

Strategic Foresight Consulting Services



FINAL REPORT:

Region of Waterloo
Strategic Plan
2023 - 2027

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1. Executive Summary

The Region of Waterloo is one of the fastest growing areas in North America, uniquely comprised of three cities and four townships and is situated at the heart of the Grand River waterway. Residents share rich and diverse cultures and experience a good quality of life. The region is known for its innovation, with the the second highest density of startup companies in North America (outside of Silicon Valley) and diverse economy that supports local jobs and nurtures new technologies and solutions. Growing in a sustainable, equitable and inclusive way requires ambition, vital partnerships and a shared vision for the future. With this in mind, Council embarked upon a strategic planning process that centred the voices of communities across the region, considered data and explored the social, environmental and economic trends impacting us.

2023 is a year of transition for the organization as the new Council, staff and community work together to create a new plan while closing out the existing one. The new Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027 is to be developed and approved by Council in August 2023 to support 2024 business planning and budget, and beyond. Since March 2023, a series of strategic foresight activities have been undertaken to support the development of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. The goal of these activities is to:

1. Understand a range of opportunities and challenges, expected and unexpected, that the future holds for Waterloo Region.
2. Identify key strategic priorities for the Region's strategic plan that address these opportunities and challenges.
3. Engage community members, staff, and strategic partners in the planning process to shape the Region's future.

As such, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan aims to identify the Region's focus for the next four years while keeping long-term objectives in mind. Due to the Region's diversity and anticipated growth by 2050, as well as a number of other external changes that bring opportunities and economic constraints, fulfilling every request and need is challenging. The Strategic Plan's goal is to set and communicate the strategic choices made by Council, informed by input from residents, community members, and staff. It will outline the focus areas, activities, and roadmap to build the desired community for present and future generations.

This document provides a summary of strategic foresight activities conducted to date in support of the Region of Waterloo's 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan, as well as recommended strategic priorities.

To support this work, thousands have participated in the process, culminating in over 2,500 ideas to inform the Strategic Plan.

Key engagement activities have included:

- Approximately 5,000 respondents to the Mini Wellbeing Survey;
- 1,100 respondents to the Region of Waterloo's statistically representative telephone resident survey;
- 1,652 respondents to the 2023 EngageWR Plan and Budget Survey;
- 4 Council workshops held (including one All Council meeting);
- Nearly 1,200 community members engaged through 5 workshops, 13 community events and open houses, and an online survey;
- Over 1,000 staff reached through 4 workshops, 17 outreach events and 2 online engagement opportunities; and,
- Many more informal presentations to the community and staff.

Throughout this process, a series of 12 key trends were identified that will potentially shape Waterloo Region in 2050. These trends and subsequent possible futures were used by Council, residents, and staff to identify aspirational visions for Waterloo Region in 2050. At the May 29th Special Council Meeting, Council described elements of the preferred future for Waterloo Region in 2050, and the strategic actions needed in the near-term to get there.

Overall, **Councillor visions** focused on a future where:

- Waterloo Region is named the #1 place to live in Canada.
- Waterloo Region meets climate targets and announces carbon zero operations.
- Waterloo Region celebrates the anniversary of poverty eradication, achieves affordable housing for the most vulnerable, and announces the end of chronic homelessness.
- Waterloo Region has implemented a 20 year transit plan and use of cars has diminished.
- Waterloo Region has thriving countrysides, protected farmlands and continues to hold the Countryside Line.
- Waterloo Region has a diversified and thriving economy and attracted new businesses to the region.
- Waterloo Region has examples where the private and public sectors have collaborated to balance economic growth and environmental protections.
- Waterloo Region is a complete community that is inclusive and accessible to all residents.

Strategic actions built on these visions, including the following:

- Expand public transit routes and services.
- Refine fiscal framework, exploring collaboration and innovative service delivery models.
- Expand public engagement opportunities for residents.
- Continue and expand reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion commitments.
- Expand a climate-first approach to decision making.
- Provide more affordable housing.
- Support sustainable growth in the Region that stewards the countryside and agricultural production.
- Expand active transportation infrastructure.

There is significant alignment between the future Council described and the desired future expressed by residents, community and staff involved in this process. The strategic planning process, through engagement, data analysis and review of plans and existing strategies surfaced ten themes that are used to inform strategic priorities.

Ten Future-Focused Themes:

- Affordability & Accessibility
- Liveable Vibrant Growth
- Safe and Equitable Communities
- Economic Growth & Equitable Prosperity
- Thriving Countrysides
- Climate-focused Decisions & Actions
- Community-Based Decision-Making
- Car-free Mobility
- Health & Wellbeing, and
- A Municipality Fit for the Future.

