individualistic society; and,
- no religious or spiritual life.

The connection between loneliness, anxiety, depression, and distress is cyclical, as these factors reinforce one another. Researchers emphasize the need to foster a culture of care and service to help reduce loneliness. They state that "collective service can provide important connections that relieve loneliness" and "cultivate

meaning and purpose and mitigate mental health challenges."

Ontario Parks highlights the mental health benefits of spending time outdoors. Being in nature reduces stress, increases energy, improves focus and vitality, and also reduces symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Welcoming and accessible parks and open spaces contribute positively to an individual's personal wellbeing and their feeling of connection to the community. Parks and open spaces play an important part in addressing the growing concern of loneliness.

Community wellbeing

An article published by the International City-County Management Association (ICMA) highlights the important role that parks play in tacking the loneliness epidemic and more generally improving a person's wellbeing. The article emphasizes the importance of "third places" to promote a sense of wellbeing and belonging. "Third places" are spaces outside of the home and work where people can engage and build relationships. For many, parks and open spaces are "third places".

Parks foster community wellbeing by promoting a healthy lifestyle, providing access to free or low-cost recreational amenities such as trails, sportscourts, and green spaces. There is a correlation between an absence of green spaces and increased perception of a shortage of social support. As available green space declines, loneliness increases.

In addition to parks and open spaces, natural spaces provide many mental health benefits. Simply walking through a natural area can decrease cortisol levels, relieve high blood pressure, improve heart health and other health conditions.

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Housing crisis

Parks are not designated as emergency shelters. Vulnerable populations turn to public space as a last resort when no other option exists. The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association estimates that approximately 235,000 people experience houselessness in some form every year. The lack of stable and affordable housing puts undue stress on the limited resources available to municipalities and community-based organizations.

Parks and open spaces have, in part, taken on the role of emergency housing for those facing houselessness. For many municipalities, parks also act as emergency shelters. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 90% of Canadian cities reported houselessness to be a challenge; Kitchener was among those cities.

The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and United Nations (UN) recommended that people experiencing houselessness be allowed to remain in place in the absence of housing alternatives. From a parks planning perspective, this further re-enforces the importance of publicly available washrooms and water sources as recreational amenities and a basic need of the park attendees when other options are unavailable.

With a sustained increase in park visitors since COVID-19 coupled with a growing number of people continuing to use parks as emergency shelter locations due to the ongoing the housing crisis, parks can very quickly become overwhelmed.

Parks and open spaces alone cannot solve pandemic, loneliness, housing, or future crises. They can, however, help people adapt in times of emergency and act as places to maintain community connection when needed and wanted.

Data Sources

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

This section highlights the relevant sources of data and information used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 sources, including all forms of engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
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- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

The typical neighbourhood or local park in Kitchener is a maintained open turf space with trees, playground, and trails.

New park developments have followed this same typology. Renewed interest in outdoor gathering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic supports adding shade structures, larger seating areas, and basic needs such as drinking water and accessible, gender neutral washrooms to the existing park typology.

Inclusion

Along with improving accessibility of outdoor gathering spaces comes other improvements that support inclusion. Public washrooms can be made both more accessible and inclusive to all genders by adding individual barrier free units as opposed to traditionally grouped genders.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the largest volume of visitors and highest level of use in destination parks such as Victoria, McLennan, and Huron Natural Area. Providing recreation options closer to home may help distribute park users and relieve the peak season volume at busier parks.

Health and wellbeing

The pandemic showed not just the valued importance of public parks, but how foundational they are to the community. Engagement findings have confirmed the fundamental need for public, free-to-use recreational spaces. Similar to the tendons and ligaments that connect your body, public parks are necessary components to the whole community and need to be flexible to properly function and adapt to changing needs.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

03: Review existing Parks By-Law

Establish a cross-departmental team to complete a review and update of the existing Parks By-Law.

Kitchener's Parks By-Law (Chapter 270 of the Municipal Code) outlines prohibited activities within park boundaries. The document was last updated in 2012, though only through additional clauses and clarifications. Original clauses from 1988 are still present. It is recommended to complete a holistic review of the by-law to remove or modify outdated clauses that do not reflect current uses in parks. The conditions of the pandemic and recovery revealed the need to update and modernize park rules and regulations.

31: Expand small-scale commercial licensing in parks

Permit occasional, small-scale commercial use of park space.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the value of public spaces. Statistics show levels of park use peaked during times of greatest indoor activity and capacity restrictions. From this, a renewed and, in some cases, new use of park space is expected to continue.

One of the shifts seen from the COVID-19 recovery included moving indoor events and activities outdoors. The City has seen a desire from the public to continue to accommodate activities such as fitness classes, gathering and events, in public parks.

Booking licenses for these activities currently follows the sportsfield booking process which is not meant for commercial licensing. Formalizing a commercial licensing program would allow the City to enable commercial use of public spaces, support local businesses and initiatives, and further develop interest and engagement in public parks.

Recommendations summary

03: Review existing Parks By-Law

Establish a cross-departmental team to complete a review and update of the existing Parks By-Law.

31: Expand small-scale commercial licensing in parks

Permit occasional, small-scale commercial use of park space.

pizza pizza
NOW OPEN
KITCHENER

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Dedication

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

Related sections

Places
Spaces
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Park Amenities
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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

The City of Kitchener ran an informal park dedication program which was put on hold in 2020 due to resource constraints and priorities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic response. The program allowed residents to dedicate trees, benches and other amenities throughout the city's parks, trails and open spaces.

To apply for a dedication through the previous program, a person would fill out an application form and select one of four memorial features: Rock and Tree, Premium Bench and Plaque, Standard Bench and Plaque, or Table with Pad. The location of memorial items were chosen by the applicant with support from City staff.

The prices of the memorial features under the previous dedication program no longer reflect current market prices. Benches purchased through this program were maintained annually with other city benches and replaced as needed. For the cost of the feature, residents could purchase a dedication piece in a park that was to be maintained and replaced by the City in perpetuity.

Dedication program staff worked with families and residents to create meaningful memorials in Kitchener's public parks and walking trails. However, the informal nature of the program led to coordination barriers. Program staff noted challenges such as: a long manual application process, lack of publicly accessible information, staff capacity, and inconsistent tracking and participant records.

In October of 2023, City Council unanimously approved a motion for staff to review the tree and bench dedication program and develop a new program. The review was to include an evaluation of the previous program, an examination of best practices from other municipalities, a resourcing assessment, and an exploration of technological solutions. The future program will be informed by this review.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Inclusion

The need to make dedication opportunities more accessible for all was identified. Conversations with Equity, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Division staff at the City of Kitchener highlighted the challenges of incorporating equity in the tree and bench dedication program as it previously existed. Barriers to inclusion in Kitchener's tree and bench dedication program often included cost, ease of use, and access to program information.

The previous dedication program relied on applicants to reach out to the City of Kitchener Parks Division to become informed of their options and the dedication request process. The information was not readily available to the public, creating a barrier for the public and for City staff. The informal process often led to confusion and complication.

Because memorial items were priced below market value, the City was highly subsidizing this program, highlighting the need for updated pricing structures. Updating and implementing a new pricing model to align with current goals would require an exploration that prioritizes equitable access to dedications.

During engagement with Kitchener residents, more than half communicated that they would not be willing to pay for dedication pieces. Regarding cost-sharing, one quarter of these residents believed that the cost of dedication pieces should be shared between the resident and the City to support equitable access to dedications. Equity was emphasized by many sources proposing lottery systems, income-adjusted payment options, grant systems, sharing funds with equity-deserving groups, and more affordable dedication options in general.

Tree and bench dedications are challenging from an equity perspective. Dedication models that are based on payment exclude those without the ability to pay. To provide greater opportunity for participation, additional program offerings could be considered.

One option is having a donation-based memorial forest in addition to other tree and bench dedication options. An added benefit of having a memorial forest is more opportunities for community-building through planting programs and annual events.

Environmental sustainability

Findings supported a desire and need to pursue alternative dedication options such as naturalization gardens and memorial forests. Strategic planting of these memorial forests can promote ecological sustainability and biodiversity. Where dedication benches are added, choosing from a list of pre-determined locations could reduce environmental risks. This method would also support areas with fewer seating options. Furthermore, this option would contribute to the current canopy targets outlined within the Sustainable Urban Forestry Strategy.

Partnerships

It is common for memorial forest programs to partner with local funeral homes to facilitate outreach and engagement with potential donors. A memorial forest dedication program could provide opportunities for collaboration with a wide variety of community groups. Partnerships between the memorial forest and community groups could lead to the organization of community planting events, site stewardship groups, and more community-led involvement.

Additional considerations

Administrative burden: The program was cumbersome for staff, with inefficient administration and resource allocation. Dedicated staff resources are needed to manage the program effectively.

Lack of defined opportunities: Nearly unlimited options for dedication locations led to inconsistencies as well as maintenance and administrative challenges.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation is accompanied by a symbol or a number representing its prioritization status. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Introduce a revised dedication program

Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench and tree dedication program.

The proposal in response to the October 2023 directive from Council includes a modified bench dedication program and a memorial forest program. The changes made to the bench dedication program aim to streamline maintenance, standardize offerings, and operate more sustainably. The memorial forest program is introduced as an innovative and environmentally friendly way for residents to honour loved ones with more opportunities for community building.

Bench dedication program

An improved bench program includes lifecycle and maintenance changes, standardization of placement and design, and set recognition periods for dedication plaques.

Lifecycle and maintenance

Dedication plaque recognition period
Five-year or ten-year recognition terms provides a sustainable revenue stream for the program and allows for easier maintenance.

End of recognition period
At the end of the recognition period, the participant may be offered a renewal at the discretion of the program administrators. If the recognition period is not renewed, the plaque will be returned to the resident. Factors influencing offer of renewal include availability of dedication locations and demand for dedication items.

Flowers and wreathes
Memorial features such as flowers, wreathes, stuffed animals, candles, and others are not permitted to be kept on dedication benches and will be removed by parks operations staff. This practice will aim to preserve dedication benches as usable public assets.

Plaque replacements
Establish a clear policy regarding replacements during the recognition period (e.g., one plaque replacement may be covered with additional replacements paid for by the participant.)

Bench maintenance and replacements
The bench remains an asset owned by the City of Kitchener and will be maintained and replaced according to the standard bench maintenance and replacement schedule.

Design of dedication items

Plaques available for benches only
Dedication trees, stones, and picnic tables have been identified as being costly and inconvenient to maintain. The recommendation moving forward is to limit dedication features to benches with plaques. By discontinuing plaques on other features, the program can better focus its resources. Dedication forests, as opposed to individual dedication trees, will be considered to offer a tree dedication option.

Standardization for consistency
Standardizing the design and details of dedication benches and plaques ensures consistency across dedications, simplifies the selection process for citizens, and facilitates maintenance and implementation for staff.

Placement of dedication items

Determine eligible bench locations
Through consultation and assessments done by staff, specific benches and locations can be pre-determined for dedication. This ensures that dedications are in a visually appealing place while responding to seating needs. By using the plaques for recognition as opposed to the benches themselves, existing benches maintained by the city can be used to further reduce costs for program participants.

Rotation system for availability
Implementing a rotation system for bench locations helps manage demand for dedications and simplifies the process to choose locations. By periodically rotating available locations, the program can accommodate a diverse range of dedications while preventing overcrowding in any one area.

Memorial forest program

The implementation of a memorial forest program should aim to address the following items:

- Appropriate resourcing to oversee the memorial forest program.
- Community involvement opportunities including tree planting.
- Cost can be considered through an equity lens as all combined donations support tree planting and plaque costs.
- Criteria for tree placement and maintenance will be determined by the Forestry department to align with current tree canopy and Forestry goals.
- Dedication plaques not attached to specific features (individual trees, benches, stones, etc) but recorded in a shared database and/ or memorial wall.
- Direct funds from donors towards planting trees and maintaining a memorial forest.
- Scalable cost options to support an equity approach to program participation.

Rationale

Making strategic improvements to the bench dedication program paired with implementing a memorial forest both maintains the historic dedication program in a more functionally sustainable way and adds a new, innovative, and environmentally friendly dedication option.

Alignment with Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy canopy target

In January of 2022, City Council supported and approved a tree canopy target of 30% in each ward by 2050 and 33% across Kitchener by 2070 as part of the Sustainable Urban Forestry Strategy. This strategy includes recognizing the value of current trees, sustaining existing canopy, growing canopy, and communicating with and involving neighbourhoods. Supporting a memorial forest program as an option for dedication both supports the growth of the urban canopy and supports community involvement.

Expert management for success

Employing dedicated staff to oversee the bench dedication and memorial forest programs ensures proper management and maintenance for both initiatives. By collaborating with the Forestry Division and following established criteria for tree planting and maintenance, the City can ensure the success and longevity of the memorial forest.

Flexibility and adaptability

Providing the opportunity to record dedications in a shared database as an extension of the memorial forest program rather than attaching plaques to specific features provides increased flexibility in placement, replacement and maintenance, and cost requirements. This approach accommodates changing needs and preferences while ensuring that dedications remain meaningful and accessible to donors and their families. The “plaque” component could be an online resource or, alternatively, a singular dedication wall with a display of remembered names.

Innovative and sustainable approach

Pursuing a memorial forest program as an alternate dedication method offers a unique and environmentally friendly way for citizens to honor loved ones. By using funds for tree planting and maintenance, the City can create a lasting tribute that enhances the natural beauty of the city and contributes to its overall sustainability.

Maintains tradition with improvements

The previous dedication program allows citizens to commemorate loved ones in public spaces. By making key changes to the program structure and administration, the City can ensure its sustainability and effectiveness for future generations.

Recommendations summary

Introduce a revised dedication program

Proposed program to include a memorial forest program and rework of the park bench dedication program.

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Dogs

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

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Related sections

Places
Spaces
Downtown Kitchener
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Signature & Feature Parks
Trails & Lighting

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Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

In January 2024, Kitchener was certified as a pet-friendly city under the Better Cities for Pets initiative. Part of the certification includes pet-friendly green spaces for people and pets to get healthy exercise and connect with each other.

Planning parks to accommodate the wide variety of pets starts with understanding the types and number of pets most commonly found in Kitchener households. Although there is no census for pets, the American Veterinarian Medical Association (AVMA) offers a pet populations estimate based on household numbers. By far the most significant population are dogs and cats. For the purposes of park planning, dogs will be the focus for public open space considerations.

This booklet intends to profile the existing facilities for dogs in parks today, identify the needs of dog owners in parks, and offer recommendations to suit those needs.

256,885
2021 Kitchener Population

99,812
2021 Kitchener Households

61,284*
Approximate pet dog population*

45,614*
Approximate pet cat population*

**AVMA 2022 data calculation of estimated number of cats (0.457 per household) and estimate number of dogs (0.614 total dogs per household)*

Trends

Pet population growth
According to the Canadian Animal Health Institute (CAHI) a nationwide Kynetec survey conducted in September 2022 showed there are 7.9 million dogs and 8.5 million cats in Canadian households. This is a 2.5% to 5% increase over a two-year period (2020) compared to the Canadian population increase of 2.2% over that same time period.

Housing
There is no evidence to suggest housing type influences pet ownership. However, shifting housing types in Kitchener will influence the needs of pets within these environments. Higher density areas have less private outdoor space, if any. These areas, particularly infill developments, have a higher need for public or semi-public space than in suburban development types.

The total number of dwellings in Kitchener has grown by 8% between 2016 and 2021. The largest area of growth is in apartments greater than five storeys (15%) and row houses (15%). The smallest area of growth is in single-detached (6%) and semi-detached (1%) housing. The growing pet population and denser housing types indicates an increasing demand for pet-friendly public spaces.

Types of facilities

The need for pet spaces in parks is primarily centered around dogs. There are three types of facilities for dogs in Kitchener, and two possible types of facilities with regional examples:

Existing facilities:

Leashed
Any area that is not designated as a fenced dog park or leash-free area requires dogs to be kept on a leash at all times. Keeping dogs leashed remains the most consistent way to ensure public safety in shared park spaces.

Fenced dog parks
These facilities are most often referred to when using the term “dog park”. Any future reference to dog park within this booklet will relate to fenced dog parks unless otherwise described. They are off-leash areas that are completely fenced with controlled entry and exit points. All dog parks have specific rules and policies and are often surfaced with a combination of turf, mulch, and gravel trails.

Possible facilities:

Off-leash zones
Although there are no off-leash zones in Kitchener, there are regional examples of designated areas of parks or open spaces permitting off-leash activity that are not fenced or controlled.

Alternatives
Other off-leash options for dog facilities such as unoccupied sportsfields for off-leash dog use. Baseball diamonds in particular can offer well defined, fenced in areas during off-season times. Use of baseball diamonds by dog owners can, however, create conflicts between uses and users during seasonal transitions, for example the beginning and end of scheduled playing seasons.

Dog park facilities, a closer look

Dedicated dog parks and off-leash areas are a common development in parks across the province and country. They are still relatively new though, only first being implemented in the early 1980s. They are well used locally and offer many community benefits. However, there are many factors to consider when planning dog facilities:

Benefits:

- Social interaction among and between people and dogs.
- Opportunity for interactions and relationships with other dog owners.
- Off-leash exercise for dogs, particularly for those without private outdoor space.
- Peace of mind that off-leash dogs will not conflict with park goers.

Disadvantages:

- Potential conflict between dogs, resulting in physical injury in people, dogs, or both.
- Increased spreading of diseases within dog populations, particularly in smaller spaces for dog facilities.
- Abuse of rules by dog owners including inattention, littering, and inappropriate dog park behaviours.
- Noise nuisance to nearby residences, places of work, etc.
- Isolated and exclusive single-use facility (by design) within a public park setting.

Facilities in Kitchener

Kitchener features five dog parks, two of which are considered "micro" dog parks with less fenced in area than the remaining three.

Public engagement has suggested a willingness to drive up to 18 minutes to visit their preferred location, reflected in the circled service areas on the map:

Fenced "micro" dog park
- George Lippert Park
- Idlewood Park

Fenced dog park
- Kiwanis Park
- McLennan Park
- The Auditorium

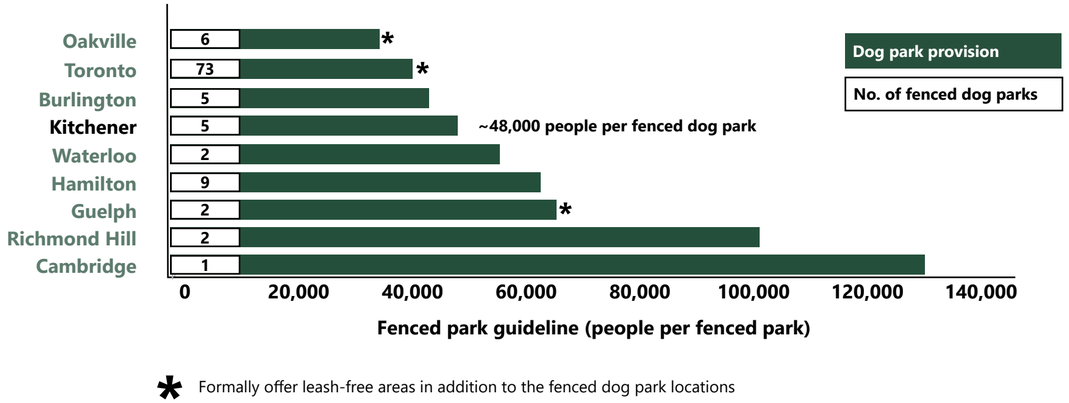
Micro dog parks are defined as dog parks with an area of less than 2,000 m^2. Any dog park larger than 2,000 m^2 is categorized as a "fenced dog park."

Provincial precedents

Fenced dog parks are a frequently requested recreational space across the province. Understanding how Kitchener's facilities compare to others in Ontario can be done by looking at the number of dog facilities available per person.

Strictly by number of dedicated dog parks, Kitchener is about the same as the median Ontario city.

However, comparing Kitchener to the provincial average is not an ideal indicator of adequate quality and quantity of dog facilities locally. The number of fenced dog facilities can indicate Kitchener's supply, but equally important are the qualities of each dog facility location, where they are in the city, what function they serve, and how they are accessed.



* Formally offer leash-free areas in addition to the fenced dog park locations

Managing dog facilities

Fenced dog parks in Kitchener are typically simple geometric fenced in areas with mulch or turf cover, waste bins, and in some cases, water sources.

The City of Kitchener spends approximately $25,000 annually to maintain the existing fenced dog park inventory. The majority of those costs ($18,000) are related to maintaining the surface and cleaning litter at the McLennan Park facility. Depending on its size and amenities, the average fenced dog facility costs between $5,000 and $10,000 annually to maintain.

Over 90% of these annual costs relate to labour and equipment, 75% of that labour goes towards litter clean up and landscape maintenance.

Addressing housing trends

One of the largest areas of residential growth in Kitchener is apartment dwellings over 5 storeys in height. This trend will only continue with the advent of Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) being established through the core of the City. These SGAs will all provide land use zoning of unlimited densities, with limitations shifted to building heights. The highest level SGA will have unlimited densities and unlimited height residential developments permitted.

There is a positive correlation between pet population and resident population. Lack of traditional private yard space has not shown to be a deterrent to dog ownership. There is and will continue to be a reliance on shared or public spaces in order to properly care for dogs. Park space is not, and cannot be the only option. Parks can offer leashed and leash-free opportunities, but equally important are streetscapes and private amenity spaces within higher density developments in particular.

Private dog amenities within high density developments are not only possible, but they currently exist in Kitchener. Charlie West (60 Charles St. W) and Garment St. Condos (100 Garment St.) include dog runs, sheltered areas, and dog wash stations. These were built to accommodate the nearly 50% projected dog ownership within the building. These types of facilities do not compensate for park space, but rather provide alternative options in lieu of traditional yard space.

Parks should and can adapt to properly account for the needs of pets and pet owners. In the face of increasing built-form density and significantly reduced capacity to acquire park spaces, dog park spaces need to continue to be supported by alternative options, public and private alike.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
- **Region of Waterloo strategies**
- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Accessibility of dog park facilities emerged as a theme, highlighted by the quote below:

> *Please make these areas more accessible. I have an all-terrain mobility scooter and I can't use anything in Waterloo that is legal for my dogs to run*

Safety

Safety for dogs, owners and other park users was noted as the most important consideration when creating shared spaces for people and dogs. Most important to have in fenced dog parks include adequate waste management, safety measures for both dogs and people, and amenities for both dogs and people. The majority of instances of conflict within a dog park was found to be caused by dog owners who let dogs off-leash in unpermitted park areas, most often in natural areas or wooded trails. Further, most dog owners prefer those same natural areas and wooded trails to off-leash dog parks.

Information

The need for signage for all park goers, including dog owners and non-dog owners, was a common theme emerging from the responses.

> *Clear signage for where dogs can be expected to be off leash - this is important for people not comfortable around dogs, but also for DOGS who are uncomfortable around dogs.*

Inclusion

Engagement data suggests the majority of dog owners are willing to drive up to 18 minutes to access dog parks. Mapping suggests this is generally achievable city-wide, except for the communities of the south end of the city. Data also suggests the majority of dog owners are willing to walk up to 14 minutes to a preferred dog park location.

When asked how Kitchener might create parks that are accommodating for everyone including dogs, dog owners, and those uncomfortable around dogs, the following findings emerged:

- Create designated off-leash areas with clear signage and fences to clearly demarcate areas
- Create more dog parks that are larger, closer to home and easy to get to
- Enforce leash rules
- Include more waste disposal bins and bags
- Offer education for dog owners, and non-dog owners

In addition to the physical components summarized above, a specific question about pay-to-use dog park facilities was available for response. Nearly half of the responses were somewhat or extremely unlikely to pay for dog park use.

> *"Having a fenced off area for dogs to be leash-free at every park, or at least one leash-free dog park area in every neighbourhood, that is within a walkable distance, would be ideal. There are a lot of dogs in my area, and the closest dog park is a 20 minutes drive away to McLennan. It would be really nice to have one that we could walk to, or at least have a shorter distance to."*

Health and wellbeing

The strongest themes that were found during consultation were related to activities within the dog facility itself. These include conflicts between dogs, cleanliness of the facility, and its maintenance (e.g., surface quality, garbage)

> *"As our human population grows so too does the dog population. I believe it's imperative that we provide numerous locations for dogs to be able to be dogs - safely running free and playing."*

Environmental sustainability

Some respondents suggested using natural spaces for off-leash areas. According to ProtectNatureTO, off-leash dogs can impact habitat negatively through physical and temporal displacement by inducing stress responses in wild animals and can indirectly or directly lead to mortality, while also spreading disease through dog waste.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

The future of dogs in parks

Recognizing the proportion of dogs to people within the city is an important first step. Kitchener has 5 fenced off-leash sites for an estimated dog population of 61,000, or approximately 1 dog park for every 15,000 dogs.

Off-leash dog facilities will continue to be a well used park feature in Kitchener. Simply creating more dog parks throughout the city however, is not the only solution to a growing population and growing pet population needs. Expansion of the fenced inventory should directly relate to population growth and fill existing gaps. Placing a fenced dog park in every park to ensure equal access is simply not feasible, sustainable, nor balanced with other public park uses.

A balance of accommodation is necessary, including facilities outside of public parks or other off-leash facilities. Leash free areas, where conditions are suitable and safe, can accommodate for the demand for off-leash areas in Kitchener, offset costs of operating fenced dog parks, and expand recreational potential of underused green spaces.

30: Review existing dog facilities

Audit existing fenced dog parks to assess accessibility needs, waste management, and general improvements to user experiences.

Concerns that emerged in the consultation findings should be addressed regardless of the direction of future dog park facilities. Issues of safety and maintenance were prevalent in consultation themes. Reviewing each existing fenced dog park facility will reveal any potential site-specific improvements that can address the varied experience of dogs and dog owners, including accessibility, shade, seating, and garbage collection systems.

33: Pilot off-leash areas

Create a pilot project to use select hydro corridors and park space as designated off-leash areas. Establish permanent off-leash areas throughout Kitchener informed by the results of the pilot project.

Hydro corridors present a unique opportunity for off-leash areas as green spaces containing maintained turf and often public trails for passive recreational use. They have limited alternative uses due to their primary role of power distribution and are restricted accordingly.

Kitchener has over 53 hectares of hydro corridor that are currently under a land use agreement for public recreational use. In order to minimize the risks of off-leash areas, properties are shortlisted using the following criteria:

- Defined boundaries with one or more types, including fencing, sidewalks, and roadways
- Does not share space with other open spaces such as public parks, playgrounds, or school grounds
- Does not share space with naturalized areas
- Regularly maintained turf surface
- Public trail access
- Multiple accessible points of entry

The location that meets all of the above criteria is the largest continuous hydro corridor property in the city known as **Forest Heights Community Trail,** located in the Forest Heights community between Ira Needles Blvd. and Driftwood Dr. The property is 11.48 hectares of hydro transmission corridor, with five roadway frontages, four barrier-free walkway block access points, and almost one kilometre of existing multi-use trail.

Map legend:

1. Walkway block access, barrier-free
2. Walkway block access
3. Trail access
4. Trail connection
5. Open maintained turf

Proposed pilot project parameters:

Location(s): Forest Heights Community Trail (hydro corridor)*

Duration: 24 months

Scope:

Establish on-site signage at key locations to define the area as a temporary leash-free zone.

Install waste facilities at key locations.

Monitoring:

Seasonal staff inspections and on-going input from local residents and facility users.

Evaluation of pilot project:

Public feedback:

- Use of green space, before and after pilot program
- Instances of conflicts among people and dogs, before and after pilot program
- Reception within local community

Surface evaluation:

- Turf conditions before and after pilot program

Operational commitment:

- Frequency of maintenance calls during pilot program.

*The location that has been proposed was selected based on its characteristics and location matching the criteria of a possible off-leash area. Should the recommendation be supported, a public engagement process will be required prior to any action taken on the pilot project to understand and respond to local neighbourhood feedback.

35: Build a south-end dog park

Establish an off-leash dog facility located in one of the southern residential communities sized to accommodate the projected 20-year population growth in the area.

The advantages and disadvantages of fenced dog park facilities can be partly mitigated through a variety of design tactics. For example, small sites with high pedestrian and dog traffic can see increased conflict between dogs, disease spreading, and surface damage, among others. Small sites can be successful when demand is balanced with other dog facility options. Here are other considerations based on public feedback:

Size
Large fenced areas provide ample space whereas micro-dog parks tailored to local areas can supplement the dog park inventory with quieter, less crowded experiences.

Access and accessibility
Getting to, into and through facilities are a critical success factor. Distance to parking facilities can act as both a barrier to use, and as a means for dogs to decompress before and after visiting.

Movement
Providing dogs an opportunity to move along a trail network or around intentionally designed obstacles supports socialization, training and cognitive health for dogs.

Shade
Another factor important for dogs, dog owners, and all park users is providing shade within fenced areas.

Water
Access to water is equally important for dogs and people. Water sources outside of fenced areas for people to use to fill containers or individual bowls should be considered.

Garbage
Large capacity waste receptacles are necessary for dog parks year-round to accommodate peak use, and during the winter when garbage maintenance is reduced.

36: Dogs in Community parks

Support "micro" dog parks in Community class parks, where brought forward by grassroots initiatives, grant programs, or supported by local consultation, and balanced with other recreational interests.

Spaces revised the hierarchy of park classifications in Kitchener defining parks by their uses rather than their size. This classification system allows for flexibility in park classifications as demands change over time.

Each Community class park contains many open space uses such as sportsfields, play areas, and non-programmed open space. Community parks are intended for more uses and higher use. Dog parks often require parking, either on-road or in the park itself Community class parks can generally provide dedicated parking for users.

Where supported by the local community through grassroots efforts or community engagement, and balanced with these other open space amenities, "micro" sized fenced dog parks are supported as a means to provide access to leash-free dog facilities in Community class parks.

Recommendations summary

30: Review existing dog facilities

Audit existing fenced dog parks to assess accessibility needs, waste management, and general improvements to user experiences.

33: Pilot off-leash areas

Create a pilot project to use select hydro corridors and park space as designated off-leash areas. Establish permanent off-leash areas throughout Kitchener informed by the results of the pilot project.

35: Build a south-end dog park

Establish an off-leash dog facility located in one of the southern residential communities sized to accommodate the projected 20-year population growth in the area.

36: Dogs in community parks

Support "micro" dog parks in Community class parks, where brought forward by grassroots initiatives, grant programs, or supported by local consultation, and balanced with other recreational interests.

KITCHENER

Downtown Kitchener

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

KITCHENER

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Health & Wellness
Dogs
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Design Approach
Signature & Feature Parks
Splashpads
Trails & Lighting
Winter Use

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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

When considering park space in Kitchener's downtown core, the focus has historically been on Victoria Park, the city's signature park space. Victoria Park dominates the downtown experience and is often promoted as a reason to visit the city's commercial core. Other spaces downtown which add to the public experience include parkettes and urban squares that have supported the commercial, employment, and local residential population over the past 50 years.

Parks are a critical component of city living. Changing development trends, introduction of ION light rail transit, increased housing, and a new modern planning framework have led to a significant shift from primarily manufacturing and employment uses in Downtown Kitchener to a mixed use, growing community with increased housing units. Downtown will continue to modernize and evolve into a high-density mixed use area that will include places for people to live, work, and play. This booklet intends to profile the park spaces downtown, tie in existing and future policies that influence downtown, and provide a vision for downtown park development.

Existing parks and opportunities

There are seven parks within Downtown Kitchener excluding Victoria Park. Though just outside of the commercial core, it is well recognized that Victoria Park serves as the open space anchor for all activities in the downtown area, from commercial interests to events, and residential development.

As the commercial core continues to become more intensified with housing units, profiling each City park helps to understand needs and gaps.

Of the seven locations downtown that are operated and classified as park spaces, three offer potential to be re-imagined as modern spaces: Civic Centre Park (6,250 m^2), Market Green (1,170 m^2) and Francis Green (1,130 m^2). These parks have largely been unchanged for two decades or more, and are the three largest park properties within the downtown community.

Map legend:

Park spaces

1. Civic Centre Park
2. Market Green
3. Francis Green
4. Oktoberfest Platz
5. Cenotaph Green
6. Vogelsang Green
7. Speakers Corner
8. *Victoria Park*

Alternative open spaces

- A Carl Zehr Square
- B Gaukel Street
- C Rotary Plaza
- D Kitchener Market
- E Regional Courthouse
- F Goudies Lane

Limit of downtown boundary

1 Civic Centre Park

Size: 6,250 m^2
Style: Passive (no programming or activities), parkette

Features:
Since 2005, Civic Centre Park has been home to "Protecting the Memory", a memorial donated by the Kitchener Professional Firefighters Association. A September 11th Memorial was added in 2012. The memorials have become the focal point of the space, and are surrounded by open green space with almost complete canopy coverage of large stature trees, seating and a small playground.

Opportunities:
The park's cover of large stature trees offers a well shaded passive park experience. These large trees are important to protect and restrict any full scale renovation designs. Therefore, a re-imagined park renovation is unlikely until significant tree replacements are necessary.

2 Market Green

Size: 1,170 m^2
Style: Passive, parkette

Features:
This green space at the south end of downtown has largely been untouched for over 30 years. It is a green respite bordered by Duke and Scott streets, featuring almost 50% large stature tree canopy coverage, seating and feature shrub and flower displays.

