



Special Council Meeting Agenda

Monday, November 10, 2025, 3:30 p.m.

Council Chambers - Hybrid

City of Kitchener

200 King Street W, Kitchener, ON N2G 4G7

People interested in participating in this meeting can register online using the delegation registration form at www.kitchener.ca/delegation or via email at delegation@kitchener.ca. Please refer to the delegation section on the agenda below for registration in-person and electronic participation deadlines. Written comments received will be circulated prior to the meeting and will form part of the public record.

The meeting live-stream and archived videos are available at www.kitchener.ca/watchnow

Accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request. If you require assistance to take part in a city meeting or event, please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994.

Pages

1. Commencement

The meeting will begin with a Land Acknowledgement given by the Mayor.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

Members of Council and members of the City's local boards/committees are required to file a written statement when they have a conflict of interest. If a conflict is declared, please visit www.kitchener.ca/conflict to submit your written form.

3. Delegations

Pursuant to Council's Procedural By-law, delegations are permitted to address the Committee for a maximum of five (5) minutes. All Delegations where possible are encouraged to register prior to the start of the meeting. For Delegates who are attending in-person, registration is permitted up to the start of the meeting. Delegates who are interested in attending virtually must register by 1:30 p.m. on November 10, 2025, in order to participate electronically.

4. Strategic Session Reports

- | | | | |
|------------|--|------|---|
| 4.1 | Action Plan Review - Special Events, Arts and Creative Industries, DSD-2025-459 | 90 m | 3 |
|------------|--|------|---|

5. Mayoral Business and Updates - Mayor B. Vrbanovic

6. In-camera Meeting Authorization

Note: Any member of Council may question the appropriateness of a listed in-camera item. This may be done during the special Council meeting or at the beginning of the in-camera session.

Council is asked to enact the following resolution to authorize an in-camera meeting:

"That an in-camera meeting of City Council be held immediately following the special council meeting this date to consider one land acquisition matter as authorized by Sections 239 (2) (c) of the Municipal Act, 2001, respectively."

- | | | |
|------------|---|------|
| 6.1 | City Park Strategy - Potential Land Acquisition (Land Acquisition - Section 239 (2) (c)) | 30 m |
|------------|---|------|

Staff will provide information and seek direction on this matter.

- | | | |
|------------|--|------|
| 6.2 | Land Acquisition Negotiation Strategy (Land Acquisition and a position/procedure to be applied to negotiations - Section 239 (2) (c) and (k)) | 30 m |
|------------|--|------|

This matter is strictly for information, no direction of Council is required.

7. Adjournment

REPORT TO: Special Council

DATE OF MEETING: November 10, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Jeremy Dueck, Director, Arts & Entertainment

PREPARED BY: Jeremy Dueck, Director, Arts & Entertainment

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All wards

DATE OF REPORT: November 6, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2025-459

SUBJECT: Council Strategy Session – Reviewing the “Special Events Action Plan” and “Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan”

RECOMMENDATION:

For discussion.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide context and outline the agenda that will be used during the Council Strategy Session on November 10, 2025.
- This report supports Creating an Economically-Thriving City Together: Focuses on growing an agile, diverse local economy powered by talented entrepreneurs, workers & artists; creating opportunities for everyone and a resilient future that propels our city forward.

BACKGROUND:

Arts & Entertainment is a Division within Economic Development and the Development Services Department. The City’s Arts & Entertainment Division includes three units – Arts & Creative Industries, Special Events, and Arts & Entertainment Venues. Outlined in Kitchener’s 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, Council directed staff to develop and implement a “Special Events Action Plan” and an “Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan.” Staff plan to bring both action plans to Council in Q4 of 2025 or Q1 of 2026.

The objectives for the November 10, 2025, Council Strategy Session are to review the progress of each action plan separately, share key learnings from the engagement work conducted by staff, and communicate the aspirational vision for each plan. Staff will describe the strategic themes for the Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan and the guiding principles for the Special Events Action Plan.

Council will be invited to provide feedback on how well the proposed A&CI vision and strategic themes align with constituent input and to offer guidance on prioritizing future A&CI action items. Additionally, Council will rank key performance indicators (KPIs) that

will shape future special event decisions and provide feedback on the alignment of the proposed Special Events vision and guiding principles with community feedback.

REPORT:

The purpose of the Strategy Session is to obtain input from members of Council on two action plans: the Special Events Action Plan and the Arts & Creative Industries (A&CI) Action Plan. The workshop will be conducted in two parts, with the first focused on the A&CI Action Plan and the second on the Special Events Action Plan.

Each segment will provide an opportunity to review progress, share key engagement learnings, present the aspirational vision and strategic framework, and gather Council's feedback on alignment with community input and priorities.