Based on Council input at the May 29th Special Council Meeting, and strong alignment with the key themes, a series of emerging strategic priorities were presented to Council for discussion and refinement at the June 27th Region of Waterloo Special Council meeting. This discussion resulted in the identification of four strategic priorities, listed below, which have been further developed through conversations with the Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team, Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team and the Strategic Plan Team.

Recommended Strategic Priorities:

- 1. Homes for All:** We will invest in affordable homes and economic opportunity for all that are part of inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities. To achieve this we will:
 - a. Move quickly to create affordable and equitable housing;

- b. Eliminate chronic homelessness and reliance on traditional emergency shelter models;
 - c. Invest in upstream solutions to reduce housing and economic precarity; and
 - d. Unlock land that supports community growth.
- 2. Climate Aligned Growth:** As we grow, we will support a healthy environment where communities can thrive. Through intentional collaboration and creativity, we will support sustainable community growth. To achieve this we will:
- a. Use a climate adaptation lens to reimagine infrastructure, land and services for growth;
 - b. Foster car-alternative options; and
 - c. Steward our natural environment and shared resources as we grow.
- 3. Equitable Services and Opportunities:** Through collaboration and innovative design, we will provide equitable, accessible services across Waterloo Region that support the social determinants of health and complete communities as we grow. To achieve this we will:
- a. Ensure services are inclusive, accessible, culturally safe and appropriate;
 - b. Design equitable Regional services that meet local community needs; and
 - c. Explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships.
- 4. Resilient and Future Ready Organization:** The Region of Waterloo is a great place to work, where everyone is valued, feels they belong and where they have the supports and tools they need to do a great job. We will be prepared for the future by providing a safe place for bold ideas and experimentation that transform services based on data and other ways of knowing. To achieve this we will:
- a. Foster an empowered, people-centred culture;
 - b. Reconcile past injustices to advance our future together; and
 - c. Explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service.

The following report describes each recommended strategic priority in detail, including their rationale, proposed objectives, emerging strategic actions and possible key performance indicators. These recommended strategic priorities will be presented to Council at the August 15th Committee Meeting for approval. The 2024 Plan and Budget process will provide Council with the opportunity to work with staff to refine the strategic actions required over the coming 12 months and beyond.



2. Recommended 2023 – 2027 Strategic Priorities

The Region of Waterloo proactively chose to identify strategic priorities by taking an approach to strategic planning that uses a future-focused approach, exploring possibilities over the longer term. Given the Waterloo Region’s anticipated population growth over the next 25 years and the current municipal fiscal constraints, it is important to consider the range of future changes, disruptions and opportunities. To inform the Region of Waterloo’s 2023 - 2027 strategic planning process, thousands of participants were engaged to explore possible futures for Waterloo Region in 2050, in order to describe what they hope to see for the region over the longer term. By keeping the long-term in mind, the near-term strategic priorities ensure the region is focusing on key intervention points that are on the trajectory towards achieving the desired future for the region.

Throughout all of the strategic planning engagement activities, community, staff and Council described a number of common elements. As the region grows, residents want to see the Region of Waterloo take a leadership role in enabling climate-friendly, complete communities where residents have access to safe and culturally appropriate services, walkability, access to outdoor and greenspaces, and a high quality of life. In 2050, residents hope to see the end of chronic homelessness, affordable housing options, protected farmlands, expanded transit in order to reduce reliance on personal cars, and a diversified and thriving economy.

Based on this desired future, there are a myriad of possible strategic priorities and areas for investment. However, the current and projected budget means that focus is required. As such, the strategic priorities described below keep in mind the desired longer-term future while providing focus over the next few years on the key elements that are within the mandate of the Region of Waterloo. These strategic priorities were co-developed with Region of Waterloo Councilors at the June 27th Region of Waterloo Special Council meeting, and further developed through conversations with the Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team, Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team, and Strategic Plan Team.

Recommended strategic priorities:

- 1. Homes for All:** We will invest in affordable homes and economic opportunity for all that are part of inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities.

- 2. Climate Aligned Growth:** As we grow, we will support a healthy environment where communities can thrive. Through intentional collaboration and creativity, we will support sustainable community growth.
- 3. Equitable Services and Opportunities:** Through collaboration and innovative design, we will provide equitable, accessible services across Waterloo Region that support the social determinants of health and complete communities as we grow.
- 4. Resilient and Future Ready Organization:** The Region of Waterloo is a great place to work, where everyone is valued, feels they belong and where they have the supports and tools they need to do a great job. We will be prepared for the future by providing a safe place for bold ideas and experimentation that transform services based on data and other ways of knowing.

