

PLACES & SPACES

City of Kitchener Parks and Open Space Strategy

Project Introduction and Overview

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Traditional Territory

Places & Spaces will be a document focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. The City of Kitchener recognizes the communities and parks within them are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Neutral, 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 City stewards almost 2000ha of land as part of a parks and open spaces system the serves the residents and communities of Kitchener. The role that this land plays in supporting connection to land, and opportunity to celebrate tradition and culture for Indigenous communities is recognized. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities will be respected and the vital role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation is valued and will be reflected in Places and Spaces.

Introduction

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

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

Kitchener's Parks strategy does not stand in isolation. It will draw from, and support initiatives from a wide range of strategies including the Leisure Facilities Master Plan (2019), the Cycling and Trails Master Plan (2020), Kitchener Growth Management Plan (2019-2021) and the Stormwater Master Plan (2016).



Foundations

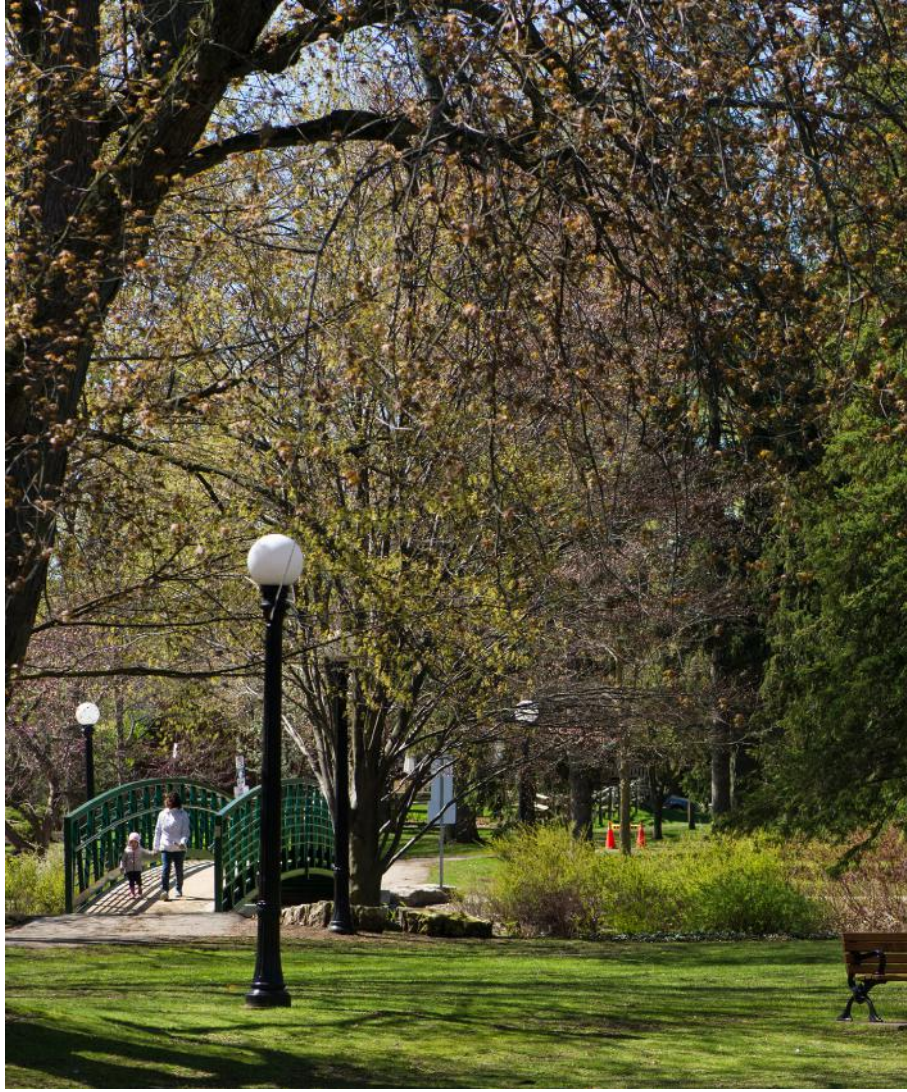
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Vision

Parks are important. This is a simple yet profound statement, and one that is recognized not just in Kitchener but cities everywhere. Understanding their value in urban systems including ecological preservation, health and wellness support, and significant economic benefits.

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

Parks are more than important for Kitchener, they are essential. This is a term we've familiarized ourselves with since the beginning of 2020. Parks are more than the sum of their parts. They provide places for people to gather, unwind, exercise, socialize, play, celebrate, and enjoy. They are extensions of the communities they are placed in and contribute significantly to the community's identity and individuals' connections within it. These values were all key concepts of the 2010 Parks Strategic Plan and evident in the decade since its completion. That plan endorsed the below vision statement, to be re-forged through public consultation in 2021:



A healthy Kitchener is enriched through a diverse network of parks, natural areas and trails that connect people to the environment, support active living, strengthen community development, celebrate our heritage and actively engage residents in achieving an exceptional quality of life.