PART 1 – ARTS & CREATIVE INDUSTRIES ACTION PLAN (TOTAL TIME: 50 MINS)

Overview of Action Plan

Staff will provide a brief overview of the Arts & Creative Industries (A&CI) Action Plan, beginning with a reflection on Kitchener's legacy of arts planning through Culture Plan I (1995) and Culture Plan II (2005). While these earlier plans were ambitious and visionary, not all recommendations were implemented due to limitations in capacity and alignment with municipal priorities. Of the 20 recommendations in Culture Plan I, 8 were executed; Culture Plan II saw 30 of its 61 recommendations realized.

Building on this foundation, the 2025 A&CI Action Plan is designed to be action-oriented and responsive to the current needs of the arts and creative industries sector. The plan is informed by extensive engagement, including the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative (2023), which convened 40 regional arts leaders and a working group of staff and sector representatives. Additional input was gathered through Environics Research (2023), which engaged 153 arts practitioners and residents, identifying key themes such as distribution of funds and grants, access to physical spaces, promotion and awareness, and representation and support. Further insights were drawn from the "Uncovering Barriers" report (2024), which synthesized feedback from 10 diverse arts representatives and 66 surveyed artists.

This research highlighted systemic barriers faced and recommended targeted programs to improve access to resources, employment, exhibition spaces, and mentorship. Surveys and interviews conducted from the Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts operating model review in 2024 also contributed to the understanding of local A&CI needs and opportunities.

The scope of the A&CI Action Plan includes support for artistic sectors (visual, performing, literary, and public art), development of creative industries (media, entertainment, design, and technology), economic development initiatives, funding and grant programs, public-private collaboration, infrastructure and space planning, community engagement, strategic awareness initiatives, and support for museum and archival work through other municipal arts initiatives.

The proposed vision for the A&CI Action Plan is: **"Canada's Emerging Arts City."**

This four-year vision (2026-2030) reflects Kitchener's commitment to cultivating a vibrant, inclusive, and locally-rooted arts and creative industries ecosystem. It emphasizes the importance of supporting local talent, fostering community connections, and positioning Kitchener as a national leader in arts innovation.

To achieve this vision, the A&CI Action Plan is organized around five strategic themes:

1. **Spaces for Production & Presentation** – Enhancing access to affordable physical spaces for artists and creative professionals to work, exhibit, perform, and collaborate.
2. **Public Art Creation & Care** – Supporting the creation, conservation, and visibility of public art and industrial artifacts throughout the city.
3. **Local Artist Development Programs** – Investing in mentorship, professional development, and programming that supports emerging and established artists.
4. **Communications Strategy** – Strengthening the visibility of Kitchener's arts sector through coordinated branding, promotion, and storytelling.
5. **Music Development** – Building infrastructure and “layer in local” programming to support music creation, performance, and industry growth.

2026 A&CI Work Plan

This section provides a summary of the key actions currently planned for 2026 under the Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan. These initiatives are based on existing staff resources and the submitted 2026 operating budget. Each action aligns with one of the five strategic themes identified in the plan and reflects the City's commitment to advancing its arts and creative industries ecosystem in a sustainable and achievable way.

Under the theme of **Spaces for Production & Presentation**, staff will continue to operate 44 Gaukel as a City-led creative hub, support THEMUSEUM's financial sustainability commitment, and maintain operating agreements with Homer Watson House & Gallery, THEMUSEUM, and the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery (KWAG).

For **Public Art Creation & Care**, the work plan includes developing a temporary public art policy, assessing and conserving the existing public art and industrial artifacts collection, and daylighting the public art collection at the Conrad Centre to enhance public access and visibility.

In the area of **Local Artist Development Programs**, staff will deliver artist and community programming at 44 Gaukel to support local creators and foster community engagement.

As part of the **Communications Strategy**, staff will continue to develop and promote the upcoming launch of Kitchener LIVE. The Film Office will implement operational efficiencies to better support film-related activities and streamline services.

Under the theme of **Music Development**, the City will continue to offer the Roos Island Music Series, onboard a new Music Officer to lead music sector development, and work with the KW Symphony towards grant reinstatement.

2027-2030 Actions to Consider

Building on the foundational work planned for 2026, staff have also identified a series of aspirational actions for the 2027-2030 period. These proposed initiatives reflect ideas generated through community engagement, sector feedback, and internal planning. While not yet resourced, they represent meaningful opportunities to advance the strategic themes of the A&CI Action Plan. Each item is presented with an estimated budget range to help frame future decision-making and guide Council's prioritization discussions.

Note: Estimated project budget range symbols.