Each strategic priority is described further below, including the rationale, objectives and corresponding strategic actions.

2.1 Strategic Priority 1: Homes for All

We will invest in affordable homes and economic opportunities for all that are part of inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities.

We know that a house alone is not a home. Homes are part of communities that are culturally safe and inclusive; environmentally sustainable; enable economic success; and forward reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Housing was declared a human right when the *National Housing Strategy Act* was passed in 2019. However, in the broader external environment, Canada is experiencing a housing crisis where the country has some of the highest housing prices in the G7 and OECD countries, rising rental prices and growing homeless encampments.

This is also true in Waterloo Region where in the most recent resident survey, residents identified housing and homelessness as the most important issues facing the region. With the population of the region expected to grow by 50% over the next 25 years, these issues are likely to be amplified unless there is a proactive approach to ensure current and new residents to the area have homes. This

Relevant Future Trends

- Population Boom
- Economically Divided
- Families Evolved
- Housing Crisis

Key Themes

- Affordability and accessibility of services
- Liveable and vibrant growth
- Economic growth and economic prosperity
- Climate focused decisions and actions
- Safe and equitable communities
- Health and well-being

priority was clearly articulated throughout the strategic planning process where community, staff and Council want a future where all residents have safe, culturally appropriate permanent homes that meet their needs.

This includes affordable housing for everyone including the most vulnerable, the end of chronic homelessness and homes that address the diversity of resident needs, with higher density, walkable neighbourhoods, and proximity to services, rather than sprawl.

Part of the housing solution includes building more homes – in cities and townships – where these developments are often different in nature, and all require different types of municipal servicing. The whole community must prepare for this. New sustainable development in townships (as complete communities) in particular present new opportunities for innovative solutions. This will require an increased investment over the coming years to ensure that existing and new infrastructure continues to serve the community and planet.

Housing solutions also need to consider the residents that face additional barriers to achieving affordable and suitable housing, such as seniors with health needs, residents living with a low income, newcomers and refugees, Indigenous communities, and residents with mental health and addictions.

As the region grows, it will also be important to create employment opportunities through a thriving, diversified economy and the growth of key sectors to support residents in securing and keeping their homes. The need to focus on homes for all emerged as part of the key themes of affordability, liveable vibrant growth, and economic growth and equitable prosperity.

To advance this goal, over the next four years, we will:

1. **Move quickly to create affordable, accessible, and equitable housing:** We will increase equitable access to affordable homes that cost less than 30% of household income across the region. We will also work to ensure these homes reflect the present and future needs of residents, with a variety of options across the region. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Incentivize affordable housing in partnership with others;
 - b. Grow our land portfolio for affordable housing;
 - c. Provide affordable, accessible housing options that fit with the diversity of residents and evolving households; and
 - d. Advocate with other levels of government to unlock new funding for the development of affordable homes.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Number of households paying less than 30% of household income on housing; Increase in number of affordable housing and rental units developed and occupied; Increase in provincial/federal funding for affordable housing; Decrease the Community Housing Waitlist; Number of accessible affordable housing units.

2. **Eliminate chronic homelessness and reliance on traditional emergency shelter models:** We will work in collaboration with area municipalities, community partners, and other levels of government to reduce then eliminate chronic homelessness by advancing new long-term housing solutions that enable people to have safe, permanent homes. This may include the following actions:
- a. Launch a region-wide task force to implement the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness;
 - b. Partner with community organizations to continue to implement the Interim Housing Plan with a focus on system accountability, outcomes and impact:
and
 - c. Advocate with other levels of government to unlock new funding for supportive housing options.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Decrease in number of chronically homeless residents; Increase in funding for supportive housing options; a decrease in the PATHS (Prioritized Access to Housing Support) list; Explore equity measures such as accessible housing, housing for older adults, veterans and more.

3. **Invest in upstream solutions to reduce housing and economic precarity:** To adequately address the complexity of the housing crisis for current and future generations, we will extend our focus beyond the traditional domain of housing solutions, and focus on preventative interventions and continue to deliver wrap-around supports. This may include the following actions:
- a. Increase available wrap-around services (e.g., child care supports) including a multidisciplinary rapid response team;
 - b. Collaborate with healthcare providers to address health and wellbeing challenges facing residents, including mental health and addictions; and
 - c. Advocate with other levels of government to unlock new funding for mental health support and healthcare services.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Decrease in number of homeless residents through the point in time count; Increase in funding and availability of health and mental health and addiction supports.

4. **Unlock land that supports community growth:** We will make land available across the region appropriate for affordable housing, shovel-ready employment lands and other supportive infrastructure designed for families and future needs.

