Contents

Our vision ......................................................... 3
   Beyond COVID-19 ........................................ 4
   A world-class community ................................ 5
   Investing in our community ............................. 6

Supporting our businesses .................................. 8
   Current challenges ........................................ 9
   Investing in economic recovery ......................... 10

Affordable homes: building a better future for all ..... 12
   A home. A community. A better life. ................ 12
   Our role in achieving affordability ...................... 13
   Affordability = stability .................................. 14
   The housing path ........................................... 15
   Our work at a glance: 2020 ............................. 16
   Community challenges .................................... 17
   A new way. Together. ..................................... 18

Addressing inequities in our community .................. 19
   Building a better future for EVERYONE in our region 19
   The diversity and inclusion journey ..................... 20
   Equity in 2021 and beyond .............................. 22

Region of Waterloo Council ................................ 23
Our vision

Our vision is to build the best community in Canada and beyond.

In this community, every resident feels like they belong. Every resident has a warm bed and a safe place to live, because we believe that communities prosper when everyone has a place to call home.

In this community, every resident has the support they need, not just to meet their basic needs, but to thrive, grow and fully contribute. Every resident is supported by a thriving economy that provides jobs and meaningful careers.

In this community, every resident can get where they need to go easily, with a mix of sustainable and accessible transportation options.

In this community, we respect the global climate and the local environment and we understand that we live in a unique region, where our urban areas are surrounded by precious farmland.

In this community, we listen to the voices of all residents and we give opportunities for all residents to have a voice.

And in this community, we act on those voices to keep moving in the right direction, together.
Beyond COVID-19

To achieve our vision, we need to support our community through this pandemic and we need to plan for beyond COVID-19.

The pandemic has presented challenges we could have never foreseen, but thankfully, some things don’t change.

We’re still a caring region.

We’re still a region that takes pride in making the right decisions, not just for today, but for future generations.

We understand that COVID-19 has shifted our focus but it has not shaken our vision.

At the Region of Waterloo, we continue to strive to build the best community in Canada and beyond.

And at the Region our role remains firm: we exist to improve the lives of every single resident.

Every. Single. One.
A world-class community

As we work towards a long-term vision for Waterloo Region, we continue to provide critical services to each and every resident.

And as we do so, we are also committing to an exciting, historic investment in upstream funding to help improve the lives of residents.

These investments recognize that we have a diverse, growing community.

These investments also ensure we are well-positioned to emerge from the pandemic to build a community that is globally competitive as one of the world’s greatest places to live.

Our approach is thoughtful and purpose-built and aims to bring better quality of life to all residents now and into the future.
Investing in our community

$15 million over two years to improve the economic, social and cultural health and wellness of Indigenous, Black, racialized and other marginalized communities

$3 million over the next 18-24 months to support businesses impacted by the pandemic

Over $20 million over two years in response to the urgent and growing need for affordable housing

Federal and Provincial funding to manage the pandemic through the addition of more than 100 public health staff, as well as funding for safe isolation centres
Investing in our community

$88 million allocated to advance our active transportation network for all users: $65 million for cyclists and $23 million for pedestrians.

To further connect our communities, we are driving forward with Stage 2 ION light rail from Kitchener to Cambridge through the launch of the Transit Project Assessment – a major milestone in this project. Building on the success of Stage 1 ION, when complete, Stage 2 will see our three urban areas connected through 37 kilometres of light rail.

To improve long-term employment opportunities for residents we have now submitted an East Side Lands Strategy for provincial approval that would expand employment opportunities in East Kitchener/Breslau.

Together with Smart Waterloo Region, our rural libraries are supporting access to high-speed internet to help rural communities access online educational, health care and cultural services.

Listening and responding to the needs of local residents: In 2020, we answered over 300,000 questions from residents at our Service First Contact Centre.
Supporting our businesses

Businesses of all sizes have faced challenges throughout the pandemic.

