



REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee
DATE OF MEETING: October 3, 2016
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DATE OF REPORT: September 22, 2016
REPORT NO.: CAO-16-027
SUBJECT: Kitchener Market Strategy

RECOMMENDATION: That the Kitchener Market Strategy be approved as the guiding document for the Kitchener Market and market-related activities of the Economic Development division and the City of Kitchener.

BACKGROUND:

The Kitchener Market dates back to the 1830s when farmers convened in the tiny village of Berlin to share their harvest. The location has changed over the years, but it has always been an icon for fresh, local food. But, with the creation of a dedicated facility for the Market in 2004, its role in the community shifted. The market has become a place where communities connect, and where businesses launch.

Since 2004, the Market has become part of economic development, in recognition of the role that it plays in both pillars of *Make it Kitchener*, creating career opportunities and a compelling city in which to live. No longer just a place to buy produce, the Market's expanding role has created a need for a guiding strategy to ensure that the market's programs and services deliver the greatest community benefit.

Kitchener Market staff began the process of creating the first Market Strategy in 2015. This process has included extensive internal and external consultation to provide a guiding document that will establish a clear mandate for Market's role in the city, and ensure that service delivery aligns with the corporate Strategic Plan, the economic development strategy *Make it Kitchener*, and the upcoming Neighbourhood Strategy.

REPORT:

About the market

The Kitchener Market is a 60,000 sq.ft. facility built in 2004 to anchor the east end of downtown. It has 650,000 visitors annually, including an average of 10,987 Saturday market patrons. Initially the Market's primary purpose was to deliver a Saturday Market and offer prepared food through its International Food Court.

The Market became part of Economic Development in 2008. Since then, it has expanded its role in the community to better align with the City's Economic Development priorities. In particular the Market has developed a portfolio of events, cooking classes, camps and holiday celebrations, while building demand for private rentals. Since 2012, Saturday Market visitors increased by 15%, while cooking classes, rentals and events have grown by 205%. As well, the international food court drives weekday traffic to the market, with lunchtime visits up 310% since 2011 to an average of 422 visitors per day.

Through these activities, the market contributes to both the "Make it Urban" and "Make it Vibrant" pillars of *Make it Kitchener*. It contributes to the quality of life of residents by offering affordable, fresh, local food, while creating experiences that nurture a sense of belonging in the community.

Consultation results

The consultations to inform the Market Strategy validated the community's love for the tastes of the Market. Residents spoke passionately about the quality of the product, access to local goods, affordability, and the relationships they have developed with vendors. Food is a universal need, and the market provides an inclusive environment in which all members of our community can fulfill their nutritional requirements and explore new tastes.

Consultations also revealed that market visitors are driven by more than the food; they value the sense of community – a predominant feedback theme. Respondents spoke of familiar faces, vendors who know patrons by name, events, classes and experiences that support a sense of belonging. In this way, the Market is more than just a building. It's a community that contributes to a vibrant downtown core, and a healthy Kitchener.

Finally, business development discussions in recent years have revealed a need for greater support for the development of the food industry. The significant capital costs of launching of food business present a barrier to entry for many would be entrepreneurs. In the Market, access to kitchen space and short-term leases allow food start-ups to test their products, and build a customer base before committing to long-term leased space. The Market is well-positioned to facilitate these connections as a hub for the food industry, based on existing consumer traffic, partnerships and industry relationships.

Based on these consultation results, the proposed Kitchener Market Strategy includes three goals:

- Support a vibrant food culture
- Grow and strengthen the role as an urban public market
- Become a catalyst for the food industry

These goals all contribute to the market's purpose:

The market is not a building, it's a community. We believe the market exists to connect people, create experiences, and build relationships.

ALIGNMENT WITH CITY OF KITCHENER STRATEGIC PLAN:

The recommendation of this report supports the achievement of the city's strategic vision through the delivery of core service.