This may include the following actions:

- a. Create a land acquisition policy;
- b. Build and revitalize existing infrastructure; and
- c. Advance the implementation of shovel-ready housing and employment lands

Possible key performance indicator(s): Amount of land allocated to affordable housing; Number of new developments that support a complete community.

Overall, this strategic priority amalgamates specific actions that were identified in the previous Region of Waterloo's 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, into a new strategic priority that addresses one of the primary current and future concerns of residents who live in the region.

2.2 Strategic Priority 2: Climate Aligned Growth

As we grow, we will support a healthy environment where communities can thrive. Through intentional collaboration and creativity, we will support sustainable community growth.

The most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that the planet has already warmed by 1.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels causing fiercer wildfires, heat waves, droughts and storms. The climate crisis will mean adapting to frequent storms and flash flooding as well as air quality alerts. Agricultural production is also being impacted by climate change, due to warmer winter temperatures as well as drought conditions in some parts of the country. At the same time, Ontario municipalities are facing significant budget constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Bill 23.

Waterloo Region needs to consider how it will respond to the infrastructure impacts of extreme weather and other

Relevant Future Trends

- Population boom
- Climate-first leadership
- Food system transformation
- Disrupted municipal finances

Key Themes

- Liveable and vibrant growth
- Economic growth and economic prosperity
- Climate focused decisions and actions
- Car-free mobility
- Safe and equitable communities
- Health and well-being

climate shocks as well as how it will contribute to mitigating further climate damage. In 2022, as part of the community well-being survey, 80% of residents said they are concerned about climate change. Youth have expressed anxiety due to climate change and will face the longer term impacts of decisions made today. Furthermore, the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan outlines the importance of climate equity, and how impacts are disproportionately impacting some communities. The need to prioritize climate-focused decision-making was reiterated throughout this strategic planning process. The majority of participants expressed a desire to see the Region of Waterloo apply a climate-lens to all decision-making and increase environmental protections. Community, staff and Council feel that prioritizing car-alternative mobility is an important element of climate mitigation.

As the region grows, there will be pressure on its natural resources; however, it is important to enable a healthy environment for all residents to thrive. This means protecting and enhancing clear air, clear water, biodiversity and land. The TransformWR strategy already identifies a series of detailed actions to help Waterloo Region transition to an equitable, prosperous and resilient low carbon economy. As such, this strategic priority is intended to amplify these efforts in mitigating and adapting to climate impacts. The Region of Waterloo will work in collaboration with partners to take practical steps to reduce our collective impact on the environment and improve how services, assets, and infrastructure adapt to climate change. This will also require the Region to explore and identify new strategies to fund the new and revitalize infrastructure and services that are needed to support climate aligned growth.

To achieve this outcome, over the next four years, the Region will:

1. **Use a climate adaption lens to re-imagine infrastructure, land and services for growth:** Using a climate mitigation and adaptation lens, we will work collaboratively with TransformWR, area municipalities, businesses and community partners to integrate infrastructure planning and adaptation. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Advance climate adaptation in asset management planning;
 - b. Advocate with other levels of government, and explore with partners, and community other financing solutions for climate adaptation, mitigation initiatives, and climate aligned growth; and
 - c. Work with area municipalities to co-develop green development standards.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Lower carbon emissions; Lower energy utilization across regional infrastructure; New funding for climate mitigation and adaptation.

2. **Foster car-alternative options:** By expanding equitable public and active transportation networks across the region, we will make it easier for people to get around and make climate-friendly choices. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Expand public transit service;
 - b. Expand active transportation infrastructure; and
 - c. Shorten everyday travel distances.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Increase in GRT ridership; Increase use of affordable transit programs; Increase in kms of public transit service; Increase transportation modal split; Increase in frequency of public transit on select routes; Increase in kms of cycling and walking trails; disaggregated data.

3. **Steward our natural environment and shared resources as we grow:** We will work to protect the region’s natural environment, biodiversity, trees, and water. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Partner with Indigenous communities to learn from, provide support, and collaboratively steward the natural environment;
 - b. Enhance stewardship practices (ex. embracing circular practices, improving biodiversity in all landscaping guidelines, waste diversion, and reducing road salt use);
 - d. Support local food system resilience (such as reducing food waste).

Possible key performance indicator(s): Number of new community partnerships focused on stewardship; Number of new trees planted; Reduced levels of salt in water; Amount of waste diverted from landfills.

This strategic priority builds on the Region of Waterloo 2019 - 2023 strategic plan by reinforcing one of the previous focus areas of environment and climate action.

2.3 Strategic Priority 3: Equitable Services & Opportunities

Through collaboration and innovative design, we will provide equitable, accessible services across Waterloo Region that support the social determinants of health and complete communities as we grow.