Opportunities:
Market Green is small in size and located on the perimeter of the downtown core. It is currently a passive park that features large trees on its southern edge and horticultural beds that frame the green space in from the road. Its small size and peripheral location make a re-imagined park renovation a lower impact to the downtown community.

3 Francis Green

Size: 1,130 m²
Style: Passive, parkette

Features:
Francis Green is most notable for its prominent displays of restored industrial artifacts, five in total. The park was expanded in the early 2000's to include part of the former Charles and King street intersection, and was re-developed in 2003 to what it is today - a passive seating area featuring a mix of green and hardscape.

Opportunities:
Francis Green is a relatively small sized park, located more centrally in the downtown core. The park features more hardscape and industrial artifact settings and is intended for passive use. The park is surrounded by high density residential development, and at the time of writing this master plan, the park is subject to be re-imagined in response to these developments.

4 Oktoberfest Platz

Size: 280 m²
Style: Passive, urban square

Features:
The smallest of the downtown parks, Oktoberfest Platz has seen the most change in modern times. The former location of the Oktoberfest Maypole, the space was reconstructed in 2002 and again in 2017 through the development of the Region of Waterloo's Light Rail Transit system.

Opportunities:
At the time of writing this master plan, the park is once again under transformation in partnership with the redevelopment of the former Oktoberfest Haus. The building will be adapted to a four storey office building with ground floor retail. Oktoberfest Platz will be re-constructed to suit the future demand of the building to a modernized plaza space in keeping with the design of Vogelsang Green.

Image by Logical Landscaping, 2022

5 Cenotaph Green

Size: 790 m^2
Style: Passive, urban square

Features:
Cenotaph Green is a national monument site owned by the federal government and operated as a park space by the City of Kitchener. The area was renovated in 2018 as part of a larger road reconstruction and placemaking effort. The renovation refreshed the design which remains centered around the monument honouring Canadian Armed Forces.

6 Vogelsang Green

Size: 790 m^2
Style: Passive, urban square

Features:
Vogelsang Green was modernized as part of a larger downtown road reconstruction and placemaking effort in 2018. The park space has been adapted to suit a larger residential cohort in Downtown, and accommodate small scale events. The park has a design palette that will be replicated in other downtown park spaces - overhead string lights, iconic vertical entries, bench, and counter seating.

7 Speakers Corner

Size: 680 m^2
Style: Passive, urban square

Features:
Speakers Corner is an expanded boulevard that is classified as park space because of its function as a passive seating area. The space is a central feature in Oktoberfest ceremonies and is home to the Oktoberfest Glockenspiel. The space was last renovated in 2009.

8 Victoria Park

Just outside of the downtown core is Victoria Park, the city's Signature Park. Victoria Park is the anchor green space for new developments in the downtown core. It continues to be a central feature of not only downtown but all surrounding communities, and the city as a whole. Increased population density in this area has caused increased pressures on Victoria Park. There is a need to examine not only the park itself, but the network of parks within the downtown to alleviate these pressures.

Efforts are currently underway to update the Victoria Park master plan, using modern technologies to document where, when and how people use the park. As development continues in urban areas, the City can use this data to project increases in park use, both in Victoria Park and the surrounding downtown park network.

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Alternative open space:

A **Carl Zehr Square**
The second largest (approximately 3,200 m²) and one of the more prominent public spaces downtown, Carl Zehr Square, is an important public space in downtown Kitchener. It is home to many annual events and festivals including Oktoberfest and the Christkindl Market.

The space was re-constructed in 2023 to update the event space and parking garage below. The featured fountain was re-imagined as an interactive splash pad, adding to the city's inventory, while maintaining its function as a maintained ice rink in the winter.

B **Gaukel Street**
Gaukel Street was temporarily closed beginning in 2020 to support a residential tower construction. The idea of a permanent closure of the roadway began to gain traction and as of 2024, Gaukel Street has been converted to a fully pedestrianized space. A featured play structure was added directly to the road surface, opening in 2024.

Photo by Eve Nadler

Alternative open space:

C **Kitchener City Hall: Rotary Plaza (Duke St. Entrance)**
By size, the outdoor public space "behind" City Hall is the third largest downtown public space (approximately 2,000 m²). Though secondary to the King St. side of City Hall, the open space provides passive seating areas, well-shaded courtyard entries, public art, structured planting beds and terraced plaza space.

D **Kitchener Market**
Kitchener's Farmer's Market is one of the oldest continuous local farmer's markets in Canada, originally founded in 1869. The Market moved to its current location at 300 King Street in 2004. The Market features an outdoor, public patio space approximately 1,400 m² in size, and a public fountain facing Eby St. N.

E **Waterloo Region Courthouse**
The Waterloo Region Courthouse is the entire city block at 85 Frederick Street between Weber, Frederick, Scott and Duke. Constructed in 2014, it is a public facility with over 3,000 m² of courtyards and seating areas providing a passive, public open space setting.

F **Goudies Lane**
Goudies Lane is an award winning placemaking project featuring impressive murals, string lighting, and ample seating. In the summer, residents enjoy the live music performances it facilitates.

Existing downtown park planning framework

Growing Together (2024)

Building on the recommendations of the Planning Around Rapid Transit Stations (PARTS) Plans, the Growing Together project created an entirely new land use planning framework for Kitchener's Protected Major Transit Station Areas (PMTSAs), which includes Downtown Kitchener. This framework introduces new Strategic Growth Area land uses and zones to permit high-density mixed use development along the ION light-rail system. Growing Together was approved in March 2024. Kitchener's PMTSAs are intended to accommodate a large portion of Kitchener's future growth, including residential and non-residential uses. Downtown Kitchener will intensify significantly in the coming years and park space and public realm has emerged as a priority. Downtown Kitchener is also to be planned as the City's primary focal point for public gatherings and events. Through the PARTS and Growing Together process, several public space recommendations were made including:

- Animate laneways such as Goudies and Halls Lanes.
- Close Breithaupt Street to traffic and create a shared street on Gaukel Avenue.
- Consider new park opportunities through re-development. As new local business development occurs, intentional projects will need to improve public spaces for everyone to enjoy. "Attention needs to be paid to creating streets and laneways that in themselves can become destinations" (PARTS Central, 2016).
- Encourage mid-block pedestrian connections, suggesting through use of privately owned public spaces (POPS).
- Enhance connections to existing neighbourhood parks including Sandhills, Mike Wagner Green, and Kaufman Park.
- Implement a neighbourhood park within PARTS Central in the Innovation District Area.
- Revitalize under-utilized spaces: Cenotaph, Vogelsang, Francis and Stabler Greens, specifically.
- Support the development of the multi-modal transit hub trail connection to the Iron Horse Trail.

Spaces (2022)

The Spaces part of the Parks Master Plan addresses the quantity of park space. It established targets and necessary tools to develop park space across the city.

Downtown Kitchener in particular was identified as a critical needs area. As a community, it is well below the city-wide average in park space (4.7 m^2 per person), it has a low average annual income, and has a high density of apartment dwellings (93%), indicating a greater reliance on public open space. Victoria Park is a critical asset to the surrounding area.

No targeted properties to acquire were suggested in the plan. However, it specifically detailed a need for park space planning in the downtown core and a need to secure additional park land within the community to support this growing population through a parkland acquisition strategy.

Planning Act and Bill 23 (2023)

The Provincial Planning Act enables municipalities to collect park space or cash-in-lieu of park space through developments within a city's boundary. The amount of park land calculated under the Act is either based on a percentage of land (2% or 5%) or an alternative rate of 300 hectares per number of residential units proposed, whichever is larger.

Over time and due to changing provincial legislation, the alternative rate has decreased from the original 300 hectares per residential unit, and was capped as recently as November 2022 (see next page for cap value). Decreasing the rate has added significant challenges to ensuring the public has adequate access to local park space. Two recent significant changes to the Planning Act are:

2016:
New alternative rate for cash-in-lieu applications only set at one hectare per 500 residential units

2022:
Alternative rates amended as follows:

- **Parkland:** One hectare for every 600 units
- **Cash-in-lieu:** One hectare for every 1,000 units
- **New cap:** All park dedication capped at a maximum of 10% of the total land area, up to 15% if greater than five hectares

Spaces (2022) illustrates that park dedication is the exclusive tool Kitchener has and continues to rely on to create modern park land. As the rates have been reduced and caps introduced, this directly affects the City's ability to provide park land. Downtown and high density areas will see the greatest impact – as much as an 85% reduction in park dedication in these areas.

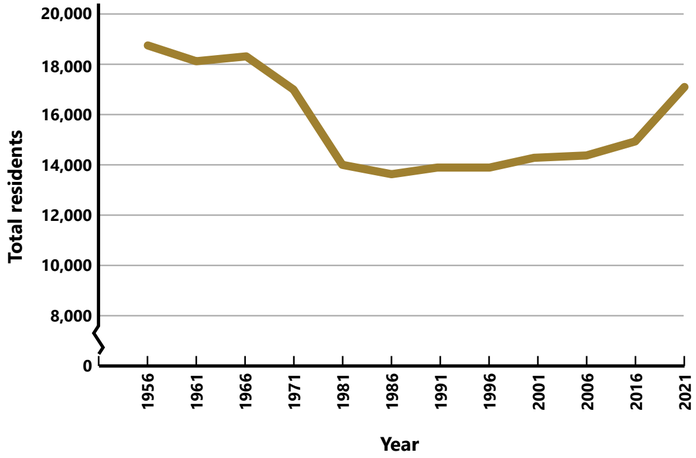
Downtown growth

The park spaces downtown have largely been in place since the 1970s with small expansions as early as the 2000s.

Looking at past development can help put into context modern pressures on existing park space and creating new parks. This is not intended as a complete record of the historical eras of Downtown Kitchener, but rather to illustrate the modern pressures on park land.

Population profile

At the time of writing this master plan, there are 13 active high rise residential towers under construction within the downtown core. Development in downtown has surged, particularly over the past decade. The assumption could be made that the city has been growing quickly over several decades. However, census data shows that the steep increase in population downtown occurred from 2016 to 2021 and is only returning to the previous generation of total residents. A steady decline in population occurred between 1966 and 1981, likely due to a boom of suburban growth.



Early downtown development

As the population began moving toward to the suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s, downtown development slowed. There was simply no market to create living spaces and the focus shifted to commercial opportunities. At this time, the downtown core was geared to offices and shopping centres. Places to spend a lunch break or have a coffee became the most common public open space. Nearly all of the park spaces developed at this time were passive green spaces.

This downtown era lasted until the City's creation of the Economic Development Investment Fund (EDIF) in 2004 and the resulting re-investment in significant developments.

The first major investment was the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy. The downtown Kitchener campus opened in 2008, leading to further development opportunities as the market for downtown investment opportunities was re-ignited. Just across the intersection of King and Victoria, Kaufman Lofts turned a former industrial space into residential lofts. Other renovations followed such as the Lang Tannery and the launching of Communitech, further influencing and increasing interest in downtown living.

From 2016 - 2018, the first modern high rises were under development at 1 Victoria, City Centre Condos, and 100 Victoria. They are each between 18-27 storey condos.

Photo by Ball Construction

Downtown Kitchener Community Improvement Plan (2008-2019)

To re-imagine downtown development and to compete with other cities for development investment, Kitchener allowed all development, including high rise buildings, to be developed with no City-levied development charges or park requirements. This exemption was in place until 2019 for development charges, and 2022 for park dedication.

LRT development (2015-2019)

The announcement, construction, and opening of Region of Waterloo's Light Rail Transit (LRT) System in 2019 led to larger, more dense residential developments. Property values began rising dramatically, particularly in areas around the transit stations as the economics of development were aligned. Interest rates remained low while demand for land steadily increased. Victoria Park was much more widely accessible as the primary open space for park and recreational needs downtown. Use of the park further increased as a result of growing population.

COVID-19 and the housing crisis

Economic conditions that sparked the boom of development through the LRT construction reached a peak during the COVID-19 and housing crises, and were experienced well beyond downtown. Lending rates reached near zero percent interest, and demand for housing skyrocketed leading to never-before-seen property value increases.

From a parks perspective, the downtown park dedication exemption remained in place during the majority of this time, yielding only a handful of opportunities to create new publicly owned park space through adjacent developments.

Growing Together: 2024 and the future

Development in the Downtown has slowed following the recent peak. However, demand for housing remains. Kitchener has implemented a new modern planning framework known as Growing Together for the Downtown and surrounding Protected Major Transit Station Areas to guide and permit new development as the area continues to evolve into a contemporary high density mixed-use transit supportive community. These policies set expectations, guide developments, and enable responsible growth to enable more housing.

Residential profile

The increasing trend of downtown residences is changing the reliance on public park land. Smaller living units are being developed as a response to the cost of building and living in those spaces. Zoning permissions are changing to allow significantly less parking. The built form and amenities that support them impact those who can comfortably live there.

While there are many families with children downtown and their numbers are expected to grow, most of the new households moving downtown do not have children. This shapes park and recreational needs. Changing cultural diversity also needs to be reflected in all park spaces including those downtown.

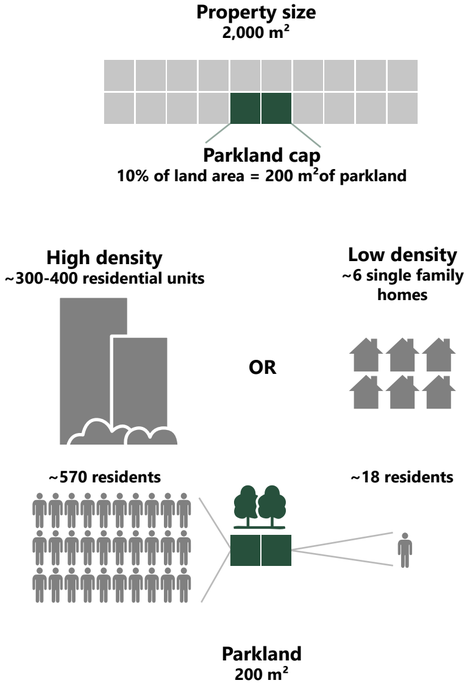
A shift in park land development is therefore needed to design for those living downtown. Similarly, planning park space as it relates to public transit is important.

Addressing growth

Under current planning regulations, park space and park land development requirements in dense residential areas has been greatly reduced from previous requirements. Conversely, the lowest density developments yield the highest amount of park land per person. Downtown Kitchener is almost exclusively an area of intense growth and increasing residential densities. No matter how high or small units are developed, park land is capped at one tenth the land area. This means the opportunity to develop park land in dense areas is severely limited.

There is a fundamental disconnect between encouraging intensification and the Planning Act tools available to provide public park space to support it. Park dedication regulations cannot be relied on as the exclusive way to develop parks any longer.

To illustrate this point, the graphic to the right demonstrates the difference in the number of people that can reside in approximately 2,000 m², and the impact of park dedication limits on the delivery of park space in a high density and low density development scenario.



Future opportunities

How can the City continue to provide adequate, quality, and sustainable public park land amidst new developments, competition for land, and with fewer resources to build parks? The simple answer is: the City has to adjust expectations, parkland area targets, funding sources, property inventory, and even the notion of what a park is in the downtown context.

Acquisition strategy

Efficiently and effectively directing funding is key. An acquisition strategy was recommended in Spaces (2022) and endorsed by Council. Due to shifting Provincial policies and park dedication by-law appeals, this initiative had to be paused until the appeal process concluded.

The park dedication tool was historically relied on almost exclusively to provide park land. It is critical to update the park dedication by-law to reflect current legislative framework, better understand its limitations in delivering downtown park requirements, and make recommendations on funding and resources towards to meet downtown park objectives.

Privately owned public spaces

Few Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) exist in Kitchener. Spaces and its Park Dedication Policy classify these as Alternative Open Spaces intended to augment the public park system. Typically, these spaces are linked to high density residential areas, for example, on top of parking garages or decks.

POPS can be effective in otherwise vacant open spaces. Up to 25% of a proposed POPS is eligible to be considered as part of the required park dedication area. This accurately reflects Kitchener's position that these spaces are supportive only and do not replace public park space.

Downtown parks portfolio

Opportunities to redevelop existing parks in the downtown core will emerge either through capital budget planning or re-development partnerships, as laid out by the PARTS Central plan. Oktoberfest Platz is being re-constructed as part of a developer-build owners agreement with the former Oktoberfest Hall. Gaukel Street has been in the process of a full pedestrian conversion since 2019.

At the time of writing this master plan, only three of the identified parks and supporting public spaces have not been renovated within the last 15 years: Francis Green, Market Green and Civic Centre Park. The latter two locations share similar features of open green space and large canopy cover, both on the fringe of downtown.

Francis Green is expected to be re-constructed as part of an agreement with the 30 Francis Street development. This will allow the space to offer an engaging and welcoming park experience downtown in a small 1,000 m^2 park space.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
- **Region of Waterloo strategies**
- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

When presented with downtown development options, parties participating in engagement ranked their importance in the following order: 1) creating fewer but larger park spaces, 2) improving existing park spaces, 3) creating more but smaller parks, and 4) expanding Victoria Park.

Inclusion

Engagement participants shared visions for downtown parks now and in the future. Visions desired parks to have:

- Connectivity between public spaces;
- Green and natural elements;
- Places to relax and unwind;
- Social opportunities;
- Variety of and unique elements and reasons to be at the park;
- Welcoming spaces;
- Year-round options.

These spaces should be inclusive, creative, innovative, and accessible in all designs.

> *Future park spaces in Downtown Kitchener will be intentionally designed to meet the variety of needs of residents by offering year-round, welcoming, and social green spaces.*

> *"Downtown park spaces should be creative and innovative public spaces that make the most of what we have, are accessible, part of a connected network, people-focused, and animated by diverse, inclusive programming"*

Health and wellbeing

Recent residential growth in the downtown core was seen as negative in the engagement data. Specifically, respondents thought spaces were too crowded and wanted more parks and green spaces as population increases and intensifies.

> *"The parks aren't getting any bigger but there are more and more people wanting to spend time outdoors and near trees"*

Key considerations suggested for downtown Kitchener parks included:

- Committing to building high quality outdoor spaces for residents living in densely populated environments;
- Creating multi-purpose spaces;
- Ensuring resources are available to create and maintain meaningful spaces;
- Re-imagining the potential of gray (alternative) spaces;
- Understanding how community members would prefer to use public spaces with an emphasis on equitable engagement.

Partnerships

Recognizing that expanding and building new parks can take a long time and space is limited downtown, top short-term ideas include closing roads to create pedestrian plazas, developing partnerships between parks and urban plazas, and creating temporary pop-up park programming.

Photo by Amy Martin

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Along with many other municipalities in Ontario, Kitchener is shifting the way it creates new park spaces, particularly in highly urban environments. In the past, Kitchener has relied on developments to require new park land; however, as the downtown population grows, this approach will not keep up with the demand for public park land.

While downtown is not the only community in Kitchener without enough park space, it is representative of how the City can adjust and respond to a new era of park and city development. The recommendations developed here directly address existing downtown park concerns, though the principles can be applied to other Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) as they continue to develop.

01: Prioritize parkland as a use of current City-owned properties

For suitable City-owned lands located in areas identified in Spaces as High or Critical Needs, prioritize parkland when considering land-use modification to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets when assessed in accordance with the City-Owned Land Disposition Framework (DSD-2024-044).

Bramm Yards

The Bramm Yards is a City-owned parking lot in Downtown Kitchener. At eight acres in size, it is the largest City-owned land parcel that can be used to support future employment land use. Prior to becoming a parking lot, it was one of the City's Satellite Operations facilities. All city operations activities were centralized 2011, making the Bramm Yards redundant. The Bramm Yard facility was decommissioned, demolished, and renovated as a parking facility in 2014.

In the City's Official Plan, the Bramm Yards are part of the Urban Growth Centre – an area of the city designated for higher intensity developments. The lands are expected to accommodate a higher intensity, mixed-use development. The Bramm Yards are also part of the Innovation District and are expected to accommodate major office developments.

Master planning efforts are currently underway for this site. Although it will not be exclusively park space, a well-designed public space is the basis for its future design. This will likely be in the form of publicly accessible passive space similar to the Kitchener Market and Regional Courthouse. As the design progresses, pursuing active and unique recreational opportunities is the priority for downtown open spaces.

Rockway Golf Course

Rockway Golf Course was built in 1935 by renowned Canadian golf course architect, Stanley Thompson. The course is built on 44 hectares, touching Courtland Avenue and Schneider Creek. Approximately 35% of the course is on floodplain lands and zoned Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC-1). The remaining property is zoned as Open Space and Recreation (OSR-2). The course is one of two municipally owned and operated golf courses. The other is Doon Valley Golf Course at the south end of the city, touching Highway 401 and the Grand River.

Publicly owned golf courses provide open space value to the community. Spaces recognizes them as Alternative Open Spaces, generally available and accessible in the shoulder seasons. In a sense, they provide this open space at no cost to the community during these shoulder seasons, albeit limited by its primary use as a golf course during peak season.

Rockway Golf Course is in a unique location within the core of the city's "Central Neighbourhoods". Rockway's vast open space could meet current and future park land needs for all central communities as the population intensifies. Downtown is not directly connected to Rockway, but it can be accessed by existing LRT connections between communities. It is thought of as a transit connected corridor.

As long as the golf course continues to operate, its value for community recreation should continue to be promoted, explored, and maximized where feasible to blend the land uses.

04: Alternative spaces

Pursue opportunities for recreation beyond park property boundaries. Continue cross-departmental re-imagination and adaptation of spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.

The city's downtown road network and transportation demand on those roads has changed dramatically since the city was established. The City has explored the possibility of converting roads to pedestrian-first spaces downtown. The temporary closure of a section of Gaukel Street in 2020 to support a residential tower construction spurred the idea of a permanent closure. Gaukel Street has since been converted to a fully pedestrianized space. As of June 2024, an additional play structure was added to Gaukel Pocket Park.

In October 2022, a temporary park was created for one week on King Street, closing the roadway to vehicle traffic and adding pop-up games, play structures, gathering spaces, and seating areas.

These initiatives can be looked to as examples for other roadways or laneways, such as Goudies, Bell, and Halls lanes. As park space is more challenging to develop Downtown, it is recommended that opportunities to develop recreation options in non-traditional spaces be prioritized where possible.

16: Active uses downtown

Encourage the development of active park uses in downtown parks. Consideration should be made for sport, play, activities and games during redevelopment opportunities.

Park spaces within the downtown core primarily offer passive recreation. As it stands, there is a lack of active use opportunities within downtown park spaces. This recommendation aims to encourage the consideration of active uses during downtown redevelopment opportunities.

Recommendations summary

01: Prioritize parkland as a use of current City-owned properties

For suitable City-owned lands located in areas identified in Spaces as High or Critical Needs, prioritize parkland when considering land-use modification to compensate for reduced parkland acquisition tools and to support parkland provision targets when assessed in accordance with the City-Owned Land Disposition Framework (DSD-2024-044).

04: Alternative spaces

Pursue opportunities for recreation beyond park property boundaries. Continue cross-departmental re-imagination and adaptation of spaces such as roads and laneways to support and integrate with the parks system downtown.

16: Active uses downtown

Encourage the development of active park uses in downtown parks. Consideration should be made for sport, play, activities and games during redevelopment opportunities.

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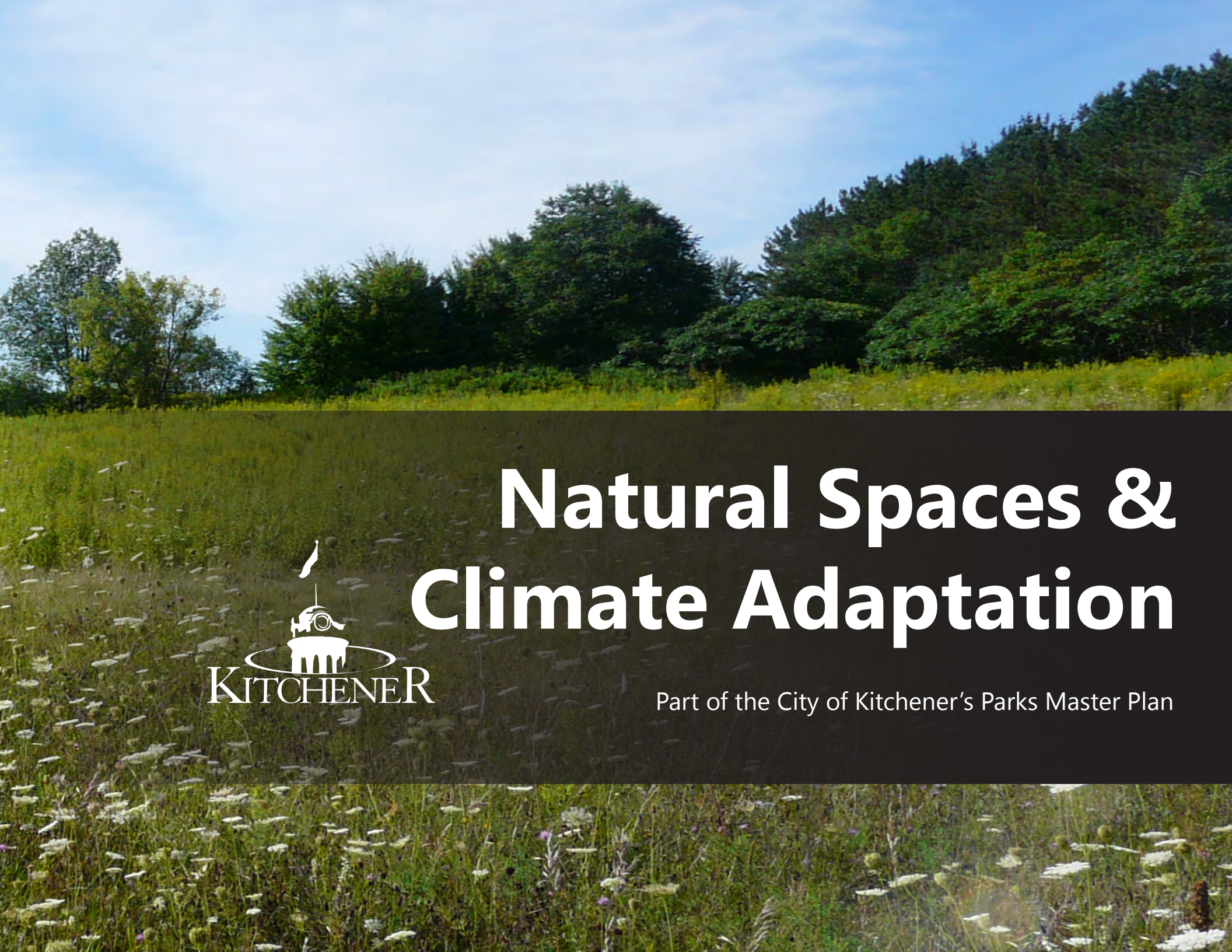

Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation

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Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

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Spaces
Community Health & Wellness
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The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

With climate change comes more volatile weather events such as intense storms, more frequent freeze-thaw cycles, and increasing temperatures overall. In the wake of the resulting environmental, social, and economic risks, simply protecting and managing the natural environment is no longer enough. Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies are needed. This requires intentional, ongoing, and city-wide approaches. Through several approved policies and strategies, the City of Kitchener has made specific commitments to manage, protect, and enhance natural assets, to proactively adapt to changing weather patterns resulting from climate change, and to reduce carbon emissions.

While other initiatives are already underway, alignment between these approved plans and the Parks Master Plan will support a cross-departmental collaboration to reach key goals and objectives already endorsed by Council. This section of the Parks Master Plan will discuss recommendations related to how parks and open spaces can directly support these approved objectives.

Connected strategies

Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy (SUFS, 2019)
In January 2022, Council approved a tree canopy target of 30% in each ward by 2050 and a target of 33% across Kitchener by 2070. This targeted approach to growing the tree canopy over time will involve increasing the maintenance of existing trees and implementing a tree planting program with an equity-driven approach. This means planting more trees in areas of the city where they will have a greater impact on climate change mitigation, or in areas where people must rely on tree shade for their everyday well-being, promoting social equity. The City's partnership with Reep Green Solutions, an environmental not-for-profit that has been helping people in Waterloo Region live sustainably, subsidizes tree planting costs for residents so that more trees are planted on private property. Strategic implementation of the tree canopy targets has been underway since 2022. Current progress toward tree canopy targets can be viewed on the City of Kitchener's online urban forest map: Discovering Our Urban Forest.

New trees require significant initial inputs such as adequate and good quality soil, watering, staking, and mulching for the first two years. Young trees require structural pruning in the first 20 years to make them easier to manage as they mature. It takes several decades for investments in new trees to realize a return.

> *"From a cost-benefit perspective, large-stature trees start to provide a return on the initial investments when they reach the semi-mature life stage (40 years)."*
>
> ***Kitchener's Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy, 2019***

City of Kitchener Official Plan, A Complete & Healthy Kitchener (2014); Kitchener 2051 (Underway)
Shade, as provided by mature trees and shade structures, is identified in Kitchener's Official Plan as an essential component when planning or retrofitting community facilities and public parks.

Kitchener Changing for Good; Our corporate climate action plan for sustainability (2019-2022); CorCAP 2.0 (underway)
Initiatives through the City's Corporate Climate Action Plan (CorCAP) have reduced greenhouse gas emissions through actions that transition the City's fleet, including maintenance equipment used in parks, away from fossil fuel use. Work on fleet optimization continues through CorCAP.

Integrated Stormwater Master Plan (ISWM-MP, 2016)
In 2016, City of Kitchener Council approved a comprehensive, city-wide Integrated Stormwater Master Plan to manage stormwater for the next 15 years. This plan showed that only 25% of runoff in the city is managed through stormwater facilities. This means 75% of runoff from heavy rainfall and snow melt flows into storm sewers contaminating local creeks with surface pollutants picked up by water runoff.

The goals of the master plan include improved resilience against climate change and enhanced community safety. These goals will be achieved by improving water quality, reducing the risk of flooding by intercepting water before it rushes into creeks and streams and reducing erosion in watercourses. As we experience more intense storms and frequent freeze-thaw cycles, creating more space for stormwater to collect will reduce flooding and erosion and will allow suspended sediment to settle, releasing cleaner water into local creeks.

Actioning the 2016 ISWM-MP includes adding eight stormwater facilities to existing parks:

1. Cherry Park
2. Concordia Park
3. Country Hill Park
4. Countryside Park
5. Idlewood Park
6. Meadowlane Park
7. Millwood Park
8. Prospect Park

Parkland Naturalization pilot project (2022-present)
Work is already underway through the Parkland Naturalization Program, a pilot project, to transition select park areas to naturalization areas. The selected areas are currently hard to maintain as turf and present an opportunity to try alternatives such as native wildflower plantings.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the interconnectedness of all forms of life on our planet; is the variety of life in an ecosystem and the relationships between these lifeforms and their habitat. Biodiversity supports our food, our soil, our weather, and the air we breathe. Climate change has altered terrestrial, marine, and freshwater ecosystems around the world.

Biodiversity in parks and open spaces can be improved all over the city by intentionally supporting more diverse local plants and animals through naturalization.

What is naturalization?

Naturalization is the process of transforming a cultivated landscape to a naturalized one by reintroducing species native to a given area or that are well adapted to the climate of that area. Naturalized landscapes are designed to mimic natural habitats such as forests, wetlands, or meadows. They help support many types of plant, animal, and insect life. Natural areas that are biodiverse are more adaptable and resilient to climate change.

The City of Kitchener uses naturalization to bring ecological and aesthetic diversity of landscapes into public parks and open spaces. The City's naturalization priority is to create sustainable landscapes that increase biodiversity, strengthen corridors between natural areas, and increase access to nature in parks. By increasing biodiversity and pulling more carbon dioxide out of the environment, Kitchener's parks and open spaces can help reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change.

Simply protecting natural areas is no longer enough. Increasing area and improving the health of naturalized areas will create more sustainable parks while reducing traditional landscaping and long-term maintenance costs. However, on-going invasive species removal and management are essential parts of all naturalization initiatives, particularly during establishment.

While mown turf areas are typically used by the City to calculate and assess the overall provision of park space against target rates, engagement has demonstrated a shift in public understanding of what is considered useable park space. The outcomes of the Parkland Naturalization Pilot Project will help to determine the best way to expand the area of naturalized spaces while continuing to enhance park user experiences.

Turf areas and maintenance

Open turf areas are important in parks to support unprogrammed play and unstructured enjoyment of park spaces such as imagination games, gathering for a picnic, or enjoying a game of catch with friends.

Maintenance of turf areas is completed using several types of equipment including ride-on mowers for larger grass areas, and hand-held equipment such as line trimmers to complete detailing work. Cutting routes are completed on a two-to-four week rotation during the growing season. Ride-on mower routes and detailing routes are completed separately and may not be completed on the same day or week.

What is green infrastructure?

Green infrastructure is a collection of natural assets and built elements that provide environmental benefits in urban spaces. Built environmental interventions are sometimes called low-impact development (LID). The combination of natural assets and LID elements contributes to cities that are more resilient to climate change.

Green infrastructure increases the city's biodiversity, helps manage water quality and runoff, and contributes to health and wellness for people. This section of the Parks Master Plan will focus on natural assets and LID elements that can enhance a park's resilience to climate change, and contribute to visitor enjoyment, and environmental protection.