The Kitchener Market plays a critical role in Make it Kitchener, the City's economic development strategy by supporting culinary creativity (Make it Spark) and food startups (Make it Start) as well as supporting the urban vitality (Make it Urban and Make it Vibrant).

In particular, the Market Strategy supports a strong and resilient economy by nurturing quality of life, supporting job creation and facilitating the ongoing development of Downtown Kitchener (items 2.1, 2.4 and 2.5).

As well, the Market Strategy supports safe and thriving neighbourhoods, by encouraging people to come together in a public space, supporting health and well-being, and providing a venue for citizen-led events and experiences (item 3.6).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Any disbursements will be funded through existing Economic Development operating budgets and/or the Economic Development Reserve Fund. Any disbursements outside of existing budgets or outside the parameters of the City's Purchasing Policy, will be brought forward to Council for approval with a supporting business case.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Staff engaged over 3,000 people in consultation to inform this strategy. A comprehensive approach was used to try to achieve representation across the community. This included a digital survey, social media campaign, on-the-street interviews, idea boards at the market, vendor dinner, advisory committees, and stakeholder meetings.

As well, the Market has an ongoing collaborative relationship with its vendors, chefs and programming partners, and works in partnership to develop programming.

CONCLUSION:

The Kitchener Market Strategy delivers a strong vision and compelling strategy for the future growth of the Kitchener Market. The proposed strategy will provide 1) a point of entry for the community and future partners to engage with the City on the future growth of the Market; and, 2) a guiding document for implementation by Economic Development staff. The strategy will help maximize the investments already made in the facility, staff will work to ensure the market delivers value to citizens, while growing revenue-generating portions of the business and supporting the development of the food industry. The market will need to develop a resource model to align with the support and implementation of this strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGED BY: Jeff Willmer, CAO

Kitchener Market Strategy

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The role of a market

Throughout history, markets have been a powerful force in urbanization. Community markets spawned village growth, and remain anchors for vibrant cities. The Kitchener Market was a central gathering place from the very early days of the village of Berlin. What was once a few tables in the basement of the town hall, has become an iconic establishment, described as early as the 1930s as “one of the best things the city possesses”.

Markets have been gathering places since the ancient Roman forums, Persian bazaars and Greek agoras – a place name meaning “assembly”. These markets served their communities for more than commerce; they provided a public space for civic announcements, political debate, and performances of artistry and sport.

Modern markets continue to act as places of congregation alongside their merchandise. Though they may differ in their offerings, they are alike in contributing to healthy communities. They nourish our souls, create a sense of belonging, and energize cities -- making them more similar to community centres, clubs or festivals than retail stores.

Markets differ from other types of retail based on human connections and shared experiences. Buyers and vendors reconnect with each return visit, amid a sea of familiar faces. They move almost unknowingly into a social ritual that delivers benefits beyond the basket of goods.

But when that ritual does involve food, it extends additional significance to the experience.

The rituals of food

Food rituals are some of the most enduring expressions of culture through history. From fasting to feasting, we associate food rituals with times of day (dim sum), season (harvest festivals) and life experiences (weddings).

Food is an instrument we use to pass down tradition and appreciate different cultures. And markets can become cultural icons that reinforce and express community identities. The best known markets around the world reflect their cultures, such as Tokyo’s Tsukiji fish market or Guadalajara’s Tonalá pottery and craft market.

Beyond cultural expression, almost universally, the kitchen is the heart and soul of any home because it brings together families and friends. The market becomes the heart and soul of the community as it draws us together too.

We believe...

The market is not a building, it's a **community**. We believe the market exists to bring people together.

Our goals

What began as a place to sell and source crops has become a landmark for local food. The Market's simplest purpose is to fulfill our most basic need for sustenance. But beyond our health and wellness, we pursue a tantalizing variety of tastes. The market is the anchor for **our vibrant food culture**.

The rituals of food extend beyond consumption; the gathering of ingredients becomes a shopping ritual when combined with familiar faces, scents and sounds. The Market community comes together every week to share this distinct experience. The food can become peripheral to the connectedness experienced as different ages and cultures intermingle in **a public urban space**.