Waterloo Region is located on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral Peoples. On these lands, a diversity of people, communities, cultures, and eco-systems contribute to Waterloo Region’s rich multicultural heritage that is expressed uniquely across cities and townships. Waterloo Region is among the fastest growing regions in

Ontario that continues to welcome newcomers and immigrants to settle here. The number of racialized people in the region has increased by almost 60% over the last five years and this is expected to continue into the future. In 2021, 1 in 4 residents of Waterloo Region were immigrants (25.4%), up from 22.6% in 2016. Collectively, everyone’s strengths, talents, and contributions enable Waterloo Region communities to thrive and its economy, environment, and infrastructure to grow.

Equitable services and opportunities emerged as an important priority for the Region to focus on over the next four years. Through engagement, community, staff and Council expressed that they want a healthy and safe community that is welcoming to everyone. Ensuring equitable access to critical goods and services so no one is left behind means focusing on pockets of our communities that need the most support so that everyone can flourish and thrive. Communities that foster connection, collaboration, and respect for diversity will allow us to care for and support one another, bringing us together instead of further apart.

In response, the Region will focus on expanding safe and culturally appropriate services to those who need it most such as people who self-identify as seniors, youth, having a disability, living with a low income, newcomers and refugees, Racialized and/or Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, and having mental health and addictions challenges. It means working together with these communities to co-design solutions to our biggest service barriers and new opportunities that foster safe, culturally appropriate and equitable service options.

While the diversity of the region has increased, contributing to Waterloo region’s richness, the recent Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan highlights that many residents experience discrimination due to ethnicity, culture, race or skin colour, disability, geography, or income. Systemic barriers and discrimination limit people’s opportunities and equitable access to the supports people need to achieve health and well-being.

In addition, inequity, injustice, unfairness and bias are compounded by a number of other factors, such as inflation, economics, lack of affordable housing, to name a few, which further exacerbates the problem. Racialized communities are disproportionately impacted by challenges associated with the rising cost of living, struggling to pay for housing and food. Food

Relevant Future Trends

- Population boom
- Economically divided
- Equity and social justice
- Mental health emergency

Key Themes

- Affordability and accessibility of services
- Liveable and vibrant growth
- Safe and equitable communities
- Community based decision-making
- Health and well-being

banks and others are calling for an increase in social supports that responds to the rising cost of living challenges.

To advance this goal, over the next four years, we will:

1. **Ensure services are inclusive, accessible, culturally safe and appropriate:** The Region will work to ensure the services it delivers are safe, culturally appropriate, inclusive and empowering to communities. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Continue and grow current investments in Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and related initiatives; and
 - b. Evolve current services, programs, and policies using the Community Safety and Wellbeing Framework as a guide.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Disaggregated service experience data; Increase in number of residents who feel safe accessing services; Reduction of hate-motivated incidents; Increased community participation in solution generation.

2. **Design equitable regional services that meet local community needs:** We will work to ensure people have access to the services they need when, where, and how they need them most. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Expand service accessibility and equity across the region;
 - b. Explore mobility and access needs in townships and communities currently underserved; and
 - c. Expand equitable childcare spaces.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Increase in public transit ridership; Increase in number of childcare spaces; Increase in number of residents who report having access to the services they need; Increase disaggregated data around service access, utilization and experience.

3. **Explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships:** To best meet people's needs, we will work with community partners, community members, and across Regional departments to co-design safe, fiscally responsible and culturally appropriate service improvements and policies. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Evolve community engagement practices to ensure community voices are centred in decision-making;
 - b. Find new ways to partner with community organizations to improve service delivery; and

- c. Develop advocacy plans that support new investments in equitable service delivery.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Increase in number of service, program, and policy changes to address inequities; Increase in engagement with unheard voices; New funding to support investments in equitable service delivery.

This strategic priority builds on the Region of Waterloo’s 2019 -2023 strategic plan by strengthening the previous focus area of healthy, safe and inclusive communities to focus on building and expanding equitable service delivery so that residents who need it most receive appropriate, safe, inclusive and empowering services.

2.4 Strategic Priority 4: Resilient and Future Ready Organization

The Region of Waterloo is a great place to work, where everyone is valued, feels they belong and where they have the supports and tools they need to do a great job. We will be prepared for the future by providing a safe space for bold ideas and experimentation that transform services, based on data and other ways of knowing.

Ontario municipalities are currently experiencing significant challenges with growing community needs, a shifting mandate, and compounding fiscal constraints. High inflation and interest rates, the cost of implementing and renewing municipal infrastructure, provincial and federal funding reductions (including Bill 23 and affordable housing funding), and the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic all present unique challenges to municipalities that must be addressed in new and different ways.