Examples of green infrastructure

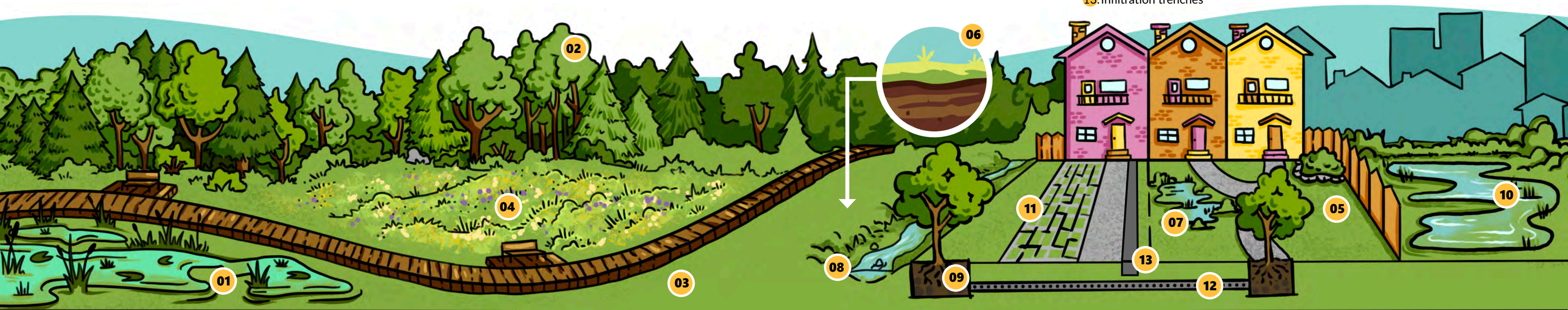
Natural assets

1. Wetlands
2. Forests
3. Parks
4. Meadows
5. Lawns and gardens
6. Healthy soils

Low impact development

7. Rain gardens
8. Bioswales
9. Trees in the urban environment with soil cells
10. Naturalized stormwater management (SWM) ponds
11. Permeable Pavement
12. Perforated pipes
13. Infiltration trenches

> *We define green infrastructure as the natural vegetative systems and green technologies that collectively provide society with a multitude of economic, environmental, health, and social benefits.*
>
> ***Ontario Green Infrastructure Coalition***



The Grand River watershed

The Grand River stretches 280 kilometers, connecting villages, towns, and cities; and forests, wetlands, and grasslands. Its meandering corridor is both a city boundary and a natural heritage feature and was designated as one of Canada's heritage rivers in 1994. The river has shaped the evolution and development of Kitchener as a city.

For thousands of years, the Grand River watershed and all its tributaries were a source of sustenance, transportation, and spiritual connection for Indigenous communities living on their traditional territories.

The Grand River is located within the bounds of the Between the Lakes Treaty, No. 3, established between the Crown and Mississaugas of the Credit in 1784 and ratified in 1792. Through the Haldimand Treaty of 1784 the Six Nations, which includes the Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora nations, were granted an area of 10 km on either side of the entire length of the Grand River in recognition of their support to the British during the American Revolution. This area is called the Haldimand Tract.

Any parks and open space use within the Haldimand Tract and Treaty lands must recognize and acknowledge the importance of these lands to First Nations rightsholders, and their role in opportunities for action toward Reconciliation. The Grand River remains an important cultural and spiritual place for First Nations rightsholders and Indigenous persons living and working in Kitchener today.

A vision for a continuous open-space network

The 2010 Parks Strategic Plan identified seven areas along the Grand River corridor that could complete the vision of a continuous public open space system along the river. It was recognized that protecting these lands as part of the river experience was not expected in the short or medium term, nor necessary to meet objectives outlined in the Official Plan. Completing the Grand River park strategy is an action toward the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan goals.

Grand River access points

In 2015, the Province of Ontario and Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO4) commissioned and published the Grand River Access Point Standards Manual & Pilot Design Plans document. The goal of the document is to reinforce the importance of the Grand River as a destination for recreational tourism and aims to standardize each access point with similar design, layouts, signage, and facilities.

In total, 32 river access points were identified from Lake Belwood to the mouth of the river at Lake Erie, near Port Maitland.

Of those, five access point areas were identified in Kitchener:

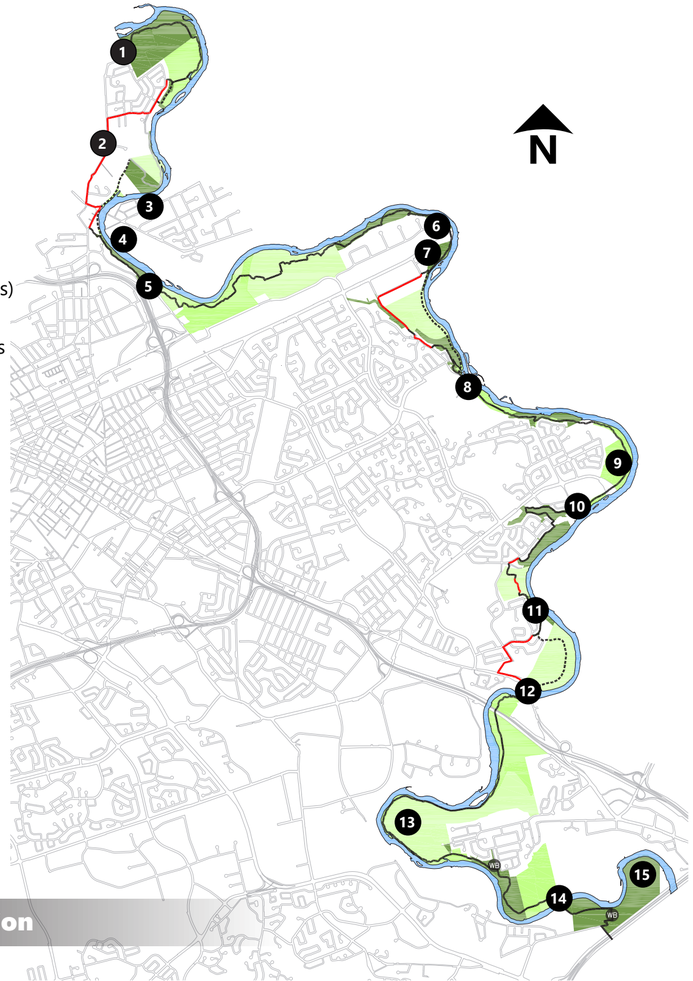
1. Bridgeport
2. Bingemans
3. Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area
4. Otterbein
5. Freeport

Since the standards were established, Kitchener developed the new Idlewood Access Point in 2020, and re-developed the existing Otterbein Access Point in 2023. The new and renovated access points offer improved accessibility, signage, temporary canoe storage, and washroom facilities.

Grand River corridor open space system

Locations are listed North to South along the Grand River corridor.

1. Kiwanis Park
2. Walter Bean Grand River Trail (on-road bypass)
3. Schaefer Park
4. Joe Thompson Park & Bridgeport Sportsfields
5. Riverbend Drive Viewpoint
6. Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area
7. Kolb Park
8. Otterbein Access Point (Region of Waterloo)
9. Grand River Flats (GRCA)
10. Idlewood Access Point
11. Chicopee-Vale Viewpoint
12. Freeport Access Point
13. Deer Ridge Trail (GRCA)
14. Pioneer Tower bridge
15. Doon Valley Golf Course



Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Inclusion

Through engagement, there was strong support for more opportunities to interact with nature and naturalized spaces in parks both for ecological benefit and because they are considered part of unstructured play experiences in parks. Through public feedback, respondents most often described their current play in parks in a similar way to how they used to play in parks when they were young, including enjoying nature, naturalized spaces, and nature trails; enjoying picnic areas; and having places to sit in the shade.

Accessibility

Shade was a main conversation topic among community advocate consultation group participants, particularly as a means of creating accessible and welcoming parks. Key considerations for increasing shade in parks include:

- Considering how shade can decrease visibility which can both provide privacy and also decrease feelings of safety;
- Ensure accessibility of shaded areas;
- Equitable distribution of shade;
- Natural and artificial shade;
- Shade over play equipment, near public transit stops, and as a climate mitigation measure;
- Shady spaces to sit and rest, including benches with backs and picnic tables.

Environmental sustainability

This entire booklet is centred around environmental sustainability and therefore this theme is highlighted within other theme categories as well.

Public feedback highlighted the importance of creating more naturalized environments and park settings including wild spaces for ecosystems to thrive. Also important is for the City to invest in climate change mitigations like integrated stormwater management, permeable pavement, and rain gardens in parks.

> *"Regardless of the improvements that you're hoping to make, please take care not to disrupt what little natural areas that we have."*

Health and wellbeing

Changes to improve the environment will inherently improve the health & well-being of the public through improved air and water quality, flood prevention, cooling the environment on hot days, and contributing to climate change mitigation. The experience of a healthy ecosystem in the city can contribute to a person's overall well-being.

> *"Regardless It's tough because it can provide a [habitat] for animals and insects and benefit biodiversity, but it can also cause problems with pests like mice and ticks."*

Engagement highlighted that respondents are satisfied to very satisfied with grass quality and mowing frequency. The top concern among respondents if grass in parks is left to grow longer is ticks followed by accessibility, and ease of cleaning up after pets. The top benefit was the positive environmental impact of natural spaces. City of Kitchener partner conversations highlighted the importance of setting realistic maintenance expectations for turf areas.

Information

Establishing new naturalization areas can take several years of active management and it can take time for the area to look appealing. A key part of communicating the benefits of naturalization is to include signage and information for interested residents.

Engagement feedback highlighted the value of teaching people about the importance of natural spaces as well as the plants and animals that live there, with information about how natural spaces and parks contribute to social and physical health. Learning more about the health benefits of natural spaces and about their significance to local Indigenous culture is also important to respondents. Sharing information regarding natural spaces can support the environmental sustainability of nature.

Safety

Careful consideration of how shade can decrease visibility which can both provide privacy and also decrease feelings of safety was noted during engagement.

Stable paths of travel in naturalized areas is important for safe enjoyment of these spaces.

Partnerships

Collaboration among internal staff departments with overlapping policies and strategies, as well as with local community partners such as Reep Green Solutions is key to a coordinated effort to make progress toward positive climate adaptations city-wide.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Parks and open spaces can continue to support achieving the targets set out by approved City policies, strategies, and master plans by deliberately incorporating natural assets and low impact development (LID) elements in renovated parks. This includes retrofitting integrated stormwater management, growing the urban forest in parks, and transitioning turf areas to meadow or naturalization areas. The future of green infrastructure in parks and open spaces is to comprehensively and proactively design spaces that balance environmental benefits with enjoyable park experiences.

Grow the urban tree canopy

Use parks and open spaces to help implement the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy tree canopy targets.

The urban forest plays a vital role in supporting biodiversity and protecting wildlife habitats. Tree planting is a long-term investment and care must be taken to plan for and plant them correctly to ensure their long-term benefits. Trees are one of the most publicly supported investments in parks; however, new tree plantings are often the first to be considered for removal from a project scope to save on costs. By prioritizing tree plantings in new and renovated parks, this ongoing investment in a healthy urban tree canopy can provide ecological, health and wellness, and economic benefits.

Other LID approaches can be considered in urban developments as ways of enhancing growing space for trees in low canopy areas. Soil cell technologies, an LID approach for trees, are modular underground systems that provide structural support under paved areas preventing the compaction of growing medium for trees planted in highly urban areas. Soil cells can accommodate underground utilities while providing enough space for roots to promote tree growth. Another example is to consider, where eligible spaces exist, areas to receive permeable pavement surfaces. These are pavements that are either porous surfaces, or are non-porous surfaces that have gaps to permit water to flow through the pavement. Permeable paving can support urban tree health by making water more available to tree roots in urban environments.

Continuing to advance the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy (SUFS) tree canopy targets in parks and open spaces is critical to the success of quality park service delivery. Recognizing their long-term importance for the city will protect the specific inclusion of new tree plantings in eligible new and renovated park projects where identified in SUFS.

Acquire floodplain lots for open space network

Continue or initiate active pursuit of properties in targeted floodplain areas.

It remains a priority for the City to explore suitable acquisition opportunities in the Grand River corridor as part of a parkland acquisition strategy under development.

Continue Grand River access improvements

Prioritize and improve Grand River canoe launch access points to established standards.

The Grand River Access Point Standards Manual & Pilot Design Plans document identified five access points to the Grand River within Kitchener. Of those locations, two have been built to these standards: Idlewood Access Point and Otterbein Access Point.

Two existing access locations remain to be renovated: Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area, and Freeport Access Point. Committing to the renovations of these two access points will create accessible, consistent, and recognizable access points to the Grand River.

The Bridgeport area requires a further study of feasible locations for an access point.

10: Increase biodiversity in parks

Using an asset management approach, identify strategic parkland areas that can be transitioned to naturalized areas through park renovation projects. Design plantings to mimic nature as much as possible in species diversification.

Naturalized areas contribute to biodiversity and provide direct ecological benefits to humans. Natural landscapes are inherently low maintenance, are self-renewing and can continue to foster a sense of environmental stewardship for people in urban areas.

By proactively identifying more areas to naturalize in new and renovated parks during design stages a biodiversity management approach that reduces resources required to maintain turf over large areas can be resourced through park projects. When designed planting areas are considered in new or renovated parks, native species should be prioritized and plant selection informed through engagement with First Nations rightsholders and local urban Indigenous organizations.

20: Less intensive turf

Diversify turf species to improve biodiversity and reduce cutting rotations.

Transitioning away from large swaths of turf areas while also introducing turf seed mixtures that include more drought-tolerant plant species can reduce turf-cutting rotations. A reduction in cutting rotations will in turn reduce overall contributions to greenhouse gas emissions through operational practices, an action that is in alignment with CorCAP commitments.

> *"The City of Kitchener's Corporate Climate Action Plan (CorCAP) aims to achieve meaningful and measurable carbon emission reductions throughout its operation, while also adapting to impacts resulting from climate change."*
>
> ***Kitchener Changing for Good; Our corporate climate action plan for sustainability, 2019-2022***

22: Green infrastructure integration in existing parks

Establish integrated design and development standards and criteria for retrofit stormwater management adaptations, natural assets, and low-impact development (LID) in park spaces.

Retrofit stormwater management adaptations identified in the 2016 Integrated Stormwater Master Plan (ISWM-MP) have challenged the City to explore ways to add climate-adaptive infrastructure into parks while preserving valuable recreation and community spaces. "Sponge parks", spaces that creatively incorporate stormwater function into park spaces, are being used successfully elsewhere in Canada and worldwide while also capturing the imagination of park visitors.

Creating forward-thinking design standards between recreation spaces and stormwater function inspired by a "sponge park" concept is key to successfully integrating climate-adaptive strategies in existing park spaces in Kitchener. With increasing environmental volatility comes the need to consider more city sites for inclusion of stormwater management and LID when renovation opportunities are identified.

Open stormwater ponds are not accepted as parkland through new developments because they are engineered facilities that are subject to specific zoning and regulations for their maintenance. Stormwater management facilities, including but not limited to wet ponds and infiltration galleries, remain excluded as eligible parkland dedication in new developments.

Recommendations summary

Grow the urban tree canopy

Use parks and open spaces to help implement the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy tree canopy targets.

Acquire floodplain lots for open space network

Continue or initiate active pursuit of properties in targeted floodplain areas.

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Park Amenities

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Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Park amenities

Park amenities include both recreational and functional amenities that enhance the value of park spaces for all park users. The collection of amenities in each park is called park programming. Recreational amenities such as playgrounds, sportscourts, trails and splashpads are explored in other booklets in this master plan.

This booklet explores a variety of functional park amenities that contribute to comfort, convenience, and overall enjoyment of parks and open spaces for everyone. These functional park amenities are organized into three categories:

Site furnishings
- Seating
- Shade
- Picnic tables
- Bike racks
- Waste receptacles

Electrical amenities
- E-scooters
- Power
- Wireless internet

Water amenities
- Public Washrooms
- Drinking Water

Seating and picnic tables provide resting and gathering places, while shade structures and sails reprieve from the sun and heat. Waste receptacles prevent littering and accommodate various events and programming. Bike racks and e-scooter parking support alternative transportation in neighbourhoods and across the city. Publicly accessible power and wireless internet can enable public performances or entertainment, utility device charging, or simply offering another place to work or study.

This booklet will inventory current functional park amenities, outline standards of quantity and quality for each, and make recommendations for their provision in Kitchener parks.

Site furnishings

Engagement for this master plan highlighted that barrier-free shade, seating, bike racks, picnic tables and waste receptacles in parks and open spaces is a high priority for Kitchener residents. This section will highlight each of these site furnishings and what currently exists in Kitchener's parks.

Seating

Seating areas are valuable spaces to rest and recharge in parks. They are especially helpful for those with mobility needs, health conditions and, those needing more frequent rest stops. There must be sufficient seating in parks given its importance.

Most seating options fit into one of two categories: formal or informal seating.

Formal seating includes bleachers and benches with a seat, back, and arm rests. Formal seating requires a level area is typically fixed to a concrete pad, and is accessible by situating options near paths, close to playgrounds, splashpads, or other recreational amenities.

Bleachers typically only exist at sportscourts and sports fields and might be fixed to concrete or placed on level turf.

Informal seating includes a variety of options such as seat walls and seating stumps or stones. Informal seating is advantageous as it can be placed in areas that may not be suitable for formal seating, or can be combined with formal seating options. Informal seating is not considered accessible.

Although current seating in parks all over the city offer a variety of options such as armour stone, bleachers, benches, seating stumps, and stones; benches are the only seating option that are considered accessible in parks.

The following table summarizes the current inventory of benches in Kitchener parks.

Park classification (total no.)	Number of parks with benches	Total benches in this classification
Signature (1 park)	1	49
Feature (4 parks)	3	41
City (10 parks)	6	43
Community (11 parks)	10	26
Neighbourhood (174 parks)	120	169

Bleacher seating

Bench seating

Seating stumps

Armourstone seatwall

Seating stones

Combination of formal and informal seating

Shade

Many regions and municipalities are making a conscious effort to provide shade in parks. Various municipal guiding documents state that shade structures are an important functional amenity. The Region of Waterloo Public Health states that parks, playgrounds, seating areas, sports grounds, and trails are priority settings for shade.

Shade in parks is important as summer temperatures increase year after year due to climate change. Shade helps protect from UV (ultraviolet) exposure, makes playgrounds more inviting and comfortable. The City of Kitchener Official Plan 2014 states that shade, whether natural or constructed protects from sun exposure and mitigates the urban heat island.

The Standards Council of Canada released a report called, Thermally Comfortable Playgrounds: A review of literature and survey of experts in which roughly 38% of respondents stated that artificial shade structures should be highly prioritized and 40% of respondents stated that shade structures in general should be prioritized.

Shade is also provided by a healthy tree canopy. The City of Kitchener's Sustainable Urban Forestry Strategy (SUFS) includes an urban tree canopy target of 30% in each ward by 2050 and a target of 33% across Kitchener by 2070. The strategy relies on planting new trees as well as maintaining the existing urban forest canopy of around 27%. Shade provided by tree canopies is both cost-effective and environmentally friendly; however, trees require significant time for growth and do not meaningfully provide shade for many years. Given the limitations, investment in trees is a good long-term solution for shade and climate adaptation.

Constructed shade options are more costly to install than trees and offer a more immediate solution to a need for shade with recreational amenities. Both shade structures and sails are installed in some parks throughout Kitchener, although not consistently. Due to cost and historical park design approaches, only around 14 structures exist in 275 parks city-wide.

Picnic tables

Picnic tables help support various park uses and are a great place to rest or connect with others. They are placed in all park types and are often installed based on demand. The Canadian City Parks Report outlines how picnic tables and other similar functional amenities contribute to the reason people use parks. Without them, park spaces have limited recreational options, the quality of a park's function suffers.

The Contribution of Public Parks to Physical Activity journal article summarized observed park use and found that the most common activities were sitting or picnicking. These activities are supported by adding more opportunities within parks. Moveable furniture allow visitors of all ages and abilities to rearrange furnishings based on their needs and preferences. Fixed picnic tables are immovable providing a consistent seating option over time. Both moveable and fixed picnic tables are valuable to park spaces and should be considered for implementation whenever possible and practical.

Moveable picnic table

Fixed picnic table

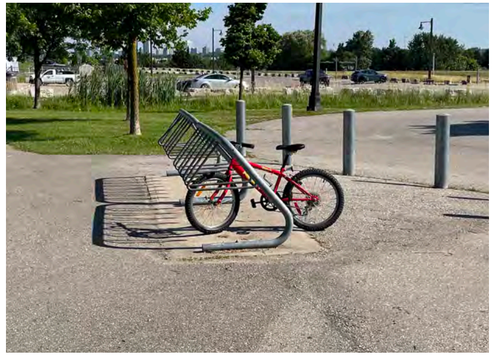
Bike racks

As outlined in the Cycling and Trails Masterplan 2020, the City of Kitchener is focused on providing safe, walkable, and bikeable neighbourhoods and supporting health in all its forms. As the City of Kitchener continues constructing bicycle infrastructure connecting the city's major active transportation networks, it is important that parks provide bike parking to ensure the park system is also connected to those networks. The current inventory of bike racks is limited. There are no provisional guidelines to meet when providing bike racks within parks.

The number of bike racks can vary based on the type of bike parking options. Here is the breakdown of the number of parking spots available with each bike rack:

- **Ring-and-post style (and similar):** 2 spots
- **Spiral rack:** 2 spots
- **Multi-bike rack:** 8 spots

With the development of the Downtown Cycling Grid in Kitchener, ridership increased by 164%, totaling 54,781 cycling trips within the first seven months of 2023. When ridership increases, functional amenities for bikes must keep up. A person may request a bike rack through the City of Kitchener website, however, high-demand areas such as commercial districts, recreation centers and libraries have been generally prioritized. It is important for Kitchener to support the growing ridership with infrastructure and amenities by including more bike racks in parks and open spaces.



Multi-bike rack

Ring-and-post style bike rack

Ring style bike rack

Bench and bike rack

Waste receptacles

There are currently two types of waste receptacles in Kitchener parks: above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles. Above-ground waste receptacles can be permanently fixed in place, or moveable within the park so long as they can be accessed and serviced. The volume of waste held, however, is limited in these waste receptacles. Subterranean waste receptacles hold significantly more waste and need to be serviced less frequently, but are permanent and can only be located on a route accessible by maintenance vehicles. Therefore, the ideal solution is a hybrid approach that includes both above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles.

The City currently provides 406 above-ground, and approximately 100 subterranean units. These are located throughout parks and open spaces. Prior to 2023, above-ground waste receptacles were removed from parks and open spaces during the winter months. Council direction since then means most above-ground waste receptacles are now available all year. In winter, the number of above-ground units is reduced, and locations may shift to park frontages along snow cleared pedestrian routes.

Placement of subterranean waste receptacles have parameters to enable suitable and safe use for the public and for maintenance operations.

Subterranean units must be:

- Placed along a route accessible to maintenance vehicles. An accessible route is a paved park trail with an entry and exit point and an appropriate turning radius to allow service trucks to access the waste receptacles. Park trails must be at least three meters wide and maintained throughout the winter. Alternatively, waste receptacles can be placed at the park frontage without obstructions above or around them. This ensures that service trucks can remove the waste safely without interference.

- Barrier-free for everyone including those with mobility needs, those using mobility devices, and people of varying heights. It is best practice that people should not have to reach into a waste receptacle past their wrist to dispose of waste.

Above-ground waste receptacle

Subterranean waste receptacle

Recycling in parks

Kitchener parks do not have separate containers for recycling. This is because in public places, many non-recyclable items are often thrown into recycle bins and contaminated recycling is not accepted at waste management facilities. All contaminated recycling is diverted as regular landfill.

Circular materials

Circular Materials is a national not-for-profit organization managing Ontario's recycling which has transitioned to an extended producer responsibility (EPR) model. This transfers the responsibility of recycling management from municipalities to packaging producers. This recycling model holds producers accountable for their product's footprint throughout its entire life cycle. It was initiated by the Blue Box Regulation in June 2021, the transition began in July 2023 and will continue on until December 2025. Starting in January 2026, producers will be fully accountable for their products. The goal of this initiative is to create a consistent and efficient recycling system across the province.

The City of Kitchener will continue to support the advancements of the EPR model and Blue Box Regulation and work with producers to ensure a seamless transition.

Electrical amenities

E-scooters

E-scooters offer an alternative mode of transportation to walking and cycling which help keep people connected to the City's major destinations. There is currently no E-scooter parking in parks, and no consideration given to E-scooter parking needs.

Power

Publicly accessible power outlets within parks are important as they allow for more events and activities, increase the number of park visitors, allow for longer and safer park visits, and ensure people with mobility devices can recharge.

Publicly available outlets do exist in general park settings and sportsfields specifically and are determined case-by-case based on local use and improvement budgets. There is currently no mandate nor requirement to provide outlets in Kitchener parks.

Wireless internet

More and more park users rely on electronic devices for navigation, communication, education and entertainment.

Publicly accessible wireless internet provides a service for everyone, particularly of benefit to those without reliable internet access. The integration of wireless internet in outdoor public spaces such as parks encourages connectivity, and supports the streaming needs of sport tourism activities.

Public wireless internet access is currently available in three parks, in addition to community centre locations: Victoria Park, McLennan Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park. There is currently no standard nor requirement to provide wireless connectivity in Kitchener parks. However, wireless internet is considered when budget is available during park renovations.

Water amenities

Accessible public washrooms and drinking water support inclusion, convenience, and a welcoming environment in parks and open spaces. For some, the duration of park visits are extended when access to washrooms and water is provided. Public washrooms and water access are especially beneficial in parks that contain sportsfields, splashpads, picnic areas and other amenities that increase park usage. Visiting parks at all may not be an option at all for some without having access to washrooms.

This section focuses on standalone washroom facilities located in public parks and open spaces. These are facilities specifically dedicated to providing restrooms in with active and passive recreational amenities. Other types of facilities can provide the same service for park users (e.g., community centres or libraries) and will be considered as part of the overall recommended strategy but are excluded from any of this master plan's recommendations.

Washrooms in parks

There are several different types of washroom facilities in Kitchener's parks, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. The current public washroom inventory in Kitchener parks and open spaces consists of **brick-and-mortar facilities** and **portable washrooms**.

A third **semi-permanent** option has emerged in recent years - pre-fabricated facilities placed on grade and plumbed. There are no semi-permanent facilities in Kitchener at the time of writing this master plan.

In most cases, washroom service hours are linked to the park opening hours. Most washroom facilities are not open during the winter months as not all existing facilities are winterized due to changes in demand over the winter months depending on the park context.

The following map shows the nine brick-and-mortar washroom facilities available to park users. Although Kiwanis Park has a washroom facility, it is not included in the inventory map because it is not open for public use due to restricted pool access and associated entry fees.

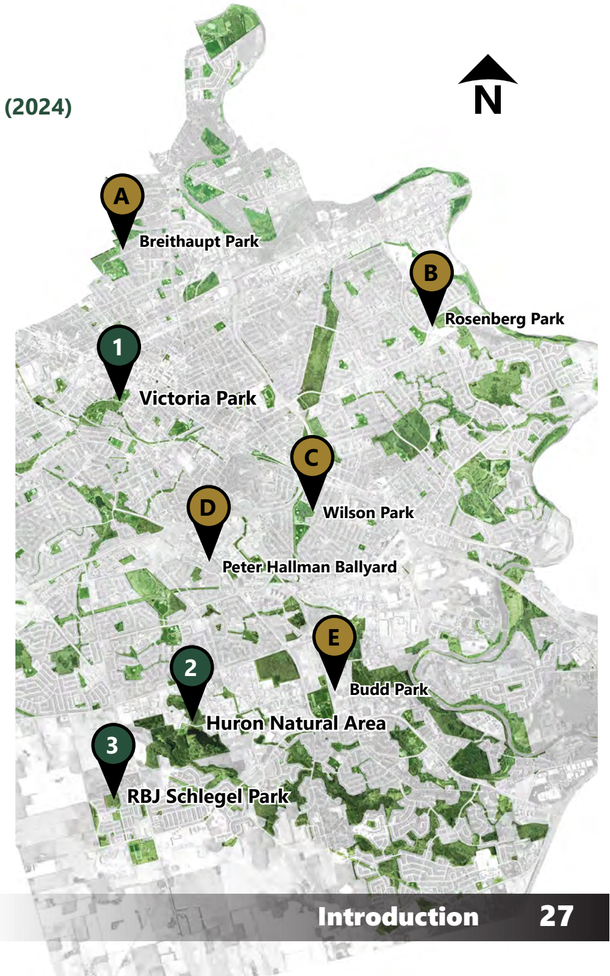
Permanent washroom facilities in Kitchener parks (2024)

Signature & Feature parks

1. Victoria Park (2 facilities) *40 Jubilee Drive and 57 Jubilee Drive*
2. Huron Natural Area (1 facility) *801 Trillium Drive*
3. RBJ Schlegel Park (1 facility) *1664 Huron Road*

All other park locations

- **A** Breithaupt Park (1 facility) *806 Union Street*
- **B** Rosenberg Park (1 facility) *600 Heritage Drive*
- **C** Wilson Park (1 facility) *75 Wilson Avenue*
- **D** Peter Hallman Ballyard (1 facility) *220 Hayward Avenue*
- **E** Budd Park (1 facility) *1111 Homer Watson Boulevard*



Permanent washroom facilities

There are currently nine permanent, standalone brick-and-mortar washroom facilities in Kitchener parks. These facilities offer a "traditional" approach to providing high-quality, accessible washroom facilities.

The cost to construct and operate permanent facilities is by far the highest compared to portable and semi-permanent facilities. The benefits of permanent facilities are the assurance of accessible, durable, and consistent washrooms that offer safe and reliable service.

To-date there are no guidelines that determine when it is best to include permanent washroom facilities in park settings. Kitchener's current permanent washroom inventory distribution is most influenced by active recreational park uses such as sportsfields and splashpads.

Portable washroom facilities

Portable washrooms are a common outdoor facility that offer a cost effective, flexible solution to washroom needs in parks and open spaces. There are barrier-free portable units, however the vast majority in use today are the common single portable toilets familiar to most park-goers. The use of portable washrooms are a solution to provide quick, adaptive, on the spot servicing where it is needed.

Portable washrooms are mainly used in City class parks to service sportsfield programming.

There are currently 50 portable washroom units located within City class parks in Kitchener. During sports tournaments additional units are required along with more frequent servicing.

Despite their familiarity, portable washroom facilities pose barriers. They are not accessible, they lack space and facilities for those who must be accompanied by parents or caregivers, or need privacy and basic cleanliness for personal hygiene or health reasons. They are more frequently vandalized than permanent and semi-permanent facilities. In addition to the functional issues, portable washrooms tend to hold odors due to the small size, limited ventilation, and lack of plumbing. Some people may avoid portable washrooms altogether for any of these reasons.

Portable washrooms will continue to have a role in parks, however should not be considered a permanent solution for park washroom needs particularly in high use, high demand parks.

Semi-permanent washroom facilities

Semi-permanent washrooms have emerged as a third option to providing washroom facilities in parks. These can include single stall self-cleaning, modular prefabricated, and shipping container facilities. These facilities are often placed on grade and plumbed for permanent water and sanitary servicing.

Kitchener does not currently have any of these facility types in park spaces. The nature of their construction make them attractive options for the future of McLennan Park, and other active use parks.

Semi-permanent facilities have lower upfront costs than brick-and-mortar buildings. Facilities without plumbing carry higher operating and servicing costs and may require more frequent servicing in high use areas.

Various semi-permanent facilities are available on the market and each facility has its own benefits and disadvantages.

Self-cleaning units require large up-front costs. However, they do not require many resources to maintain compared to a traditional brick-and-mortar facility. In addition, these facilities are designed to be accessible and are gender neutral in nature as they are often single stall facilities. Self-cleaning, autonomous public washroom facilities are becoming more widely used by municipalities.

Pre-fabricated units, such as a converted shipping container, are another such option. This style of washroom facility is rising in use and becoming more cost effective to fabricate and install as a result. They provide a similar experience as a brick-and-mortar facility for a fraction of the cost.

Kitchener's parks can benefit from semi-permanent washroom facilities as they can deliver accessible, reliable washroom services on par with brick-and-mortar facilities.

Use of public washrooms

Through Places engagement, safety and security in public washroom facilities were highlighted as a concern. Currently, washroom safety is addressed through Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. CPTED is a site design approach that uses the built environment to promote natural surveillance by the community to minimize the need for traditional security measures.

The rise in vandalism over the past few years has made it more expensive and time-consuming to maintain public washrooms. Damage to fixtures, graffiti, and other forms of vandalism increase cleaning and repair costs, requiring more frequent servicing. This puts a strain on budgets and resources, making it harder to keep washrooms clean, safe, and accessible for everyone.

Public drinking water

Drinking water is not currently available in Kitchener's parks, with the exception of controllable locations such as community centres and interior public washrooms.

At the time of writing this master plan, only one Kitchener park has formal access to drinking water - RBJ Schlegel Park. It is located within an existing washroom facility that is open and closed daily, cleaned and maintained multiple times per day.