\$ = Up to \$50,000

\$\$ = Between \$50,000 and \$100,000

\$\$\$ = Over \$100,000

Spaces for Production & Presentation

- \$ Develop a Culture Days program to celebrate local artists and venue spaces.
- \$ Increased artist fees for Artist in Residence and Gallery Programs (CARFAC).
- \$ New gallery space program at the Conrad Centre.
- \$\$\$ Enhanced 10-year capital plan for Homer Watson House & Gallery.

Public Art Creation & Care

- \$\$\$ Increased maintenance funding for public art and industrial artifacts collection.
- \$\$ Temporary public art implementation, annual program plan, and funding.
- \$\$\$ Indigenous public art project in Victoria Park.

Local Artist Development Programs

- \$\$\$ Add a new immersive/interactive temporary artwork festival.
- \$\$ Create a multidisciplinary City-wide mural-making festival.
- TBD Align with the Community Grants Program review and support recommendations.

Communications Strategy

- \$\$ Upgrade/replace all City collection interpretive signage.

Music Development

- \$\$ Music production and performance incubator including a soundproof studio.
- \$\$ Create a "layer in local" talent budget to ensure local artists are featured.

Council Feedback on A&CI's Strategic Themes (15 minutes)

Note: Council will answer the questions using the Menti application.

Question #1 – Based on your conversations with constituents and your understanding of the sector, where do you believe the greatest opportunity exists within the five strategic themes?

Spaces for Production & Presentation

Public Art Creation & Care

Local Artist Development Programs

Communications Strategy

Music Development

Council Prioritization Exercise (20 minutes)

Council will be invited to rank the proposed 2027-2030 Actions to Consider in order of priority, from most important to least important. These actions reflect what staff heard consistently through community engagement and are intended to be inclusive of constituent feedback.

Question #2 – As you review the proposed actions, are there any priorities or ideas you've consistently heard from constituents that are missing from the list?

PART 2 – SPECIAL EVENTS ACTION PLAN (TOTAL TIME: 70 MINS)**Event Categories**

Festivals and events in Kitchener take many forms and vary significantly in size, complexity, and purpose. To support effective planning and delivery, the City categorizes events into four distinct types: Signature Events, Special Events, Corporate Events, and Community Events. These categories help clarify which events fall within the scope of the Special Events unit and which are supported by other divisions across the corporation.

While the Special Events team plays a central role in producing and supporting many high-profile and civic events, not all activities labeled as “events” fall under their purview. This section outlines the event types and the corresponding responsibilities, helping to establish realistic expectations and ensure appropriate resource allocation.

Signature Events – Signature Events are large-scale public gatherings typically held in Downtown Kitchener or Victoria Park, drawing 5,000 or more attendees per day. These events demand extensive planning and coordination across multiple municipal departments and often involve significant impacts to public infrastructure, including road closures and emergency preparedness. They receive substantial municipal support, such as Tier I grant funding, and usually operate with budgets of \$100,000 or more. Signature Events may be produced directly by the City or supported by the City, and are recurring annual fixtures in the community calendar.

Examples of City-produced signature events:

- Canada Day
- Cruising on King Street
- Wayback Festival
- KidsPark
- Endless Summer
- Christkindl Market
- New Year's Eve

Examples of City-supported signature events:

- Multicultural Festival
- Kitchener Blues Festival
- Oktoberfest
- Kitchener Ribfest & Craft Beer Show (for-profit event, does not receive City funding)
- 5K FoamFest (for-profit event, does not receive City funding)

Special Events – Special Events are community-focused gatherings coordinated by the City or in partnership with third-party organizers. These events are open to the public and typically take place in or around Carl Zehr Square and the Rotunda. They attract between 500 and 4,999 attendees per day and generally operate with budgets under \$100,000. While they require permits and coordination with select City departments, they involve a moderate level of planning and logistical support. Special Events may be City-produced or City-supported, with some receiving staff assistance or financial backing through the Tier II grant program. Occasionally, Special Events may include larger-scale, one-time activations.

Examples of City-produced special events:

- Kitchener Rangers Winter Carnival
- Wicked Sing-Along
- Pickleball Paddlepalooza
- Pop-up events (e.g., Erick Traplin Day, sports watch parties, etc.)
- Recognizing local Stanley Cup winners or Olympic medal recipients.

Examples of City-supported special events:

- Sporas Art Exhibit
- Bring on the Sunshine
- Diwali Event
- Indian Food Festival
- TriPride Summer Festival
- Canadian Arab Festival
- Momma's Cookout
- Sporas Palestinian Festival
- Afrovibes Festival
- Caribana Ignite
- Romanian Festival

Corporate Events – Corporate Events are programs or events organized and delivered directly by the City of Kitchener as part of its core service offerings and civic engagement initiatives. Regardless of size, these events reflect the City's commitment to community

connection and public service. They are typically coordinated through collaboration between the Special Events unit, the Office of the Mayor & Council, and Corporate Communications.