Facing an increasingly complex future will require new thinking, skills, collaborations, data and new technologies, such as AI and automation. It will also require investing in people and organizational culture through increasing diversity and the capacity of employees to work collaboratively with each other, community and partners in other sectors.

Being intentional about increasing research, partnerships, data-analytics, and evidence-based decision-making capacities, will enable the

Relevant Future Trends

- Population boom
- Disrupted municipal finances
- AI government
- Democracy under pressure
- Truth and reconciliation
- Equity and social justice

Key Themes

- Affordability and accessibility of services
- Liveable and vibrant growth
- Safe and equitable communities
- Economic growth and economic prosperity
- Community based decision-making
- Health and well-being
- A municipality fit for the future

Region to better understand root causes and generate new ideas and solutions faster. Since complex problems and opportunities are best solved through a diversity of lenses and expertise, the Region will invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion. This will ensure the Region has the best representation and talent bringing critical experiences, knowledge, and skills to the table. Service transformation will be re-imagined through human-centred service design and cross-department and community collaboration—drawing on everyone’s strengths and insights. Knowing teams are at their best when they are truly supported, the Region will invest in employees’ holistic well-being, development, inclusion and engagement. In doing so, the Region will balance affordability with creating the kind of community it’s envisioning through fiscal resilience and sustainability.

The Region has many assets to draw upon as it embarks on this transformation journey. Waterloo Region is a home to innovation, with the second highest density of startup companies in North America (outside of Silicon Valley). There is a keen desire to experiment with new solutions and to be creative in how the Region does its work. The Region of Waterloo has a unique opportunity to build upon this broader culture of innovation by investing in digital transformation and embracing new approaches to service delivery. This strategic priority is focused on culture-building at the Region of Waterloo in order to prepare for and navigate current and future challenges and enhance a culture of respect, collaboration, and experimentation so that the well-being of all employees is supported.

To achieve this outcome, over the next four years, the Region will:

1. **Foster an empowered, people-centred culture:** Our people are critical to enabling the delivery of our services. We will work to ensure present and future staff feel valued, respected and have the tools, support, processes and agency they need to make a positive impact. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Enhance employees experience;
 - b. Attract and develop the next generation of leaders, representative of our diverse population;
 - c. Foster an environment that is respectful, inclusive and cultivates belonging; and
 - d. Advocate with other levels of government to unlock new funding to ensure growth of the Region is properly resourced by staff.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Decrease staff turnover rates; Enhanced employee experience; Increased diversity in leadership positions; New funding to support growth of Region; Increased staff engagement.

2. **Reconcile past injustices to advance our future together:** To meaningfully advance our future, we must acknowledge and learn from our past injustices, and act. This includes centering the voices of those traditionally discriminated against in policy decisions, staffing decisions and service delivery. It also means exploring new approaches to community-centred decision-making, and how we attract, value, and support Indigenous, Black and racialized communities. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action;
 - b. Invest in Reconciliation Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training across the organization; and
 - c. Increase representation of equity seeking groups in decision-making.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Number of Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action that are relevant to Municipalities completed; Increase in diverse community representation in community engagement activities.

3. **Explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service:** Working together, we will identify and invest in new approaches that support our future fiscal resilience. We will support staff and the community to drive service transformation that is culturally appropriate, safe and inclusive through co-design, data-driven decision-making, innovative digital tools, and other ways of knowing. This may include the following actions:
 - a. Implement the digital service transformation strategy;
 - b. Proactively assess and review programs and service methods; and
 - c. Innovate with the private sector, non-for-profit sector, area municipalities, and other levels of government.

Possible key performance indicator(s): Number of new innovations seeded; New funding from the province to support service transformation; Increase in satisfaction with service experience; New cost efficiencies from digital investments.

This strategic priority builds on the Region of Waterloo’s 2019 - 2023 strategic plan by enhancing the previous focus area of responsive and engaging public service. This new strategic priority incorporates elements of this focus area and puts greater emphasis on advancing reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives, as well as digital and service transformation.



3. Background & Context

The geographic area of Waterloo Region comprises eight municipalities - the Region of Waterloo, three cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, four townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich - and is known for being forward thinking. As the Region embarked on a strategic planning process, it needed to take into account its diversity and anticipated growth by 2050, and a number of other external changes that bring opportunities and challenges. External factors - such as a growing population, economic instability, the climate crisis, social inequity, to name a few - make it challenging to meet all needs when committing to new priorities and investments.