Drinking water has precedence in park settings within the province, and in Kitchener. There were drinking fountains installed in three locations within Kitchener's downtown core in the past. However, they were removed and not reinstated due to issues with maintaining sanitary conditions.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff Experience

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Site furnishings & electrical amenities

Accessibility

Engagement respondents noted the lack of shaded seating in parks as a physical barrier to park use. Quiet shaded spaces offer relief for those with sensory issues and should be wheelchair accessible. Members of the community generally want to see more seating and shaded areas. Picnic tables and benches without backs are inaccessible.

> *More accessible seating. More shade.*

Inclusion

Members of the community would feel more welcome in parks if more seating and electrical outlets were available and if waste receptacles were made widely available and maintained year-round.

Environmental sustainability

Members of the community have expressed interest in shaded play equipment to mitigate the impacts of increasing summer temperatures caused by climate change. People would like to see more shaded areas in natural spaces. Respondents expressed interest in both natural and manufactured shade solutions.

Safety

Community members are concerned about the lack of visibility impacting feelings of safety in shaded areas. People are also concerned about unplanned shade such as buildings or structures casting shadows which would decrease visibility in certain areas.

Water amenities

Accessibility

Community members requested that public washrooms and public drinking water be made barrier-free to everyone, not just in location but also in the design of the infrastructure and its operation.

People have expressed that washrooms will be more accessible if automated external defibrillators (AEDs), change tables, step stools and electricity access are available.

It was also shared that washroom stalls that are labeled as accessible still present barriers. Sinks, soap dispensers and flush buttons are often out of reach. Heavy doors without automatic buttons are difficult to open and enter through. The gaps and lips between surfaces can be difficult to wheel over. Portable toilets are too small to access. Where washrooms are available, they are not open 24/7 or year-round.

Survey respondents indicated that to create a more welcoming experience for visitors with sensory needs, washrooms should not have loudly flushing toilets and should feature quieter hand dryers.

> *"More washrooms. Open washrooms. Like waaaaaay more. Kept clean. And single use/ family washrooms without loud flushing toilets and without loud hands dryers. For kids with sensory issues, these are a nightmare. They just want to play and need to pee sometimes or to clean up after an accident.*

Environmental sustainability

Respondents requested that sustainable washroom options be explored where possible. Ideas include eco-friendly alternatives to washrooms including composting toilets.

Safety

People have expressed that washrooms will feel more safe if automated external defibrillators (AEDs), sharps disposal, and naloxone access is made available. Methods such as implementing a safety advisory group, community ambassadors and help buttons would create a feeling of safety without the need for traditional security presence. These security methods can be implemented in washrooms and throughout parks.

Partnerships

Engaging with park users and interested parties can help build equitable, accessible, meaningful, and sustainable spaces. Along with partnerships, there is also a need for a standardized approach to implement, maintain and operate public washrooms and public drinking water infrastructure.

Inclusion

There was also a request for more washroom options, gender neutral washroom additions, and increased maintenance of the facilities. In addition, showers and foot washing stations were requested for religious and cultural practices. Respondents stated that they would feel more welcome in parks if washrooms were well-maintained. Tent encampments and drug-use were also listed as reasons as to why park spaces feel unwelcoming.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

More shade and seating in parks

Establish standards to support an increase in seating and shade options in parks.

Recent feedback from community engagements has emphasized the growing need for more seating and shade in parks and open spaces. Places to sit, gather and rest comfortably are some of the most desired elements of a park space. Despite their importance to park users there are minimal guidelines mandating a minimum number of seating opportunities, shade structures, or gathering spaces in any new park renovated park.

Addressing this desire for more functional amenities is done on a case-by-case basis through park renovations and is informed by the park context and community engagement.

Criteria based on location should be created as shade and seating should be available at parks, recreational amenities and facilities. Establishing guidelines associated with each park classification and park use will provide consistency across all park spaces, and inform budgeting processes when planning upgrades to recreational amenities such as courts and playgrounds, or when developing brand new park spaces.

Refer to the Appendix for the recommended provisional guidelines.

02: Create a park washroom and hydration strategy

Develop a strategy to assess existing inventory, renovations, adaptations, future growth, alternative delivery methods, operating and staffing needs, all rooted in inclusive and accessible design at the lowest lifecycle cost.

Public washrooms are an important piece of city infrastructure as they encourage community health, recreation, and participation.

Community members have expressed interest in more accessible and inclusive washrooms equitably allocated in Kitchener parks. As the absence of public washrooms can create significant barriers for park users and it is important to create a detailed guiding document to inform how the City will provide them. A park washroom and hydration strategy will be the visioning document to assess existing public park washrooms and describe what the future of washrooms and drinking water in Kitchener parks will look like.

This document will:

- prioritize public washroom allocation and upgrades;
- establish criteria for future washrooms;
- define design guidelines that consider accessibility, sustainability, vandalism, safety and lifecycle costs;
- explore investment into existing facilities.

The strategy will be centered around infrastructure in parks however, it will also take into consideration the broader city context. Ideas shared through community engagement will inform the strategy throughout its development.

Strategy considerations

Kitchener's park washroom and hydration strategy will include short-term and long-term recommendations to:

- develop a system for renewing and building new facilities;
- ensure accessible design standards;
- establish detailed park washroom design recommendations;
- identify areas of high need.

The resources needed to install, maintain, and operate public washroom infrastructure is significant. While the benefits of having these washrooms are clear, it will be important to ensure the washrooms are appropriately resourced over the short – and long-term to keep up with changing and growing needs.

05: Public drinking water in parks

Support a pilot project to provide public drinking water at three locations and monitor their use, cost, and staff time implications. Incorporate findings from the public drinking water pilot project into the park washroom and hydration strategy.

The United Nations recognizes access to water and sanitation as a fundamental human right because of the important roles they play in human health, dignity, and prosperity. However, public drinking water infrastructure is absent in Kitchener parks. This is, in part, due to the inability to maintain existing public drinking water infrastructure. Drinking fountains in the past were severely vandalized and became difficult to maintain appropriately.

Kitchener parks can contribute to health and safety by providing drinking water access in outdoor public spaces where possible. Drinking water would be very beneficial to those in park spaces. Members of the community have voiced that the lack of water stations cause many barriers by forcing the public to pay for water from private businesses which often sell water in single-use plastic bottles. Despite the maintenance challenges, different approaches to public water access can be explored while reducing vandalism.

An example of this is installing more water bottle refilling stations as opposed to drinking fountains as they have less bacteria, have fewer parts that can break, and still provide drinking water access.

Drinking water pilot guidelines

Given the level of community interest in public drinking water, City of Kitchener is proposing a pilot in which three selected parks will have drinking water infrastructure installed. The proposed park locations include sports fields, urban areas, and neighbourhood park locations which cover a wide variety of park uses. The purpose of the pilot is to understand the best way to offer drinking water to those who need it. The public drinking water sources would then be monitored for use, frequency, and maintenance needs.

This pilot will last 24 months and will take place following Council approval after community engagement.

The proposed drinking water pilot could inform a combined public washroom and hydration strategy, which will help guide the implementation of drinking water within parks and open spaces. The strategy will evaluate suitability of locations for drinking water, necessary infrastructure, and projected costs.

17: Power in parks

Include publicly available outlets at each new or renovated shade structure, where possible to do so.

Electrical outlets are much easier to install when connecting to an existing power source. Therefore, power can be available in Kitchener parks at each new or renovated shade structure where connection to power is feasible. This enables people to access power and shade at the same time to rest or do their homework while charging their personal, and mobility devices. Installing power when adding other amenities during park renovations is cost efficient. However, installation, operation, and maintenance of power in parks needs to be considered when planning the budget for park renovations. When installed, power is only available during park operating hours.

25: Install permanent waste receptacles

Establish a suite of standard above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles appropriate to park classifications, uses, and need. Prioritize locations for the installation of preferred waste management improvements.

The two main types of waste receptacles, above-ground and subterranean, require guidelines to prioritize where they go and budget for installation and maintenance. Above-ground waste receptacles are inexpensive to install; however, they require frequent servicing by which requires staff resources and operating budget. Subterranean units require funding to install and maintain them; however, they need significantly less maintenance given their large capacities.

Some form of waste removal is required in all parks. Since it is not currently feasible to install subterranean units in every park, above-ground receptacles are needed to support waste collection. The recommended waste disposal options for each park class are appended to this booklet.

Appendix:
Site Furnishings Provisional Guidelines

Site furnishings provisional guidelines

The following chart guides the recommended minimum provision of each site furnishing by **park classification** and by **recreational amenity.**

Legend

+1 Inclusion of shade structures or sails to be determined through community engagement and assessment of mature shade trees.

» Inclusion of the amenity to be determined through a future park master planning process.

Site furnishing	Park classification					Recreational amenity					
	Signature	**Feature**	**City**	**Community**	**Neighbourhood**	**Playground,** Destination	**Playground,** Local	**Sport Court,** Destination	**Sport Court,** Local	**Splashpad,** Destination	**Splashpad,** Local
Benches	»	»	**3** per hectare	**2** per hectare	**2**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**1**	**6**	**2**
Shade structures and sails	»	»	»	**+1**	n/a	**+1**	n/a	**+1**	n/a	**+1**	**+1**
Picnic tables	»	**10**	**7**	**5**	**2**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bike racks	»	**16**	**12**	**8**	**4**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Waste receptacle (permanent)	**12**	»	**4**	**2**	**1**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Seating

Park uses that receive many visitors for a prolonged period can benefit from additional seating. The "Recommended provisional guidelines" table accounts for an increase in visitors during peak times. To ensure enough seating is provided within parks, provisional guidelines must reflect the needs of the community. Two provision guidelines are necessary to ensure that the classification of parks and amenities of each park have adequate seating.

The provisional guidelines will be applied when replacing existing seating, during new park constructions, and during existing park renovations. Along with any proposed increase in seating, a similar increase in capital budget is needed. Approximate budgets enable more seating to be implemented in the near future with a long-term plan to address inventory gaps.

Seating opportunities may be formal or informal. However, formal options such as benches should be prioritized as they are accessible. Benches should meet the following accessibility criteria; include a seat back and arm rests, situated on a concrete pad with an optional concrete curb for wheelchair access, and be 17 to 19 inches above the ground.

Shade structures

Shade opportunities such as shade sails and structures are to be prioritized in the following areas:

- Playgrounds with a focus on seating areas and sand pits;
- Seating areas and rest stops such as benches on trails;
- Splashpads;
- Sportscourts;
- At a minimum, one park within a park network, defined as, a group of local parks often within walking distance from one another.

Where a new park is developed or an existing park is being renovated, shade structures should be considered based on the five criteria listed above. These shade structures will be implemented in addition to trees and plantings to provide long-term natural shade opportunities. Shade structures and shade sails will require a budget for installation, operation, and maintenance.

The criteria are balanced as they consider real challenges such as budget and limitations of natural shade (e.g., the time it takes a young tree to grow large enough to cast shade) while prioritizing areas that need immediate shade.

Picnic tables

Most current picnic tables are not accessible in design or location. Although current picnic tables may benefit some, they are inaccessible to others. Accessible picnic tables are secured to a concrete surface and have an open side for mobility device accessibility. The guidelines for picnic tables by park classification can be found in the "Recommended provisional guidelines" table appended to this booklet.

These guidelines are approximate quantities and may change based on emerging park needs. The proposed picnic table provision guidelines will be implemented:

- In new park developments;
- In park renovations;
- In park retrofits;
- During spring park clean ups;
- Based on community park demand.

This allows for additional tables to be added over time. Picnic tables may be fixed or moveable depending on visitor needs. When picnic tables are placed in parks, at least one needs to be accessible.

Bike racks

Considering the growing active transportation infrastructure, bike racks should be installed in every park class. The installation of bike racks protects park infrastructure such as benches, trees, fencing and shade structures from being damaged when there are no other bike parking options available. The recommended guidelines for bike racks by park classification can be found in the "Recommended provisional guidelines" table appended to this booklet.

Additional bike parking will be installed during new park developments, existing park renovation, and on a case-by-case basis. Installing bike racks will require a budget as they require concrete pads for installation and may need to be replaced over time.

E-scooters

E-scooters will be supported in community parks, city-wide parks, signature parks, and feature parks to enhance Kitchener's alternative transportation options. A concrete pad and signage to indicate bike parking and e-scooter parking spaces are required to support e-scooter use in parks. The concrete pad will be located beside existing bike parking. Parking will be limited to designated areas and speed limits will be lowered within parks to ensure the safety of all visitors.

Wireless internet

Internet connection is important as it allows people to navigate, communicate, find supports and services, and stay connected. It is important to add wireless internet so that parks can accommodate various needs. The interest and need for wireless internet in Kitchener parks are being determined. Wireless internet may be implemented during park renovations projects if it is deemed a priority through engagement. Wireless internet will likely not be made available in local park types such as Neighbourhood and Community class parks as these parks are close to people's homes. In park locations that meet the criteria outlined, infrastructure to support wireless internet implementation will be installed. This enables wireless internet to be installed at a later time. A separate spare conduit should be installed underground where communication lines will be accommodated.

The following criteria must be met for the infrastructure to be installed in Kitchener parks:

- Readily available power;
- Existing light poles;
- Large park area;
- Ability to install infrastructure at least ten feet high.

Recommendations summary

More shade and seating in parks

Establish standards to support an increase in seating and shade options in parks.

02: Create a park washroom and hydration strategy

Develop a strategy to assess existing inventory, renovations, adaptations, future growth, alternative delivery methods, operating and staffing needs, all rooted in inclusive and accessible design at the lowest lifecycle cost.

05: Public drinking water in parks

Support a pilot project to provide public drinking water at three locations and monitor their use, cost, and staff time implications. Incorporate findings from the public drinking water pilot project into the park washroom and hydration strategy.

17: Power in parks

Include publicly available outlets at each new or renovated shade structure, where possible to do so.

25: Install permanent waste receptacles

Establish a suite of standard above-ground and subterranean waste receptacles appropriate to park classifications, uses, and need. Prioritize locations for the installation of preferred waste management improvements.

KITCHENER

KITCHENER

Park Design Approach

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

KITCHENER

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Health & Wellness
Community Gardens
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Play
Signature & Feature Parks
Splashpads
Sports & Games
Trails & Lighting

Content

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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

The Park Design Approach section will guide the long-term development, renovation, and maintenance of the parks and open space system in Kitchener in a way that reflects community needs identified through engagement while minimizing operational resources needed for its ongoing maintenance.

Planning for park upgrades

Approaches to long-term planning and selection of parks for renovation have varied over time. Predicting which parks will need to be updated, and when, can be difficult to project. A combination of factors influences these predictions. Parks can be chosen for renovation based on a combination of some of the following factors:

- Park location, size, or classification
- Nearby community facilities
- Public interest
- Nearby projects such as road re-construction
- Alignment with community grant opportunities (e.g., LoveMyHood, RISE)
- Infrastructure replacement needs (e.g., age of the existing infrastructure)
- Nearby sub-division development projects
- Available amenities in the neighbourhood
- Connected strategies (e.g., Integrated Stormwater Master Plan or Leisure Facilities Master Plan)
- Existing park master plans

Signature and Feature parks benefit from a dedicated annual funding forecast to meet their needs. These larger parks represent five of the total 275 Planned parks that require active maintenance, infrastructure planning, and replacement. All other Planned parks, by contrast, compete for the same budget resources to address aging or non-existent infrastructure year after year.

A park design must be considered with other department strategies in mind as they can impact major infrastructure decisions. Parks that often need to

consider a connected strategy are typically located close to public pools or community centers or are in spaces that include facilities for organized sports.

Projecting park maintenance

To develop parks both successfully and sustainably, maintenance needs to be considered. Every piece of a park requires maintenance. Maintenance can be frequent like grass cutting, garbage removal, janitorial cleaning, and playground safety inspections or it can be more long-term like, pavement repairs, or light replacements. As Kitchener continues to grow, a reliable method does not exist to project park maintenance needs and budgets to support these more frequent and long-term maintenance needs.

Coordinating park development efforts

In the past, parks have generally been selected for upgrade one at a time with programming in one park planned in isolation from programming in other nearby parks. This has resulted in parks that are close to one another offering the same type of park experience with similar playgrounds, benches, and picnic table amenities. This approach does not consider other important factors such as enhancing biodiversity, surrounding economic activity, elements that encourage social interaction, active transportation, changing demographics, and climate adaptation. Not all amenities or functions can be designed for in every park, but coordinating these elements across local parks that are near to each other can create a healthy network of complementary experiences in parks and open spaces for residents. Planning and development processes that secure new parks in sub-divisions may or may not consider overall connectivity to existing parks and open spaces in their plans. Looking at the collection of local parks more holistically will support a variety of park experiences that fulfill multiple functions for the community.

An evolution of engagement-informed design

Parks department engagement practices have evolved considerably since the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan. For many years, the approach to engagement included a single opportunity for the public to provide feedback on a limited number of pre-determined designs. A final design was then created considering public input and other operational factors. This design was then constructed.

Through a process taking place over several years and with consideration for evolving engagement best practices, significant changes have led to a far more in-depth approach. Today's park renovation projects typically include several stages of engagement to hear from the public both earlier in the planning process, and at interim design stages. Each stage typically includes a combination of in-person meetings and online surveys to gather feedback on designs. As much as possible, a consistent approach to public engagement for park renovation projects is needed. With an engagement-driven decision-making approach, the City can equitably address needs that arise from changing neighbourhoods and communities.

As part of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan action to "Enhance the city's engagement practices", the City is currently undertaking a review of corporate engagement practices for all departments, which includes a review of the Community Engagement Policy and related processes.

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS)

Spaces (2022) categorizes privately owned public spaces, or POPS, as Alternative Open Spaces. POPS typically exist as part of high-density residential developments. These developments require general outdoor amenity areas (e.g., courtyards, enhanced streetscapes, central plazas, or rooftop spaces) that are used either as private amenity spaces for residents of the development, or as privately owned public spaces. It is important to note that POPS are not equal to public parks but are a complement to the public park system. This is why POPS are considered Alternative Open Spaces.

The concept of POPS is not new. Larger municipalities, such as Toronto, have had POPS guidelines since 2014. POPS have publicly available amenities and remain privately owned. Kitchener has only one property under such an agreement: a passive seating area at 460 Belmont Avenue connected to the Iron Horse Trail.

In order to ensure long-term access to POPS by the community, legal agreements are required permit them to function as valuable public spaces. Phase 3 of Breithaupt Block, for example, includes a POPS space

that is secured for public use through a public access easement.

The Planning Act now allows developers to provide POPs as an alternative to public parkland. As infill development continues to put increased pressure on existing park spaces, Kitchener should establish guidelines and policies to maximize the contributions of POPS as Alternative Open Spaces created through development to the public park system.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

It is important to acknowledge the broad spectrum of accessibility considerations when planning any given park and open space, including access to washroom facilities, accessible play structures, stable trail surfaces, and more. In many cases, accessibility considerations fit together well and benefit the whole population. For example, maintaining stable, paved trails can support both mobility devices and the enjoyment of the park space by the general public. However, some accessibility considerations can contradict each other. While metal slides can be slippery and therefore less safe, plastic slides can interfere with cochlear implants. It is important in all cases to engage meaningfully to understand how to make parks and open spaces accessible and enjoyable for all.

Inclusion

Feeling welcome and included in a space can mean very different things for different people. Spending free time, connecting with each other, playing, and relaxing are all subjective experiences. For some, having picnic tables to sit and socialize is important. For others, having places and equipment to play cultural sports and games will contribute to feeling welcome. It will be important to understand this diversity of experiences in an ongoing way to create parks and open spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Accessing parks and open spaces is also a consideration when planning inclusive spaces so that residents can meaningfully participate in the amenities those spaces have to offer. Those who expressed access challenges identified the following:

- Limited parking;
- Limited accessible parking;
- Distance travelled;
- Not having safe, reliable methods of transportation; including public transit, biking and walking;
- Parks being too busy and crowded;
- Terrain barriers such as slopes, winter conditions, gravel pathways, gaps in pathways;
- Poor asphalt conditions.

Environmental sustainability

It is vital to understand how to best preserve and promote environmental sustainability in parks and open spaces. Public engagement shows how environmental considerations can be included in all decisions, from conserving water in splashpads to leaning in to naturalized play spaces to adding more food-bearing trees in public spaces to support food security. Learning from evidence and local knowledge holders will be key to ensuring sustainable actions are consistently taken.

Health and wellbeing

Similar to the Inclusion section, things that support the health and wellbeing of people can vary. Many engagement sources recognize the physical, social, and mental health benefits of including natural spaces. Some of these findings include:

- Facilitating community connectedness through natural spaces, community gardens, cultural events, and spaces for all to play;
- Offering warming and cooling stations throughout parks and open spaces;
- Supporting methods to improve food security, including community gardens and knowledge to grow, process and store food;
- Taking a human rights approach to decision-making for public spaces.

Continually connecting with diverse community groups to support health and wellbeing through parks and open spaces is critical.

Information

Ways to approach the meaningful design of parks and open spaces relies on two-way information sharing between the public and City of Kitchener. Overall, engagement findings reflected a desire to have more information to help people engage with these spaces. Signage, historical and traditional teachings, information about the natural world, and information to support accessible and inclusive visits to spaces were all requested. A positive design approach will both be embedded with helpful information and will result in sharing helpful information to the public.

Safety

A safe design approach is one that prioritizes engagement how, when, and where it is safe to do so. Open lines of communication can support ongoing sharing of feedback regarding the safety of both the design approach and parks themselves.

Partnerships

Thoughtful relationship development and engagement processes with community members, partners, and groups underlines all of the above themes as a means to implementing recommendations in a meaningful way. Partnership opportunities were identified across virtually all topic areas as a way an to build equitable, accessible, meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable parks and open space network.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Engagement-informed design

Tailor park experiences and amenities to the communities that use them and as supported through equitable community engagement.

Identifying park experiences valued by the communities they are situated within supports a responsive design approach to changing communities. Engagement that is tailored to the needs in the community will help scope key considerations when investing in park infrastructure. Feedback though recent engagements has highlighted the increasing importance of more seating and shade in parks and open spaces.

Implementing equitable engagement practices includes adopting the recommendations resulting from the corporate engagement review.

Pursue strategic master planning for select parks

Create development plans for identified parks or park networks impacted by multiple connected strategies, initiatives, asset needs, and future recreational opportunities.

Recommendations relating to major infrastructure improvements must be considered with connected City strategies because they overlap and impact park locations in a targeted way.

Parks identified for master planning of major infrastructure changes recommended through the Places strategy and other relevant strategic plans include:

- Budd Park
- Heritage Park

- Kaufman Park
- Laurentian Park (and network)
- Lions Park
- Queensmount Park (and network)
- Rosenberg Park
- Weber Park

Rather than find available space for desired amenities and develop it within the existing park amenities to minimize impact on other park uses, the recommended approach is to create a master plan for each park that considers the long-term use of the overall park to create a balanced and purposeful approach to major infrastructure changes. A master plan will maximize construction opportunities, cost-sharing, efficiency, and longevity with local consultation in mind.

07: Local park networks

Design local parks as networks of unique and complementary park experiences to deliver a variety of services while avoiding redundancies.

A network of parks is defined in this Parks Master Plan as a group of several local parks of various sizes often within walking distance from one another and generally in the same Planning Community. Parks designed as a local network should not be separated by a major road or highway. Upgrading park infrastructure using a network design approach responds to local context and encourages broader thinking about social, economic, and environmental benefits. By designing local parks as networks, the city benefits from:

- A balance of complementary active and passive recreation opportunities across a network (e.g., opportunities to sit and enjoy nature, picnic, or play organized sports)
- Ecosystem function integration for the whole community (e.g., by integrating green infrastructure that can help manage stormwater for the whole community)
- Faster upgrades that provide adequate spaces for a variety of community interests (e.g. sitting and gathering spaces, off-leash areas, sport courts, playgrounds)
- An increased overall level of recreational value

Selecting appropriate parks for a network design approach will consider:

- A collection of several local parks within 500 to 1,000 meters from each other with no major physical barriers (e.g., major roads or highways) between them
- Alignment with other City strategies as appropriate (e.g., Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy, Cycling and Trails Masterplan, Integrated Stormwater Masterplan)
- Consideration of complementary park programming, connectivity, and environmental improvement opportunities together
- Opportunity for distinct passive and active programming areas across identified network parks appropriate to park classification (e.g., traditional playground, splash pad, sports fields or courts, community gardens, vs. unprogrammed fields, naturalization areas)
- Multiple parks in need of upgrades in close proximity to each other
- Placemaking opportunities for City grant programs

The network-based approach should also be applied through community planning, draft planning, and sub-division design and construction stages. New parks should be planned and designed to promote local and broader community connectivity, provide a variety of recreational programming opportunities and experiences for residents and provision of park amenities to the updated standards outlined in the Park Amenities booklet in this master plan.

11: Resource relationship-building

Resource engagement for and in-between projects and in alignment with the outcomes of the corporate engagement review.

As engagement methods for park projects have evolved to respond to best practices and community expectations, the funding and time requirements to do so meaningfully and effectively have not been accounted for nor been well resourced. Further, outreach to the community is limited to project-specific engagements, limiting the City's understanding of the impacts of the design decisions made in park spaces.

Properly resourcing engagement efforts through dedicated staff with engagement expertise, standardized methods tailored to project complexity, and with appropriate budgets will support a park design approach that is responsive to community need. Engagement practices should be in alignment with the outcomes of the review of the Community Engagement Policy.

14: Standard agreements for POPS

Develop a standard policy to outline the public use, design, and maintenance agreements for privately owned public spaces (POPS), consistent with the Park Dedication By-Law and Policy.

Kitchener maintains the position that POPS are not equivalent to public parkland. However, developers have recently proposed POPS more often as alternatives to parkland. The Park Dedication By-Law and Policy outline the reduction in parkland dedication for developers for POPS, and the general requirements they need to meet for the City to accept POPS. As the trend of POPS proposals continues, a more refined document is necessary to guide the legal agreements and physical development of these open spaces. A standard policy will allow the City to remain consistent with its approach to POPS proposals, efficiently guide their development and create spaces that make a positive contribution to the network of parks and open spaces.

Formalizing long-term agreements enabling POPS to remain accessible to the public will secure ongoing public-private partnerships that enhance and protect the public space system for generations. There are benefits and risks associated with formal, long-term POPS developments. Risks can be resolved through standards, guidelines, and agreements.

Benefits:

- Establishes protection of public use for otherwise unused or inaccessible areas of high-density developments
- Provides a variety of open space experiences and explores types of recreational spaces that are not possible in a public park setting such as unique urban spaces, creative amenities, or a direct connection to small businesses and restaurants

Risks:

- Administration of a long-term agreement, typically 30 years or more, can add complexity and cost to basic park management
- POPS can often be in areas with structures such as parking garages. This poses significant physical barriers that severely limit or eliminate park programming opportunities such as playground pieces or basketball nets requiring footings
- POPS remain in private ownership and operation. Ongoing public access cannot be guaranteed (e.g., gates may control or restrict public access)
- Quality of amenities is the at the discretion of private condominium boards. If funding is reduced, maintenance and replacements may stop over time
- Residents of a development with a POPS are responsible for the cost of maintaining publicly available parkland in addition to their standard property taxes that contribute to funding for the public park system

19: Connect operating and life-cycle planning to capital works

All reporting and budget planning for capital park development to include recognition of changes to maintenance procedures and future life-cycling requirements including funding, labour, and equipment needs.

Assessing and projecting ongoing operating and life cycling costs with each new or renovated park will help identify if the funding required to maintain the new or replaced infrastructure should be increased or if it can be managed within the existing operating budget. This approach will provide transparency as to the real cost of meeting and maintaining park service level expectations and inform allocation of funds to deliver those services. Decisions to pursue each development or re-development will be informed by the projected life cycle costs, reinforcing a measured and sustainable approach.

27: Data-driven capital forecasting

Employ evaluation criteria to prioritize park renovations. Criteria to include community priority, park asset conditions, and accessibility.

Standardizing criteria for park renovations will provide an objective and transparent selection process. Established criteria will prioritize distribution of park spaces in areas of identified need through Spaces (2022). All the influences on the park renovation schedule will also be considered. Partnering with internal departments and external organizations to meet shared goals through redevelopment efforts is a key planning step.

Recommendations summary

Engagement-informed design

Tailor park experiences and amenities to the communities that use them and as supported through equitable community engagement.

Pursue strategic master planning for select parks

Create development plans for identified parks or park networks impacted by multiple connected strategies, initiatives, asset needs, and future recreational opportunities.

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KITCHENER

KITCHENER

Play

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

KITCHENER

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Health & Wellness
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Amenities
Park Design Approach
Splashpads
Sports & Games

Content

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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

What is play?

Play and fun are cognitive and social needs for everyone of all ages and abilities and support a person's health, growth, and well-being over their lifetime. Play can be enjoyed through physical movement, working through a challenge, and building social connections with others. Many factors in a person's life can influence their experience of play.

City parks and open spaces can encourage playful experiences for everyone by enabling a balance of active and passive uses. In the past, play experiences in Kitchener have typically been geared to young children and have relied on traditional playgrounds and open grassed fields for organized or informal sports. This approach has served a limited group of Kitchener residents. Through this Parks Master Plan, the City will explore other ways of introducing playful experiences in parks and open spaces for all ages and abilities in new and renovated parks.

Current playground inventory

For decades, the City has focused on the number of traditional playgrounds in parks and open spaces. When a park was created in Kitchener, it almost always included a small playground and a few benches surrounding that playground.

The result is that many of the city's playgrounds today, particularly in older areas of the city, look similar, and are very close to one another – often less than 500 m apart. Kitchener currently has approximately 150 traditional playground sites across the city. The 2010 Park Strategic Plan set a target of having one neighbourhood park or playground within a five-minute walking distance (400-500 m) of every residence to support equal access to neighbourhood parks. This remains the objective the City is working towards.

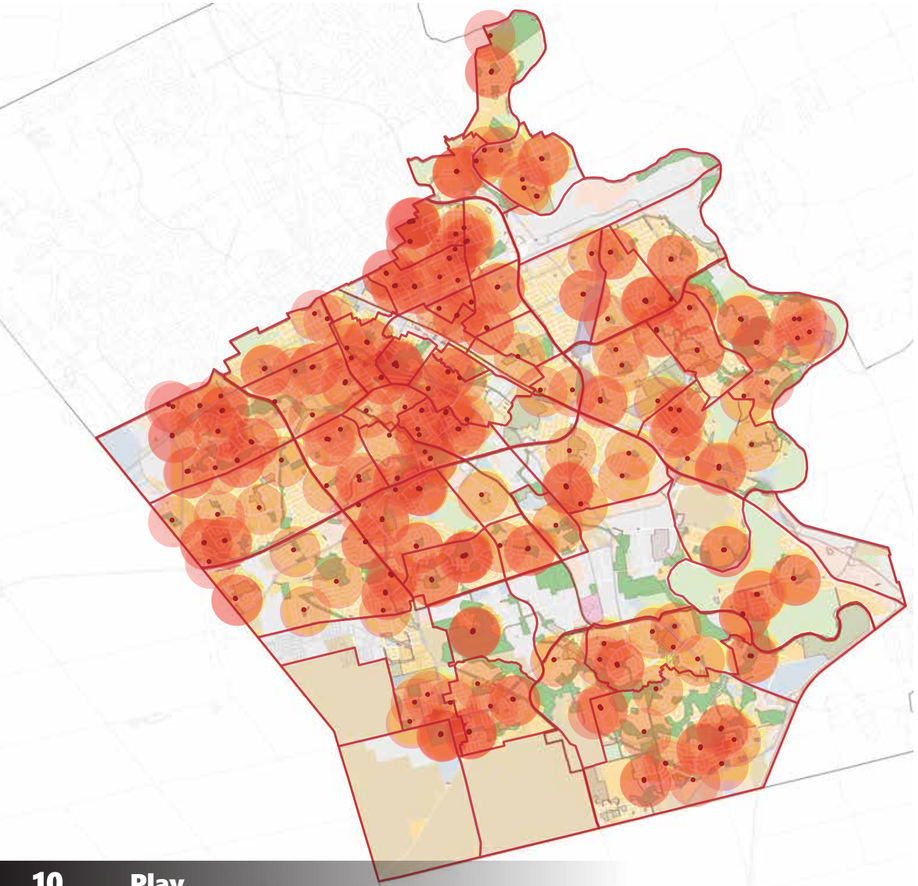
Traditional playgrounds often include play structures and other manufactured play pieces in a defined area with an approved play safety surface. These playgrounds generally serve a narrow segment of the population, children aged 18 months to 12 years old and their caregivers. Playgrounds require routine inspections to assess their safety and on-going preventative maintenance and upkeep to meet the standards outlined by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and City standards.

As part of their routine maintenance, traditional playgrounds all over the city need upgrades or replacements caused by regular wear and tear. A playground's life cycle can vary, but is generally expected to last from 15 to 25 years without major repairs or replacements. Playground condition is evaluated regularly through a routine inspection process when staff assess the safety of the equipment and complete any necessary repairs to maintain the equipment in safe condition. The condition of the playground inventory in Kitchener is dynamic as minor issues can be repaired or parts replaced. When repair or new parts are no longer options, the entire playground might be replaced as part of a larger park renovation. Supporting infrastructure such as seating, tables, shade, ramps, and accessible surfacing help create an enjoyable and accessible playground experience for children and their caregivers. Many playgrounds in Kitchener often have little of this supporting infrastructure to contribute to a comfortable experience.