Examples of corporate events:

- Park openings and renewal celebrations
- Facility openings and groundbreakings
- Funding announcements
- Government and dignitary visits
- City-community partnership events
- State of the City
- Grillefest
- New Year's Levee
- Public Works Week
- Major staff celebrations
- Hosting other levels of government and boards

Community Events – Community Events are smaller-scale gatherings, typically attracting fewer than 500 attendees, and are organized by internal City staff or community individuals and groups. These events are open to the public or specific local audiences and are generally low-risk, with minimal impact on public services. They may require basic permits or approvals but involve limited logistical complexity. The City of Kitchener facilitates hundreds – if not thousands – of these events annually, such as those under the Love My Hood initiative. **While these activities are often referred to as “events,” they do not meet the criteria for Signature, Special, or Corporate Events, and therefore fall outside the scope of the Special Events team.** Any City support for Community Events typically comes from other divisions or units within the organization.

Examples of community events:

- Charity runs
- Faith-group barbeques in parks
- Flag-raising ceremonies
- Neighbourhood clean-ups
- Street parties
- Small community picnics

Re-emphasizing Scope of Work – As part of ongoing efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities, the Special Events team will continue to focus on the planning and delivery of Signature Events, Special Events, and Corporate Events. These categories align with the team's mandate and require varying levels of coordination, municipal support, and strategic oversight.

Community Events, while still valued and encouraged, fall outside the scope of the Special Events team. These events will continue to take place across the city, but their coordination and support will be managed through other areas of the organization. This re-emphasis ensures that the Special Events team remains focused on arts and entertainment programming, while the corporation explores appropriate and sustainable ways to support community-led initiatives.

Overview of Action Plan

Staff will provide a brief overview of the Special Events Action Plan, beginning with a reflection on the growing importance of major events and festivals in shaping Kitchener's civic identity. Over the past decade, these events have become central to how residents and visitors experience the city, contributing to its reputation as a vibrant and welcoming destination. As the scale and impact of these events have grown, so too have the costs and resources required to produce and host them. This evolution has highlighted the need for a more strategic and financially sustainable approach to event planning and delivery.

Building on this momentum, the Special Events Action Plan is designed to be forward-looking and responsive to the current and future needs of Kitchener's events ecosystem. The action plan will guide the City's approach to producing and supporting major events and festivals over the next four years. It will provide the Special Events unit with clear direction on how to manage and deliver high-impact programming, communicate Council's vision to internal teams and external partners, and offer transparent guidance to third-party event producers and community groups. The action plan will also outline the benefits of hosting events in Kitchener and describe tangible ways the City can support their success.

To inform the development of the Special Events Action Plan, staff led a six-step engagement process involving key stakeholders with a vested interest in the future of Kitchener's special events portfolio. This process included an internal review with City staff across all departments, consultations with the Mayor and Council, and focused discussions with third-party event organizers. The Special Events team contributed operational insights, while broader community engagement activities captured public perspectives and aspirations. Finally, a municipal scan was conducted to assess best practices and benchmarks from other cities. Together, these inputs provided a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape, existing constraints, and future opportunities.

This engagement surfaced several recurring themes, including the desire to enhance the current portfolio, create year-round programming, simplify processes for organizers and staff, and establish greater sustainability and predictability in the sector. A key insight was the recognition that the City cannot fund all events, reinforcing the need for a balanced and strategic approach to resource allocation.

The proposed vision for the Special Events Action Plan is: **"Canada's Event Leader."**

This four-year vision (2026-2030) reflects Kitchener's commitment to cultivating a dynamic, inclusive, and strategically supported events ecosystem. It emphasizes the importance of hosting exceptional experiences, accelerating event innovation, and fostering a collaborative, event-friendly corporate culture.

To achieve this vision, the Special Events Action Plan is organized around three guiding principles:

- 1. Canada's Best Host City** – Delivering exceptional experiences for attendees, organizers, and partners.

2. **Canada's Event Accelerator City** – Supporting innovation, growth, and capacity-building in the local events sector.
3. **An Event-Friendly Corporate Culture** – Fostering internal alignment, responsiveness, and collaboration across departments.

Council KPI Ranking Activity (15 minutes)

"Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Defining Success.

As Kitchener continues to attract more event suggestions and opportunities, staff and senior leadership will face increasing pressure to make informed decisions about which events to pursue. To support this decision-making process, the Special Events unit is proposing the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate and prioritize events based on their alignment with strategic goals.

