

Region of Waterloo
Chief Administrative Officer
CAO

To: Regional Council

Meeting Date: March 22, 2023

Report Title: CAO Report

1. Recommendation

For Information

2. Purpose / Issue:

To celebrate Region of Waterloo Employee Appreciation Week and provide Regional Council with an update on the work of the Region's almost 4,000 staff providing service each and every day to the 647,000 residents that call the communities of Waterloo Region home.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report aligns with strategic priority "Our People" and specifically objective 6.2 to foster opportunities for regional staff to be engaged, recognized, and valued for their work.

4. Report Highlights:

In February, Regional Council approved a \$1.9 billion investment to serve our growing community and a few days later we began Employee Appreciation Week at the Region of Waterloo.

Residents are at the heart of the Region's plan and budget process and so too are the thousands of Regional employees who provide critical services each and every day.

Having the opportunity to meet with so many of our teams during the week was a powerful experience.

Employee Appreciation Week provides another window into the function of the Region - a look behind the curtain at the people who provide clean drinking water, reliable transit, long-term care for older adults, safe roads and so much more.

Driving down Ira Needles Boulevard at 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday morning and Waterloo Region was waking to yet another ice storm.

Heading to GRT to meet our bus operators checking in for the day's first shift, I was struck by the conditions of the road. Snow and ice had built up overnight but the roads were clear. Our crews had been out overnight, reliably going about their work, ensuring the community could go about their day.

GRT was a hive of activity. Comings and goings. Operators being assigned to routes, standby buses being prepped just in case.

Operators I chatted to had a sense of the role they play in the lives of thousands and thousands each day. They stressed the importance of being on time to ensure passengers could get to school in time for the bell or get to that much needed medical appointment.

Many told me they watched Council discuss the need for more on time buses. "We would love nothing more than to always be on time too! The best thing you could do to achieve that would be to address the issues around the fare boxes! It's such a struggle to read the coins and the lineups just grow and grow."

"Bruce, every time the Royal Mint creates a new coin, we have to recalibrate the boxes! We take pride in running on time, Bruce. We also know some people need to pay in cash! There has to be a solution!"

As the buses rolled out of Chandler Drive to pick up the first passengers of the day, I once again got a sense of that higher calling that I encounter so often when I meet Regional employees.

I moved around from location to location during the week, meeting teams and employees who were energetic and connected to their work.

Later, I found myself at 150 Main Street in Cambridge, talking with residents who were so grateful for the services provided by the team. Seeing individuals with lived experience coming back to the building to provide support to other residents was heartwarming. And watching the Public Health and Community Services teams providing care and support to those in need really brought home what we do.

From there, it was onwards to the Waste Management site in Cambridge. What a site! Who knew we provided gas to the neighbouring steel fabrication plant! And all that compost that we distribute for use in gardens and the odd golf course around the Region! And staff who were so incredibly proud of the work they do and proud to work for the Region.

And then an amazing visit to Sunnyside to meet with staff and residents on the floors, downstairs in the kitchen and in the day program. Peter and I were able to share our own experiences with loved ones and how much we value the work of

the Sunnyside team.

As we moved around Sunnyside, I ran into a team member, Navdeep, a PSW who was the first person to look after my Dad when he was admitted to long-term care. Navdeep - who trained to be an RPN while working, and now is an RN at Sunnyside and teaching at Conestoga College. Navdeep, you meant the world to my Dad and you mean the world to my family. I am so happy to be working in the same organization as you!

So many highlights from the week come flashing towards me – I could fill pages and pages.

So much talk amongst employees about watching budget deliberations. And how grateful staff are that Council sees them and sees how important their work is. And sees how necessary it is to invest in the essential services of the Region as this community grows rapidly.

So many talking about how this has been the best week in years, a possible bookend to COVID.

People stopping, if only for a moment, to say thank you to a colleague, thank you to a leader, thank you to a stranger. And so many saying how hard public service is and how it is getting harder, but the rewards of having such a positive impact on so many each and every day continue to fill their buckets with hope.

It a great week. It was a week of fun, of stories, of food. It was a week of an impromptu dance (don't ask!). It was a week of seeing faces some hadn't seen since COVID crashed down upon us. Most of all, it was a week of excitement for what lies in store and a true sense of serving our (almost) 650,000 residents.

I bring this reflection from Employee Appreciation Week to you to give a sense of what working for the Region of Waterloo is like. I bring it to show the huge array of services our teams provide.

As we continue on this journey together, I will share more about the people who provide these great services on behalf of the Region of Waterloo to give you a look into the "story behind the story".

Because for all of us, it really is the people who make this community and this organization great.

5. Background:

N/A

6. Area Municipality Communication and Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

Region of Waterloo staff are proud to work in close partnership with their municipal

colleagues at the area municipalities.

Financial Implications:

Nil.

7. Conclusion / Next Steps:

To continue to highlight the work of Regional employees to Council.

8. Attachments:

None.

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