

Staff Report



To	City Council
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, December 16, 2025
Subject	St. George’s Square – Final Design

Recommendation

1. That the Final Design for St. George’s Square, as outlined in report 2025-548, dated December 16, 2025, be approved.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the final design for St. George’s Square to Council for approval.

Key Findings

- After significant community engagement, the final plan for St. George’s Square responds to the comments that we heard from Council, key interest-holders, and the community. The revised plan envisions the Square as an active urban plaza providing flexibility for a wide range of events and activities, including daily use and self-activation, as well as larger events and festivals.
- As detailed design of the Square continues, minor details may be slightly modified, however, the overall final plan of the Square will remain.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The re-imagining of St. George’s Square as part of the Downtown Renewal program of work aligns with Strategic Goal 12: Make downtown a vibrant place for everyone. Downtown Renewal, the re-imagined St. George’s Square, and the upgraded streetscapes will provide the foundation for community success over generations.

Future Guelph Theme

People and Economy

Future Guelph Objectives

People and Economy: Make downtown a vibrant place for everyone

Financial Implications

Staff do not anticipate a substantial change to the project budget to accommodate the final plan. As directed by Council in July 2025, staff will report back on any budget impacts stemming from the revised design, if applicable, through either the 2026 budget monitoring process or the 2027 budget update.

Report

In conjunction with the Wyndham Street North right-of-way reconstruction, this provides a logical time to reimagine St. George's Square, which is an important public space, in the context of our intensifying Downtown.

In July 2025, Council approved a Recommended Concept plan for St. George's Square and requested that additional public engagement occur and that the detailed plan be brought back to Council for approval by the end of 2025. The July 2025 report titled [Wyndham Street North and St. George's Square – Preparing for and mitigating construction \(DTIRP Phase 1\)](#) set out the relevant City policies, plans and guidelines, as well as the significant amount of public engagement, that informed the concept plan.

Additional public engagement occurred in August, September, and October, leading to the current revised plan for St. George's Square being presented for Council's approval.

What we heard about the final concept plan (July-September 2025)

During engagement with the community, key interest-holders, and Council, we heard that the concept plan should include:

- A **wow** factor
- More natural materials, including more trees and native planting, and less concrete
- More flexibility, particularly with the ability to provide space for events
- Materials that are more sympathetic to the existing heritage character of Downtown Guelph
- Further consideration with respect to including a public washroom
- Further consideration with respect to the placemaking structure or an area for play. The feedback ranged from support and desire to see it expanded, to those who think it was unnecessary, to those suggesting it be re-located within the Square.
- Space for outdoor patios to be located and businesses to operate
- Additional lighting
- The opportunity to incorporate a potential community-lead idea for a tribute to Robert Munsch
- Reconsideration of the need for gateway features
- Opportunities for shade
- More opportunities for seating, including accessible seating.

For additional details about what we heard from the community, complete engagement summaries can be found on the City's website:

- [Summer 2025 engagement summary](#): including feedback on the 60% detailed design of the Square
- [Fall 2025 engagement summary](#): Including feedback on the more detailed design of the Square

Summary of relevant Council motions

In July 2025, Council provided direction that the final design of St. George's Square should incorporate flexibility to support seasonal patios and community events by ensuring that site furnishings—such as benches, chairs, and waste receptacles—are designed and positioned for easy reconfiguration or temporary removal.

Furthermore, the design should reflect the heritage and character of Downtown through the integration of natural materials and heritage-inspired elements. This includes the use of stone, wood, and salvaged limestone where feasible; interpretive signage and public art that convey local history and Indigenous narratives; gateway features such as low stone walls or planters; landscaping with native species to soften hard surfaces; and brick or stone paving patterns that reflect traditional streetscapes.

In September 2024, Council provided direction to the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program of work, which includes St. George's Square, to provide an enhanced level of streetscaping that gives priority to improved tree canopy, flexible streets, public seating, paving stones in highlighted areas and design that optimized public space for the most efficient operating budget.

For motions passed by Council related to St. George's Square, see Attachment-2.

Summary of relevant Downtown Guelph Business Association motions

In September 2025, the Downtown Guelph Business Association (DGBA) passed motions requesting the concept plan for St. George's Square be modified as follows:

- To ensure the design reflects and enhances Guelph's unique heritage character while supporting a vibrant Downtown public space.
- To incorporate the placemaking initiative proposed by Barb Minett related to Robert Munsch's Paper Bag Princess.
- To find a more discreet location for the public washroom.

In November 2025, the DGBA reviewed the Final Plan and passed the following motions:

- Recognizing that the Final Plan addresses the Board's previous motions and concerns
- Supporting the Final plan proposed for St. George's Square.

For motions passed by the Downtown Guelph Business Association related to St. George's Square, see Attachment-3.

