



Report: CSD-HOU-18-06

Appendix J: WRH Master Plan Consultation Summary

What We Heard

Region of Waterloo

Community Services

Housing Services

To: Chair Geoff Lorentz and Members of the Community Services Committee

Date: February 27, 2018 **File Code:** D27-80

Subject: Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan Consultation Summary – What We Heard

Recommendation:

For information

Summary:

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo Council approved the creation of a Master Plan for Waterloo Region Housing (WRH) on February 22, 2017 (Report CSD-HOU-17-04), which included establishing a WRH Master Plan Steering Committee and hiring consultants to conduct a community consultation process. The purpose of the WRH Master Plan is to provide a vision and long term plan for WRH for the next 20 years, with a focus on the Region's role as a housing provider, rather than its role as a Service Manager for Housing and Homelessness.

During the consultation process, key stakeholders were consulted across the Region of Waterloo, including Regional staff and Councillors, area municipal staff and Councillors, current WRH tenants, other housing providers (private market and community housing) and community support agencies. Various methods were used to obtain their feedback such as interviews, focus groups, forums and surveys.

This report includes an overview of the findings from the consultation process, which are summarized in the attached report “What We Heard”. The WRH Master Plan Steering Committee will continue to meet for a few more months, with the goal to have a report to Regional Council by May 2018 with options and recommendations regarding the long term direction for WRH.

Report:

Phase 1 of the WRH Master Plan process began soon after Council gave its approval on February 22, 2017. A Steering Committee was established with five Regional Councillors representing urban and rural communities in Waterloo Region, and ten senior staff representing various Regional divisions and departments.

Phase 2 of the WRH Master Plan process included hiring a consultant team to conduct a community consultation and provide a summary report of the results. Tim Welch Consulting and Glenn Pothier from GLPi were the consultant team hired in June 2017, with consultations beginning over the summer and completed by the end of September.

Within the Region, the following stakeholders were consulted:

- Regional staff from a number of divisions/departments such as Community Services (including housing staff from WRH and those that carry out other housing administration and policy functions), Public Health, Facilities, Finance, Legal, Planning and Economic Development;
- Commissioners from a number of Regional departments and the Chief Administrative Officer; and
- The Regional Chair and Regional Councillors.

The following stakeholders from the broader community were consulted:

- Tenants currently living in WRH communities;
- Community groups providing support services to tenants in WRH buildings;
- Non-profit housing and Co-operative housing providers;
- Private market housing developers; and
- Councillors and staff from lower tier municipalities.

A number of processes were used to obtain feedback from stakeholders within the Region of Waterloo and the broader community. These include:

- Focus Groups with stakeholders from within and outside of the Region to discuss their views about WRH;
- Individual interviews with staff from the Region, elected officials, non-profit and private sector housing providers and support service providers in the community;
- Surveying tenants living in three different types of WRH communities (seniors, families and single non-seniors) during BBQ's, Back to School Events and unit

inspections. There were several meetings with the WRH Tenant Council, as well as a meeting with the YouthForce Team. Tenants who did not wish to complete a paper survey were invited to complete an online version of the survey; and

- Inviting participants to provide written feedback via e-mail if they were unable to participate in scheduled consultation events.

In total, more than 200 individuals (including 100 WRH tenants) were consulted through these four strategies.

Overview of results – What We Heard (see Appendix A for more details):

Based on feedback from very different groups of stakeholders, there emerged some general findings and perceptions:

1. Waterloo Region Housing appears to have a good reputation regarding their management and physical stock, although there is general lack of knowledge and familiarity about WRH.
2. There are a number of perceived strengths of Waterloo Region Housing, noting that the organization was moving in the right direction and has made great improvements in a number of key areas such as asset management and tenant engagement. Staff excellence and the benefits of economies of scale with WRH being the largest community housing provider in Waterloo Region were also recognized.
3. There are a number of perceived weaknesses of Waterloo Region Housing, such as WRH's low profile, absence of WRH long term plan, and constraints of being integrated into a Regional corporation. WRH was considered a relatively more expensive provider due to variables such as a unionized workforce and high standards for construction and asset management compared to other community housing providers. Limitations of some of the WRH stock were noted such as age, poor design and other inefficiencies. Other concerns were the perceived uneven distribution of units across the Region, tenant concerns about policies, staffing levels, and stigma of living in WRH communities, and confusion about different staff roles and functions.
4. Despite some of the perceived weaknesses, there was a strong feeling among the majority of stakeholders that WRH plays a pivotal role in the community and there are a number of benefits from the Region being a housing provider, such as being a more effective advocate for affordable housing, providing quality housing and supports, helping the Region's most vulnerable citizens, setting a high standard for others, having the potential to be more innovative, and playing an important role in preserving affordable housing stock in Waterloo Region.
5. Feedback also included important issues and trends that should be addressed as part of the WRH Master Plan. This would include housing market trends, current and changing tenant needs, integration of support services, other municipal

funding pressures, capacity in the non-profit sector for operating and developing housing, capital funding opportunities, and collaboration opportunities with other community partners.

Overall, there was very strong support for WRH creating a 20 year Master Plan, as an important tool to help WRH evolve into an organization that is more efficient, robust and responsive to the opportunities, challenges and changing needs within Waterloo Region. There were many suggestions about what WRH future activities should include, as outlined in the summary document.

When asked about the potential roles WRH could evolve into over the next 20 years:

- There was little to no support for “status quo”, which was perceived as neither feasible nor desirable.
- The option of divesting the entire WRH stock was also not seen as a feasible or desirable solution. There was support for divesting some stock with inefficient use of land or high operating costs if proceeds could be re-invested into the re-development of existing or new WRH communities to replace this loss and help build more affordable housing.
- There was support for WRH to play a larger role as an advocator or facilitator for affordable housing, but there was some confusion whether this should be WRH’s role or the Region’s role as Service Manager.
- There was strong support for WRH to redevelop its existing communities that met certain criteria, with the intent of replacing and increasing the number of units and where more income mixing could occur.
- There was no consensus on whether WRH should build additional communities. Some supported this option while others felt that the non-profit and private sector could do this at a lower cost.

The summary document also includes feedback about what Region of Waterloo Community Housing Inc. (ROWCHI) could potentially be used for, as a separate Region-owned corporation. Again, there was little knowledge and awareness of this entity, which is currently being used for holding acquired housing assets that were in distress or difficulty. Although there are limitations to this role, this use could continue or units could be transferred back to the not-for-profit sector once they are more viable. There was also recognition that this corporation would have more flexibility to play a larger role in the future development of WRH units.

Next Steps

The WRH Master Plan Steering Committee will continue to meet for a few more months to help take the information from the community consultation to create the vision and goals for the 20 Year Master Plan. This would also include reviewing information regarding what other municipalities and large housing providers are doing across

Ontario, to help inform WRH future directions. The goal is to present a final report with options and recommendations to Regional Council by May 2018.

Quality of Life Indicators:

Creating a WRH Master Plan will address Economic Well-being (e.g. will give direction for Regionally-owned affordable housing); Social Inclusion and Equity (e.g. will give direction regarding revitalized communities with enhanced supports and tenant engagement that increases their sense of belonging); Physical and Emotional Well-Being (e.g. will give direction about maintaining good quality housing that impacts physical and mental health); and Relationships (e.g. will give direction about creating vibrant housing communities that bring diverse people together).

Corporate Strategic Plan:

This report addresses the Region's Corporate Strategic plan 2015-2018, Focus Area 4: Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities and specifically Strategic Objective 4.3 – to increase the supply and range of affordable and supportive housing options.

Financial Implications:

Nil

Other Department Consultations/Concurrence:

The WRH Master Plan Steering Committee has staff representation from Planning, Economic Development, Finance, Facilities and Legal services, and the consultation included key stakeholders across Regional divisions and departments.

Attachments

Appendix A: What We Heard – Waterloo Region Housing (WRH) Master Plan Consultation Summary

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