Select playgrounds and parks are upgraded with Council-approved budgets each year through two streams: park renovations or standalone replacement when a full park renovation is not planned within the next ten years. The City of Kitchener currently completes three to five playground replacements annually. There is a need to increase the playground replacement rate to meaningfully address the backlog of existing playgrounds past their life cycle. The current approach often reactively directs funding to the most obvious problems with little long-term planning to respond to evolving needs and trends.

Exercise equipment inventory

Fitness equipment in parks is gaining in popularity as a low-cost option to support movement and physical activity for adults. Outdoor fitness equipment is a relatively new addition to Kitchener parks. The City recently supported the installation of several outdoor fitness equipment areas. Some of these projects were community-led through grants and partner funding. Staff continue to collect feedback and data about their use, maintenance and operation, style of equipment, and appropriateness of locations for this type of amenity.



Playground distribution 2024

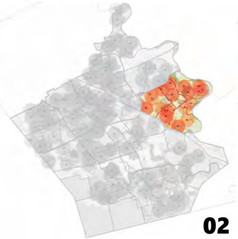
Legend:

Playground with 500m buffer. More intense colour indicates a greater number of overlapping buffers.

Playground distribution by ward

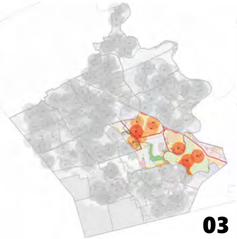
01

Playground distribution generally meets target with some gaps.



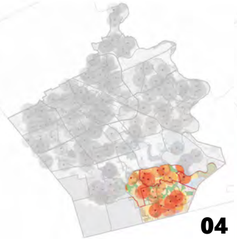
02

Playground distribution generally meets target.



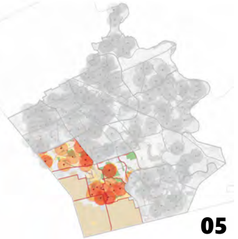
03

Playground distribution does not meet target.



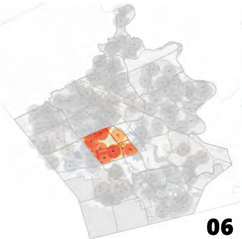
04

Playground distribution generally meets target with some overlap.



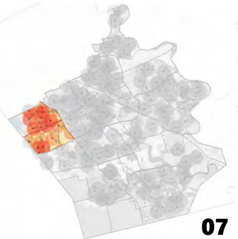
05

Playground distribution generally meets target.



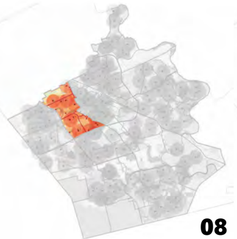
06

Playground distribution generally meets target with some gaps.



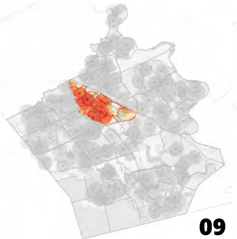
07

Playground distribution does not meet target.



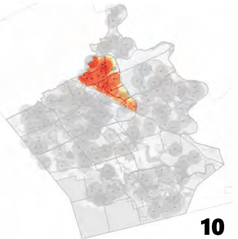
08

Playground distribution meets or exceeds target.



09

Playground distribution meets or exceeds target.



10

Playground distribution meets or exceeds target.

Data Sources

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Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Access to park spaces and amenities and the accessibility of those spaces and amenities arose as a key theme across topics and datasets. A lack of accessible and safe play spaces was highlighted as a barrier to feeling welcome in parks.

Engagement data highlighted there is not enough accessible play equipment, especially for people who use wheelchairs and people with sensory processing disorders and neurodivergent conditions.

> *"The disability community is largely left out of park design. It is improving with new parks, but accessibility needs to be prioritized/properly funded."*

> *"I feel unwelcome because my daughter has a physical disability, and she cannot play on the playgrounds. At best there is a single accessible swing. I feel like families like us do not belong/ are not wanted in the park because no one considered disabled people when the parks were designed. The play structures keep us out. I don't feel like anyone expected/wanted people like us to be there."*

More accessible play equipment at a greater number of parks is key to enabling participation in playful experiences of parks.

Ensure accessibility of shaded areas, and that shade is provided over spaces to sit and rest, including benches with backs and picnic tables.

Sensory-friendly play spaces support inclusion for people with special needs.
A desire for more accessible equipment including height-adjusted swings, more accessible baby swings, and equipment to support self-regulation was heard through engagement

The importance of maintenance is confirmed as a key factor in the accessibility of play experiences.

Inclusion

The engagement data highlighted a wide understanding of what play means to residents in a park, which includes playgrounds, play structures, opportunities to meet and play with other people, and use of open fields, forested areas and hills or slopes. Respondents most often described their current play in parks and how they used to play in parks when they were young in a similar way. This includes enjoying nature and naturalized spaces, trails and picnic areas, having places to sit and socialize, especially in the shade, and playing on play structures including slides, swings, and climbing structures.

When respondents were young, methods of play also included the use of imagination in games. Some ways that children and youth might have enhanced experiences in park spaces include play opportunities to promote imagination, taking risks, social skills and social connection.

People shared ideas regarding how spaces might be created where older adults and older youth can play. Responses ranged from adding more equipment to parks, to requesting more natural space to explore, to increasing opportunities to interact with people and with art.

- Additional equipment such as paved paths, obstacle courses, climbing, seating or skate parks.
- More natural areas and open spaces with looped trails and shade.
- Opportunities for interactivity such as interactive art or creative spaces, pop-up play spaces for play or vendors, and spaces to play board games, table games, or cultural games with tutorials.
- Including larger equipment for bigger bodies.

> *"Sensory-friendly, this includes special needs swings and secured parks."*

Adding playground equipment, particularly swings, and places to sit down were common requests from youth for neighbourhood parks, while older adults value having enough seating and gathering options with shade in parks and open spaces. Unstructured play elements create opportunities for fun and play for all ages and abilities.

The value of play equipment and activities for all ages emerged as a key theme through engagement. More spaces to play close to home are important aspects of inclusion. Overall, spaces to play contribute to community connectedness.

Environmental sustainability

Engagement data suggested when it comes to naturalization, nature is part of a play experience. Respondents value spaces to explore, walk, enjoy, connect, and play outdoors. Respondents would like to see more natural play equipment and natural play spaces, shade over play equipment, near public transit stops, and as a climate change mitigation measure.

Health and wellbeing

Play equipment and activities for all ages, more seating and gathering areas, and shade surfaced as important considerations to promote health and well-being in parks and open spaces. Enough spaces to play contribute to improved and maintained health and wellness.

Information

Sharing information about what amenities are available in each park to support planning park visits. Space to play board games including cultural games with tutorials.

Safety

Regular maintenance of park amenities is an important aspect of safety. Many factors contributing to accessibility also contribute to safety.

Adding fencing around play spaces for children who may need play boundaries supports the safety of children and their caregivers.

Partnerships

The value of exploring partnerships with school boards and neighbourhood associations, and promoting grant opportunities for residents to contribute to play in Kitchener where possible surfaced through engagement.

Recommendations

Photo by Earthscape

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

The future of play in Kitchener parks and open spaces

The benefits of play beyond traditional playgrounds have not been well explored in Kitchener's parks and open spaces. While there remains value in conventional playground experiences, the idea that a traditional playground meets all play needs in parks must be examined. By promoting a philosophy of play that provides opportunities for enjoyment and connection for all ages and abilities, more Kitchener residents can experience joy, fun and community in their local parks.

Plan whole play spaces

Resource new and renovated playground projects to provide suitable play experiences and supporting amenities such as seating, shade, playground curbing, and barrier-free infrastructure that support play, caregiving, and maintenance activities.

At a minimum, playground renovation budgets should cover necessary amenities to support the enjoyment of traditional playgrounds for both children and their caregivers, account for accessibility requirements, and ensure the optimization of maintenance activities. Well placed shade and seating are important amenities as they allow for park users to extend their park visits. There are two main factors which influence and inform park amenities within Kitchener's parks and open spaces; engagement and the provisional guidelines as highlighted in the Park Amenities booklet.

Playground amenities that support the comfort and enjoyment of caregivers:

- Benches or seating
- Shade structures or sails
- Picnic tables
- Trees

Playground requirements that enable accessibility:

- Entry/exit ramp in each playground.
- Barrier-free paths of travel with appropriate minimum clearances, a stable accessible surface and smooth ground plane transitions.
- Accessible surfacing such as engineered wood fiber or rubberized material.

Playground design that supports maintenance:

- Curbs to maintain and monitor a consistent minimum engineered wood fiber surface depth for shock absorption.
- Sub-surface drainage to protect the longevity of the playground.
- Trail and entrance with drop curb for improved maintenance vehicle access.

Faster playground replacement

Resource a sustained increase in the playground replacement rate at priority locations to address the current backlog.

The current playground replacement rate is not fast enough to meaningfully update an aging inventory. The rate of replacement should be increased and resourced with appropriate budgets to fund a playground experience in alignment with the park classification, including supporting amenities to offer a complete and accessible playground area that can be well maintained. Supporting amenities that include but are not limited to seating options, shade, barrier-free paths of travel, curbing, and drainage. Locations prioritized for replacement should be informed by the playground inventory evaluation. Accessible play elements are included in all new and renovated playgrounds, however, engagement with the local community can be used to further inform design. Where possible, opportunities to partner with schools and neighbourhood associations, and community grant programs should be explored.

06: Change the way we play

Establish play design standards for new and renovated parks that describe fun and play for all ages and abilities, and that allow a responsive approach to evolving local and broader trends.

Traditional playgrounds provide play experiences for ages 18 months to 12 years old, often separated into two distinct structures for ages 18 months to 5 years, and for ages 5-12 years. They provide a valuable resource for children and families during an important time of cognitive growth. Cognitive and developmental needs for all ages and abilities including fun, problem-solving, and socialization can also be met through alternative opportunities beyond traditional playgrounds. Gaps exist for youth older than 12 years, adults, and older adults. By including opportunities for play and fun experiences for all ages and abilities, and a variety of body types and sizes, more of Kitchener's residents can find value and have playful experiences in parks and open spaces.

The City will consider alternative play options that meet safety standards and are operations- and maintenance-conscious. Refer to appendix for play design standards.

13: Match playgrounds to their parks

Establish standards for traditional playground size and complexity in alignment with park size and classification.

Investments in playground size and complexity must align with Planned Park classification levels. By establishing a standard approach, service levels will be consistent across park classifications in each ward.

Decisions made about the size or complexity of playgrounds will be directly related to a park's classification.

15: Evaluate the playground inventory

Establish data-informed evaluation criteria to create a playground inventory management plan. Invest resources into increasing the size and improving the quality of traditional playgrounds at strategic locations and consolidating playgrounds where supported by engagement.

A balance of active and passive programming in park spaces is needed to support all park visitors. Unique and complementary play options can be spread across a network of complementary neighbourhood park experiences. The city needs to strategically support future management of the current playground inventory in a meaningful and sustainable way. It is recommended to evaluate the current playground inventory to formalize two streams to inform funding needed to increase the playground improvement and replacement rate.

Stream 1: Strategic playground placement in a network of parks in close proximity that each offer a variety of complementary play experiences:

- Where multiple playground areas exist in one park, consider combining smaller traditional playgrounds into one, larger strategically placed playground.
- Select one park to meet the playground need and match playground investment to park classification as much as possible.
- Minimize overlap between traditional playgrounds (e.g., at least 500 m apart).
- Where there is significant overlap, explore non-playground options to enable other playful experiences.
- Prioritize replacement in residential areas in the city with fewer playgrounds.
- Provide a variety of complementary park and play experiences for all ages and abilities across a park network.
- Continue to leverage partnership opportunities with local schools and neighbourhood associations and promote community grant programs.

Stream 2: Standalone playground replacement:

- Where a park renovation is not identified within the next ten years, identify select playgrounds to be replaced at a similar size and play value with supporting amenities such as seating, shade, playground curbing, and barrier-free infrastructure that support play, caregiving, and maintenance activities.
- Continue to leverage partnership opportunities with local schools and neighbourhood associations and promote community grant programs.

For both the development and formalization of the two improvement streams above, the playground inventory and evaluation will be informed by community engagement and neighbourhood analysis.

24: Consider exercise equipment in parks

Monitor existing exercise equipment locations for usage rates to determine if infrastructure should be expanded.

Kitchener has begun to install outdoor fitness equipment, but its use and demand are not well understood nor documented. To better understand the needs and use of outdoor fitness equipment, the current inventory, and its use, should be assessed and evaluated.

32: Rubberized surfacing in each ward

Identify and resource one playground per ward to receive rubberized surfacing in a location with greatest access in the community.

While engineered wood fiber is generally accepted as an accessible play safety surface, engagement on the subject highlighted that rubberized surfacing is more accessible and is preferred as an accessible surface. The cost of rubberized play surfacing is significantly higher than that of engineered wood fiber. To meet the need for more accessible playgrounds, at a minimum, one playground per ward should be identified to receive rubberized safety surfacing as part of a playground replacement or park renovation project. These locations should be situated to enable greatest access for the community, such as near a community center or library, near a washroom facility, on a public transit route, and with adequate parking.

Appendix:
Play Design Standards

Opportunities for fun and play for all ages and abilities can be met through a variety of creative design options. The following highlight some, but not all of the play opportunities that can be integrated into public parks and open spaces:

Ground play experiences

- Painted games
- Bike tracks
- Stepping stones
- Tactile surfaces, embedded rocks, varying textures
- Ground-plane murals
- Sand with play archaeology

Places to socialize

- Stepped seating
- Moveable furnishings
- Long picnic tables
- Imaginative play
- Open unprogrammed areas
- Game tables such as chess or ping pong
- Shared or group swings

Grade changes

- Tunnels
- Mounds
- Terracing
- Earthworks and grade changes
- Ramps

Sensory experiences

- Plantings
- Surface textures
- Water tables and runnels
- Musical play equipment
- Light or colour reflections

Connection to nature

- Naturalization
- Seating near habitat for observation
- Rain gardens
- Bird houses near naturalized areas
- Lookouts and boardwalks
- Wildflower or pollinator gardens

Places to exercise

- Trail loops, connections to the trail network
- Outdoor exercise equipment
- Parcour-type equipment

Places for individuals

- Individual seating opportunities for quiet contemplation
- Sensory calming elements
- Rest areas
- Bench seating and informal seating

Places to play games

- Places to play board games and table games
- Cultural games with information and tutorials
- Painted games
- Basketball and other court sports

Places for unstructured activities

- Open fields
- Walking trails, connections to the trail network

Places for creative expression

- Small amphitheaters or informal entertainment spaces
- Places for interacting with or creating art
- Temporary, or pop-up play experiences

Alternate approaches to fun

To encourage people of all ages to use Kitchener park spaces, they must be designed to be inviting for a variety of ages, abilities, and interests. Parks may include fitness equipment, walking trails, or more passive recreation opportunities to attract park users. Park programming may respond to specific to community needs where extensive engagement has taken place. This makes certain that immediate community needs are being fulfilled.

Recommendations summary

Faster playground replacement

Resource a sustained increase in the playground replacement rate at priority locations to address the current backlog.

Plan whole play spaces

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Signature & Feature Parks

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.

Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Gardens
Dogs
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Design Approach
Trails & Lighting
Winter Use

Content

Introduction ***06***

Data Sources ***28***

Findings ***30***

Recommendations ***34***

Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

This section focuses on describing Kitchener's most identifiable parks: those that are unique, significant, or otherwise unable to be categorized with the majority of other parks. They are destinations for many beyond the city's borders. These parks are defined in Spaces (2022), carrying over the definition from the previous strategic plan (2010). This booklet profiles these parks, their history, development, and significance to the City of Kitchener and beyond.

Park classifications

Classifying park spaces in a city is a common tool for understanding the park inventory and managing the vast amount of space for which the City is responsible. It may be intuitive to know there is a difference between Victoria Park and any given local Neighbourhood park or Huron Natural Area and a typical protected naturalized area. Spaces (2022) outlines these park types in a more detailed and updated framework.

The 2010 Parks Strategic Plan defined the "highest" level of park classification as providing multi-activity or multi-sport venues and/or serve specialized recreational, social and economic functions for the entire city that may also draw regional-scale audiences.

When "Legacy Parks" came to represent these high level parks, they were also defined by having unique landscapes and characteristics with significant natural, cultural, or historical components.

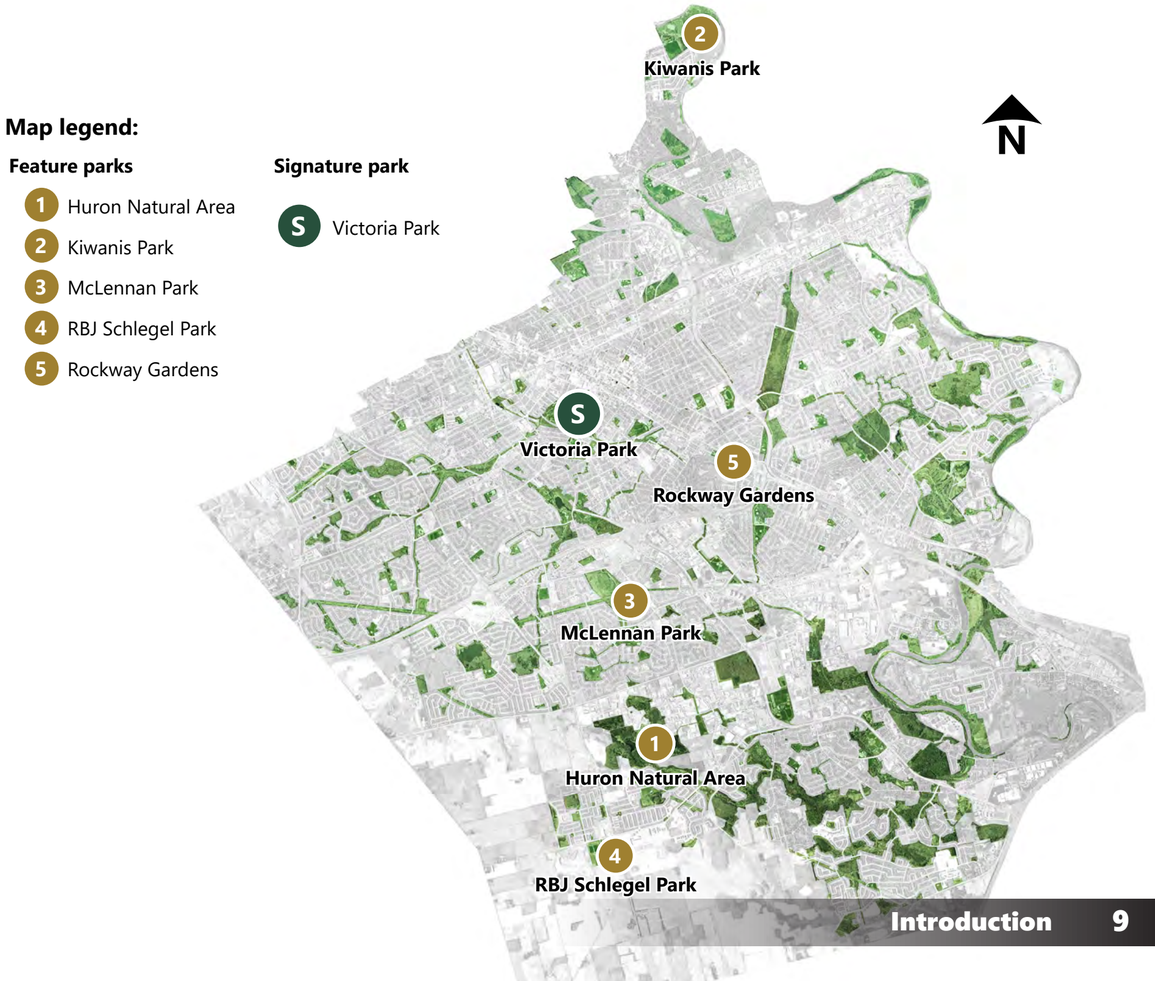
Since Spaces was presented to and approved by council, further engagement with community and other City departments has influenced understanding of what a legacy park is. Legacy parks have been renamed as Signature & Feature Parks.

Signature park: Victoria Park

Victoria Park is a category to itself. It fully represents the previous definition of Legacy Parks. An example of a historical component is the former City Hall clock tower now in Victoria park. The clock inspired the city's logo.

Feature parks: Kiwanis Park, Huron Natural Area (HNA), Rockway Gardens, McLennan, and RBJ Schlegel Park

Feature parks are some of the more identifiable locations in the city and represent significant spaces, investments, and some or all of the Legacy Park characteristics.



Impacts of classification

Spaces (2022) updated park classification system is meant to address Planned Park needs. The classifications help measure what we have against what is needed in the future. Since what can be achieved in the future is limited by Provincial policy, it is important to recognize that park development goals from the past are not realistic today. For example, Victoria Park and McLennan Park are not considered achievable in today's development environment due to their size and locations. Therefore, it would not be realistic to look at these parks as examples when setting goals for new, local park development.

There are other benefits to classifiying special parks as Signature or Feature Parks:

Accurate budgeting
Asset replacements are typically assessed as a whole. For example, all playgrounds are assessed together. Locations for these assets are then planned through the capital budget process for renovation, upgrade, or replacement, occasionally paired with other infrastructure in the same location.

Signature and Feature parks each have historically been assigned their own asset management and operating budget with annual amounts allocated to address the specific needs of each park.

Unique amenities in each park
Victoria and Schlegel Park attract more visitors and have a wider reach, because of their size and variety of recreational offerings like courts, splashpads, seating areas, and playgrounds. Properly recognizing the demand and popularity of these parks will help define a budget for each facility and the amenities within them.

Each park within this classification also has its own development master plan and carries their own asset management and operating budget. With some exceptions, this classification of park can have stand-alone priorities and phased planning tailored to their unique context.

Signature park

Victoria Park

In 1894, Council, in what was known then as the Town of Berlin voted eight to six in favour of a new by-law adopting the Province's Public Parks Act. From there, the City envisioned an 11 hectare (110,000 m^2) "city central park". Despite the narrow voting margin, Victoria Park was opened in 1896 and quickly became central to the city's development.

Today, it is the Signature Park in Kitchener. Victoria Park is a destination for local residents and beyond because of its size, tree canopy coverage, event programming, accessibility, downtown context, and natural and cultural history.

Key characteristics

Location and size

Originally deemed to be too far outside of town, Victoria Park now sits in the core of the city, 18 hectares (180,000 m^2) of green space just outside of the Commercial Core community boundary. This size of park in such a central location is unachievable in today's park development environment.

History

The park is part of the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District which includes the park and surrounding lands, and is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The park itself still has architecture and landscape features from its creation including the Roos Island Bridge (1896) and Roos Island Pavilion (1924). The original Kitchener City Hall Clock tower was moved to the Gaukel Street entrance in 1975 and inspired the City's modern logo.

Water access

Locally known as Victoria Park Lake, the water feature is central to the park. Sandrock and Filsinger creeks enter the park into a large human-made pond at the north-west end and outlet into Schneider Creek at the southeast side of the park. As much as the "lake" is a functional part of the stormwater system, it has historically been viewed as an aesthetic and recreational asset.

Amenities and popularity

Victoria Park supports a wide variety of activities, including playgrounds, a splashpad, and court space, waterfront trails, and open turf space for picnicking. The popularity of the park as a destination location and venue for large-scale events has supported recurrant commercial activities like annual festivals. The Boathouse and other park vendors, further adding to its draw.

Feature parks

Kiwanis Park

Kiwanis Park is the city's second largest park at over 50 hectares (500,000 m^2) in size. It is the northern-most property within Kitchener's city limits, nestled between residential properties and the Grand River. Kiwanis Park is remote in terms of location and is accessible by one local road only.

The park was originally developed by the Kiwanis Club in 1959 as a 19.4 hectare (194,000 m^2) flood plain property. The club constructed an outdoor pool that opened in 1967, among other recreational features. The City of Kitchener had always owned the park, and in 2008 the Kiwanis Club handed over maintenance and management responsibilities to the City. The park continues to bear the clubs name today.

Kiwanis Park offers an experience unlike any other in Kitchener's parks and is one of few Planned Park spaces with direct access to the Grand River.

Key characteristics:

Grand River

The majority of Kiwanis Park is within the Grand River floodplain. This limits its development potential but also provides many recreational opportunities. The Grand River serves as the park's backdrop with informal access to and views of the river along the Walter Bean Grand River Trail around its northern and eastern edges.

Amenities

Kiwanis has some of the largest park amenities of their kind in Kitchener. It is home to a wide range of well used facilities including playgrounds, sand volleyball courts, seven full-sized disc fields, a leash free dog park, a full-sized cricket pitch, and the city's largest outdoor pool.

Rockway Gardens

Although relatively small in comparison to other Feature parks, Rockway Gardens stands alone as a park featuring highly manicured, modern-day, Victorian style gardening and passive park experiences.

The property was leased to the Kitchener Horticultural Society (KHS) beginning in the 1920s and today remains a between the two organizations. The park mainly offers passive activities and gardening programs that cannot be found in any other Kitchener park.

Key characteristics:

Gateway into Kitchener's core

Rockway Gardens serves as a main entry point into the central neighbourhoods and commercial core of the city. This is consistent with its original vision from the 1920s.

Supportive programming

Rockway Gardens also serves as an entry point to gardening. Kitchener Horticulture Society, in partnership with other public educational groups, offer community programming on gardening education, food and seed sharing, bulb sales, and various seminars hosted both within the park and around the city.

Huron Natural Area

From the mid-1980s, the city slowly began to build and protect what is now known as Huron Natural Area and in 1995, efforts were initiated to establish a formal joint venture and partnership with the Waterloo Region District and Waterloo Region Catholic School boards. The last major update in this park was in 2007 when the formal front entrance and extensive trail networks were developed over a two-year period. Although now thought of as one natural area, it is a collection of cultural landscapes, naturalized areas, ecological features, and experiences.

Key characteristics:

Location and size

Huron Natural Area is the largest open space property in the city at over 105 hectares (1,050,000 m^2). As development continues around the property, it offers a vast naturalized setting among its industrial, commercial, and residential surroundings.

Trail networks

Seven kilometers of trails loop through and around the natural area, leading through its many ecological zones and providing a sense of exploration through each.

Water access

Within the natural area is the Board of Education pond, a natural body of water supported by the Strasburg Creek cold water stream. The pond is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna, most notably as a habitat for various turtle species. Boardwalks and viewpoints have been added to access the water while protecting its important habitat.

Natural playground and parking expansion

Kitchener's first natural playground was installed in 2014 as an active use area that complemented the park's wooded areas. As the popularity of the playground and trail system as a whole grew, a second parking lot was added in 2017. The expansion is a demonstration area for low impact development (LID), which allows rainwater to be absorbed into the ground where it falls.

Indigenous presence

There is evidence of indigenous settlement along the creekbank dating back to the 1500's. Archaeological findings are recognized on the site through art and signage. The City continues to work with Indigenous communities to ensure Huron Natural Area is a welcoming space for Indigenous people to gather for cultural celebrations and practices.

McLennan Park

A landfill until 1976 that was capped in the 1990s, this site was developed as a park in 2009 after a decade of planning. Though it has seen significant challenges, McLennan Park has become a recreational focal point in the overall park system. Its 100 foot (30 m) hill known locally as “Mount Trashmore” is used as a downhill bike track and toboggan hill. This type of recreational area does not exist elsewhere in the city.

Key characteristics:

Re-purposed landfill
McLennan Park represents a significant effort to re-purpose an area that would have otherwise been unusable space in the city and for surrounding residents.

Amenities
The park has a variety of active use options on top of its capped landfill. These include the previously noted 100 foot toboggan hill and downhill bike track, a splashpad, playground, washroom, various sports courts, skatepark, leash free dog park, and a large maintained lawn area.

Future considerations
Since opening in 2010, some of the amenities have had to close or be removed altogether due to unanticipated differential settlement of the lands. The Region continues to monitor the landfill and the on-going settlement concerns. The skatepark bowl was removed in 2018 due to settlement-related concerns. The washroom building was permanently closed in 2022 due to settlement preventing access and compromised utility connections. The splashpad, although open at this time, continues to require significant annual repair because of settlement-related drainage issues and will eventually need to be removed.

RBJ Schlegel Park

RBJ Schlegel Park (simplified to "Schlegel Park") is the newest of the Feature parks, still under construction at the time of writing this master plan. The vision for the park was first developed in the early 1990s. It is now the hub of virtually all active park uses. It represents the most significant single investment in the city's history responding to the city's southwestern growth and demand for recreational infrastructure. When complete, Schlegel Park will offer one of the widest varieties of recreational activities of any park in the region.

Key characteristics:

Amenities
Schlegel Park is home to many active park uses: artificial and natural turf sportsfields, cricket field, splashpad, playground, basketball, tennis and pickleball courts, and an outdoor exercise area. The park offers activities for people of all ages and abilities.

Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex
The park will be home to the new Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex the city's fifth and largest indoor pool, and its second and largest indoor turf facility. The indoor facility features a running track and community rooms, and plans are in place to develop an indoor gymnasium. The 190,000 square foot facility will serve the community for generations.

Heritage washroom
The property features a former residence resembling 1860s Scottish architecture. The house was to be protected, relocated and adapted to suit the park uses. It is now used as a public change room and washroom.

Stormwater
Unique to the park, all stormwater is managed onsite as there is no natural or human-made stormwater outlet. All rainwater that falls on the site moves back into the ground to the aquifer through low-impact development gardens or the one hectare stormwater management pond.

A riverside park

The Haldimand Tract
The Grand River stretches 280 kilometers, connecting villages, towns, and cities; and forests, wetlands, and grasslands. Its meandering corridor is both a city boundary and a natural heritage feature and was designated as one of Canada's heritage rivers in 1994. The river has shaped the evolution and development of Kitchener as a city.

For thousands of years, the Grand River watershed and all its tributaries were a source of sustenance, transportation, and spiritual connection for Indigenous communities living on their traditional territories.

The Grand River is located within the bounds of the Between the Lakes Treaty, No. 3, established between the Crown and Mississaugas of the Credit in 1784 and ratified in 1792. Through the Haldimand Treaty of 1784 the Six Nations, which includes the Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Tuscarora nations, were granted an area of 10 km on either side of the entire length of the Grand River in recognition of their support to the British during the American Revolution.

This area is called the Haldimand Tract.

The Grand River remains an important cultural and spiritual place for First Nations rightsholders and Indigenous persons living and working in Kitchener today.

Any parks and open space use within the Haldimand Tract and Treaty lands must recognize and acknowledge the importance of these lands to First Nations rightsholders, and their role in opportunities for action toward Reconciliation.

Continuous parkland along the Grand River
The benefits of a continuous, accessible, open space and parkland system along the Grand River have been acknowledged and identified within several plans and studies. These plans and studies include the Grand River Strategy (GRCA, 1993), the Grand River Corridor Conservation Plan (Region of Waterloo, 1995), Parks Strategic Plan (2010), the Leisure Facilities Master Plan (2013), the City's Official Plan (2014), and as recently as the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to complete a Grand River park strategy.

The 2010 Parks Strategic Plan placed a high qualitative value on the open spaces along the Grand River with opportunities to contribute to public access to, appreciation and experience of the river valley. Through community engagement for Places, three priorities surfaced:

- Expand public open space within the Grand River corridor
- Create unique open space gateway features at major river crossings
- Develop a Riverside Park

The 2010 Parks Strategic Plan identified seven areas along the Grand River corridor that could complete the vision of a continuous public open space along the river. To anchor this vision of a contiguous public space corridor one of these seven areas would become a future Grand River Park. The seven areas are shown on the map included on this page.

It was recognized, however, that protecting these lands as part of the river experience was not expected in the short or medium term, nor necessary to meet objectives outlined in the Official Plan.

> *The Parks Strategic Plan provides an implementation strategy for the Grand River Corridor Conservation Plan and the City will endeavor to implement its recommendations where appropriate.*
>
> ***Official Plan [OP 8.C.1.2.]***

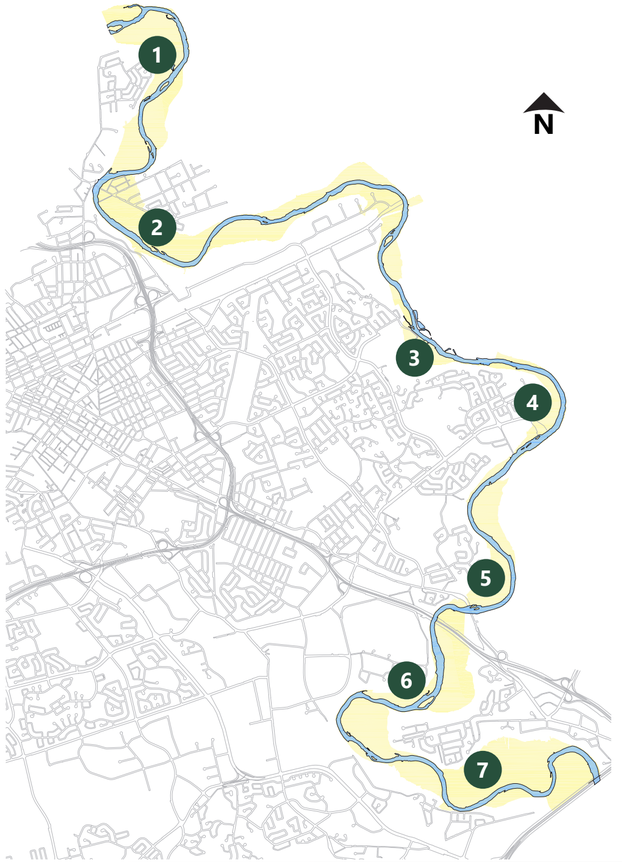
> *We will seek to maximize opportunities for public access to the Grand River to enable its recreational potential to be realized.*
>
> ***Official Plan, "Kitchener Tomorrow"***

> *To provide for a continuous public open space system, which includes the diverse natural areas of the Grand River and its major tributaries, supporting diverse recreational pursuits, environmental sustainability, active transportation and a high-quality public realm and urban landscape."*
>
> ***Official Plan [OP 8.1.5.]***

Map of Grand River corridor areas

Locations are listed North to South along the Grand River corridor. ESPA denotes an Environmenally Sensitive Protected Area.