These KPIs are intended to provide a consistent framework for assessing the value and impact of special events. By ranking these indicators, Council can help shape how success is defined and measured across the portfolio.

Activity – When evaluating the success of special events, please rank the following KPIs in order of priority, from most important to least important:

Number of attendees – Overall attendance and reach of the event

Experience of attendees – Contribution to quality of life and enjoyment

Tourism impact – Ability to attract visitors and drive economic activity

Local engagement – Participation from Kitchener residents leaving a positive impact

Business impact – Effect on downtown businesses and local economy

Safety – Risk management and public safety outcomes

Budget compliance – Adherence to financial plans and responsible spending

Community brand – Enhancement of Kitchener's identity and reputation

Council Feedback on Guiding Principles (20 minutes)

As part of the Special Events Action Plan development, staff are seeking Council's input on the proposed vision and guiding principles that will shape the City's approach to producing and supporting major events and festivals over the next four years.

Question #3 – Based on your initial impressions and what you've heard from the community, what resonates with you about the proposed vision and guiding principles for the Special Events Action Plan? What, if anything, would you change or refine?

2026 Special Events Work Plan

Staff will provide a summary of the key actions currently planned for 2026 under the Special Events Action Plan. These initiatives are based on existing staff resources and the submitted 2026 operating budget. Each action aligns with one of the three guiding principles

identified in the plan and reflects the City's commitment to advancing its special events portfolio in a strategic, coordinated, and achievable way.

Under the guiding principle of **Canada's Best Host City**, staff will continue to support the hosting of Signature and Special Events in Victoria Park. This includes maintaining the City's role as a trusted and capable host for large-scale public gatherings that contribute to Kitchener's civic identity and community vibrancy.

Aligned with **Canada's Event Accelerator City**, the Arts & Entertainment Division will be leveraged as a centralized point of entry for event organizers, ticket buyers, and the broader community. This approach is designed to streamline access, improve service delivery, and enhance the overall event experience. In addition, staff will continue to develop and promote the upcoming launch of Kitchener LIVE, a platform that provides timely and relevant information to both event organizers and residents, helping to build awareness and engagement around upcoming events.

Supporting the principle of **An Event-Friendly Corporate Culture**, staff will develop a publicly accessible Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for event intake and event allocation. This SOP will clarify processes, improve transparency, and support consistent decision-making across departments. Additionally, a dedicated SOP will be created to guide internal chargebacks and cost centre usage, ensuring financial clarity and operational efficiency for all City-supported events.

Setting Productive Expectations

As Kitchener's reputation for hosting major events and festivals continues to grow, so too do the demands on staff, budgets, and the event calendar. Events are becoming more expensive to produce, staff are operating at full capacity, and the prime event season – from May to October – is nearly saturated. In 2026, the City will need to take a more selective and strategic approach to calendar and event management to ensure sustainability and avoid burnout.

Staff are seeking Council's support in setting realistic expectations for the upcoming season. This includes providing the Special Events team with the resources needed to stay within budget, manage workload effectively, and maintain the high standards that have made Kitchener a leader in the sector.

Current Portfolio Snapshot – Based on the success of recent seasons, Kitchener is increasingly recognized by event producers, cultural organizations, and attendees as one of the best cities in Canada for hosting major special events and festivals. In 2025, the City's Special Events team was involved in producing or directly supporting 38 unique events, which collectively attracted over 350,000 attendees.

One of the key measures of success for the Special Events portfolio is the number of events scheduled during the prime outdoor season – spring, summer, and early fall. As the 2026 season preview below demonstrates, few weekend dates remain available between May and October, underscoring the need for strategic prioritization. The presence of several annual and recurring events in the calendar also reflects the strength and sustainability of third-party organizers who have built resilient business models.

2026 Special Events Season Preview	
Date	Event
January 4	Mayor's Levee
January 16 – 18	Sporas Art Exhibit
February 15	Bring on the Sunshine
February 18	Winter Staff Event
February 23 – 25	Festivals & Events Ontario Conference
March 11	Kitchener Rangers Winter Carnival
April 12	Diwali Indie Event
May 20 – 22	Public Works Week
May 23 – 24	Indian Food Festival
May 26	City LEAD Workshop
June 7	Trinity Event
June 3	The Main Event
June 6	TriPride Summer Festival
June 13	Palette x Palate
June 13	Neighbours Day
June 13	East Asian Festival
June 14	Canadian Arab Festival
June 20 – 21	Multicultural Festival
July 1	Canada Day
July 10	Cruising on King
July 11	Momma's Cookout
July 11	Electrolit 5K Foam Fest
July 12	Sporas Palestinian Festival
July 18	AfroVibes
July 17 – 19	RibFest
July 24 – 25	Wayback Festival
August 6 – 9	BluesFest
August 13	Summer Staff Appreciation
August 15	Pakistan Canada Day
August 16	KidsPark
August 21 – 22	Caribana Ignite Festival
August 25	Pickleball Paddlepalooza
September 4 – 5	Endless Summer
September 7	Mela Festival
September 11 – 12	Bestival Festival
TBD	Romanian Festival
September 13	Terry Fox Run
September 17	United Way March of 1000 Umbrellas
October 9 – 12	Oktoberfest
October 12	Oktoberfest Parade
November 11	Remembrance Day
November 14	Santa Clause Parade
December 3 – 6	Christkindl Market
December 31	New Years Eve