We’ve seen many businesses adapt to the new reality by:

• shifting to remote-working
• reducing hours
• changing their business models
• applying for government funding
• or seeking rent relief

The Region has been there every step of the way to address and support local businesses’ needs and concerns.

Small and medium-sized businesses have been hardest hit, with the food and hospitality industry feeling the most impact.
Current challenges

Businesses have told us their biggest challenges are:

- **Continually changing requirements**
  From lockdowns to colour-coded stages, businesses have been nimble as they adjust their workplaces and business models to align with public health measures to ensure the safety of their employees and customers.

- **Financial strain**
  Revenues were lost due to lockdowns and operating restrictions while businesses have taken on additional costs such as: personal protective equipment (PPE), plexiglass, expanding/creating patios and more.

The Region will invest in programs to **support the business community** and to help re-instill customer confidence as we move into economic recovery.
Investing in economic recovery

BESTWR
The Business Economic Support Team of Waterloo Region (BESTWR) is comprised of community organizations from across the region who have come together to jointly address concerns and impacts to the business community during the pandemic.

Buy Local campaign
Promoting buying local through campaigns with partner organizations and by leveraging e-platforms.

Data and measurement
Monitoring data on business challenges to provide proper support through the second wave and economic recovery.

Patio extensions
Creating standard guidelines to allow patios to extend onto roads and parking lots.

PPE support
Helping local businesses source PPE.
Investing in economic recovery

Arts and culture
Helping find new ways to display, share and sell art and exhibits.

Adopting smart community solutions
Working with the local tech sector to help adopt smart technologies.

Talent development
Accessing reskilling programs to support the displaced workforce.

Business support for Black, Indigenous and Racialized communities
Support for business initiatives in the Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

COVID-19 certification program for businesses
Partnering to create a COVID-19 safe practices assessment and certification program.
Affordable homes: building a better future for all

A home. A community. A better life.

Communities thrive when everyone has a place to call home. A place that is their own, where they feel comfortable, safe and part of a community. This is what we are working towards in Waterloo Region. Communities where homes are the foundation upon which people can build their best life.

An affordable home can reduce stress for people who are struggling to pay the rising cost of market rent or home prices. It can enable a family to provide enough food for their children or give an individual the stability they need to cope with an addiction.
Our role in achieving affordability

The Region of Waterloo is committed to making housing affordable for all. We manage the delivery of housing and homelessness services across the region, operating as one system with a plan that informs everything we do. Developed and reviewed with community input, this plan is adaptable as needs change.

10-year housing and homelessness plan priorities:

• Create more affordable and community housing.
• Retain and maintain existing stock.
• Offer a broader range of housing options to meet diverse needs.
• Expand supports for people to find and secure housing.
• Improve access to programs that support people into stable housing.
Affordability = stability

To thrive, we need stability. Stability in housing means something different for each of us, such as being able to pay rent on time each month or having the life skills to keep your home. For Ann Marie, stability meant owning a home.

She and her children lived in community housing while she received income support from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

They were comfortable, but Ann Marie wanted to know her children were taken care of if something were to happen to her. After securing full time employment and with support from the Region’s Affordable Home Ownership program, she had a down payment for a home.

The loan gave Ann Marie’s family more independence and roots in Waterloo Region. Her family grew from hoping, to having a home, and later being able to set aside funds for improvements.

“I wanted to leave this to my children. I didn’t want them to have to move every couple of years. It was the stability for my kids, to know they always have a place to come to. We hope our story helps others to dream big!”
The housing path

When Ann Marie’s family moved from community housing into home ownership, a unit in community housing opened up for another family. This is how the housing continuum works. Each point is connected. A thriving community has options, programs and projects at all points along the way.
Every year, we work collectively with our partners and funders to make progress in different areas of the housing path.