Food activates our economy in a myriad of ways. From chefs, servers, butchers, farmers, and bakers, to food production workers, caterers and food trucks, there are a variety of career opportunities that support economic diversification and inclusive job creation to support all our citizens. The market can be a **catalyst for the local food industry**.

Support a vibrant food culture

This is what the Market has been and always will be: a place for food. The first spark of the Market took shape in the 1800s when local farmers came together to share their abundant harvest. The location and the faces have changed, but the essence of the Market remains the same. You'll find the freshest produce, savoury meats and cheeses, and mouthwatering baking all under one roof.

While food is at the heart of the market experience, as Kitchener evolves, we celebrate the culture of food in new ways. From the sensory delights of Saturday morning to weekday lunches and cooking classes, we explore both new and traditional food – from canning to Thai cuisine to wine pairings. The relationships that develop with chefs and vendors allow us to be better informed about our food choices, and to be confident to explore new tastes.

Our European roots are evident in the sausage and schnitzel, but the aromas of today's international food court include jerk chicken and tacos – a direct reflection of our diverse community. The attributes of our groceries – such as organic, gluten-free, or vegan – reflect our health needs, values, and personal relationship with food. While the ingredients may change, our passion for the food will endure.

We believe:

- food is at the heart of the human experience.
- the rituals of food are social; it connects us to one another.
- food expresses tradition and culture.

What we're doing:

We will always offer a vibrant Saturday market focused on high quality local food. This is how the Market began; our nearly 150-year tradition means we've always known the value of freshly picked produce. From the first strawberries of June to the last of the autumn squash, food brings us together, symbolically tracking the passage of time from season to season.

Our customers are passionate about food, but don't all shop for the same basket of goods. We know that you value local food, but also search out international ingredients. To remain relevant to our diverse population, the Market must balance its vendor mix to offer variety – without sacrificing authenticity.

To meet the needs of our customers, we recognize that a Saturday market alone may not be enough to satisfy your appetite, so we will evaluate options to offer more market days.

Action items:

Pursue a variety of products

- Celebrate food and food culture, and the related traditions we value (e.g., Oktoberfest)
- Support Ontario farmers and producers by ensuring the market maintains a strong local presence, the cornerstone of the Saturday market experience

- Clearly identify local farmers and MyPick verified vendors
- Ensure the product mix reflects the needs of our customers (e.g., offer access to organic, non-GMO, gluten-free options)
- Infuse cultural diversity into market offerings by continuing to attract international vendors that will fulfill emerging customer preferences (e.g., exotic spices , Halal meat, international cooking classes, international food court)
- Support sustainability by encouraging awareness of seasonal food preparation through cooking classes (e.g., canning)
- Preserve access to affordable products, including “ugly” fruits and vegetables
- Offer sought-after amenities such as market bags, carts, and water filling stations

Expand operations to improve access

- Investigate expanded operations such as a weekday market and/or extended operating hours
- Explore new options to provide access to market products including a pick-and-pack distribution system, a food box service with local farmers, or online vendor distribution
- Support the implementation of the Neighbourhood Strategy by creating, for example, a toolkit to facilitate pop-up neighbourhood markets
- Consider options to facilitate market access such as valet-style assistance with purchases
- Build stronger relationships with vendors, and showcase their strengths (e.g., vendor information wall board)
- Work with vendors and customers to inform and educate about food safety and choices, and encourage two-way communication to share this knowledge

Grow and strengthen the role as an urban public market

The location of the Kitchener Market has always been central; its existence was founded on the principle of bringing people together. As the shape of the city evolves, downtown Kitchener remains at the heart of the region, and the convergence of transit. As a cherished public space, remaining accessible to all members of our community is a priority.

Public markets are distinct for their public goals; commerce is not our civic purpose. Municipalities operate public markets primarily to activate underutilized space, support local farmers/vendors, and create inclusive communities.