The approach to developing the Region of Waterloo's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan has been multifaceted, grounded in data and informed through an extensive engagement process. Creative Futures was hired to support the process using a strategic foresight methodology.

Since March 2023, the Region of Waterloo, along with Creative Futures, has engaged in a series of future-focused activities and engagements to support and inform the development of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is intended to identify where the Region will focus its efforts over the next four years while also keeping in mind the longer-term objectives for the Region. Within the current fiscal environment, it is very challenging to deliver on every request and need. This Strategic Plan is meant to articulate the strategic choices being made by Council and informed by residents and staff. It will clearly articulate the focus areas, activities and roadmap that will be elevated and invested in, that will help build the community that is desired for current and future generations. The Strategic Plan will not describe every service provided by the Region of Waterloo, but will provide a decision-making framework that will be applied for the remainder of the current term of Council.

The future-focused activities designed to support and inform the 2023-2027 strategic plan have the following objectives:

1. Understand a range of opportunities and challenges (both expected and unexpected) facing the future of Waterloo Region;
2. Identify key strategic priorities for the Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan that respond to these opportunities and challenges; and
3. Engage residents, staff, and strategic partners in the future-focused planning journey.



4. Future-Focused Approach & Methodology

To be able to successfully plan in this current moment requires an ability to make sense of complexity and understand where things are headed in the future. As such, the Region of Waterloo's strategic plan approach incorporated strategic foresight methodology to ensure the plan identifies future-focused priorities. The methodology includes four key steps:

1. Signals of change - Scan a range of sources, stakeholder and resident surveys, community profile, and public engagement activities to identify hundreds of signals of change that may impact the future of Waterloo Region.
2. Key trends - Distill signals of change into key trends across a range of categories - social, technological, economic, environmental, political and values - that might present challenges and opportunities for Waterloo Region.
3. Future scenarios - Develop four possible futures of Waterloo Region, that represent the interaction of key trends in the future, to spark new thinking about the future of the region.
4. Scenario application - Use scenarios in a series of workshops to identify key strategic priorities and stress test current strategies against a range of possible futures.

These steps were conducted over the course of three phases, described below. For more details about strategic foresight, the methodology and project approach, see Appendix A.

In addition to these activities, the Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan team conducted extensive engagement activities with a range of specific communities to ensure broad input into the strategic planning process. For more details, see Appendix B.





5. Uncovering the futures of Waterloo Region

The above activities started in early March with a series of kick-off sessions with staff and Council. These kick-off sessions were designed to introduce various audiences to the strategic foresight methodology, while also gaining insight into the key opportunities and disruptions that were top of mind. Starting in 2022, the Region of Waterloo Strategic Planning team collected extensive data from residents through the 2023 budget process and the Community Wellbeing Mini Survey. Creative Futures built upon these data inputs to set-up the next stage of the strategic planning process.

To support future-focused strategic planning, Creative Futures started by working with key stakeholders to identify key opportunities and challenges impacting the future of Waterloo Region, building on existing data sources, and supplemented by additional research and engagement activities.

Existing data sources included:

- EngageWR Plan and Budget survey (2023);
- Waterloo Region Immigrant survey (2021);
- Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (2021);
- Census data (2021);
- Youth Impact Survey (2021); and
- Inventory of existing strategies and plans.

Strategic Plan Engagement activities included:

- Resident survey (2022);
- Community Wellbeing Survey (2022);
- Workshops with Council;
- Futures workshops with Community and Youth;
- Community outreach events and conversations;
- EngageWR online engagement survey for community (note, the focus was on in person engagement, the survey was available for those who could not participate in person);
- Futures workshops with Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), Internal Leadership Team (ILT), Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team (REDI);

- Staff workshops and survey related to a refreshed Vision, Mission and Values;
- Staff outreach events and online engagement; and,
- Supplemental futures research conducted by Creative Futures.

Based on this data, over 30 trends emerged, which were shared with Council, Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team and residents to hone in on 12 key trends that will significantly impact the future of the region. These key trends, described below, represent an important lens to apply to the development of the Strategic Plan. Understanding the potential implications of these trends, and how they might intersect will ensure a robust plan and set of priorities are set.

5.1 Key Trends

The following outlines a range of social, economic, technological, political and values-based changes that are happening in the external environment and that Waterloo Region needs to monitor and consider in order to be prepared for the range of possibilities over the next 25 years. Each of the trends listed below is uncertain with a number of risks and opportunities that may emerge over the coming years.