Managing New Event Opportunities in 2026

To set realistic expectations for the 2026 event season, staff have identified three potential approaches for considering new special event opportunities. Each option reflects the need to balance community demand with available resources, calendar capacity, and budget constraints.

Option 1: Reallocate Existing Resources – Remove or scale back existing events to create space for new, unbudgeted opportunities. This option would require a careful review of the current portfolio to determine which events could be reduced or discontinued.

Option 2: Increase Operating Budget & Staff Capacity – Starting in 2027, add new operating dollars to the Special Events budget to accommodate additional events. This option would require Council approval through the annual budget process and would support expanded programming without compromising existing commitments.

Option 3: Selective Prioritization – Be highly judicious in selecting new events, if any, based on alignment with strategic priorities and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This option emphasizes quality over quantity and supports a sustainable approach to growth.

Important Note: Staff anticipate operating with a 2026 budget that is similar to the 2025 allocation, with adjustments for inflation as determined by Council. As such, any expansion of the portfolio will require either reallocation of existing resources or additional funding.

Examples of unbudgeted opportunities:

- Mayor's Blues Breakfast
- Watch parties
- Kitchener Takes the Stage
- Kitchener Legacy (Hall of Fame)
- Kitchener Connect
- International Sport Events
- WinterFest
- Christkindl (increasing to 2 weeks)
- Hosting conferences
- High profile concerts

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Creating an Economically-Thriving City Together: Focuses on growing an agile, diverse local economy powered by talented entrepreneurs, workers & artists; creating opportunities for everyone and a resilient future that propels our city forward.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications arising from the result of this discussion; however, there will be proposed operating and capital budget impacts from both action plans (i.e., 2027-2030). These recommendations will be presented to Council later in Q4 of 2025 or Q1 of 2026.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – Since 2024, staff from both Special Events and Arts & Creative Industries have been engaging with internal and external groups to collect feedback and create a strategic list of action plan recommendations for Council’s consideration. These recommendations will be presented to Council later in Q4 of 2025 or Q1 of 2026.

COLLABORATE – Engagement with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has also been an important part of the process of creating both action plans. To date, discussions with members of CMT and CLT have included the following sessions:

- December 10, 2024 – CMT Meeting: Internal review of Special Events
- April 16, 2025 – CLT Strategy Session: Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan
- June 18, 2025 – CLT Strategy Session: Special Events Action Plan
- October 15, 2025 – CLT Strategy Session: Special Events Action Plan

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

There are no previous reports/authorities related to this matter.

APPROVED BY: Must be the CAO or a General Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Council Session Presentation



COUNCIL STRATEGY SESSION – NOV. 10, 2025

Photo Credits:
John Spauling Photography
Explore Waterloo Region



Introduction

- The Arts & Entertainment (A&E) division is excited about the launch of Kitchener LIVE
- The destination brand will connect arts, special events, and all City-owned A&E venues
- Today's purpose is to narrow focus on 2 units in the A&E division and their action plans:
 1. Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan (50 minutes total)
 2. Special Events Action Plan (70 minutes total)

Important: Outlined in Kitchener's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, Council directed staff to develop and implement a Special Events Action Plan as well as an Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan.

Council Session Objectives

- Share progress and engagement learnings
- Present aspirational visions and strategic frameworks

Council Input

- Prioritize A&CI recommendations
- Rank KPIs for Special Events
- Guide future event prioritization





Photo Credit:
John Spaulding Photography

PART 1 – Arts & Creative Industries Action Plan

Legacy & Foundation

- Builds on Culture Plan I (1995) and II (2005)

2025 Plan Approach

- Action-oriented and responsive to current sector needs
- Informed by extensive engagement and research

Key Engagement Inputs

- Bloomberg Harvard Initiative (2023): 40 regional arts leaders
- Environics Research (2023): 153 practitioners/residents
- Uncovering Barriers Report (2024): 10 reps + 66 surveyed artists
- Conrad Centre Review (2024): surveys and interviews