The role of the Market in the urban community has been in transition since 2004, when the new building was opened, anchoring the east end of downtown. The market now delivers a greater variety of community benefits beyond nutritious food, such as welcoming new Canadians, offering cooking classes and camps, and providing a space for life celebrations. From baby showers to board game groups, the Market contributes to strong, vibrant communities.

The Market's utilitarian roots have given way to enriching experiences. In its simplest form, we encounter friends and family amid bustling food stalls. But new experiences help form new connections, and give us a stronger sense of belonging to our city.

We believe:

- the Market's role is to be the city's definitive Saturday social gathering place.
- the Market fulfills a variety of social rituals throughout the week, from cooking classes to kids' music, and both public and private events.
- the Market contributes to healthy communities and strong neighbourhoods, and supports a greater sense of belonging for all citizens.

What we're doing:

The Market supports the urban community by offering access to affordable, fresh goods without getting in a car. But the quality of the food — and the market experience — draws in crowds from the region and beyond. Our programming and presence in the core make the Kitchener Market distinct, and we will continue to offer an authentic urban market experience to both new visitors and our long-time community members.

The accessibility and reach of the Market will expand with the launch of LRT service to the district. This means we need to think about where the market experience begins; it is not contained to the building itself. Our presence in the district — from signs to sidewalks to public space — welcome our guests. And our spaces will come to life when we work with our partners to animate them.

Expanding the reach of the Market makes a beloved community institution available to more of our citizens. This must be supported by ensuring operations, programming and communications are aligned to deliver the experience our community expects.

Action items:

Offer highly engaging programming

- Ensure the market continues to offer a wide variety of community events that reflect the diversity of market attendees and build a stronger sense of community (e.g., charity events, board game groups)
- Offer highly engaging kid-friendly programming such as agricultural scavenger hunts and interactive education (e.g., kids' camps, sheep shearing, apple press truck)
- Expand into market-related classes and displays such as food photography, floral arrangements, food/agricultural antiques, as well as artisan/crafter bazaars
- Inspire a stronger connection to the earth through related programming such as a spring seedling sale, flower market, and access to information on growing your own produce
- Contribute to a vibrant downtown by offering programming throughout the week
- Promote rentable space option to provide the community with access to affordable space for shared experiences and life events (e.g., wedding showers, corporate events)

Better integrate the facility into the surrounding area and fill the district with life

- Investigate possible parking options
- Extend the look and feel of the market outside the building to improve the market's street presence (e.g., better signs)
- Improve signage throughout the district, especially leading from the Market LRT station stop, and support branding of the station area as the Market station area
- Refresh design materials to reflect the Market's evolution in the eyes of the community
- Animate the piazza with, for example, music, dancing, theatre, buskers, pop-up mini markets, especially in the evening
- Update the facility to ensure accessibility to all members of the Market community include upgraded washrooms, and access to high chairs
- Engage the cycling community to make the Market more bicycle-friendly, including improved parking/lockup facilities
- Develop a comprehensive plan to make over the piazza
- Create inviting nooks and cozy spaces both inside and out, and showcase assets like the Sweet Pea ("pea pod") fountain. (e.g., establish a community living room space for impromptu gatherings, and information exchange)
- Investigate the creation of a community garden

Work with partners to make it happen

- Build stronger connections with local partners such as neighbourhood associations and community builders to tap into community interests and values
- Engage artists to animate the space
- Work with charities and community groups to provide access to appropriate, accessible event space

Become a catalyst for the food industry

Very simply, the Market enables local producers and shoppers to connect, in support of the local food economy. It connects urban and rural economies, and helps secure local food systems. But there is additional untapped economic potential of the Market that is now revealing itself.

Beyond retail benefits, the Market has become a place for emerging businesses to experiment. The Marketplace kitchen and market stalls allow prospective food entrepreneurs to develop and sample their products before making long-term capital commitments. Aspiring chefs can develop their reputation in cooking classes, and hopeful retailers can build a customer base before establishing a store front.

