

A Better Vision

A Better Vision for a Better Waterloo Region

Purpose

For A Better Waterloo Region (FABWR) invites the WR community and its elected officials to re-imagine a better vision for the Region. We are committed to working with well-meaning officials, groups, and the entire WR to build a community that focuses on including the most vulnerable among us. A community that is committed to anti-racism, accessibility, intersectional feminism, 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, environmental sustainability and, 'right to the city.' In this document, we offer five key pillars to building this ideal vision. While this document is in no way comprehensive, we believe that these key policies would both practically and tangibly improve the lives of everyone in our community.

Housing: A Human Right

Everyone has a **right** to affordable, liveable, and accessible housing. It is a responsibility of the entire Waterloo Region, and specifically our elected officials, to provide this human right. Regional and Municipal governments should be doing everything they can to provide this basic human right.

1. **Immediately sanction all encampments.** Sanction and materially support **all** encampments, treating them as a legalized, short-term gap to address the growing challenges of homelessness in the Region. We must also eliminate the policing and criminalization of homelessness and these encampments.
2. **Remove barriers to creating more housing options, by allowing more housing types as-of-right in all neighbourhoods.** Remove restrictions from zoning by-laws such as maximum height, minimum lot sizes, setbacks, parking minimums, and minimum separations for multi-tenant homes.. These restrictions lead to decreased affordability and increased pressure to sprawl, which contributes to environmental damage and increased costs to provide services. The implementation of as-of-right zoning rules will allow the construction of diverse housing by default.
3. **Fully fund housing alternatives:** The Region is called to be creative in how it addresses the growing housing crisis, especially as it affects the most marginalized among us. While permanent housing structures are ideal, short term solutions must include:
 - a. **More non-market affordable housing units**
 - b. **More shelter spaces, especially shelter spaces that are truly inclusive of all, regardless of mental health challenges.**
 - c. **Housing solutions like A Better Tent City**

4. **Invest in wrap-around services for those who are unhoused.** In collaboration with key community partners, the Region must significantly invest in these services, recognizing that shelter is one of many challenges that unhoused folks face.
5. **Increase social and subsidized housing to ensure everyone has access to affordable housing.** The region and municipality can take an active role in funding the organizations and agencies which work to build and maintain affordable housing locations in the region. This can be done by using public lands for affordable housing and providing non-traditional financing (such as bridge loans) to housing projects.
6. **Provide housing support to those who receive benefits from programs like Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program.** The existing supports from the provincial government are not adequate to provide a healthy, dignified standard of living. We must ensure that the housing supports provided will not count against benefits provided by provincial programs.

Public Safety: Grounded in care and support

The approach to public safety must be grounded in a compassionate philosophy of seeing people as human beings navigating challenges and not criminals determined to break the law. The current public safety budget is overwhelmingly allotted to downstream measures like policing. Therefore, the Region's future investments in public safety should rely on upstream measures (e.g. Mental health support, housing & homelessness, addiction support, etc.) aimed at supporting and uplifting all people in the Region. Policing should be seen as the very last result: a temporary tool to address issues of violent crime. We need to acknowledge that if the upstream investments are successful, it is possible to build a police-free community.

1. **Invest in community-led public safety and wellbeing initiatives by reestablishing the Waterloo Crime Prevention Council and increase funding for other local organizations.** These initiatives must be police-free and could include groups like Community Justice Initiative (CJI), outreach workers, or The Working Centre.
2. **Stop criminalizing social issues.** Instead of policing social issues, we must acknowledge their relationship to poverty and recognize them as indicators of where the Region must invest more resources to support those disproportionately impacted. We must decriminalize and stop punishing:
 - a. **Drug Use**
 - b. **Homelessness**
 - c. **Mental Health Issues**
 - d. **Sex Work**
3. **Boost funding to police-free, upstream social services by at least the proposed increase of the WRPS budget, and keep the WRPS budget at its current amount.** We must shift the Region's budget for public safety to invest a higher percentage in upstream measures than downstream measures. All new increases to the public safety budget should focus **only** on upstream measures moving forward. Given the scarcity of funding to support all upstream measures, the Region should commit to reallocating the current policing budget to fund upstream measures.