1. the Bridgeport North floodplain
2. the Bridgeport East floodplain
3. Lackner Woods-Natchez Hills ESPA
4. Woolner Flats in Grand River South
5. the Freeport floodplain
6. the Hidden Valley ESPA floodplain
7. the Pioneer Tower West floodplain



Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
- **Region of Waterloo strategies**
- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Accessibility was a dominant theme that emerged during consultation.

Those who expressed accessibility challenges identified the following:

- Limited accessible parking
- Terrain barriers such as slopes, winter conditions, gravel pathways, gaps in pathways, and poor asphalt conditions.

Health and wellbeing

One connection drawn back to Signature and Feature parks from the engagement data was related to expansion, specifically of Victoria Park. We asked to rank four options to help focus park expansion and improvements in the Downtown, Civic Centre, and KW Hospital communities:

- Create fewer but larger parks
- Create more but smaller parks
- Improve existing parks
- Expand Victoria Park

The least popular option was to expand Victoria Park. Desired priorities included creating fewer but larger park spaces and improving existing parks.

Inclusion

Inclusion and access concerns were prevalent during engagement with residents.

Access barriers were noted to get to “larger” parks or higher tier service parks. These parks serve multiple communities and city-wide interests like City, Feature and Signature parks do. Getting to Victoria Park and Huron Natural Area was specifically mentioned as challenging. A greater proportion of respondents noted getting to larger parks as difficult, and a smaller proportion noted getting to larger parks as easy. Comparatively, access to Local Neighbourhood parks was largely perceived as very easy or easy.

Those who expressed access challenges identified the following as issues:

- Limited parking;
- Distance travelled;
- Not having safe, reliable methods of transportation including public transit, biking and walking;
- Parks being too busy and crowded.

Inclusion concerns that surfaced during engagement frequently related to Victoria Park. A number of residents communicated that the park is unwelcoming.

Engaged parties provided several reasons why they feel unwelcome in the park space. Aspects of the park that contribute to this include:

- Lack of accessible and safe play spaces;
- Tent encampments and public drug use;
- The legacy of place names and symbols;
- Not enough garbage cans;
- Not enough leash-free areas for pets.

Through engagement, several ideas surfaced for addressing these concerns. Kitchener residents suggested:

- Adding fencing around play spaces for children who may run away;
- Adding places to sit and rest in the shade;
- Ensuring folks living in parks have their short- and long-term needs met;
- Addressing the legacy of place names and symbols;
- More lighting on paths;
- More off-leash spaces for dogs;
- More well-maintained, accessible washrooms.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

A vision for a Grand River park

Continue with the Grand River Park Strategy as identified in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

Each of the seven potential areas that could collectively contribute to a contiguous public open space along the Grand River was reviewed in 2015 for its potential to host a future riverside park. Grand River South, also known as Woolner Flats, was ranked highest based on its location, connectivity, site characteristics, and property status.

The vision for the park itself is yet to be defined and will be a balance of active versus passive programming and will include specific infrastructure to meet needs and service levels. The suitability of specific uses will be linked directly to the site's characteristics.

Among these seven sites, some options are not within the flood plain and may therefore allow for more active programming opportunities.

Efforts to finalize the future park's location along the river and park programming were completed in 2018. Property values and specific opportunities have changed significantly since that time. The riverside park development remains a strategic direction for the City, as highlighted in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. At its core, the park can become a community connection to the Grand River as part of the vision of a continuous public open space system along the water.

Long term plans

Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.

This master plan intends to provide high-level guidance for each Signature and Feature Park to use within each park's individual master plan. This is not to supersede future engagement processes of each plan, but to distill and communicate findings from the Places Parks Master Plan engagement pertaining to the city's larger parks.

Table 1 (to follow on page 36) depicts the major milestones and strategies that have been completed, are in progress, or have been planned for each of the Signature and Feature parks.

Park plan considerations

Barriers to feeling welcome
Feeling crowded in City, Feature or Signature Parks can be viewed as both a success for attracting visitors and also as evidence of a need to create more spaces for people to explore. Increasing demand leads to continual improvements not just at Signature and Feature Parks, but in local parks which can be accessed more easily.

Signature and Feature Parks will continue to be a popular draw by design. In some cases, there are no other viable open space options, particularly downtown and in growing residential areas near Victoria Park.

Efforts through the recommendations made in the Victoria Park Master Plan will begin to collect usage data with the goal of thoroughly understanding and documenting where, when, and how people use the park. This information will help target areas and periods of high and low use and serve as a baseline to inform future development decisions.

Access
As each Signature and Feature Park master plan develops, access to and within parks will be a priority. This could mean creating new or expanding existing parking lots, consulting with Grand River Transit on public transit routes, and building multi-modal access such as by trails, sidewalks and bike lanes.

Table 1: Strategies in progress and major milestones

Park	Original development	Master plan in place	Last updated
Victoria Park	1896	**Yes**	Underway
McLennan Park	2009	**Yes**	Underway
Rockway Gardens	1930	No	N/A
Kiwanis Park	TBD	No	N/A
Huron Natural Area	2009	**Yes**	Underway
RBJ Schlegel Park	2020	**Yes**	2013

Major milestones

2007	2011	2012	2013	2014	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
	pond dredging and edge reconstruction; three bridge replacements	major Boathouse and patio renovations		opening of David St. washroom	three bridge replacement				three bridge replacement		re-opening of Boathouse; Roos Island and bridge renovations			
							significant re-capping and additional park elements	skatepark bowl removal	washroom closure	comprehensive review of park assets		strategic park development plan update		
second gazebo installed														
	installation of dog park	installation of disc fields				complete outdoor pool reconstruction	full playground replacement				installation of cricket pitch			
			Strasburg Creek boardwalk expansion	natural playground installed	parking lot expansion		major trail expansion to Strasburg Road					Indigenous placekeeping		
					ground-breaking for initial park development			first phase opening		second phase opening			projected completion of indoor facility	final budget year for park development

Recommendations summary

A vision for a Grand River park

Continue with the Grand River Park Strategy as identified in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

Long term plans

Initiate or update existing strategic and asset management plans for each Signature and Feature park including Victoria Park (underway), Huron Natural Area (underway), McLennan Park (underway), Rockway Gardens, Kiwanis Park, and RBJ Schlegel Park.

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Splashpads

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

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The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

Splashpads are a common alternative to outdoor pools. They are used by municipalities all over the province for recreational purposes. Several factors play an important role in splashpad planning. This includes proximity to supporting infrastructure (e.g., washrooms), demographic needs for cooling, and most importantly- understanding water consumption. With water consumption as a foundation, gaps in the inventory can be identified and addressed with a full picture of the resource demands and costs.

The purpose of this section is to inventory Kitchener's current splashpads and project the number and location of future investments.

What is a splashpad?

A splashpad is an area that provides immersive water play without standing water. This feature allows them to be included in public spaces without life guard supervision, making them ideal recreational opportunities in many of Kitchener's parks. They offer a place to cool down and to play during the summer months.

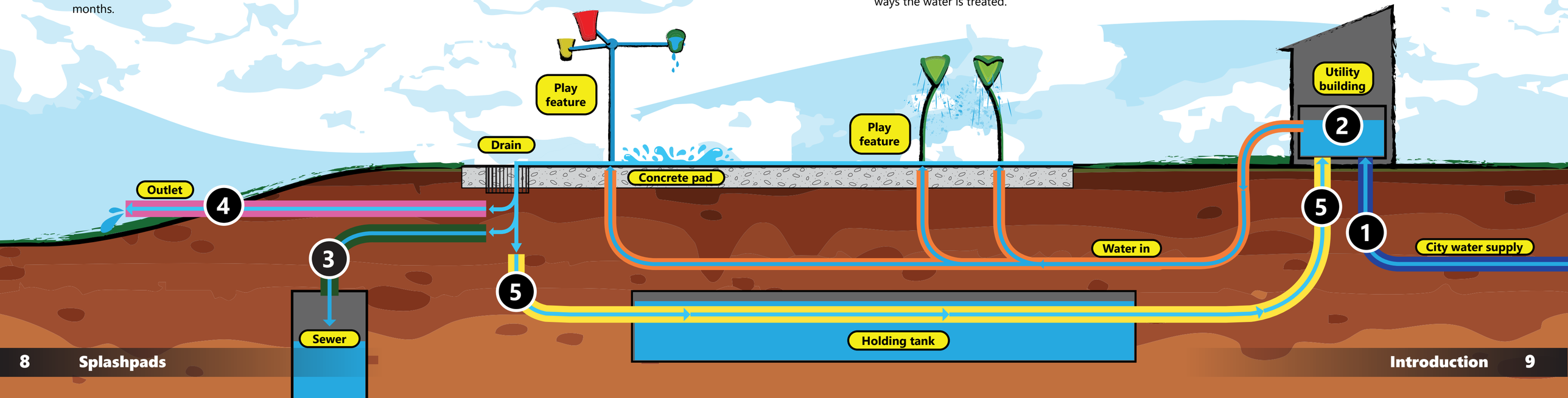
There are a variety of types, looks, and sizes throughout the city. Splash pads can include ground jets, play features, over head spraying, interactive nozzles, and more.

Water use

A typical splash pad draws its water from a potable municipal water line (1), and distributes that water through a central manifold (2) that controls the water pressure for each feature.

After passing through play features, there are three ways the water is treated.

Most common in Kitchener is a single-use approach where water is diverted to sewer lines (3) to move water off site. In some instances, infiltration in nearby stormwater facilities is possible (4). Finally, the water can be collected and recirculated back into the system to reduce the total volume of water used (5).



Existing inventory

Kitchener features ten splash pads throughout the city. There is currently no distinction between them despite a wide variety of sizes, activities, and experiences. This booklet will define new categories based on these features, including **Destination, Local, and Urban splashpads**.

Destination splashpad
Service area: 10 minute drive
A large pad area with a variety of water play features, high use facility and supported by adequate parking, seating, changing, and washroom facilities.

Local splashpad
Service area: 10 minute walk or located at a community centre
Moderate to small pad area with a narrower variety of water play features. Community pads may be standalone or supported by a community centre facility.

Urban splashpad
Service area: 10 minute walk or 2-5 minute drive
Pad area varies with single use water play or cool down misting features. Typically located in urban park settings or urban squares.

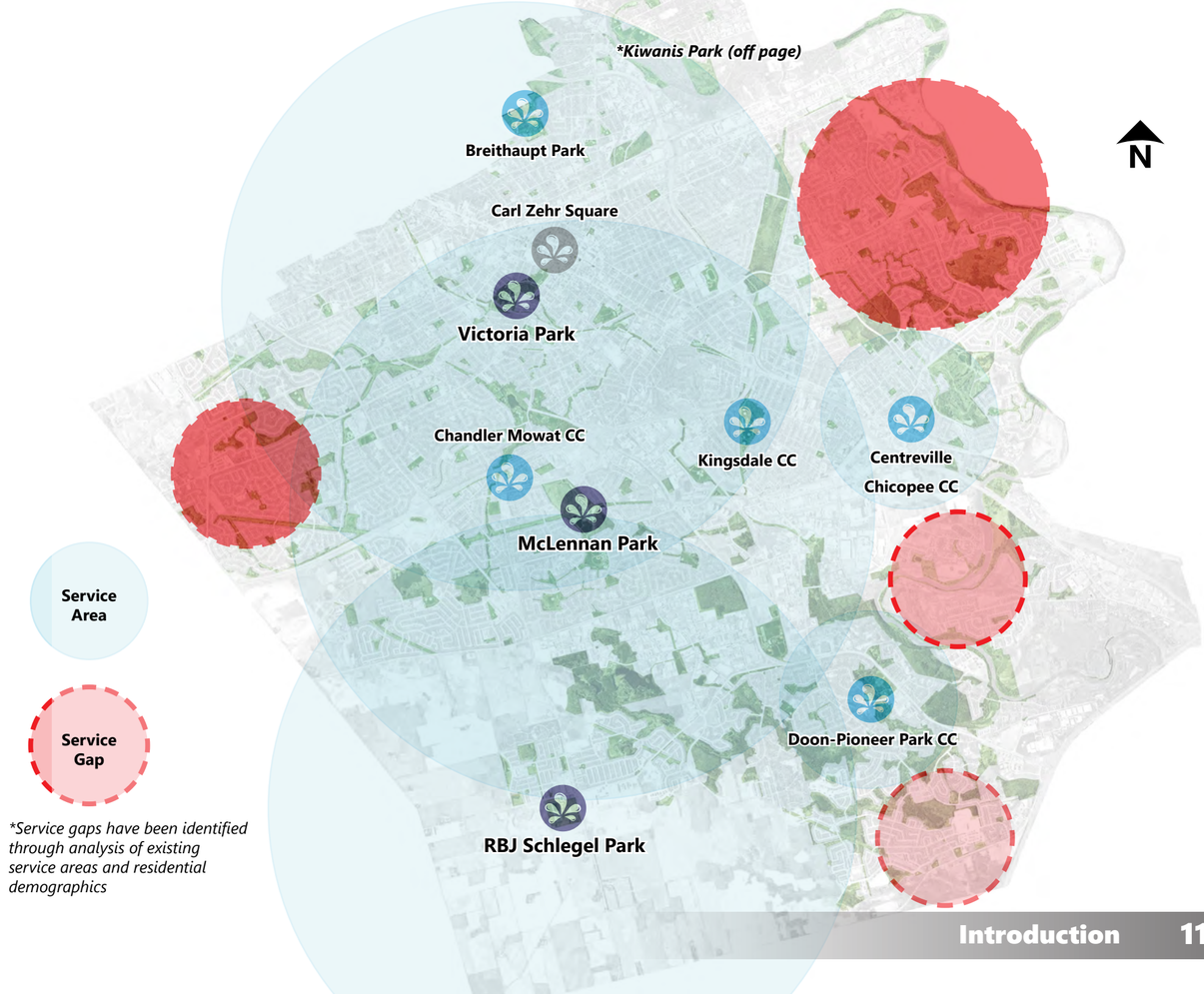
Splashpads are located around the city in a variety of park and non-park settings, including Feature parks (two), City parks (one), Community parks (one), urban square (one) and community centres (three).

Destination
- McLennan Park
- RBJ Schlegel Park
- Victoria Park
- *Kiwanis Park**

Local
- Breithaupt Park
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre
- Chandler Mowat Community Centre
- Kingsdale Community Centre
- Doon-Pioneer Park Community Centre

Urban
- Carl Zehr Square

**The Kiwanis Park splashpad is located within the outdoor pool area. It can only be accessed through controlled entry to the pool compound.*



**Service gaps have been identified through analysis of existing service areas and residential demographics*

Water usage

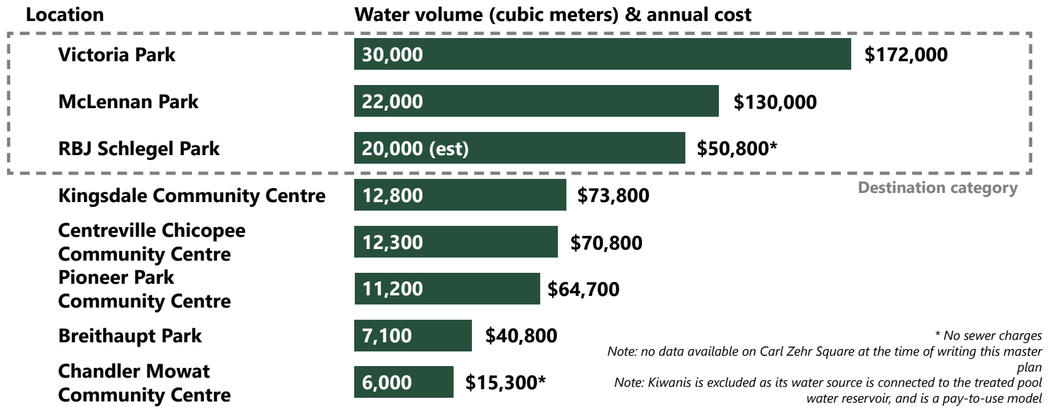
Water consumption is one of the most important factors in managing existing splashpads and planning future expansions. As single use systems are most common within the city, water drawn for splashpads is used only once before being centrally treated.

Destination splashpads use approximately 25,000 cubic meters of water annually within the operating season. The largest consumer of water is Victoria Park at over 30,000 cubic meters (30 million litres) annually. Local splashpads, on average, draw approximately 10,000 cubic meters (10 million litres) of water annually. For context, 6,000 cubic meters (6 million litres) equates to filling a standard soccer field area with one meter of water.

This use comes at a cost. At the time of writing this master plan, water supply costs $2.54 per cubic meter with a sewer surcharge rate of $3.21 per cubic meter. Only two of the city's nine splashpads do not pay the sewer surcharge rate as all waste water is managed on site.

Splashpads can be made more economically sustainable by eliminating sewer surcharges. This means adapting or selecting locations where water can be re-used or otherwise managed entirely on site.

Average annual water consumption (2017-2022)
(less 2020 data for COVID-19 shutdowns)



** No sewer charges*
Note: no data available on Carl Zehr Square at the time of writing this master plan
Note: Kiwanis is excluded as its water source is connected to the treated pool water reservoir, and is a pay-to-use model

Water resource management

There are two common designs for a splashpad's use of water: single use (or flow through), and recirculation. Recirculation provides the greatest opportunity to conserve water. Of the city's ten splashpads, two are recirculating systems at Carl Zehr Square and Kiwanis Park.

Recirculation can significantly reduce the cost and use of water. There are other factors to consider however, which have led to Kitchener primarily installing single use splashpads.

A third design option is being developed that combines the benefits of both systems: a dual-use approach.

Water is collected and treated through recirculation and re-used in adjacent large scale irrigation systems such as a natural turf sportsfield. This maintains reliable access to the splashpad, nearly eliminating public health risks related to recirculation, and promotes environmental and financial sustainability.

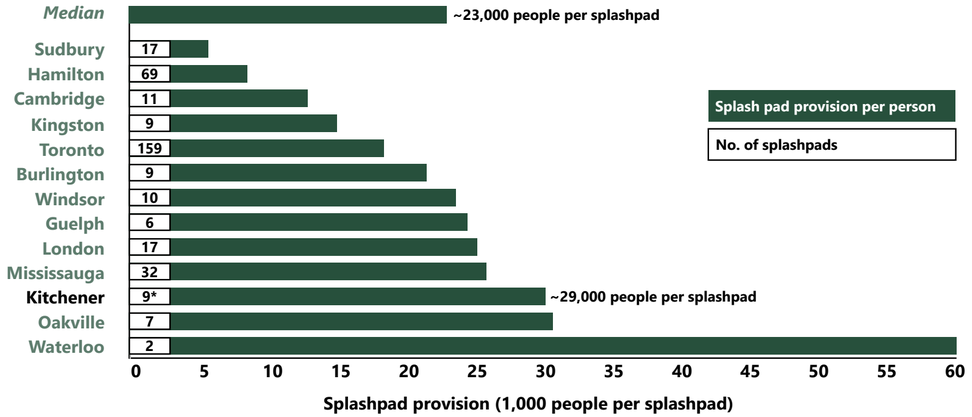
A dual-use system is a new approach to splashpad water management and has few precedents in the province.

	Single use	Recirculation	Dual use
Additional installation cost	**None**	**High** Requires all the same equipment, plus underground storage, pumps, and filtration	**High** Requires all the same equipment, plus underground storage, pumps, and filtration
Seasonal water use	**6,000 - 20,000 cubic meters** Average local and destination splash pad water consumption	**~1,000 cubic meters** Approximate volume required as minimum replacements and water losses	**Half** Potential to eliminate water consumption needs of adjacent uses
Maintenance and inspections	**Seasonally** Typically inspected on opening and closure of the system	**Daily / Weekly** Recirculated water requires daily testing every 4 hours and more frequent maintenance	**Weekly / Monthly** Largely automated irrigation controls to determine water source, system diagnostics, etc.
On site staffing	**None** No daily staff oversight required	**Daily** Water requires daily testing and action if chemically unbalanced	**None** No daily staff oversight required
Drinkable water	**Yes** Equivalent to tap water	**No** Equivalent to pool water with chemical disinfectants	**Yes** Equivalent to tap water
Risk of shutdown	**Low** Constant clean water supply eliminates risk of shutdowns beyond mechanical	**High** Small volumes of water can be chemically impacted quickly, causing full shutdown until correction	**Low** Constant clean water supply eliminates risk of shutdowns due to contamination

Precedents

Splashpads support a common recreational activity and are used by municipalities across the province. There is no standard or target provision for splashpads. The City can benchmark and set an approximate average provision by understanding how many splashpads there are to serve Kitchener's population compared to other municipalities' splashpad provisions.

The number of splashpads each municipality has can help frame trends around the province, but needs to be understood within the context of the quality of the splashpads, their locations, accessibility, water usage, environmental and financial sustainability among other factors. Measuring strictly by number of splashpads, Kitchener is slightly under serviced compared to the median Ontario city.



*9 splashpads that are independent and free to use

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- Legislation
- Equitable engagement
- Engagement with the broader community
- Engagement with City of Kitchener departments
- Engagement with partner organizations
- Comparative analysis
- External research
- Policy
- City of Kitchener strategies
- Region of Waterloo strategies
- Best practices
- City of Kitchener staff experience

Findings

Photo by Fola Akanbi via Google Maps

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Inclusion

Mapping each splashpad shows visible gaps in access to splashpads, either by biking, walking or driving. Notable gaps are highlighted on the map. The majority of responses show residents primarily drive to splashpads, and, of those drivers, are willing to drive over 10 minutes to their preferred facility.

Any consideration of expansion will consider specific parks within each community gap, and be selected based on equity metrics, including proximity to critical needs neighbourhoods and access to public transit. Furthermore, any expansion must take the Outdoor Pool Strategy into consideration.

Splashpads offer nearly all of their recreational value free of charge to any person, significantly decreasing their barrier to participate. Difficulty getting to splashpads that are too far away from individuals' homes was the most common theme raised through engagement. Others included they are too crowded, and people are unsure of where to find them.

Environmental sustainability

Considering environmental sustainability and water conservation for splashpads surfaced as themes in engagement findings. Respondents shared creative ideas to improve splashpads, including using recycled water, natural splashpads, timed/motion sensor features, and using more water-efficient equipment.

In addition to the suggestions made through engagement, treating all water on site can sustain ground water levels and decreases the burden on centralized treatment. Re-using water at least once can significantly reduce water consumption and associated costs.

Health and wellbeing

The majority of splashpad users are satisfied with Kitchener's splashpads. When asked why residents use splashpads, the top three responses included keeping kids active, free to use, and providing a way to cool down. The most common frequency of splashpad use was found to be "a few times per month", followed by "two to three times per week". Most splashpad users visit splashpads frequently.

Safety

Engagement reflected that some existing splashpads could be better maintained, sometimes illustrating their condition as a safety risk.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Consider water conservation systems for splashpads

Design all splashpads as single-use systems with the option to become recirculation or hybrid systems where applicable. Include water conservation features such as isolated timers, motion sensors, and lower volume play features.

Splashpads are a valued community recreational amenity. They are also a resource intense facility, available for use during all park hours, seven days a week, up to 18 weeks per year. Managing water as a resource is not only an environmental and financial best practice, but also highly supported by residents. All new and renovated splashpads will have water conservation as a prioritized design consideration, inclusive of a recirculation treatment model and potential connection to water treatment cycling of outdoor pools.

29: More splashpads

Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.

In order to maintain the city's existing provision of splashpads, an additional splashpad is recommended for every 22,000 new residents. Annual projections over the next 20 years are between 3,700 and 4,300 new residents per year. This means one new splashpad will be needed in Kitchener every five to six years.

Potential locations will be influenced by the Outdoor Pool Strategy and by a set of developed criteria.

Each location should be located in an area that:

- Is adjacent to existing or future irrigation;
- Is conducive to waste water management and infiltration;
- Features existing active park uses (e.g., playgrounds, courts, etc);
- Has access to washrooms or change room facilities;
- Is in an active and highly visible location;
- Is in proximity to critical needs neighbourhoods as identified in Spaces;
- Includes existing parking facilities;
- Addresses geographic gaps;
- Is within walking distance of public transit;
- Can be paired with existing outdoor pools;
- Can be incorporated into the future Outdoor Pool Strategy by the City of Kitchener.

Design considerations

All ages and abilities design
With flat, concrete surfaces, splashpads are generally accessible by nature. When planning each pad's programming, play elements, and spaces, it is important to consider that all ages use these spaces. This can be achieved through varying spray types, heights, and play experiences. Similar to playgrounds, separating age-appropriate structures can provide comfort to those overwhelmed by a crowded, highly active space.

Value neutral space
One of the reported barriers to using splashpads is overcrowding. It is important to give value to the space between features to account for high-energy movements.

Water conservation methods
Employ a variety of water conservation techniques like separation of zones, tighter timing activation windows, "push to play" elements, and a balance of high water volume play features with lower water volume ones like misters and ground features.

Be unique
Make the splashpads stand out to be engaging and maintain interest for the whole season. Consider local influences on design like surrounding neighbourhood themes, park context, or community centre architecture.

Washrooms, shade, and seating
Splashpads are only as successful as their supporting amenities. Access to washrooms are a requirement at each new location. Adequate shade and seating are equally as important as the splashpad features themselves.

Recommendations summary

Consider water conservation systems for splashpads

Design all splashpads as single-use systems with the option to become recirculation systems where applicable. Include water conservation features such as isolated timers, motion sensors, and lower volume features.

29: More splashpads

Develop three new local splashpads in alignment with the Outdoor Pool Strategy.

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Sports & Games

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

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Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

Spaces for organized sports that support a range of physical activities and participation are a key component of a healthy parks and open space network. They are often focal points in park spaces, and in some cases an economic driver leading to growth through sports tourism while supporting local sports groups, development and activities.

This booklet will define sports infrastructure standards in Kitchener, locations for fields and courts within the parks and open space network, and identify and plan for emerging trends within the sports and games inventory.

Projecting sport demand

Parks are home to many of Kitchener's sports facilities - from paved courts in local parks to premiere outdoor sportsfields. As interest in various types of sports ebbs and flows over time, the supply of the supporting public inventory is adapted to suit. Converting field types, re-lining courts, installing or removing lighting, or outright removing fields or courts have been fairly common actions taken by the City over time. These actions ensure that infrastructure remains relevant and is used by the communities they are located within.

The City plans and projects sport infrastructure needs through its Leisure Facilities Master Plan (LFMP). This plan provides a strategic framework and specific actions for continued investment, development, and re-development of the City's sportsfield inventory to better adapt to changing trends. It also determines the need for and quantity of each field type within the city.

Sportsfield demand is largely driven by organized sports. This allows for the projection of needs and inventory based on registration trends locally, regionally and provincially.

The LFMP, however, does not project use or future demand for outdoor court spaces such as tennis, basketball and pickleball facilities, nor does it suggest how to manage the current outdoor sport court inventory. Courts are not a bookable resource in Kitchener, and their uses are primarily community-driven on a first-come-first-serve system. It is also important to note that organized sport registration trends does not account for trends in sport activities not currently offered.

This booklet will begin to inventory and identify gaps in sports court recreation and take the **parks perspective** on managing the City's sportsfield inventory.

Sportsfields:

Existing inventory
Sportsfields in Kitchener come in many shapes, sizes, types, functions, and locations; they are dedicated to specific sports and are most often reserved for use by organized sports.

In Kitchener, there are two primary sportsfield types: **baseball diamonds** and multi-use rectangular **athletic fields.**

Less common but still within the sportsfield definition are cricket fields, disc fields, and athletic tracks that are designed and used for their intended sport.

Sportsfields are further classified by their surface quality, how often the turf is cut, and if irrigation systems are in place or not. Other amenities and facilities are variable within each category such as lighting, washrooms, parking and fencing. The following table illustrates the inventory of sportsfields managed by the City of Kitchener:

Sportsfield		Features & amenities					
	Total	School grounds	Artificial turf	Lighting	Irrigation	Parking	Washrooms
Baseball diamonds	**71**	**18**	**0**	**12**	**13**	**37**	**33**
Athletic fields	**70**	**25**	**4**	**6**	**21**	**34**	**34**
Cricket fields	**3**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**1**
Disc fields	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**7**	**7**	**0**
Athletic tracks	**2**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**0**

Sportsfield classifications
Common across all types of sportsfield facilities are classifications, which in Kitchener is determined by service level.

Service levels are associated with each sportsfield classification below include factors such as surface quality, mowing, grooming, and line painting frequency, as well as available supporting amenities like lighting, irrigation, parking and washrooms.

See the appendix in this booklet for supporting amenities for each class of sportsfield.

Class	Location	Mowing	Irrigation	Line painting (athletic fields)	Grooming (ball diamonds)
T*	Park	N/A	N/A	Permanent	Daily
A1	Park	2" target	Yes	Weekly	Daily
A2	Park	2" target	No	Weekly	Daily
B	Park	2 week rotation	No	2 week rotation	Weekly
S	School	2 week rotation	No	2 week rotation	Weekly

*Artificial turf surface

Artificial turf surfacing

Since the adoption of the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan, the City has developed two sets of artificial turf sportsfields. The first set is a pair of fields at Woodside Park which opened in 2012. The second set is another dual field facility at RBJ Schlegel Park opening in 2020.

Artificial turf is engineered to replicate the playability of natural turf as closely as possible, balancing both performance and player safety needs. Costs to install artificial turf are high. Benefits of artificial turf include consistent quality and performance of the turf surface year-round, and near 100% cost recovery due to lower operating costs and an extended playing season.

Woodside Park was due for artificial turf replacement at the end of the 2024 playing season, and was replaced accordingly, marking 13 seasons in use. The true costs of installation, maintenance, resources, and replacement in can be directly compared against the same number of natural turf fields that provide the same amount of bookable hours.

Artificial turf can be booked in shoulder seasons and for greater intensity uses than natural turf. The target user hours for artificial turf is 1,200 per year up to a maximum of 1,500 hours. Natural turf targets 450 hours per year, up to 500 hours depending on user group demand. It takes five natural turf fields to provide the same overall number of hours as two artificial turf fields.

Environmental considerations

The environmental trade-off between artificial turf and natural turf is the resources required to maintain natural turf compared to the production of the materials for artificial turf systems.

Artificial turf systems are made up of polypropylene filaments, thermoplastic elastomer backing, and sand infill with a recycled foam shock pad. The original fields at Woodside Park (2012) used processed recycled tires as infill and shock absorbing material. The black pellets created a heat-island effect similar to flat asphalt roofs and commercial parking lots.

All plastics and rubber used for artificial turf are re-usable or recyclable; however, globally there is increasing attention being paid to pervasive micro plastics in the environment.

Newer artificial turf systems have been used at RBJ Schlegel Park (2020). Rubber has changed to a re-usable green thermoplastic to absorb less solar energy, a blend of 83% sand by weight to reduce overall rubber use, and a recycled foam shock pad layer to further reduce the volume of infill required.

Artificial turf eliminates the use of potable water, fertilizers, and various machinery to maintain high quality, resilient natural turf. The City will continue to support modern technologies as they adapt to changing restrictions. New infill materials such as cork and coconut husk have been used at the highest professional levels in North America and have already had a positive environmental impact. As these products are tested and become more common place, they will be adopted for municipal use.

Numbers that help illustrate the cost comparison between installation and maintenance of artificial and natural turf fields are shown in the chart on page 15, which compares the artificial turf fields at Woodside Park against a similar area of natural turf field over a 13 year period.

Cost comparison and analysis

Over its 13 year span, Woodside Park's two fields have delivered the same number of play hours as five natural turf fields for $600,000 less. Those hours were played on a consistently high quality surface and were reliably available following even the most significant of weather events.

Note that the total revenue in the following chart does not account for the cost of land required for the fields. Three fields use 2.1 hectares of land plus additional land for parking, access, amenities, and other supporting infrastructure. These land costs are substantial and not factored into this analysis.

When comparing Woodside Park fields against five natural turf fields, the cost of irrigating five natural turf fields is about the same as the cost to install and maintain two artificial turf fields for the same lifespan.

This analysis supports continued investment into artificial turf facilities from a cost perspective.

Overlaying actual costs of land would further support the decision to use artificial turf.