Purpose & Structure

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

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

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

Places

Places will provide the vision of parks in Kitchener. The introduction alluded to the amount and size of park space within the city, but not the **quality** of those parks. Places will be targeted at placemaking and creating diverse and functional spaces.

Places will be presented in a series of policy statements exploring a wide range of themes in parks, including principles of design (equity, accessibility), environmental (habitat, stormwater and climate change), and specific infrastructure planning (playgrounds, sportsfields, dog parks).

Spaces

Where Places looks at the quality of park space, Spaces will explore the **quantity** of parks in Kitchener, and parks context within the City. It will detail Kitchener's current inventory, look at the definitions of park space, determine the amount of park space we need and where, and provide or update the tools in which we acquire those spaces.



Guiding Principles

How does Kitchener achieve the vision statement? Specific tools will be developed resulting from Places & Spaces. It is the intent of this document to provide the foundation for those tools. Having guiding principles that permeate improvement strategies, council policies, asset management plans and so on, will be critical in delivering the vision statement consistently across the City.

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

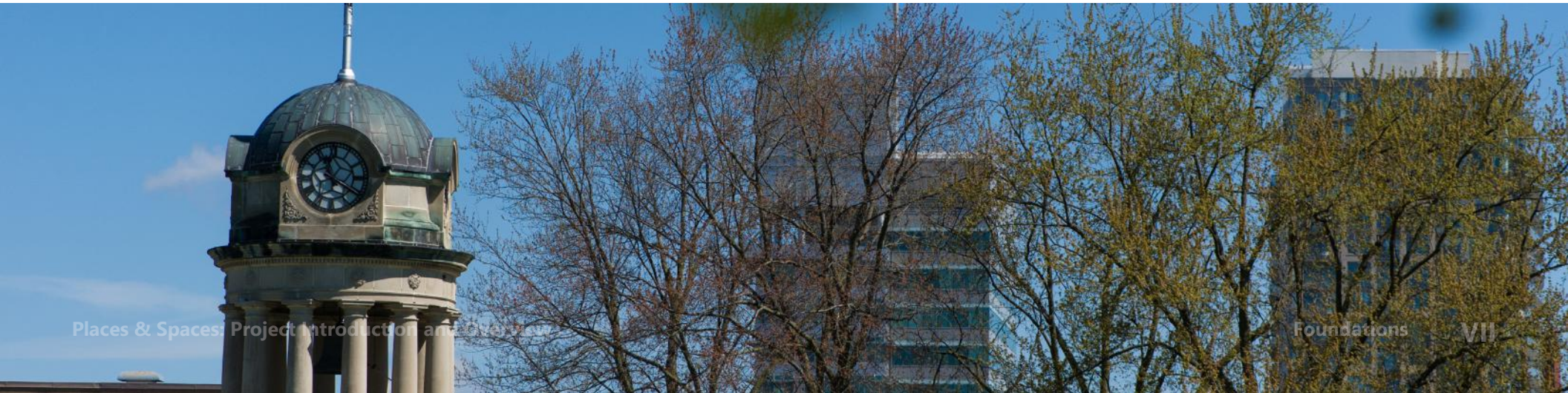
Expand the parks system strategically with a focus on community level park services and existing gaps in that service level.

Improve existing parks and the recreational components within them.

Integrate climate change actions within park planning and improvements.

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

Connect all types of parks within the system through planning, physical and visual connections.



Values

Parks are essential in Kitchener. Their value is certainly relative to the individual, however from the City perspective parks are a fundamental building block and often become the most identifiable feature of the City itself. Here's how parks contribute to the City:

Wellbeing

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

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

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

Social Wellness

Parks spaces are often the focal points of communities, fostering community involvement, activity, safety, and awareness of its neighbourhoods. They can deepen peoples' sense of community, and connect diverse neighbourhoods. They provide opportunity for social interactions, relationship building, and support community cohesion. They are canvases for placemaking opportunities like public art, gatherings, social clubs, festivals and events, and other cultural programming, often evoking pride and personal ownership from each community. They allow for equal access by all citizens, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or ability.

From complex connections like community heritage and cultural history, to more direct and simple connections such as a bench, a tree, a playground, or location within each. Each resident has a personal story with a park, and collectively those stories shape the importance of each space.