The Revised Plan - what we modified

Wow Factor - Promenade

To help identify and define the Square, significant emphasis has been placed on the promenade that surrounds the Square. The width of the promenade has been increased and will be a minimum of 6 metres wide and may be up to 8 metres wide in some areas. The promenade will include overhead catenary lighting supported by a wood structure that compliments the heritage character of Downtown and Guelph's natural heritage. The promenade area will accommodate private patios or public seating, as well as a pedestrian sidewalk that is intended to help draw pedestrians to the edges of the Square, rather than just along Wyndham Street or Quebec Street, to access the businesses. By defining the edge of the Square, ample flexible space is maintained for events, as well as day-to-day use.

Figure 1: Wow Factor - Promenade



Flexibility

Planters – To increase flexibility, the planters have been reduced in size and shifted toward the edge areas of each quadrant of the Square allowing for ample flexible space. It also allows for different configurations of the Square to be used to accommodate events of different sizes including: each quadrant to be used individually; the westerly side of Wyndham to be used (closing a portion of Quebec Street); or using the Square in its entirety (closing down the streets).

Figure 2: Planters



Stage area – To further increase flexibility, a stage area has been identified and is located in the southwest corner of the Square (where Knar Jewelry and RBC are currently located). The stage area will be a flat space that can accommodate temporary stages of different sizes, with each event bringing in the size of stage that best fits their event. For day-to-day use, or events that do not require a stage, this is a flexible flat area.

Figure 3: Staging Area



Family Fountain size and location – On the easterly side of Wyndham Street, the Family Fountain has been shifted further toward Old Quebec Street Shoppes to create more flexible space between the Fountain and Wyndham Street. The lower basin of the Fountain will also be reduced in size by approximately 1.2 metres, while generally maintaining the existing octagonal shape. The location shift and reduction in size also creates the opportunity for the area at the top of the stairs to be used as a natural stage, with room for an audience at the bottom of the stairs. Some comments were received expressing concern with respect to emergency access to Old Quebec Street Shoppes which we have reviewed with emergency services and the appropriate amount of space has been maintained for emergency access purposes.

Figure 4: Family Fountain



Natural Materials and Heritage Character

Trees – The trees in soil cells and planters have been grouped to create mini-forest edges in each quadrant of the Square to provide a more natural feeling to the area and reduce the impact of the proposed hardscaping, while maintaining flexibility within the Square. The addition of more trees also increases the amount of shade that will be provided.

Figure 5: Aerial View of the Southwest Quadrant



Lighting and shade structures – The promenade lighting structure is designed as a wood structure with an organic shape to reflect both the natural and heritage character of Guelph. With the introduction of the lighting structure, as well as additional trees, the proposed shade structures have been removed due to lack of space and conflicts between these structures. If they can be accommodated in the future, they will be constructed of wood and similar in design to the lighting structure.

Planters – The use of limestone or similar for the planters is being explored. In addition, the design of the planters has been modified to no longer have any ramped edges. This modified design allows for more public seating to be provided as part of the planters.

Figure 6: Proposed Planter Up Close



Interactive Placemaking Structure

The feedback regarding the placemaking structure was mixed with some community members expressing enthusiasm for family and child-friendly elements

within the Square. Others expressed concern about creating an area for play within the Downtown. In addition to the potential interactive placemaking structures that were presented for feedback, a community-led idea for a tribute to Robert Munsch in the form of a Paper Bag Princess statue and bench was proposed.

With this mixed feedback on the interactive placemaking structure, as well as the new Paper Bag Princess idea, the revised plan for St. George's Square protects space for one or both of these elements to be installed, however, doesn't recommend either at this time.

The protected space is relocated in the northwest corner of the Square to be more directly linked with the new public library in support of people moving between the two facilities. The community-led Paper Bag Princess suggestion is currently proceeding through the approved proposal process identified in the City's Public Art Policy.

Public Washroom

On October 31, 2025, an Information Report titled [Improving Access to Public Washrooms in Guelph – Update](#) was released outlining mixed feedback from municipalities that have had experience operating self-cleaning/automated public washrooms. The feedback highlighted both benefits and notable operational, supplier and maintenance challenges with these types of washrooms. This feedback, together with mixed feedback from the public on the proposed public washroom with St. George's Square, has resulted in the public washroom being removed from the plan at this time.

Staff continue to recommend pursuing a public washroom within or in proximity to St. George's Square, however, it is clear that the technology available to support self-cleaning/automated public washrooms may not have the operational and budget savings anticipated at this time and will likely be more reliable in the future as it develops. To keep options open and plan for the future, the appropriate underground infrastructure to support a washroom be installed, however, the washroom will not be installed. At this time, the budget allotted for a public washroom in proximity to St. George's Square remains available for this purpose.

Staff will continue to explore options for providing a public washroom including a more traditional (not automated) public washroom, either standalone or within a storefront location, or continue to monitor the technology that supports self-cleaning/automated units and further pursue a self-cleaning/automated unit once the technology has improved.