This is a new role for the Market. It benefits from a reputation as an authentic place to source ingredients, existing relationships with chefs and restaurants, and ties to the Conestoga College School of Business and Hospitality. The Market is on the cusp of expanding its role to deliver greater economic benefits by acting as a catalyst to the food industry.

We believe:

- the Market is a launchpad for all types of food businesses. There is no end to what you can do with food: cultivate produce, create a ready-to-serve meal, sell cookies all over the world.
- the Market elevates the status of these jobs by exposing consumers to the knowledge and creativity of culinary workers.
- the Market supports job creation along a continuum of experience and education. From the young person starting their first job in a restaurant to the experienced chef, the food economy supports a variety of careers (e.g., food service, retail, culinary worker, food production).

What we're doing:

The Market has the potential to anchor a downtown culinary hub, maximizing the impact of the investment already made in the facility, and leveraging its reputation. Many of Kitchener's most exciting new restaurants are found in the core, so the Market is well-positioned to facilitate the bonds between chefs, food producers, farmers and culinary workers. But opportunities in the food industry extend beyond food service, into production and retailing as well.

These aspiring entrepreneurs need access to support systems and space, just like other startups. But the very specific capital requirements for commercial test kitchens are elusive and necessary to get off the ground.

The Market already draws on the services of the Waterloo Region Small Business Centre, offering marketplace workshops on Etsy, and events for Summer Company. Conestoga College's "Rising Stars" pop-up dinners at the Market help aspiring chefs to showcase their menus and test their skills. With the right adjustments, we will be in a better position to support the local food industry.

Action items:

Support food startups

- Investigate the creation of a culinary incubator to act as a hub connecting innovators with people with experience and knowledge
- Engage with culinary entrepreneurs to encourage partnership with the market and its vendors
- Promote rentable space; events are the catalyst for culinary development.
- Upgrade kitchen facilities to meet the requirements of chefs and culinary workers
- Investigate creating a network of community-based commercial kitchens that can become a resource for food startups (e.g., church or community centre kitchens)
- Support the local culinary community by extending the market's presence outside the building (e.g., pop-up fruit stands and dinners, weekend food festivals)
- Stay on top of food trends to ensure the market's facility and programming is innovative

Conclusion

The types of food we love changes with trends and time, but our hunger will always drive us to eat. If we needed only groceries, our cupboards could be stocked from local retail stores. What separates the Market from grocery stores, or even restaurants, is its ability to connect people, create experiences, and build relationships.

The market visitor arrives on Saturday morning with the expectation of more than tomatoes or corn. They seek community.

The market vendor arrives on Saturday morning in the pre-dawn hours, hoping to empty their baskets as they fill those of others. They seek a connection with the people who buy their food.

The people who attend classes, plan events, celebrate bridesmaids' parties and even host life celebrations, choose the Market because it is more than just a space in the city. It is *their* space. They seek authenticity and vibrancy.

This strategy was made by our community through extensive consultations over the past year.

You told us that the secret to the Market's success is the passionate community behind it. When you head for home, your grocery bags and hearts are full.

We've come a long way from the basement of the Berlin Town Hall. But our roots as an urban public market remain firmly entrenched in the hearts of the community.

The types of events, music, vendors and crowds will change. But what will always stay the same is the sense of belonging and community pride we feel for the way we come together, and the values we share.

Appendix A: Action Items

Support a vibrant food culture

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Become a catalyst for the food industry

Support food startups

- Investigate the creation of a culinary incubator to act as a hub connecting innovators with people with experience and knowledge
- Engage with culinary entrepreneurs to encourage partnership with the market and its vendors
- Promote rentable space; events are the catalyst for culinary development.
- Upgrade kitchen facilities to meet the requirements of chefs and culinary workers
- Investigate creating a network of community-based commercial kitchens that can become a resource for food startups (e.g., church or community centre kitchens)
- Support the local culinary community by extending the market's presence outside the building (e.g., pop-up fruit stands and dinners, weekend food festivals)
- Stay on top of food trends to ensure the market's facility and programming is innovative