**Supported more than 200 people experiencing homelessness into housing**

**153 affordable homes on five properties are in development or will be in 2021**
- 71 in Cambridge
- 21 in Ayr
- 61 in Kitchener

**Ended chronic family homelessness**

**Began development process for 100+ of the 600+ new units planned for Region-owned community housing over eight to 10 years**
Community challenges

Despite our successes, there are many challenges we face as a community. The wait list for community housing is growing at an alarming rate due to effects of the pandemic and the rising cost of rent and home prices.

More than 1,000 people are homeless in Waterloo Region; almost half are unsheltered. Hundreds have a history of homelessness.

1 in 10 people live in a home that needs major repairs, is not big enough for their family, or is unaffordable.

Over 6,000 households are on the community housing wait list, with some people waiting up to 10 years for an affordable home.
We need to create housing stability and achieve affordability for all. To do this, we can’t keep doing what we’ve always done – relying on short-term funding from higher levels of government to drive development. The pandemic has heightened the need for affordable housing and given us an opportunity to do better. In response, we developed an investment strategy that will increase tenfold the number of homes we develop each year.

Instead of buying affordable housing, we will use existing surplus properties and buy additional land to donate to non-profit and private sector partners. These partners will build mixed-use communities with affordable options. With this strategy, funding from higher levels of government will supplement our work.

This is our new way forward – building healthy, thriving communities that are accessible no matter your income level or life circumstances.
Addressing inequities in our community

Building a better future for EVERYONE in our region

All residents should live and thrive in a safe and healthy community without disadvantages due to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability or socioeconomic status.

Everyone who lives here should feel welcome, included and safe. We know this is not the reality today, and that we’re far from where we need to be. We have made a commitment and are taking actions to make real progress towards equity, diversity and inclusion.

We have heard from racialized groups in our communities as well as those who experience barriers to service. With their input, we continue our journey.
The diversity and inclusion journey

**Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2012–2015)**
A plan developed with public input to strengthen diversity in the workforce, and be more inclusive in policies, programs and services.

**Accessibility training**
Ensured all staff and volunteers providing services to the community understood the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Human Rights Code.

**Interpretation service**
Improved access to services for all citizens.

**2006**

**2017**

**Reconcili-Action launched**
First used in public health to educate staff about the history and impact of colonization on First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This informed changes in skills, knowledge and attitudes – and promoted self-reflection.

**‘Beyond Diversity: Putting Equity and Inclusion into Practice’ training**

**Islamophobia learning event**
The Coalition of Muslim Women helped us create a safe and welcoming space for our Muslim co-workers and clients.

**Immigration Partnership**
Created to help immigrants and refugees settle, work and belong in Waterloo Region.
The diversity and inclusion journey

2018

Multi-Year Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion Plan
A community group representing people with lived experiences helped create this plan. It is updated every five years.

2019

The Working Mind
Training offered to all Regional staff about mental health in the workplace.

Welcome Spaces
A place where people can access programs and services through Employment and Income Support, Children's Services and Housing Services at one location.

KW Solidarity March for Black Lives Matter
Regional Chair Redman and area municipal Mayors issue Anti-Black Racism statement in support of BLM March.

Anti-Racism Advisory Group
Formed to help eliminate systemic racism in our workplace and our services through an Anti-Racism Plan.

2020

Anti-Racism Town Halls
At these public meetings we heard the community speak to the systemic racism that exists within our community and provide ideas about how the Region can address it.
Equity in 2021 and beyond

Our journey has not been perfect. We continue to put people at the centre of our services with the goal of benefiting all residents in this region.

As we continue to grow and evolve as individuals, and as an organization, we commit to responding to citizen needs going forward in 2021 and beyond.
Region of Waterloo Council

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To watch council and committee meetings live visit:
regionofwaterloo.ca/Meetings-Agendas

To give your input on Regional projects visit:
engagewr.ca

To watch the Our Vision 2021 video visit:
youtu.be/eqa1oj-PKOA

This document is available in alternate formats upon request.