**KING STREET RECONSTRUCTION**
Kitchener, Ontario

**RELEVANT GROWTH PLAN POLICIES**

Policy 2.2.3.7 (b, c, d, e, f): Plan and design intensification areas to provide a diverse mix of land uses to support vibrant neighbourhoods; provide high quality public open spaces with urban design standards that create attractive and vibrant places; support transit, walking and cycling; and achieve higher densities than the surrounding area, with an appropriate transition of built form to adjacent areas.

Policy 2.2.4.4* (a, b, c, d): Urban growth centres will be planned as focal areas for investment in institutional and region-wide public services, as well as commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses; to accommodate and support major transit infrastructure; to serve as high density major employment centres that will attract provincially, nationally or internationally significant employment uses; and to accommodate a significant share of population and employment growth.


**PROJECT OVERVIEW**

The King Street reconstruction project is a major public space improvement that forms a key part of Kitchener’s downtown revitalization strategy.

The new streetscape goes beyond typical street design standards to create an award-winning “pedestrian-first” environment that functions as a vibrant main street and major pedestrian-oriented event space. The reconstruction project has transformed six blocks of an underused traditional main street into a bustling, active space, restoring the street to its former status as an important meeting place in the city, but with a contemporary design and new sustainable features.

Multiple rounds of public consultation during the design process underscored the public’s demand for a street that catered to people, but could also accommodate on-street parking to support local businesses. This led to one of the project’s most substantial innovations – the flexible parking arrangement. The European-inspired street design uses sloping “rolled” curbs and removable bollards (posts) to separate pedestrians from cars in a way that can be changed to either make more space for on-street parking or more space for people.
The streetscape improvements complement a number of other initiatives and financial incentive programs established by the City of Kitchener and Region of Waterloo to encourage investment in the downtown. Increased economic activity along the King Street project area is marked by 13 new businesses opening and 22 storefront or signage upgrades since construction on the street improvements began in 2009. Private investment in a mixed use project with new residential condominium units, live-work units and retail space is planned to face the renewed street. It is estimated that, as of 2012, there are 1,626 new residential units underway or in initial planning stages in Downtown Kitchener, which have the potential to bring an additional 2,900 residents downtown.¹

The redesigned streetscape has also succeeded in creating a safe, accessible pedestrian environment that attracts more people to downtown. Crowds of over 40,000 people are drawn to Kitchener’s downtown public events on King Street, including the Kitchener Blues Festival (150,000) and Cruising on King, an antique and classic cars event (40,000). The number of people frequenting King Street has tripled, increasing from 3,000 before the street improvements to 9,000 per average work day in 2011.²

PLANNING CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Located at the centre of Kitchener’s downtown area and traditional commercial core, King Street was historically a focal point of the region, where businesses and industry flourished and people would gather to take part in the city’s festivities.

In the 1980s, declining prominence of the manufacturing sector began to affect Kitchener’s downtown centre as factories closed and businesses moved to the suburbs. The slowdown of economic activity and associated lack of pedestrian traffic directly impacted the city’s main commercial street.

Through the 1990s, King Street had a large number of vacant storefronts and under-used properties. By the early 2000s the streetscape had not been updated in decades, the lighting needed upgrading and residents perceived downtown as unsafe. The City

² Interview with Cory Bluhm, Manager of Downtown Community Development, City of Kitchener Economic Development, November 9, 2011.
recognized the importance of revitalizing the area and transforming the neglected street into an attractive space to draw more people and businesses back to the downtown core.

In 2004, the City of Kitchener earmarked $3.3 million through their Economic Development and Investment Fund for improvements to King Street, one of several projects aimed at stimulating economic regeneration and revitalization in downtown Kitchener.\(^3\) Initially, the project’s design focus was to improve street lighting.

The final vision for the project was shaped by the public through the City’s “Help Design Downtown Kitchener” public consultation process, as well as many public open houses and meetings with downtown businesses. The City of Kitchener commissioned IBI Group to complete the street redesign, working closely with the City, public and Business Improvement Association. What began as lighting improvements grew into a broader project to create a people first, environmentally sustainable streetscape design. A public online survey confirmed the “Pedestrian First” option as the preferred concept, and the City approved the new streetscape design for King Street in December 2007.