Chart notes:

**Annualized total to correct for COVID-19 interruptions beginning in 2020*

^Inflation adjusted from 2011, excluding market value increases. Includes lighting installation

** Water use determined to be 15,000 gallons per cycle, ran 80 days per season at $5.49 per cubic metre of water. Artificial turf systems do not include an irrigation system*

& Infill refers to annual top ups of rubberized pellets, Cultural practices refer to turf maintenance including aerating, topdressing, overseeding and fertilizing throughout each season

Cost comparison - artificial turf vs. natural turf

Cost category	Woodside Park	Natural turf field equivalent
Hours & revenue		
Number of fields	2	5
Years in use	13	13
Booked hours (2012-2019)*	19,200	18,000
Annualized bookings	1,200	450
Total hours	31,200	29,250
Rental fee (hourly)	$111.21	$69.86
Total revenue	**$3,469,752**	**$2,043,405**
Costs		
Capital installation^	**$2,128,000**	**$0**
Life-cycle replacement	**$1,400,000**	**$0**
Annual operating costs		
Equipment	*$1,500*	*TBD*
Water" (May to October)	*$0*	*$124,843 (22,740 cubic meters)*
Electrical	*Same*	*Same*
Grooming / cutting	*$9,000*	*$66,000*
Infill / cultural practices &	*$5,000*	*$25,000*
Testing	*$8,000*	*$0*
Repairs	*$5,000*	*$0*
Annual total cost	$28,500 (2 fields)	$215,843 (5 fields)
Total operating costs (13 years)	**$371,000**	**$2,805,954**
Summary (13 years)		
Total Hours	19,200 (2 fields)	18,000 (5 fields)
Revenue	**$3,469,752**	**$2,043,405**
Operating Costs	**$371,000**	**$2,805,954**
Capital Costs	**$3,262,000**	**$0**
Net Costs	$163,248	$762,549
Net cost per rented hour	**$5.23**	**$26.07**

Sport courts

Existing inventory
Courts are typically paved surfaces with painted markings denoting intended sport use.

Similar to sportsfields, Kitchener's sport courts are seen in a variety of shapes, sizes, orientations, and locations.

There are two primary types in Kitchener: basketball courts and multi-use courts. Courts in Kitchener can serve as winter rinks and be overlaid with multiple ball and net sports such as tennis, pickleball, road hockey, and various combinations of any of the above sport uses.

Court type	Features & amenities						
	Locations with courts	Total nets#	Purpose built	Shared space	Lighting	Parking	Washrooms
Basketball	28	71	47	24	4*	16	17
Tennis	20	48	35	12	12*	16	16
Pickleball	7	23	4	19	8*	4	4
Winter rinks (on courts)	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	10^	12	12
Total locations with courts	37						

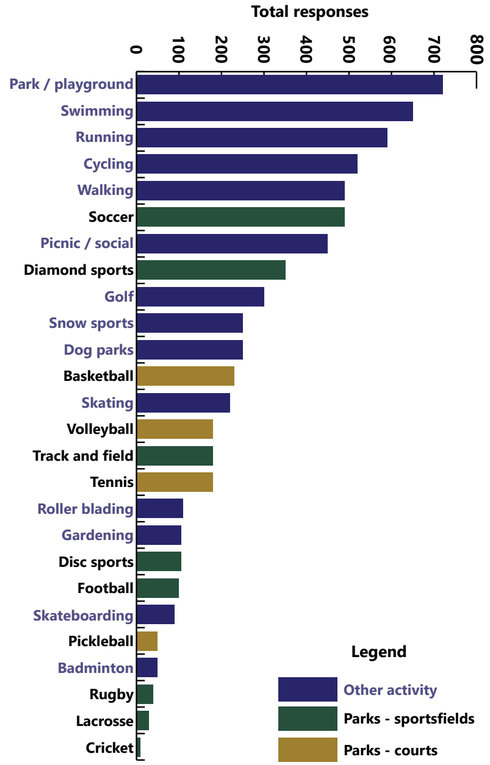
** Includes full court lighting only. Flood lamps used for winter rinks are excluded*
^ Includes single post flood light as required by winter rink operations
 # Includes 1 single tennis court, and multiple versions of basketball (both full and half courts)

Recreational trends

Popular organized sports that use the City's sportsfields inventory drive their development, re-development, and investment. Their influences are captured within the City's Leisure Facilities Master Plan (LFMP, 2019) which evaluates local registration and projected uses, balanced with provincial trends in each sport. This includes diamond sports, soccer, football, field hockey, lacrosse, and ultimate frisbee. The plan in turn, projects infrastructure needs to properly support each sport.

To inform recommendations made in the LFMP, survey respondents were asked in 2019 to **rank their favourite outdoor recreational activities**. The results are shown here. Recreational activities impacted by the sportsfield and court inventory located within parks and open spaces are highlighted.

Following completion of this survey, COVID-19 interrupted all indoor activities in 2020. Recreational opportunities were limited strictly to outdoor activities in smaller groups and has shifted public sentiment toward outdoor, public, and local recreation. This chart gives a snap shot of the relative popularity of each recreational activity prior to the pandemic's influence.



Emerging trends

Park developments completed since the 2019 LFMP update have been influenced by trends in local sporting communities and changing demographics. Cricket and pickleball are two sports that have seen an increase in demand in Kitchener in recent years.

Cricket

Though one of the lowest ranked activities within the LFMP, the plan acknowledges this sport has seen significant growth across Ontario. In 2023, Kitchener was identified as one of the most diverse cities in Canada. International immigration accounts for two thirds of the Region's growth in 2022. Sportsfields adapted to suit a range of interests and changing communities needs are a valuable asset within park spaces.

The challenge with creating new full-size cricket fields is the size of the facility necessary. Nearly three hectares are needed to accommodate the minimum 137 metre regulation-sized boundary. This is equivalent to two full sized soccer fields by area.

At the time of opening in 2021 RBJ Schlegel Park was the only cricket field in the city. The field on its own is not enough to meet the growing demand for the sport in Kitchener.

Adaptions to existing park sportsfields in 2023 and 2024 have created one additional full sized field (Kiwanis Park), one temporary location (Resurrection Park), one trial location (Laurentian Park), and one practice pitch (Westwood Park). Likewise the community has adapted the sport to facilities that are available. Street or Garden Cricket is being played on baseball diamonds and in other limited space areas in the city.

The purpose of the parks master plan is not to project need, but to acknowledge changing trends and establish cricket field standards in Kitchener. If the anticipated growth continues, future locations, needs and limitations are better understood and inform future infrastructure decisions.

Pickleball

Similar to cricket, pickleball ranked relatively low in the 2019 LFMP survey but has seen a significant growth in popularity since. Demand for pickleball and requests for adapted tennis courts have increased substantially since the first tennis courts in Kitchener were painted with pickleball lines in 2019. Since then, 15 more courts at five locations have been painted and adapted for pickleball.

In 2021, the second phase of RBJ Schlegel Park proposed adding active recreational amenities and sports courts to the previously developed playground, splashpad, and sportsfield facilities. Demand for pickleball was re-examined through public engagement and an overwhelming desire for dedicated pickleball courts was heard. As a result, four courts have been built and opened in 2023. These are the first and currently only single-use, lit pickleball courts in the city.

Pickleball is particularly popular among people over age 55, with the average participant age continuing to trend downward as popularity of the sport spreads. COVID-19 saw an unexpected spike in the sports popularity, likely driving public support for the courts at RBJ Schlegel Park. Traditional team sports and indoor racket sports were unavailable during COVID closures allowing an outdoor, accessible sport that is quick to learn and adaptable to existing court spaces primed to take off.

As the sport continues to grow, shared space within tennis courts will continue to be evaluated as existing courts are renovated or replaced. The dedicated court spaces at RBJ Schlegel Park will be monitored for use by on-site staff and through user feedback. Court usage at peak times is being monitored, and input from user groups for the City to create posted court rules is intended to reduce user wait times and conflicts.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
- **Region of Waterloo strategies**
- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**

Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Inclusion

The feeling of courts being overcrowded, making it difficult to find space to participate in sports, surfaced as a concern.

Engagement data also suggests that culturally recognizable programming and games can contribute positively to a welcoming space in which community members interact with each other. Space to play board games, including cultural games with tutorials emerged, as an opportunity to foster interactivity in parks. The current method of assessing sportsfield and court needs reinforces existing facilities; it does not take into account sports and games that are not yet available in Kitchener. Understanding these gaps will support creating truly inclusive opportunities in the city.

Other engagement themes related to this theme included a desire for cost-friendly methods to play sports and games, and building multi-use courts for all ages.

Health and wellbeing

Multiple data sets from public engagement show an equal balance of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the availability of courts, court amenities, and court surface quality.

Information

Respondents expressed uncertainty about the locations of sportsfields and courts and when they can use them. Some respondents recommended sharing this information publicly and clearly.

Safety

Respondents shared that existing courts and fields could be better maintained, sometimes illustrating the condition of the courts and fields as a safety risk.

Recommendations

Photo by Gone Flying

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

09: Public use of outdoor sportsfields facility program

Support the development of a public drop-in program for outdoor bookable sport facilities within public park settings.

When not in use by organized sport leagues fields are generally open for public use. These locations are valued open spaces and in some cases make up a large portion of the parks open space. There are some location exceptions such as artificial turf fields being fenced and gated during non-booked play.

Public engagement indicates a desire to know when fields and courts are available for general use. Evidence of damage to gates and fencing at higher class sportsfield facilities clearly show use of the facility outside of booked times.

This Parks Master Plan supports development of a drop-in program to establish a common, regularly occurring time when anyone can use the fields. Additional parameters will need to be established to assist with reducing wait times, frustration and conflict, such as posted facility rules and guidelines created with input from user groups.

23: Comprehensive court strategy

Conduct a complete asset management review and demand analysis for all sport courts in parks to inform the strategic renovation, replacement, or addition of sport courts.

One of the clearest conclusions drawn from public engagement is low court quality, both in surface and available supporting amenities.

There are two ways to address this. The first is to provide funding for like-for-like investment in restoring the courts to their original level of service.

The second is strategic re-investment. This goes beyond basic replacement of what exists and evaluates each court beyond its physical elements. Is it the right type court for the neighbourhood? Is it better suited as something else? Would lighting the court augment its use?

Demographics and recreational trends in sport courts fluctuate more quickly than the lifespan of courts, so re-assessing each court has many benefits and will maximize the investment made into each facility.

This Parks Master Plan supports the second option to invest strategically and look beyond basic like-for-like replacement.

The recommended sport court strategy should address regulating for-profit use of sports courts. All court facilities are currently free to use, non-bookable and for-profit use is restricted. Lack of indoor opportunities have driven various business interests outdoors such as private lessons and training. This should be comprehensively reviewed while maintaining public use interests as the priority.

Service levels for sport courts the following categories indicate size, function, amenities. See the Appendix in this booklet for detailed information and appropriate park classifications for each category.

Destination court

Destination courts focus on single sport uses that are high quality public sport court infrastructure. These courts are lit with performance surfacing, adequate parking facilities, and necessary supporting amenities like expanded seating and shade.

Community court

An “upgraded” version of a Local Court, the Community Court category can be variable pavement types, support multiple sport courts in one location, and could be eligible for lighting should the context allow for it.

Local court

Designed for local use and informed by local demographics and public input. Local Courts are smaller, unlit, multi-use half-court type pavement areas intended to be walked to and used for many court sports.

34: Strategic locations for sportsfield lighting

Continue or support future initiatives to install sportsfield lighting in parks that enable increased programming. Priority given to City Wide classified parks with available parking and meaningful separation from residences.

Lighting any outdoor sport facility extends each night by an average of 2 hours, doubling its playing time by adding a second bookable time slot. Lighting can also extend playing seasons when days shorten. It promotes efficient programming and operating logistics by focusing increased use in fewer locations. Lights throughout the city's sportsfield inventory provides a tool to adapt to park use trends by transitioning lesser used sportsfields to other recreational uses in park locations.

Fields eligible for lighting need to be selected carefully to support parking, minimize neighbourhood disruption, and provide potential for sport pairing or multi-use facilities to optimize the investment in lighting.

Standards for lighting sportsfields and sport courts are established below. In addition to the illumination targets, all performance lighting in parks will employ:

- Commitment to the latest technology. LED sportsfield and court lighting is now industry standard, widely available with cost-effective installation and operation.
- Reduction in energy by 40-60% compared to previous HID technology.
- Minimization of light spill/glare with shields and use of indirect light.
- Dimming capabilities to reduce light output by 80% during periods of non-use and shoulder times after field bookings.

Implementation

Modern LED technology has been used in all new sportsfield and courts since 2018 and is the standard going forward.

The existing inventory, however, remains predominantly high intensity discharge (HID), which is less efficient and uses more energy as a comparable output of LED light. Of the 18 sportsfields that are lit at the time of writing this master plan, only Breithaupt installed in 2019, and RBJ Schlegel Park installed in 2020 use LED lamps.

Retrofitting sportsfield lighting should be done at the end of its life span, as significant infrastructure repair or as replacement is needed. Due to its seasonal and restricted hourly usage, the cost to replace older HID systems far exceeds the power reduction savings despite the 40-60% energy reductions from using LED lights.

Converting to modern systems and using updated lighting targets and control methods will be achieved through replacements and new development scenarios.

Type	Sport or court category	Illumination (fc)	Colour rendition index (CRI)	Uniformity	Colour (K)
Park (for reference)*	*General*	*0.8-1.5*	*80*	*2:1*	*2700-3000*
Field	Baseball diamond	50 (infield) 30 (outfield)	75	1.7:1	4000-4500
Field	Athletic	30	75	2:1	4000-4500
Field	Cricket	50 (infield) 30 (outfield)	75	1.7:1	4000-4500
Court	Destination	50	75	1.7:1	4000-4500
Court	Community	20	60	2:1	3000-4000

Table: Illumination guidelines for active park settings

Future lighting considerations

Recent Provincial policy changes, specifically through Bill 23 impact on the Planning Act in November 2022, will, over time, result in a reduction of 50-85% of new parkland for all future residential development. Even prior to these policy changes, residential development over the past 20 years has not yielded adequate total park or open space area for new sportsfield development - typically due to size constraints.

As an example, a single regulation sized soccer field is 7,000 m^2. Of the ten parks in the Doon South community built between 2000 and 2010, only one, Wetland Way, is large enough at 7,300 m^2. The remaining parks cannot host full-sized, programmable sportsfields and the necessary infrastructure and amenities to support them.

Recognizing the impact of policy changes on the inventory, investment into sportsfield lighting, artificial turf, and amenity supports such as parking and washroom facilities, is the recommended route to best manage sport infrastructure in parks to maximize programmable use.

Consolidating organized sport use in fewer sportsfield with higher service levels will, in effect, open existing sportsfield locations for other park uses such as mini soccer fields, practice cricket pitches, blastball backstops, scrub diamonds, or open fields for any recreational purpose.

37: Artificial turf for sportsfields

Continue to invest in the conversion of eligible natural turf sportsfields to artificial turf, subject to future demand analysis.

Woodside Park, containing the city's first two artificial turf fields, demonstrates the potential success of artificial turf fields. Continuing to consider eligible natural turf fields for conversion to artificial turf applications will support maximizing programmed use of outdoor sportsfields.

Converting sportsfields to artificial turf addresses the pressures of limited future park acquisitions and a reduction of park provision through changes in provincial legislation. Artificial turf contributes to sustainable management through water conservation, creating more a more resilient sportsfield inventory as more extreme weather patterns emerge like droughts and storms.

Photo by Steve Bendo, R.K. & Associates Consulting

Appendix:
Design standards

Introduction

Many standards inform sportsfield and sport court construction, for bench types and lengths, fencing and surface types, to backstop heights that suit each sports-field or court type.

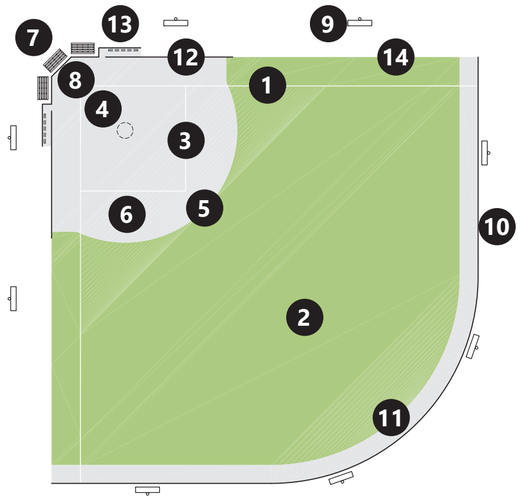
The following appendix details the standards that apply to varying service levels and the required supporting amenities for sportsfields and sport courts in Kitchener. These standards will inform new park development and park renovation.

Sportsfields: baseball diamonds

Baseball diamonds can be built in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. There are nearly three dozen different combinations of age groups and sport types, often each with their own unique recommended dimensions for mound, basepath and outfield fence distances. There are four general types of diamond sports: baseball (also referred to as hardball), Fastpitch, Slo-pitch and T-ball. A variation of cricket can also be played on baseball diamonds.

This master plan recommends four consolidated dimensions of infield and outfield distances to maximize play on each type of facility, and allow flexibility for park specific spatial restrictions. These layouts accommodate baseball (from T-Ball to Senior levels), Fastpitch (from U6 to Masters) and Slo-pitch (from U6 to 40+)

To date there are no artificial turf baseball diamonds. As an "air sport" that has less wear and tear on turf surfacing, there is little to no shutdown period required to prevent over-compaction and over-use of the grass.



	Feature	Field type				Field class		
		Hardball / stadium	Multi-purpose (large)	Multi-purpose (small)	T-Ball or local	B	A2	A1
1	Outfield distance - fines (feet)	320	280	230	180-200	By type		
2	Outfield distance - centre (feet)	380	320	260	200-230	By type		
3	Baseline distance (feet)	90	75	75	45-60	By type		
4	Pitching distance (feet)	60.5	46	46	35	By type		
5	Infield diameter (feet)	95	80	80	50	By type		
6	Infield surface	Grass and clay	Clay or stone	Clay or stone	Stone	By type		
7	Bleacher seating	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	By type		
8	Backstop height (feet)	30	20-30	10-20	10	By type		
9	Lighting	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
10	Outfield fence	5' minimum	5' minimum	Optional	No	Optional	Yes	Yes
11	Warning track	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Optional
12	Players fencing	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Players benches	Covered	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Covered
14	Line fencing	Yes	Optional	Optional	No	No	Optional	Yes
N/A	Parking spaces*	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	None	No	Yes	Yes
	Appropriate park location by classification	**City**	**Neighbourhood Community City**	**Neighbourhood Community City**	**Neighbourhood**	**Neighbourhood**	**Community**	**City**

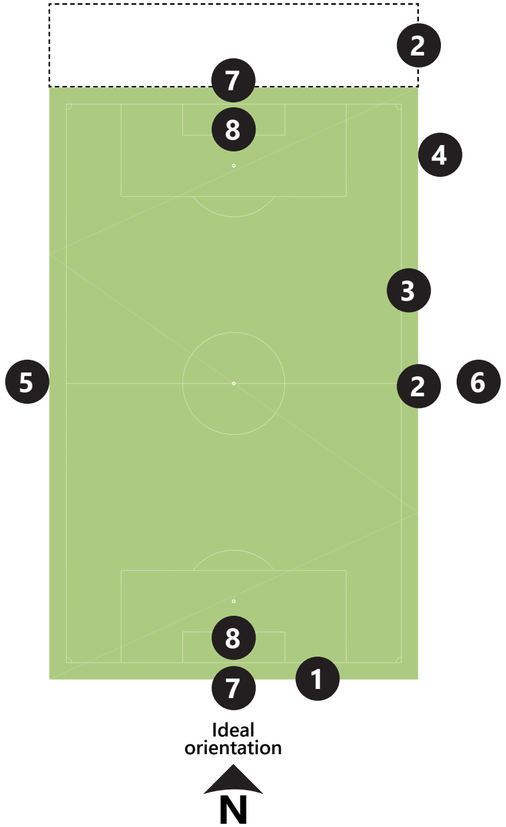
* Zoning refers to the minimum number of parking spaces required by land use regulations. Lighting refers to the doubling of parking demand when fields are lit due to the overlapping turnover of booked time slots

Sportsfields: athletic fields

The most common use of rectangular athletic fields in Kitchener is soccer. Over 75% of the entire inventory is booked by soccer organizations serving all ages. The standards developed as part of this master plan reflect the three most common sizes in demand from local and regional organizations - full sized, half sized, and mini (1/6th sized). Sizes are selected for each park to suit the park context, balancing the organized sport demand with what the park can support.

Other sports such as field hockey, lacrosse, disc sports, and football with additional space for end-zones, can all be accommodated in these full sized dimensions.

One exception that falls outside of these categories is a full sized FIFA field. The field of play for the highest level of FIFA play is 105 x 68 m, with an additional 2 m “pitch area” outside the 3m grassed run out space. Should the City pursue construction of an international competition level pitch within a park, this additional area would be accounted for, in addition to unique considerations for stadium seating and parking for example.



	Feature	Field size			Field class			
		Full	Half / 9v9	Mini	B	A2	A1	T (Artificial turf)
1	Width (meters)	60	45	18	By size			
2	Length (meters)	100 (+36 for Football)	60	27	By size			
3	Runout (meters)	3	3	3	By size			
4	Lighting	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Required
5	Players benches	Permanent	Portable	Portable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Covered
6	Bleacher seating	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Backstops	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	As required	15-20′	15-20′
8	Goals (feet)	8′x24′	6′x18′	6′x16′ (confirm)	By size			
N/A	Parking spaces*	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Appropriate park location by classification	**By classification**	**Neighbourhood Community City**	**Community City**	**Neighbourhood**	**Community**	**City**	**City**

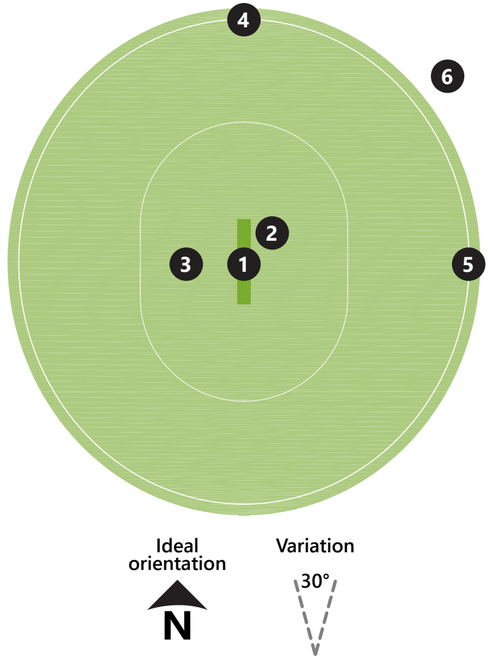
* Zoning refers to the minimum number of parking spaces required by land use regulations. Lighting refers to the doubling of parking demand when fields are lit due to the overlapping turnover of booked time slots

Sportsfields: cricket fields

Regulation size cricket fields are the largest sportsfields by area among all sport uses. A full sized field with maximum boundary limits is over 17,000 m^2. By comparison, the largest versions of baseball diamonds and athletic fields are approximately 9,000 m^2 and 7,000 m^2 respectively.

There are relatively few regulation size cricket fields in Kitchener. Only 2 regulation sized at the time of this master plan with an expectation of growth moving forward.

To accommodate the growing demand while balancing the sheer size of a regulation sized pitch, two additional cricket field size categories have been proposed as part of this strategy. These reflect a similar approach to ball diamonds - to select the appropriate sized facility for a variety of age groups, and adapt to restrictions of park sizes.



	Feature	Field size			Field class		
		Regulation	Junior	Practice / Other	B	A2	A1
1	Pitch material	By classification			Stonedust	Stonedust	T - Artificial turf
2	Pitch dimensions (meters)	51.7 x 3.6	22.5 x 3.6	22.5 x 3.6	By size		
3	Infield distance (meters)	27.4	27.4	27.4	By size		
4	Outfield Distance - long (meters)	150	137 (minimum)	Variable	By size		
5	Outfield distance - square (meters)	137 (minimum)	Variable	Variable	By size		
6	Lighting	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
N/A	Parking spaces*	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	Zoning - 20 Lighting - 40	No	Yes	Yes
	Appropriate park location by classification	**Community City**	**Neighbourhood Community City**	**Neighbourhood**	**Neighbourhood**	**Community**	**City**

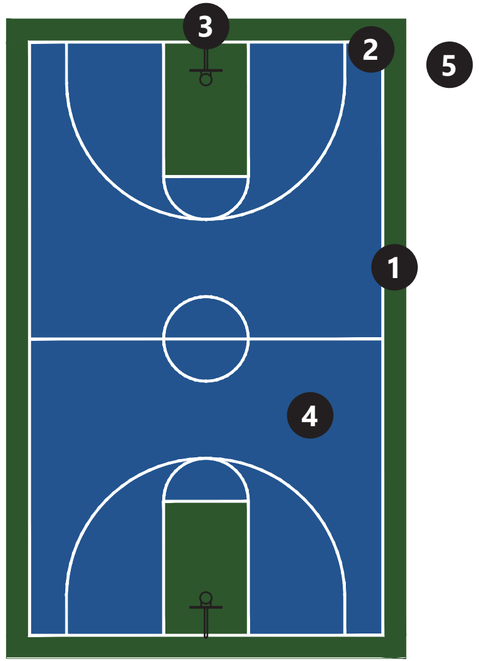
* Zoning refers to the minimum number of parking spaces required by land use regulations. Lighting refers to the doubling of parking demand when fields are lit due to the overlapping turnover of booked time slots

Sport courts: basketball

When situated in the right location and context, basketball courts can be immensely popular community gathering spaces. They can also exist as local amenity for multi-use courts because of their hard surface.

The categories proposed in this master plan will help designers and community members determine what works best for any given park location by outlining the expected amenities and usage of each courts service level. For example, performance surface types combined with lighting will draw more users, leading to a demand for parking.

Note that basketball courts, particularly half courts, can be oriented in many different configurations beyond the traditional rectangle. Half courts, or a combination of full and half courts, can be more engaging and interesting if integrated within a larger park environment, oriented to allow for unique shapes, positioning, and informal seating opportunities.



Ideal orientation

N

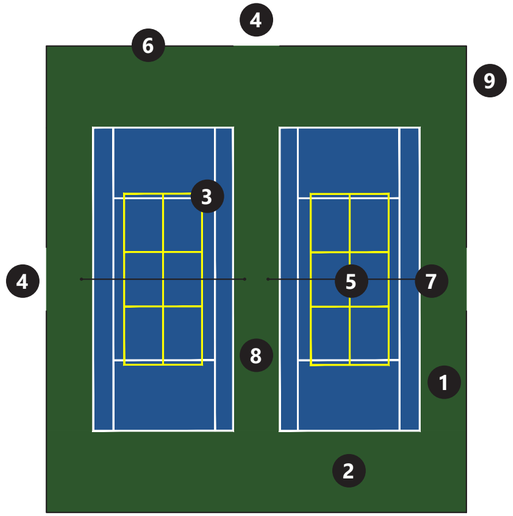
	Feature	Local	Community	Destination
1	Spacing - runout (feet)	3		
2	Dimensions and line painting (feet)	Dimensions: 50 x 84 Painting: 2" white		
3	Net height - full court (feet)	10		
3	Net height - half court (feet)*	8 to 10	8 to 10	10
4	Surface treatment	Asphalt	Asphalt	Performance / Coloured
5	Lighting	No	Eligible#	Yes
N/A	Parking (per court)	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 4
N/A	Seating (per court)	1	2	2
N/A	Shade	Tree planting	Tree planting or structure	Tree planting and structure
	Appropriate park location by classification	**Neighbourhood**	**Community City**	**City**

* Consider lowered nets for half court, local or community fields to encourage youth and accessible play
\# Follow lighting guidelines in Trails & Lighting to determine application of lights for a Community Court

Sport courts: tennis

Tennis courts provide the best opportunity for multi-use sport facilities. Lines can be doubled to include pickleball, cross court basketball lines and nets, and removable net posts to adapt to other uses such as road hockey, soccer or unplanned pavement games.

Multi-use sport court facilities should only be designed in Local or Community Courts. Destination level court will remain single sport to avoid conflicts between user groups, as all courts in Kitchener remain first come first serve.



Ideal orientation

N

	Feature	Local	Community	Destination
1	Spacing - sides (feet)	12		
2	Spacing - ends (feet)	21		
3	Dimensions and line painting (feet)	Dimensions: 27 x 78 Painting: 2" white and 2" yellow (secondary)		
4	Entries	Open, no gates		
5	Net height	42" at post, 36" at middle		
6	Fencing height (feet)	8	8 to 10	10
6	Windscreens	No	No*	Yes
7	Posts	Removable	Removable	Removable
8	Surface treatment	Asphalt	Asphalt	Performance / Coloured
9	Lighting	No	Eligible#	Yes
N/A	Parking (per court)	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 4
N/A	Seating (per court)	1	1	2
N/A	Shade	Tree planting	Tree planting or structure	Tree planting and structure
	Appropriate park location by classification	**Neighbourhood**	**Community City**	**City**

* Windscreens may be used if high volume of pickleball play is anticipated
\# Follow lighting guidelines in Trails & Lighting to determine application of lights for a Community Court

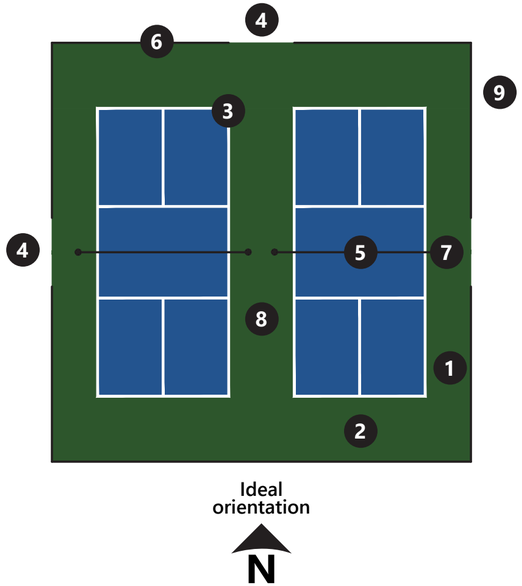
Sport courts: pickleball

Outdoor pickleball courts in public parks are relatively new in Kitchener, particularly compared to dedicated tennis and basketball facilities.

Kitchener's first dedicated, purpose-built pickleball courts were built and opened in 2023 at RBJ Schlegel Park. As the facility is used over time, the City will continue to improve the court space and its amenities to suit Kitchener's pickleball community.

Similar to tennis courts, removable netting is recommended to utilize the courts for multiple purposes during shoulder seasons (road hockey as an example), and potentially during seasons as needs may arise.

Due to the low inventory of dedicated pickleball courts, it is expected that the initial development of these court spaces will attract large numbers of users as the sport continues to grow. This will lend itself to the development of Community Courts or higher service level courts to consider any expansion scenario.



	Feature	Local	Community	Destination
1	Spacing - sides (feet)	7 at end, 10 in between		
2	Spacing - ends (feet)	10		
3	Dimensions and line painting (feet)	Dimensions: 20 x 44 Painting: 2" white		
4	Entries	Open, no gates		
5	Net height	36" at post, 34" at middle		
6	Fencing height (feet)	8		
6	Windscreens	No	Yes	Yes
7	Posts	Permanent	Removable	Removable
8	Surface treatment	Asphalt	Asphalt	Performance / Coloured
9	Lighting	No	Eligible#	Yes
N/A	Parking (per court)	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 2	Zoning - 2 Recommended - 4
N/A	Seating (per court)	1	1	2
N/A	Shade	Tree planting	Tree planting or structure	Tree planting and structure
	Appropriate park location by classification	**Neighbourhood**	**Community City**	**City**

Follow lighting guidelines in Trails & Lighting to determine best practices and decision making for lighting a Community Court

Recommendations summary

09: Public use of outdoor sportsfields facility program

Support the development of a public drop-in program for outdoor bookable sport facilities within public park settings.

23: Comprehensive court strategy

Conduct a complete asset management review and demand analysis for all sport courts in parks to inform the strategic renovation, replacement, or addition of sport courts.

34: Strategic locations for sportsfield lighting

Continue or support future initiatives to install sportsfield lighting in parks that enable increased programming. Priority given to City Wide classified parks with available parking and meaningful separation from residences.

37: Artificial turf for sportsfields

Continue to invest in the conversion of eligible natural turf sportsfields to artificial turf, subject to future demand analysis.

Photo by Gone Flying

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Trails & Lighting

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan

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Related sections

Places
Spaces
Community Gardens
Community Health & Wellness
Dogs
Downtown Kitchener
Natural Spaces & Climate Adaptation
Park Design Approach
Play
Signature & Feature Parks
Sports & Games
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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee 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 is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.

Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

There are many reasons to use and enjoy park spaces: to play, exercise, interact with others, relax, or simply to be outside. The trails that lead into and through each park are an important consideration of park use. Trails connect parks, provide access to them, and are often a place for activity through running, biking, walking, and more.

This topic focuses on trails used within parks that do not form part of a larger transportation network. It establishes a standard for park access, trail surfaces, and park lighting.

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Historical development

Considering the long history of park spaces in Kitchener, improving accessibility to and within those spaces is relatively new. Victoria Park was developed in 1896 and most other parks were created between the 1950s and 1980s.

