

Building a better future for all

10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 Annual Report

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

As designated by the Province of Ontario, the Region manages the delivery of housing and homelessness services for our community, operating as one system with a plan that informs everything we do. Developed and reviewed with community input, the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan is adapted as needs change. This Annual Report shares progress made on achieving the five strategic directions and 33 actions of the Plan in 2020.



Region of Waterloo
COMMUNITY SERVICES

2020 Highlights

Achieving a quality coordinated access system

In the spring of 2020, Waterloo Region became the third community (and first large community) in Canada to achieve Basic Quality Coordinated Access. Coordinated access is a way for communities to design, streamline, and bring consistency to the process for how people who are homeless access housing and services. This status is awarded by *Built for Zero Canada*, a national change effort to help communities end chronic homelessness.

The approach of the Region and its partner agencies involves:

Gathering data
on homelessness to intervene early and prevent lengthy experiences of homelessness

More effectively prioritizing people
for housing by using a standard assessment that determines the immediate needs of the person

Referring people to housing that is the best fit
for them

Keeping people experiencing homelessness safe from COVID-19

COVID-19 has shown us that stable housing for all Waterloo Region residents is a way to keep our community safe. The Region and partners have worked to ensure strong infection control and health and safety processes across the housing stability system. Due to these efforts, COVID-19 cases remained at zero for most of the year. Efforts to keep people experiencing homelessness safe include nearly doubling the number of emergency shelter spaces, adding private and semi-private, isolation and quarantine spaces, and supporting 24/7 operations wherever possible. Efforts to protect those experiencing unsheltered homelessness from COVID-19 include adding more street outreach staff, opening an interim housing site with private rooms for up to 80 people, and establishing drop-in spaces that offer meals, showers and connections to other services (e.g., health appointments). Efforts to connect people experiencing homelessness with new homes has continued during the pandemic with innovation and collaboration being central to success.

New Region-owned community housing in development

In 2020, the development process began for over 100 of the 600+ new Region-owned community housing units planned over the next 10 years under the Waterloo Region Housing (WRH) Master Plan. The focus of the WRH Master Plan is on finding ways to create more affordable housing in WRH communities, responding to the growing need for affordable housing in Waterloo Region, and improving the lives of WRH tenants and surrounding communities.

Building innovative housing solutions

The Region initiated a pilot project to learn about developing alternative housing in the spring of 2020. The foundational work provided through the Bechtel Alternative Housing Pilot Project informed an innovative response to the growing community need for affordable and supportive housing. Two additional alternative housing projects began in 2020, promising to add over 80 new homes in 2021 through modular design. The new homes from these two projects will provide housing to those experiencing homelessness.

Our work at a glance: 2020

Every year we work collectively with our partners and funders to make progress in different areas of the housing path.

10-year housing and homelessness plan priorities:

Create **more** affordable and community housing

Offer a **broader range** of housing options to meet diverse needs

Expand supports for people to find and secure housing

Retain and **maintain** existing stock

Improve **access to programs** that support people into stable housing

33 total actions

- 7 complete
- 24 in progress
- 2 not started

Create more affordable and community housing

- **52 new affordable homes** ready for occupancy
- **100+ affordable homes** on two properties are **in development** through Waterloo Region Housing
- **153 affordable homes** on five properties are **in development** through housing provider partners

Retain and maintain existing stock

- **40 capital repair projects** in progress with housing providers **totalling over \$2M**
- **60 capital repair projects** in progress with Waterloo Region Housing **totalling \$3M**
- **24 units of affordable housing for seniors retained** by providing a capital grant to the housing provider to support the purchase

Offer a broader range of housing options to meet diverse needs

- **Investing \$11.7M** into 3 alternative housing projects, adding **85–90 new homes in 2021**
- **Supporting Inclusionary Zoning** through a partnership between the Region and Area Municipalities



Expand supports for people to find and secure housing

- **143 households supported to stay in their homes** with rent arrears funding through the rent bank
- **319 households supported** to secure new homes **with rent assistance** funding through the rent bank
- **90% of people** living in supportive housing **retained their housing**
- **1819 households were supported** to access housing options to avoid a shelter stay through prevention and diversion
- **459 people** were served by street outreach staff
- **Ended chronic family homelessness** by focusing efforts to ensure experiences of homelessness for families are rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. Shifted from a high of 20 families experiencing chronic homelessness in April to zero families experiencing chronic homelessness by the end of 2020.

Improve access to programs that support people into stable housing

- **20 households** were provided with **funding for home repairs** and accessibility modifications through Ontario Renovates
- **20 households bought a new home** through the affordable homeownership program
- **169 homeless households moved into housing** with support through the Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) process
- **129 of these households** were chronically homeless.



A new way, together: our focus for 2021

Accelerating the development of affordable homes

To create housing stability and achieve affordability for all, an investment strategy has been developed in 2020 to facilitate a tenfold increase in the number of homes we develop each year. This includes using surplus properties and buying land to create affordable housing. We will partner with the non-profit and private sector to build communities with affordable options across the housing continuum. In addition, the Region has invested over \$20M over the next two years in response to the urgent and growing need for affordable housing. With this strategy, funding from higher levels of government will supplement our local investments and work to develop 2500 new affordable homes in the next five years. This is our new way forward – building healthy, thriving communities that are accessible no matter your income level or life circumstances. We will build homes, we will build communities, and we will do it faster, together.

Amplifying efforts to end chronic homelessness

Prioritizing people experiencing homelessness for housing based on their needs and preferences using the quality coordinated access system enables targeted, multi-pronged approaches to supporting people into stable housing. Efforts to create capacity in housing support programs to end chronic homelessness are a focus for 2021 and include:

- Offering supportive housing tenants choice and independence through opportunities to move on to other housing options;
- Connecting people to the new homes through the alternative housing options added to the housing continuum; and
- Identifying opportunities to integrate housing support options with community housing vacancies.

Together, we will end homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Strengthening partnerships with area municipalities

We recognize the integral role our area municipal partners have in guiding and supporting the collective work of addressing housing and homelessness issues in Waterloo Region. We will continue to connect with area municipal colleagues regularly to identify opportunities to leverage resources, policy, and expertise for maximum impact in developing affordable housing and ending homelessness. Through strategic alignment and partnerships, we will move forward together.

Encouraging safe, healthy and inclusive Waterloo Region Housing (WRH) communities

Through highly engaged tenants and communities, strong partnerships with community agencies, and responsive service provision, we will create healthy, safe and inclusive WRH communities. Through a collaborative process, we will develop a strategy for WRH anchored in the results of the inaugural WRH tenant survey launched in 2020. Together, we will create communities where homes are the foundation upon which people can build their best life.

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