Scope of the Plan

- Support for artistic sectors (visual, performing, literary, public art)
- Growth of creative industries (media, design)
- Economic development, infrastructure, funding, community engagement



VISION – “Canada’s Emerging Arts City”

- Cultivate a vibrant, inclusive, locally-rooted arts ecosystem
- Support local talent, foster community connections, lead in arts innovation

Strategic Themes:

1) Spaces for Production & Presentation

- Affordable spaces for artists to work, exhibit, perform, collaborate

2) Public Art Creation & Care

- Creation, conservation, and visibility of public art and artifacts

3) Local Artist Development Programs

- Mentorship, professional development, programming for artists

4) Communications Strategy

- Branding, promotion, storytelling to strengthen sector visibility

5) Music Development

- Infrastructure and “layer in local” programming to grow music industry



A&CI Work Plan in 2026

Spaces for Production & Presentation

- Operate 44 Gaukel as a City-led creative hub
- Support THEMUSEUM's sustainability model

Public Art Creation & Care

- Develop temporary public art policy
- Assess and conserve existing public art and industrial artifacts

Local Artist Development Programs

- Deliver artist and community programming at 44 Gaukel

Communications Strategy

- Promote Kitchener LIVE launch
- Implement Film Office operational efficiencies

Music Development

- Continue Roos Island Music Series
- Onboard new Music Officer



2027-2030 Actions to Consider

Spaces for Production & Presentation

- \$ Develop a Culture Days program to celebrate local artists and venue spaces
- \$ Increased artist fees for Artist in Residence and Gallery Programs (CARFAC)
- \$ New gallery space program at the Conrad Centre
- \$\$\$ Enhanced 10-year capital plan for Homer Watson House & Gallery

Public Art Creation & Care

- \$\$\$ Increased maintenance funding for public art and industrial artifacts collection
- \$\$ Temporary public art implementation, annual program plan, and funding
- \$\$\$ Indigenous public art project in Victoria Park

Local Artist Development Programs

- \$\$\$ Add a new immersive/interactive temporary artwork festival
- \$\$ Create a multidisciplinary City-wide mural-making festival
- TBD Align with the Community Grants Program review

\$ = Up to \$50K

\$\$ = Between \$50K and \$100K

\$\$\$ = Over \$100K



Communications Strategy

\$\$ Upgrade/replace all City collection interpretive signage

Music Development

\$\$ Music production and performance incubator including a soundproof studio

\$\$ Create a “layer in local” talent budget to ensure local artists are featured

\$ = Up to \$50K

\$\$ = Between \$50K and \$100K

\$\$\$ = Over \$100K



Council Feedback on A&CI's Strategic Themes (15 minutes)

Note: Council will answer the questions using the Menti application.

Question #1 – Based on your conversations with constituents and your understanding of the sector, where do you believe the greatest opportunity exists within the five strategic themes?

Strategic Themes:

1. Spaces for Production & Presentation
2. Public Art Creation & Care
3. Local Artist Development Programs
4. Communications Strategy
5. Music Development

Council Prioritization Exercise (20 minutes)

Council will be invited to rank the proposed 2027-2030 Actions to Consider in order of priority, from most important to least important.

These actions reflect what staff heard consistently through community engagement and are intended to be inclusive of constituent feedback.

Question #2 – As you review the proposed actions (2027-2030), are there any priorities or ideas you've consistently heard from constituents that are missing from the list?





Photo Credit:
Explore Waterloo Region

PART 2 – Special Events Action Plan

Event Categories – “What is a Special Event?”

- Kitchener hosts a wide range of festivals and events varying in size, complexity, and purpose
- To ensure effective planning and delivery, the City categorizes events into four types:
 1. Signature Events
 2. Special Events
 3. Corporate Events
 4. Community Events

Special Events Team Focus

- Planning and delivery of Signature Events, Special Events, and Corporate Events
- These categories align with the team’s mandate and require varying levels of coordination
- Ensures Special Events team remains focused on arts and entertainment programming

Community Events

- Valued and encouraged, but outside the Special Events team’s scope
- Coordination and support managed by other City divisions
- Allows the City to explore sustainable ways to support community-led initiatives



Signature Events

- Large-scale (5,000+ attendees/day), high-impact
- Extensive planning, Tier I funding, \$100K+ budgets
- Examples: Canada Day, Christkindl Market, Blues Festival, Oktoberfest

Special Events

- Community-focused (500-4,999 attendees/day)
- In depth planning, Tier II funding, under \$100K budgets
- Examples: Diwali Event, TriPride Festival

Corporate Events

- City-led civic engagement and service events
- Examples: Park openings, State of the City, New Year's Levee

Community Events

- Organized by residents/groups; supported by other City divisions
- Examples: Neighborhood celebrations, grassroots initiatives