Lighting

Catenary lighting – the catenary lighting structure added to the promenade adds a significant amount of lighting to the Square. The lights themselves will have a more traditional appearance, while being appropriately shielded to direct light downwards. The structure itself is proposed to be constructed of wood with an organic shape to reflect Guelph's natural heritage and some of the natural elements that have been introduced into the design.

Area lights – additional lighting on taller poles will be located throughout the Square to ensure appropriate lighting levels throughout the Square. These lights will be the

same as those proposed in Baker District. The shape of these lights is organic and somewhat whimsical in form to play nicely with the design of the catenary structure, planter shapes, and the natural elements within the Square.

Figure 7: Showcasing the Area Lights



Light sticks – Clusters of light sticks have been introduced in the Square to provide visual interest and add some dynamic lighting. The size and colour of these light sticks will vary.

Figure 8: Showcasing the Proposed Light Sticks



Additional string lights – the project team has explored adding more string lights to connect to the catenary lighting structure and other elements within the Square. In order to connect string lights to elements, particularly longer strands of lights, they need to be designed to withstand the weight of the cable and the lights, both in normal conditions, as well as windy days and during winter weather events (ice and snow). This requirement creates some technical challenges that we continue to explore. Additional string lights will be added if it is technically feasible.

For all of the lighting proposed in the Square, the fixtures used will be dark-sky friendly to ensure that the light shines down toward the Square rather than up into the sky.

Gateway Features

At this time, the gateway features have been removed because the promenade lighting structure frames the Square, including the entrances to the Square. In addition, the public engagement feedback regarding the gateway features was mixed with many community members suggesting that they should be removed. In the future, should gateway features be desired and appropriate, they can be added to the Square.

Conclusion – it is recommended that the final plan be approved

The final plan for St. George’s Square addresses what we heard from various interest-holders and groups over 2024 and 2025 – in particular, it addresses what we heard in response to the concept design presented to Council in July and the more detailed plan presented to the public in September.

The final plan:

- balances the needs and desires of the business community with the needs and desires of residents, visitors, and Downtown customers.
- recognizes and honours the existing heritage character of Downtown.
- reflects our community in that we value the environment and nature.
- can and will evolve over time. Elements such as gateway features and public art can be added to it over time.

The re-imagined St. George’s Square will be an active urban plaza and central gathering place that provides flexibility to accommodate a wide range of events and activities, including daily use and self-activation, as well as larger events and festivals.

Financial Implications

The changes to the plan between the concept presented in July and the final plan presented in this report will result in changes to the cost to construct the Square. Some changes will reduce the cost, while other changes will increase the cost. Technical details related to the final plan, as well as details related to how the Family Fountain will function when re-installed, are still being developed and refined. Given the nature of the changes, staff do not anticipate a substantial change to the project budget to accommodate the final plan.

As directed by Council in July 2025, staff will report back on any budget impacts stemming from the final plan, if applicable, through either the 2026 budget monitoring process or the 2027 budget update.

Consultations and Engagement

Extensive internal and external consultation has taken place to hear about the current and future needs and desires for St. George's Square.

In 2024, the project team focused on collecting ideas and opportunities about the Square:

- Attended various special events as well as pop-up engagement opportunities in public spaces to gather feedback. This resulted in engagement with approximately 450 participants.
- Held an online survey in which nearly 200 people participated.
- Held on-site meetings and discussions with event organizers and other interest-holders.

In 2025, the project team worked through various design options and evolved the design from a preliminary concept to a final plan which included the following engagement opportunities:

Winter

- In person and online open houses with approximately 350 participants (combined)
- Onsite tours with event organizers and other interest-holders

Spring

- In-person and online open houses with approximately 275 participants

Summer

- Committee of the Whole meeting
- Council meeting

Summer/Fall

- In-person open house with approximately 50 participants
- Virtual open house / survey with approximately 175 participants
- Tactical urbanism in the Square from September 18 – October 16
- DGBA Town Hall Presentation
- Pop-up engagement at the Dog Promenade with approximately 70 participants
- Ward 5 Town Hall Presentation

In addition to the above noted engagement opportunities, the project team has hosted monthly construction cafés to talk about all aspects of the Downtown Renewal Program of work, including St. George's Square.

Indigenous Engagement

The project team has met and shared information with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN) about the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program and specifically about the proposed design for St. George's Square.

Following Council approval of the concept plan in July, MCFN provided some ideas into how the indigenous history of the lands could be recognized and honoured in the final design for St. George's Square. These ideas include the utilization of the planters and the plants within them as a method of teaching the First Nations stories of the plant's representation to all of life on earth and the value of greenspace. Another suggestion was to use text or symbols within the promenade area to recognize that St. George's Square is along a travel path, as well as being a destination.

Discussions about these details are continuing with MCFN.

Attachments

Attachment-1 St. George's Square Final Plan

Attachment-2 Council motions related to St. George's Square

Attachment-3 DGBA motions related to St. George's Square

Attachment-4 St. George's Square Final Design – Presentation

Departmental Approval

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