Indigenous Sovereignty: Reconciliation requires immediate action

Waterloo Region is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which is land that was promised to Six Nations in 1784 and includes six miles on either side of the Grand River. The existence of our region is a result of the genocide of Indigenous peoples through settler colonialism and policies that continue today. The harms of these colonial policies are numerous and are still felt by Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation requires us to recognize this fact, move beyond symbolic statements, and take tangible action.

1. **Create an Indigenous Community Hub at Charles Street Terminal.** The former Charles Street Bus Terminal offers an opportunity to transform existing space into an Indigenous Community Hub that can provide access to the services needed by the over 16,000 Indigenous People that call Waterloo Region home.
2. **Develop a system for Indigenous consultation on all development along the Haldimand Tract.** This is a key aspect of obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous people as required by UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).
3. **Remove colonial monuments in the region beginning with the Queen Victoria Statue and officially recognizing Willow River Park (formerly Victoria Park).** Indigenous people deserve to exist in the region without having constant reminders of the people who enacted the genocide of their people.
4. **Implement two paid Indigenous positions on Regional and Municipal Councils and the school boards.** Indigenous people deserve to have a part in decision making at all levels of government. This policy can have further impact by collaborating with the provincial government to establish legislation to eventually formally recognize these positions and give them a legal vote in decisions.
5. **Create a voluntary Reconciliation Contribution Fund for property owners to contribute to when paying property taxes.** This will be an opportunity for residential and commercial property owners to contribute a voluntary amount to Indigenous groups as a tangible Land Acknowledgement that moves beyond just words.

Social Services: Available and accessible for all

The health and wellbeing of our community is directly dependent on publicly-funded social services. We need our elected officials to take into account social determinants of health when making policy decisions. We need to increase funding to existing supports and create new services to catch those who fall through the cracks of our current system.

1. **Public washrooms and drinking water accessible 24/7 across the region.** Basic sanitation services are essential to a healthy community and will benefit everyone from children and seniors to unhoused folks.
2. **Expand access to Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) and establish a safe supply of drugs.** The overdose crisis has resulted in countless deaths in our community and we need to take immediate actions to save lives.

3. **Immediately implement an evidence-based approach, like the mask mandates, to curb the spread of COVID-19.** With COVID-19 circulating within the community and cases likely to rise in the fall, we need to take measures to protect our community, especially those who are most at risk for serious symptoms or long term disabilities. Solutions like masking are easy ways to reduce transmission of COVID-19 as well as other airborne illnesses. This will keep our community healthier and reduce strain on our overwhelmed healthcare system, especially through flu season.
4. **Reinvest childcare subsidy savings from federal program to improve access to affordable childcare.** These savings should be used to open more childcare spaces, increase workers' wages, and expand eligibility and amount of existing subsidy.

Transportation: A city for the masses, not machines

For Waterloo Region to be a world-class community, all residents need to be able to move around safely and effectively. Much of our region was designed to give priority to personal vehicles which has put the safety of pedestrians at risk and contributed to the environmental crisis. We must shift our focus to sustainable, accessible, and ecological ways of moving people in the region.

1. **Free public transit.** This will make the Region more accessible, safer, and environmentally sustainable for everyone. It will also remove the need for fare enforcement officers.
2. **Implement full winter maintenance for sidewalks, multi-use paths, and bike lanes.** This is a huge accessibility concern for all and an important incentive for using alternatives to personal vehicles in all seasons.
3. **Continue taking strong steps to see Vision Zero and make our streets safer.** This includes a pedestrian-focused redesign of our region by advocating for and implementing these changes:
 - a. **Raised crosswalks and continuous bike paths across roads.**
 - b. **Give pedestrians and bikes the right of way at more crossings**
 - c. **Protected bike infrastructure**
 - d. **Slow zones in residential areas and before intersections**
 - e. **Lower speed limits**