Overview of Action Plan

- Major events and festivals are central to Kitchener's civic identity
- Growing scale and impact → higher costs and resource needs
- Need for a strategic, financially sustainable approach

Purpose of the Action Plan

- Forward-looking, responsive to current and future needs
- Guides City's approach for next 4 years and provides clear direction for:
 1. Managing and delivering high-impact programming
 2. Communicating Council's vision internally and externally
 3. Supporting third-party organizers and community groups

Six-Step Engagement Process

- Internal staff review
- Mayor and Council consultations
- Third-party organizer discussions
- Community engagement
- Operational insights from Special Events team
- Municipal scan for best practices

Key Themes from Engagement

- Enhance event portfolio and create year-round programming
- Simplify processes for organizers and staff
- Improve sustainability and predictability
- Recognize City cannot fund all events → balanced resource allocation

VISION – “Canada’s Event Leader”

- Deliver exceptional experiences for attendees, organizers, and partners
- Support innovation, growth, and collaboration in the events sector
- Foster internal alignment and responsiveness across departments

Guiding Principles:

1) Canada’s Best Host City

- Delivering exceptional experiences for attendees, organizers, and partners

2) Canada’s Event Accelerator City

- Supporting innovation, growth, and capacity-building in the local events sector

3) An Event-Friendly Corporate Culture

- Fostering internal alignment, responsiveness, and collaboration across departments



Council KPI Ranking Activity (15 minutes)

As Kitchener continues to attract more event suggestions and opportunities, staff and senior leadership will face increasing pressure to make informed decisions about which events to pursue. To support this decision-making process, the Special Events unit is proposing the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate and prioritize events based on their alignment with strategic goals. These KPIs are intended to provide a consistent framework for assessing the value and impact of special events. By ranking these indicators, Council can help shape how success is defined and measured across the portfolio.

Activity – When evaluating the success of special events, please rank the following KPIs in order of priority, from most important to least important:

- **Number of attendees** – Overall attendance and reach of the event
- **Experience of attendees** – Contribution to quality of life and enjoyment
- **Tourism impact** – Ability to attract visitors and drive economic activity
- **Local engagement** – Participation from Kitchener residents leaving a positive impact
- **Business impact** – Effect on downtown businesses and local economy
- **Safety** – Risk management and public safety outcomes
- **Budget compliance** – Adherence to financial plans and responsible spending
- **Community brand** – Enhancement of Kitchener's identity and reputation



Council Feedback on Guiding Principles (20 minutes)

As part of the Special Events Action Plan development, staff are seeking Council's input on the proposed vision and guiding principles that will shape the City's approach to producing and supporting major events and festivals over the next four years.

Question #3 – Based on your initial impressions and what you've heard from the community, what resonates with you about the proposed vision and guiding principles for the Special Events Action Plan? What, if anything, would you change or refine?

Special Events Work Plan in 2026

Canada's Best Host City

- Continue hosting Signature and Special Events in Victoria Park
- Maintain City's role as a trusted, capable host for large-scale gatherings

Canada's Event Accelerator City

- Position the Arts & Entertainment Division as centralized entry point for organizers
- Launch and promote Kitchener LIVE for event info and engagement

An Event-Friendly Corporate Culture

- Develop publicly accessible SOP for event intake and allocation
- Create SOP for internal chargebacks and cost centre usage
- Improve transparency, consistency, and financial clarity



Setting Productive Expectations

Growing Demands

- Kitchener's reputation as a major event destination continues to rise
- Events are more expensive, staff at full capacity, and prime season (May to October) nearly saturated
- Need for a selective, strategic approach to calendar and event management

Council Support Needed

- Set realistic expectations for 2026
- Provide resources to:
 1. Stay within budget
 2. Manage workload effectively
 3. Maintain high standards

Current Portfolio Snapshot

- 2025: 38 events produced or supported
- Attendance: 350,000+
- Few dates remain for 2026 → strategic prioritization required
- Strong presence of annual/recurring events reflects sustainability of third-party organizers



Managing New Event Opportunities in 2026

Context

- Budget for 2026 is similar to 2025 (inflation adjustments only)
- Expansion requires resource reallocation or additional funding
- Goal: Balance demand, calendar capacity, and budget constraints

Three Approaches

1. Reallocate Existing Resources
2. Increase Operating Budget & Staff Capacity (2027 onward)
3. Selective Prioritization (KPIs)

Examples of Unbudgeted Opportunities

- Mayor's Blues Breakfast
- Kitchener Connect
- Kitchener Takes the Stage
- Kitchener Legacy (HOF)
- International Sport Events
- WinterFest
- High-profile concerts