Environment

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

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

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

Economy

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

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

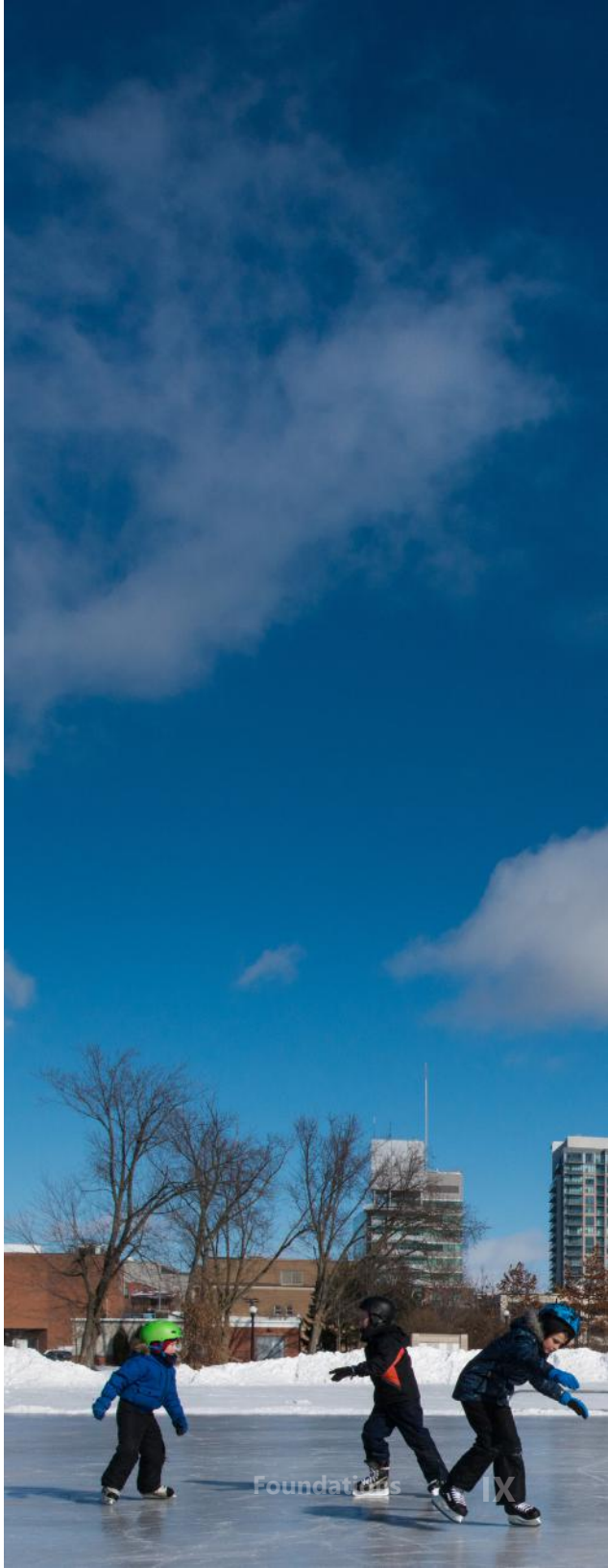
More directly, parks can boost local tourism particularly through iconic landscapes, festivals, and entertainment/sporting events. The ripple effect of more people visiting the city can increase traffic to local stores, shops, accommodations, restaurants, transit, and so on.

Quality of Life

A city's quality of life is shaped by its community and the amenities that are offered. Communities that are livable, environmentally sustainable, and amenity-rich are where people want to live and work.

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

Parks connect, contain, enhance, and unify these amenities. The value which parks provide, further strengthens a community's quality of life and fosters a sense of place.