When park trails were built during this time, they were often made of stonedust: a crushed and compacted limestone, and were a width of between 1.8 and 2.4 meters (six and eight feet). Stonedust trails only last as long as they are maintained. Aside from stonedust, surfaces were paved using tar and chip methods as a low-cost alternative to asphalt. These paved surface needed less maintenance but had a shorter lifespan than asphalt. Many Kitchener parks that have not been renovated over the past 20 years have one of these two surfaces.

It wasn't until the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was passed in 2005 that rules guided the accessibility of parks today.

The majority of parks in Kitchener were developed during a time without the formal requirement of a trail through and connecting to park amenities. The result of which is now most parks consist of a playground or seating area surrounded by turf with little to no trail access. Any existing trails were typically built in larger park facilities. Today these are critical components to provide access into and through open spaces.

Trail lighting has a similar history in park spaces. Sportsfield lighting in parks dates back to the 1960s, but general park lighting has only been installed as needed, outside of the City Wide, Signature or Feature parks like Victoria Park.

Cycling & Trails Master Plan

The Cycling and Trails Master Plan (CTMP) was approved in 2020 as an update to the City's 2010 Cycling Master Plan and 2012 Multi-use Pathways and Trails Master Plan. The goal of the CTMP is to provide connected networks of on-street cycling routes and off-street trails.

Off-street trails in the CTMP rely almost exclusively on public park spaces. These routes will be created based on active transportation needs in Kitchener. Where CTMP trails overlap with routes within parks, the standards of the Cycling and Trails Master Plan apply. For example, Cherry Park has the Transit-Hub connection trail, a major route between the Iron Horse Trail and the future Regional Transit Hub. The trail is paved and lit , which is above and beyond the traditional Neighbourhood park classification standards.

Trail surface types

Trails within park spaces can be constructed of several materials. For local parks, the choices narrow to a select few: stonedust (crushed limestone), asphalt, and concrete. Other materials may be considered under special circumstances, such as re-enforced turf or permeable pavements. These other materials make up only a small portion of total trails in Kitchener. Environmental impacts such as emissions from the install, maintenance, and disposal of infrastructure materials (referred to as embodied carbon) must also be coordinated.

Category	Stonedust	Asphalt	Concrete
Cost - installation	Lowest	Mid	Highest
Cost - maintenance	Highest	Mid	Lowest
Plowed	No	Yes	Yes
Lifespan	Seasonal	15-20 years	20-40 years
Contents	100% aggregates (quarried limestone)	95% aggregates 5% asphaltic cement (petroleum by-product)	84% aggregates 10% cement 5% fly ash 1% water *(Class C2 concrete used as most often used for trail surfaces)*
Embodied carbon ($kgCO_2e$/tonne)^	10-15	40-75	78-100*
Suitable uses	Natural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, floodplains	General trail use, sloped accesses, access to park amenities, winter clearing eligible trails	Park entry transitions, narrowed trails, greater stability needs, areas inaccessible for asphalt installation

Table 1. Description of trail surface types and their required costs, maintenance, environmental impact and suitable uses

^Values estimated based on the material components and intended only to compare trail materials selections.

*Cement accounts for the majority of embodied carbon at approximately 680 to 900 $kgCO_2e$/tonne of cement used.

Current lighting approach

Kitchener parks, sportsfields, sports courts, skateparks, and high-traffic trails are typically lit to extend their use beyond day time hours.

Other less busy park spaces and trails within them are typically not. There is no standard that requires new or renovated Kitchener parks to include lighting for pedestrians.

Where no standards exist, some existing City plans and strategies mention lighting:

Development Manual (2021):
The Development Manual is a series of requirements that all development in the city must adhere to. For the purposes of this Parks Master Plan , the Development Manual guides park construction methods that developers must follow. Walkway lighting is described as an opportunity for cost-sharing between the City and developers.

Cycling and Trails Master Plan (CTMP, 2020):
Action 1D-2 (p. 28) refers to developing and implementing a strategy for lighting on trails based on traffic, land use context (for example, within residential or industrial zoning), and trail classification. This is reflected as a Key Performance Indicator within the Safety section of the CTMP as well.

One of the unique considerations of lighting in parks, compared to most other infrastructure, is continual energy costs. Any general-purpose pedestrian light in a public park runs for 3,900 hours each year on average. A typical LED pedestrian lamp uses 44 watts at mostly off-peak usage hours.

One lamp in the landscape, then, costs about $14 each year in energy use, with LED lamps lasting up to 100,000 hours. Managing energy consumption and replacement costs for hundreds to thousands of potential lamps across the park network is a critical consideration of new standards.

There are environmental factors as well. Similar to a human circadian rhythm, wildlife depend on the darkness of night to regulate sleep-wake cycles.

There is mounting scientific evidence documenting the impact of artificial light on the ecology of the night. Parks Canada (Guidelines and Specifications for Outdoor Lighting at Parks Canada, 2016) outlines these impacts including increased predation risks, foraging activities, and insect reproduction patterns.

Walter Bean Grand River Trail

Work on the Walter Bean Grand River Trail was started in 1999 and has been made possible through many partnerships with community organizations. It is a widely recognized trail system within and beyond Kitchener's city limits.

The 2010 Parks Strategic Plan identified several gaps, two of which have been developed including the Grand River Bridge (2010) and Chicopee-Vale slope stabilization (2011). The partnership with Bingemans in 2013 further strengthened the vision for the riverside trail.

Three gaps identified in the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan remain, including:

1. Bridgeport North (Carisbrook Drive)
2. Forwell Quarry
3. Freeport Floodplains

The Walter Bean Grand River Trail has significant gaps that require on-road detours from the river until these gaps are resolved.

Some sections of the trail have been subject to continuous seasonal and severe weather damage which have made these sections suitable for hiking only. The trail surface can no longer support cycling.

Trail edges continue to be maintained through summer flail mowing and annual invasive species control for Giant Hogweed continues through these sections.

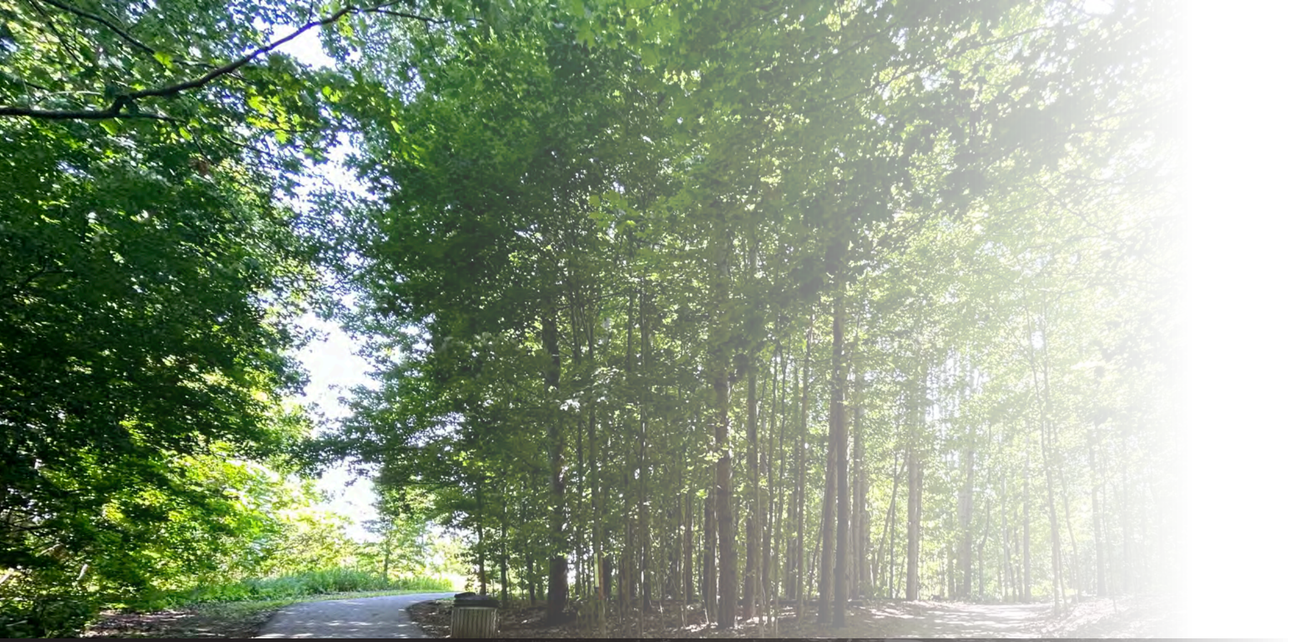
One such section along Deer Ridge Golf Club, has been officially designated for hiking only since 2014. This section of the Walter Bean trail is approximately three kilometres between the private golf course and Grand River. The lands are owned by the Grand River Conservation Authority at the time of writing this master plan and range in width from nine to 50 meters. Maintaining access to the Grand River along this section has been challenging as storm events and ice buildup continually erode natural material.

Data Sources

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

- **Legislation**
- **Equitable engagement**
- **Engagement with the broader community**
- **Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**
- **Engagement with partner organizations**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **External research**
- **Policy**
- **City of Kitchener strategies**
- **Region of Waterloo strategies**
- **Best practices**
- **City of Kitchener staff experience**



Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Barriers to accessing parks and trails include a lack of trail lighting, inaccessible trail slopes, and poor trail maintenance (e.g., winter snow and ice removal, uneven pavement, cracks, etc.) Gravel trails were highlighted as an explanation for difficulties getting to larger parks.

Environmental Sustainability

Concern for the sustainability of pavement solutions emerged from engagement data. Those engaged desired trails and maintenance solutions that have a minimal impact on the environment. This includes environmental impacts on surrounding trees and natural areas from materials, installation, and winter maintenance such as de-icing.

Inclusion

Lighting emerged in two data sets as factors that prevent use or elicit not feeling welcome or safe in park spaces. More lighting is suggested to make it easier to enjoy in winter months and appear welcoming during evening and night time hours.

Lighting parks provides access to residents who may not be able to visit them during daytime hours or during the winter months when daylight hours are decreased.

Safety

Lighting parks is a critical component of safety in public spaces. Park goers equate the feeling of safety with well-lit parks and access points, and they often requested more of it in our parks. Lighting alone does not guarantee safety, and lighting parks should be paired with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to contribute to park safety.

> *"Nice lighting (that doesn't cause night pollution) would be a help as well on trails and keep the paths safer. As well I work 9-5 so by the time I'm home it's dark and the trails we would walk during the summer are dark and not very inviting or safe feeling."*

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

Walter Bean Trail support

Support the pursuit of a continuous Walter Bean Grand River Trail and complete the feasibility report of the entire corridor to determine the long-term viability of the trail.

The City has been committed to developing the Walter Bean Trail since 1999. To achieve the objectives of a continuous trail and connection to the Grand River a decision must be made about the section along the Deer Ridge Golf Club. Options include re-constructing in the same location, re-locating and re-enforcing sections of the existing trail, or bypassing this river section to maintain trail continuity.

This decision may be faced in other trail sections as climate change contributes to more frequent and severe storms. Criteria to support decision-making should include cost implications such as purchasing land, construction, and maintenance costs as well as other considerations such as input from First Nations rights holders, user experience, and risk assessment. A feasibility study must be completed of the entire trail corridor to assess the long-term viability of the original Walter Bean Grand River Trail corridor vision. The City's responsibility is to balance the desire to be near and access the water with the sustainability of those efforts.

08: Park lighting standards

Establish park lighting criteria and policies to determine park eligibility and standards for pedestrian lighting.

Criteria for city-wide implementation

Some parks currently have lit facilities but no other source of lighting on the route to the facility. Sportsfields, courts, and skateparks may be lit but with no pedestrian or parking lot lighting to guide people to them; there is currently no guiding city policy or requirement to do so.

Not every park location can or should be lit. A balance must be struck between wide-spread implementation of lighting and lighting spaces as needed. This balance is necessary to maintain a sustainable long-term energy consumption, costs and inventory management of all-year outdoor lighting infrastructure.

Lighting should only be considered applying all of the following criteria to each park.

Lighting criteria

Destination and location based
Lighting locations must provide direct access to and from major public destinations such as community centres, schools, libraries, shopping centres, and transit connections.

Anticipated development
Lighting within a park may be considered when surrounding development is anticipated to significantly increase the demand and use of the local park or trail connection.

Amenity based
Lighting in a park may be provided to serve as a pedestrian connection to and from lit outdoor park facilities like sportsfields, courts or skateparks.

Surveillance
Adequate natural surveillance, or the ability to see in and out of an area, must be present in order for lighting to have a positive impact on public safety. When natural surveillance is not feasible, the public should not be encouraged to enter into any park or naturalized area through lighting trails or park amenity areas.

Natural surveillance is a core strategy of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED); A site design approach that uses the built environment to promote natural surveillance by the community to minimize the need for traditional security measures..

Context
Adjacent land uses and impacts must be assessed prior to installation of lighting. This includes the light itself, the activity that it is extending into the night hours, and how it impacts the surrounding area.

Environment
Parks adjacent to or included in naturalized areas will be excluded from consideration for lighting.

Park classification
All City, Feature, and Signature classified parks will be considered for internal park lighting, provided the above criteria can be met. There are 15 parks within these classifications; only three of which currently have comprehensive park lighting. These parks are defined by their programming and serve higher intensity recreational uses and activities.

Acknowledgement of risk
Lighting will not inherently reduce crime and increase safety. Parks Canada reporting suggests there is little evidence to support the claim that more lighting equals greater safety (Guidelines and Specifications for Outdoor Lighting at Parks Canada, 2016). Based on the engagement data from Kitchener residents and park goers, there is a greater comfort to using trails that are lit. A standard to include lighting in parks is warranted, however it must be acknowledged that lighting will not reduce criminal activity by itself. Other environmental factors such as context and natural surveillance play an equally important role.

Best practices

In combination with lighting criteria and CPTED principles, the following guidelines to lighting in parks can be applied moving forward; (with the understanding that lighting is not synonymous with safety).

Lighting standards:

- Target illumination range – 0.8 to 1.5 average footcandles;
- Target colour rendition index value (CRI) – 80;
- Maximum colour temperature 3000K, target 2700K with exception of sportsfield or other performance lighting.

Timing & efficient use:

- Limited to park hours of operation according to the current Parks By-Law (6 a.m. to 11 p.m. currently) with exception made for community facilities that are open beyond these hours;
- Centrally controlled via photometric cells;

Environmental:

- Provide lighting only when necessary;
- Illuminate at minimum practical levels;
- Impact as small an area as possible and is practical;
- Shorten illumination time as much as is practical;
- Colouring of light to be as low-frequency as is practical (red-shift or “warmer” colours);
- *DarkSky compliant and use LED fixtures or the latest high-efficiency lighting solutions.

**DarkSky is a third party advocacy group with the goal to reduce light pollution and promote responsible outdoor lighting that is beautiful, healthy, and functional.*

Trails and park lighting are inherently linked to accessibility and safety within a park space; they are well appreciated and desired assets within the community. As parks continue to be built and renovated, a consistent and strategic approach to pavement and lighting will be employed under the guidelines proposed within this document.

18: Trail surfaces in parks

Establish that all new and renovated park developments include stable, firm surfaces of asphalt or concrete, unless otherwise required to be stonedust for environmental reasons.

Whether it be cost, environmental, or user preference considerations (e.g., preferring stonedust for running comfort, or asphalt for smooth surface), there is often a choice made at the design level to use a loose material like compacted stone, or paved surface like asphalt as the primary surface type.

All renovated parks and their access points will standardize to asphalt or concrete pavement wherever possible. Paved trails allow all parks to be eligible for winter maintenance and plowing, and provide a consistent, firm, and stable surface throughout the seasons improving accessibility.

Asphalt is often the best economic choice for a stable, accessible trail. Mitigations can be made to reduce embodied carbon by including recycled asphalt product (RAP) in the mix design, saving 27 kilograms CO_2e per tonne of RAP used. Ontario Provincial Standard Specifications allow up to 15% RAP. For park applications, 15% RAP is recommended to be standardized.

Shifting to asphalt or concrete will result in changes to seasonal maintenance and a shift in operating procedures. Seasonal maintenance of stonedust trails include annual spring grooming whereas concrete and asphalt trail maintenance would include seals and topcoats for surface cracks and potential saw cutting of heaving joints when necessary. Paved trail surfaces also carry different environmental impacts from winter maintenance and deicing procedures.

A paved trail surface standard is consistent with the current Development Manual requiring all new parks to use asphalt as the surface material for interior trails.

Development considerations

Accessible trails have been required in park renovations since 2005. All parks will continue to include new and resurfaced trails as a critical connective, recreational and accessible component regardless of its classification.

There are specific requirements that will be considered for all new and retrofit trail installations:

- Maintain the existing maximum trail slope standard of 5% established in the CTMP and Development Manual.
- Full-scale park renovations must include paved trail access through and into the park.
- All amenities must include an accessible connection to and from park access points.
- Drop curb access in each park to and from a roadway must be achieved so long as safe pedestrian or cyclist entry into the right-of-way can be achieved.

Recommendations summary

Walter Bean trail support

Support the pursuit of a continuous Walter Bean Grand River Trail and complete the feasibility report of the entire corridor to determine the long-term viability of the trail.

08: Park lighting standards

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Winter Use

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Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

Canadians experience four distinct seasons every year and our park amenities are built to withstand the impacts of the seasons.

However, not all amenities such as parks, trails, outdoor pools, splashpads, public washrooms, and community gardens are accessible during the colder months. These spaces cannot be used in the same way in the colder months due to snow and ice buildup, freezing conditions, and lack of winter maintenance.

Although a significant portion of parks and trails are neither maintained nor accessible, some are maintained to enable community members to enjoy activities in the winter when other amenities have reduced daylight hours.

This booklet will profile park activities specifically geared to winter use, and how Kitchener's parks can improve recreational opportunities during the winter months.

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Winter park programming and services

Toboggan hills

Toboggan hills provide value for people of all ages. People use toboggan hills in various ways including sledding, tubing, and more. Although these activities can be very enjoyable, they also pose a safety risk when hills are used inappropriately or in certain conditions.

The City of Kitchener has a toboggan hill inspection program to confirm that hills are safe to use. Where hills are safe for tobogganing, they are listed on the City of Kitchener website. Hills safe for tobogganing have a sign posted with information regarding their use, closures, safety recommendations, staffing, and a "use at your own risk" message. In addition, approved toboggan hills are inspected daily when open. Where hills are not safe or suited for toboggan use, snow fencing may be installed, shrubs planted, and other barriers such as straw bales put in place to prevent use. In some cases, these hills are monitored for unsafe use.

There are currently three toboggan hills listed on the City's website:

- McLennan Park
- Foxglove Park
- Hillside Park

Winter programming 2024

Toboggan hills

1. *Foxglove Park, 28 Foxglove Crescent*
2. *Hillside Park, 15 Hill Street*
3. *McLennan Park, 901 Ottawa Street South*

Community centre rinks

1. *Bridgeport Community Centre, 58 Tyson Drive*
2. *Centreville-Chicopee Community Centre, 141 Morgan Avenue*
3. *Chandler Mowat Community Centre, 222 Chandler Drive*
4. *Country Hills Community Centre, 100 Rittenhouse Road*
5. *Forest Heights Community Centre, 1700 Queens Blvd*
6. *Williamsburg Community Centre, 1187 Fischer-Hallman Road*
7. *Mill-Courtland Community Centre, 231 Madison Ave South*
8. *Stanley Park Community Centre, 505 Franklin Street North*
9. *Victoria Hills Community Centre/Gzowski Park, 80 Chopin Drive*

Neighbourhood rinks

1. *Admiral Park, 93 Roxborough Avenue*
2. *Alpine Park, 175 Kingswood Drive*
3. *Belmont Park, 285 Belmont Avenue West*
4. *Carl Zehr Square, 200 King Street West*
5. *Cherry Park, 84 Strange Street*
6. *Conway Park, Conway Drive bewtween Wayne Drive and Gay Cres.*
7. *Country Clair Park 34 Country Clair Street*
8. *George Lippert Park 200 Weber Street West*
9. *Glendale Park, 130 Glen Road*
10. *Guelph Park, 800 Guelph Street*
11. *Hewitt Park, 269 Seabrook Drive*
12. *Kiwanis Park, 1000 Kiwanis Park Drive*
13. *Lakeside Park, 134 Lakeside Drive*
14. *Morrison Park, 245 Morrison Road*
15. *Pioneer Park West, 40 Green Valley Drive*
16. *Timberlane Park, 58 Meadow Woods Crescent*
17. *Vanier Park, 335 Vanier Drive*
18. *Victoria Park, 57 Jubilee Drive*
19. *Weber Park, 380 Frederick Street*

Arenas

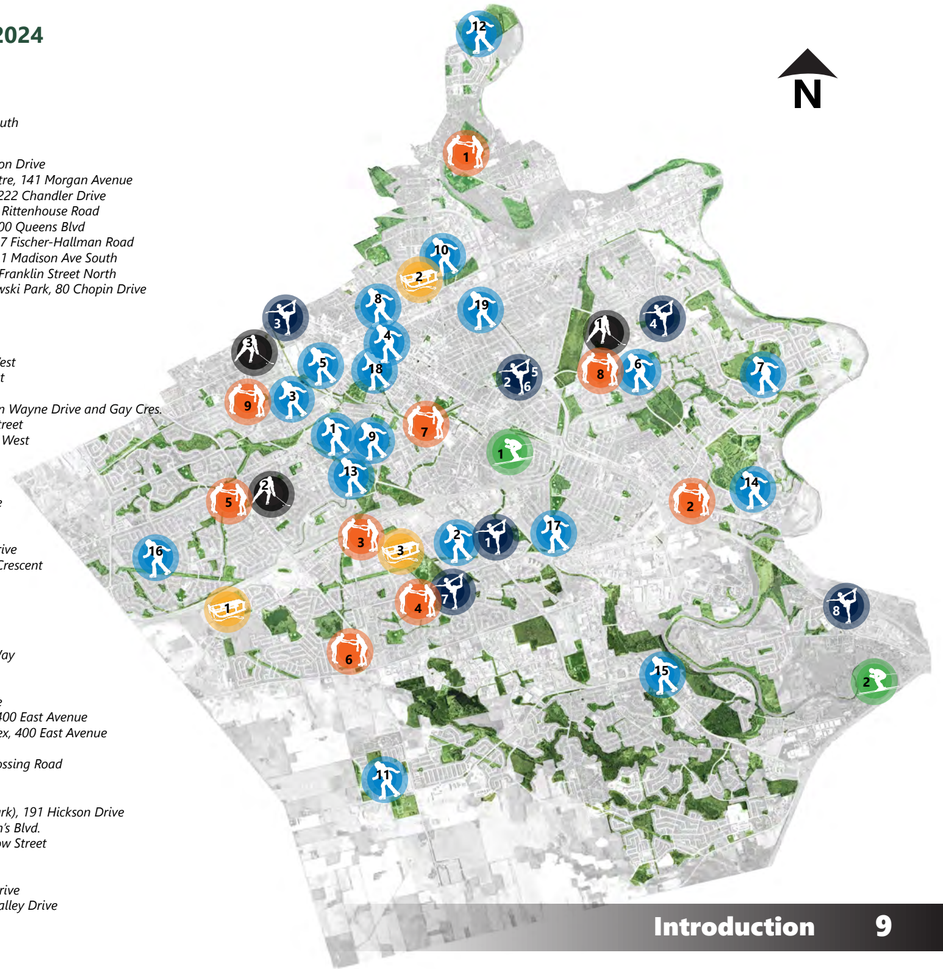
1. *Activa Sportsplex, 135 Lennox Lewis Way*
2. *Dom Cardillo Arena, 400 East Avenue*
3. *Don McLaren Arena, 61 Green Street*
4. *Grand River Arena, 555 Heritage Drive*
5. *Kinsmen/Kiwanis Twin Park Ice Rink, 400 East Avenue*
6. *Kitchener Memorial Aditorium Complex, 400 East Avenue*
7. *Lions Arena, 20 Rittenhouse Road*
8. *Sportsworld Arena, 35 Sportsworld Crossing Road*

WRDSB rinks

1. *Stanley Park Public School (Crosby Park), 191 Hickson Drive*
2. *Southridge Public School, 1425 Queen's Blvd.*
3. *Westmount Public School, 329 Glasgow Street*

Cross country ski trails

1. *Rockway Golf Course, 625 Rockway Drive*
2. *Doon Valley Golf Course, 500 Doon Valley Drive*

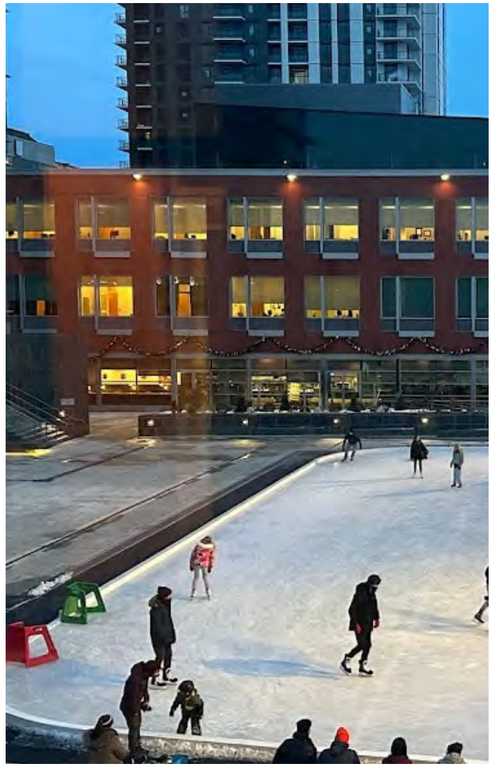


Outdoor ice rinks

Ice rinks are a popular amenity used by many during the colder months. The City of Kitchener has two types of ice rinks available: arenas and neighbourhood rinks.

Neighbourhood rinks are free to use, publicly available amenities located in outdoor spaces throughout Kitchener. They are almost exclusively volunteer-run, with only two exceptions - Victoria Park, a non-refrigerated outdoor pad, and Carl Zehr Square, a refrigerated outdoor pad, both operated by City of Kitchener staff.

Neighbourhood outdoor rinks are supported by the Neighbourhood Development Office where a Project Coordinator assists each rink's operation.



The neighbourhood outdoor ice rinks are not refrigerated, and use is dependent on weather and volunteer availability. These outdoor ice rinks need to be flooded at the beginning of each season and as needed,after freeze/thaw cycles during the winter months.

During the 2023-2024 winter season,12 of 32 neighbourhood rinks did not run due to park reconstruction or poor weather conditions. Eight rinks out of 32 did not have enough volunteer support during the 2023-2024 season. On average, rinks were open for only 9 days during 2023-2024 season.

Due to inconsistent weather, the number of successful skate days needs to be monitored by City staff and volunteer teams. This will help determine the best practices required for current successful ice formation and also when the climate will no longer support natural ice surfaces.

The Waterloo Region District School Board has removed its support for adding more rinks on its properties. With only a few school board rinks still in use, and no plans for new ones, this approach to neighbourhood rink expansion is no longer moving forward.

Winter maintenance

Park maintenance

Although parks and playgrounds are not maintained throughout the colder months, certain amenities such as trails and waste receptacles are winter maintained which allows for limited park use. In November of 2023, Council members approved an increase of waste collection in the winter months. All waste receptacles, both above ground and subterranean, are now maintained all year round, while only select trails are kept up in the winter. Certain types of trails are not maintained in the winter, such as stone dust, while others such as asphalt and concrete trails are maintained. Above-ground waste receptacles are moved closer to maintenance routes in the winter months to allow for access.

Trail maintenance

The Cycling and Trails Masterplan (CTMP) describes winter trail maintenance standards, and short- and long-term maintenance goals. The City strives to eventually maintain all trails on the Spine Network over the long term in the winter. The Spine Network is defined as the cycling routes that connect the city's major destinations to existing neighbourhoods within the city. Major destinations include high activity areas, future population and employment areas.

Short-term winter maintenance identified in the CTMP includes:

- All cycling routes and trails that are currently part of the existing winter maintenance network;
- All cycling routes and trails that will be implemented as part of the short-term implementation plan;
- An additional five kilometres of existing cycling routes and trails.

The short-term winter maintenance plan does not include Region of Waterloo infrastructure such as Regionally owned trails. The time range for short-term is within 3-10 years and will happen sometime between 2023 and 2030.

Through the CTMP, all significant trails, boulevard multi-use trails, and multi-use trails are proposed to be monitored and maintained accordingly (e.g., ice removal) within 48 hours. Major trails and minor trails will not be maintained during colder months. Lack of trail maintenance reduces active transportation opportunities and greatly impacts a resident's ability to access necessary infrastructure and services.

Climate considerations

Winter maintenance impacts
Winter maintenance practices within parks include:

- Plowing and salting trails;
- Relocation of above-ground waste receptacles to prepare for winter waste collection where applicable
- Removal of waste from waste receptacles;
- Ensuring ski trails, ice rinks and toboggan hills are fit for use;
- Removal of shade sails.

These maintenance practices ensure that certain park and open space locations are accessible to the public. However, specific maintenance practices such as the plowing and salting of trails negatively impact the environment. Salting trails and roads in the winter can contaminate drinking water, kill or endanger wildlife, increase soil erosion and over time, can cause damage to infrastructure.

The Region of Waterloo has a dedicated web page on their website which highlights the impacts of salting, includes more environmentally friendly alternatives to salt, snow clearing tips and other helpful resources for both residences and businesses.

Climate impacts
As climate change intensifies, weather is becoming more volatile and events such as more intense storms, freeze-thaw cycles, and increasing temperatures are becoming more frequent. This directly impacts outdoor winter programming as outdoor ice rinks are not able to withstand the constant weather fluctuations.

Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

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Findings

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Please note that findings regarding trail and lighting are addressed in the Trails & Lighting booklet. The Park Amenities booklet shares information and recommendations specific to waste receptacles and winter maintenance of waste receptacles. Please refer to these booklets for more information and for associated recommendations.

Accessibility

Respondents requested more seating, warm-up, and rest areas. Additionally, the lack of washrooms in winter was noted as a barrier to park visitation during the colder months. Respondents also requested a thorough clearing of parks and trails to push strollers, drive wheelchairs, and walk through trails including in parks and trails themselves, around amenities such as benches, and between park spaces and roadways.

> *"My husband is in a wheelchair and would like to go for walks in winter but cannot because the paths are usually covered with snow or ice."*

Inclusion

Respondents requested more rinks and posted hours for hockey versus family skate outdoor ice rinks times. In addition, respondents suggested family-friendly winter events, such as festivals and carnivals to help them enjoy parks during the colder months.

Survey respondents also mentioned the lack of garbage cans on trails and in parks during the winter.

> *"Removal of garbage cans during the winter leads to increased litter – we live near Tecumseh Park and regularly notice the problem when two of the three cans are taken away until the spring."*

Environmental sustainability

Respondents expressed the need for improved snow and ice removal practices to ensure the ice removal process is friendly for pets and the environment. Protection of natural land to ensure there is enough park space was a point of interest as well.

Safety

Respondents requested better lighting, specifically when the days are short, to increase the feeling of safety on trails. For more information on lighting in parks and on trails, visit the Trails & Lighting booklet. Lack of snow and ice clearing from trails arose as a safety concern. Respondents noted slipping, falling and not being able to walk on trails if they aren't adequately maintained.

> *"The disability community is largely left out of park design. It is improving with new parks, but accessibility needs to be prioritized/ properly funded. Lack of city-wide sidewalk snow clearing escalates this as people with physical disabilities are largely prevented from accessing anything in the winter. Parks need to be accessible year round, and the only way to make that truly happen is if the city is accessible year round."*

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Recommendations

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

26: Refrigerated skating area

Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.

As the climate crisis intensifies, community centres and volunteers are struggling to open and maintain their outdoor ice rinks in the winter months. The process of creating an ice rink that measures 27.6 metres by 17 metres includes flooding the area with approximately 12,600 gallons of water. If the weather does not allow for the water to freeze, the rink must be flooded again. This is quite wasteful, especially when considering the skating season has shortened significantly over the last few years. A refrigerated skating area is the more efficient solution to allow regular winter skating and requires less maintenance than outdoor neighbourhood rinks.

The proposed skating area must be refrigerated to ensure adequate ice time for rink visitors throughout the winter months. The skating area could be in the form of a trail, loop path, or an open skating area and must be located to provide city-wide access. The skating area will ideally be free to use and open to any individual or groups. Based on best practices and engagement findings, the following criteria must be met:

- Ability to hold many visitors
- Ample seating areas
- Available parking
- Enough land to construct a skating area
- Public transportation within 500 metres
- Area must be flat at a maximum slope of 1% - 1.5%

To determine whether a refrigerated skating area is a good investment, a feasibility study should be conducted. The feasibility study will consider the following costs: installation, maintenance, and repairs for a refrigerated skating area, compared to the cost of running unrefrigerated neighbourhood ice rinks. Analyzing other outdoor skating rink programs can help inform cost, infrastructure, and maintenance requirements. In addition to cost, the study will assess which solution is the best fit. The study will also examine the environmental impacts of current skating rinks compared to a refrigerated skating area.

Parks that meet the criteria above will be highlighted as suitable locations if the feasibility study results are in support of a refrigerated skating area. Capital investment will be required to install, operate, and maintain the skating area.

Photo by Scott McQuarrie

Recommendations summary

27: Refrigerated skating area

Conduct a feasibility study for a public outdoor refrigerated skating area in a park space with city-wide access.

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