Additional funding was committed to realize the more robust undertaking. The final $10.8 million project included a $3.2 million grant from the Provincial Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative, additional funds from the City, $1.23 million from the Federal Community Adjustment Fund, and $13,200 from Tree Canada.\(^4\)

When construction began, the City hired an additional, designated staff member to manage and facilitate interaction between downtown businesses and the construction teams. The newly designed street opened in 2010.

**TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSIT**

Downtown Kitchener serves as the hub of an integrated regional and provincial transportation network, with regional bus service and a rail station within short walking distance of King Street. The new King Street streetscape balances multiple modes of transportation, accommodating seven local bus routes with frequent service, and providing for pedestrians with wider sidewalks, improved transit shelters and other amenities. Although considered, it was not possible to safely implement bike lanes along the street due to the narrow right of way.\(^5\) However, the number of bike parking spaces along King Street was increased as part of street reconstruction.

A new light rail transit (LRT) system is planned for the Region of Waterloo. The new LRT system will provide regional transit connecting Downtown Kitchener to the rest of the city and neighbouring cities of Waterloo and Cambridge. The proposed LRT will not run directly through the reconstructed portion of King Street, but rather on parallel streets, with stops located within a short walk from King Street. The LRT plan was approved by the Waterloo Regional Council in 2011 and construction is set to begin in 2014.\(^6\)

In 2007, the City of Kitchener purchased lands at the corner of King Street West and Victoria Street North to develop a new transit hub that will link the new LRT, rail and regional bus service in one centralized location.

**PUBLIC REALM**

King Street’s new, pedestrian-oriented design is largely achieved through increased sidewalk width, high quality pedestrian amenities, rolled curbs and removable bollards. The custom sloping, lowered curbs and removable bollards enable the entire width of the street, including the sidewalk and roadway, to be transformed into one large public open space.

**References**


\(^5\) Interview with Cory Bluhm.

\(^6\) Regional Council Approves Light Rail Transit http://regionofwaterloo.ca/en/newslist/index.aspx?corpId=84zynQf4gqAYQy7LmpurQeQuAleQuAl&newsId=BWJzyazCRuxykw hsy2M9hAeQuAleQuAl
space. During warmer months, the bollards are moved out to expand the sidewalks and make more space for outdoor cafés and patios. The bollards can also be used to block off sections of King Street for festival space and large public events. During colder months, the bollards are moved inward to increase space for on-street parking.

Civic Square, which is located in front of Kitchener City Hall, was expanded and given greater prominence along the street. Speaker’s Corner, a traditional meeting place located at the corner of King Street and Frederick Street, has been refurbished with additional benches and public art to become an attractive, interactive public space for programmed events and for downtown patrons to have lunch.

Improved pedestrian amenities include lighting, street trees, and street furniture made from recycled materials. New lighting features have transformed the low-lit space into an attractive night environment. The combination of bright street lights, planters containing recessed lighting, and street trees illuminated by uplighting has contributed to a safe environment where people feel comfortable walking at night. Results from a Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council survey indicate that more people felt safe in 2011 in Downtown Kitchener than in previous years. A marked increase was seen between 2007 and 2011, following the King Street reconstruction project.7

To enhance the street, 120 new trees were planted, tripling the number of trees that previously lined the street. The trees were selected for their weather tolerance and ability to provide shade, improve air quality, and filter storm water. The trees were planted in environmentally friendly planter beds that collect and filter storm water before it reaches the sewer system. The planter beds consist of continuous tree trenches with enough room for roots to grow. The tree trunks are protected by stainless steel tree guards.

The contemporary design of transit shelters, benches, planters and other elements of street furniture is coordinated to create a cohesive streetscape that is easy to navigate, and leaves ample room on the sidewalk for pedestrian traffic. A deep-well garbage disposal and recycling system, which has one half of the two-metre tall unit located underground, improves the walking environment by reducing overflow and odour. Additional benches have been placed along the widened sidewalks, and the granite-clad walls of planter beds function as additional seating for pedestrians.

7 Survey results stated in City of Kitchener Economic Development Investment Fund Impact Analysis.

AWARDS

- Gold Award for Urban Design, Design Exchange Awards, 2011
- City of Kitchener, Urban Design Award of Excellence, 2011
- Making Cities Livable Conference, International Community Places Award, 2010
- Tree Canada, Green Streets Canada award, 2008/2009