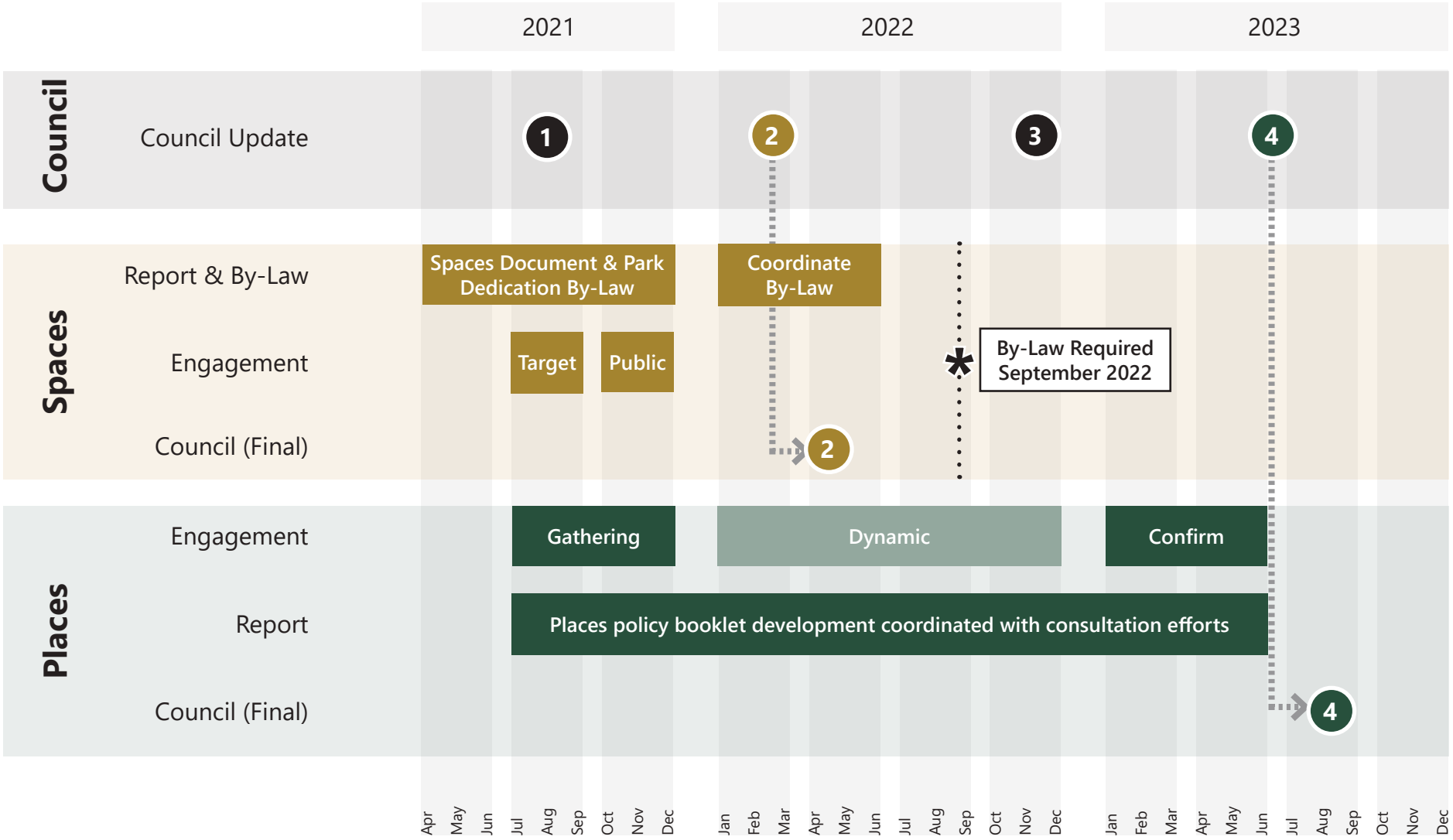


Project Plan



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Schedule


2021
2022
2023
Council
Council Update
1
2
3
4
Spaces
Report & By-Law
Spaces Document & Park Dedication By-Law
Coordinate By-Law
Engagement
Target
Public
By-Law Required September 2022
Council (Final)
2
Places
Engagement
Gathering
Dynamic
Confirm
Report
Places policy booklet development coordinated with consultation efforts
Council (Final)
4
Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

Schedule: Key Milestones

1 Introduction & Foundations
June & August 2021

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

2 Spaces Document & Park Dedication By-Law
March & April 2022

Final documents to be provided and presented to Council, including Spaces, Park Dedication By-Law and targeted consultation results. April 2022 is a targeted date (final date to be determined once Council schedule is released) for approval of Spaces and to continue with the By-Law update process.

3 Project Update
December 2022

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

4 Places Document
Q3 2023

Targeted final approval from Council in Q3-2023. Final dates to be finalized.

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Places: Framework

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Draft Report Structure

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

This is a working document and continues to evolve and grow. A number of engagement strategies will be used to inform this work including broad public engagement, specific stakeholder engagement, focus groups and phone surveys. Not all topics will necessarily be reflected in all forms of engagement.

Principles

Accessibility
Design Philosophy
Equity vs. Equality
Innovation
Pandemic Response
Private Parks
Safety
Education

Environment

Habitat
Green Infrastructure & Sustainability
Trees
Turf & Maintenance

Infrastructure

Renewal & Replacement
Dedications & Sponsorship
Pets in Parks
Playgrounds
Signage
Splashpads
Sportsfields & Courts
Trails & Access
Winter Use
Community Gardens

Community & Culture

Art
Indigenous
Equity Deserving Communities
Placemaking & Community

City Initiatives

Downtown Kitchener
Grand River
Legacy Parks



Spaces: Framework



Draft Report Structure

Spaces will explore the quantity of parks in Kitchener, and parks context within the City. It will detail Kitchener's current inventory, look at the definitions of park space, determine the amount and location of park space we need, and provide or update the tools in which we acquire those spaces.

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

State of Parks

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

Park Planning

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

The Strategy

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

Dedication By-Law Update

- **Provincial Context**
- **Comparing Provisions**
- **Revisions to the By-Law**
- **Context within Development Charges**

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