Population Boom

According to the Ontario government, the [population in the province is projected to increase by 37.7%, from 14.8 million to 20.4 million residents](#), between 2021 and 2046. This includes an increase in the number of seniors aged 65 and over, from 2.7 million to 4.4 million residents. More recently, in fall 2022, and in response to labour market shortages, the Federal government announced a commitment to welcome [500,000 immigrants per year by 2025](#). Accordingly, Waterloo Region is projected to grow from ~600,000 to 900,000 residents by 2051. However, other factors may influence this growth such as affordability and remote work. [50,000 people, primarily between 25 and 35, left Ontario in 2022 for more affordable places to live](#) such as Alberta or Atlantic Canada. As well, an increasingly [borderless, global workforce](#) may result in residents disconnecting the geography where they work and live.

Why this matters: Looking to 2050, Waterloo Region is expected to grow, likely with the demographics and density of the region transforming dramatically.

Economically Divided

With an [inflation rate of 2.8%](#) (June 2023), cost of living and affordability is increasingly a challenge for many Canadians. [Working class residents are food bank clients](#), a [growing number of older women are living in poverty](#), more [Canadians are carrying their mortgage into old age](#),

and some people have started accepting barter in the form of payment, such as this [Ontario barber who accepts food for a haircut](#). At the same time, [global luxury sales of leather accessories, apparel, footwear, jewelry and watches were expected to grow by 22% in 2022](#) to reach \$367 B.

Why this matters: As we look to the future, Ontario municipalities may be serving large numbers of residents who are living in poverty, as well as a small portion of ultra rich residents.

Families Evolved

What if the future of families is intergenerational living, poly families and intentional communities? There are a number of emerging examples that demonstrate Waterloo Region needs to plan for a diversity of families in the future. [Multi-generational homes](#) and intentional communities, an example being [a group of 10 friends building their own community in BC](#), are rising due to increasing costs. As well, platforms exist to connect [people looking to co-own property](#), programs are expanding that [house students with seniors](#) and a [growing number of Canadian parents are polyamorous](#). At the same time as the diversity of families is increasing, the fertility rate in Canada has been declining for decades and [reached its lowest level of 1.40 children per woman in 2020](#), while also seeing the average age of mothers at the time of delivery increase to 31.3 years.

Why this matters: Looking to the future, Waterloo Region cannot only plan for the traditional nuclear family and instead needs to consider the range of families and housing arrangements needed. This may also impact future service needs.

Disrupted municipal finances

How might municipalities respond to increasing financial constraints? Early in the pandemic, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario estimated the impact of COVID-19 on Ontario municipalities with an [anticipated negative impact of \\$6.8B over two years](#) (2020 and 2021). More recently, the Ontario government introduced Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, with the goal of creating 1.5 million new homes by 2031. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) projects that [Bill 23 will cost municipalities \\$1 billion annually in lost revenue](#) due to lost development charges. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Bill 23, Ontario municipalities are facing significant budget constraints, with adjustments to property taxes and user fees as the main levers to address this financial gap.

Why this matters: Looking at the anticipated growth of Waterloo Region over the next 25 years, the region may explore new revenue models or face service and program cuts in response to constrained municipal finances.

AI government

How might the development and adoption of AI impact governments in the future? Tech companies are investing billions in artificial intelligence development, with [Google leading the pack with \\$30.7 B invested in AI](#). ChatGPT is a common example right now that explains how quickly AI could change the landscape. OpenAI launched the new tool in November 2022 and by January 2023, had reached 100 million monthly active users, [making it the fastest-growing consumer application in history](#). However, [governments remain far behind the private sector in deploying and integrating AI](#) in service delivery. There are many ways that AI could influence governments in the future, including in governance. A [new political party in Denmark](#) launched last year where the leader, an AI chatbot, and all of its policies are AI-derived.

Why this matters: Over time, digitalization and adoption of AI may influence government service delivery, governance, resident expectations, and data-driven decisions through AI information collection.

Climate-first leadership

The [most recent report](#) released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that the planet has already warmed by 1.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels causing fiercer wildfires, heat waves, droughts, and storms. This is top of mind with the [current wildfires throughout Canada](#) impacting air quality and likely to become the new normal. According to the [IPCC report](#), “there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all” and “the choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years”. In response to this dire situation, there are a number of youth climate activists, like Greta Thunberg and [Fridays for Future](#), advocating for policy changes. As the leaders of tomorrow, they are likely to incorporate a climate-first approach into everything they do.

Why this matters: When we look to 2050, Waterloo Region needs to consider how it will respond to extreme weather and other climate shocks that will continue to create strain on infrastructure and disrupt everyday life. As well, it should anticipate that new leaders will expect climate-first leadership to be embedded in all policies and programs going forward.

Truth & Reconciliation

In 2015, the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) released [94 calls to action](#) to further reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. These Calls were developed after hearing from survivors of Canada’s Residential School System, who experienced decades of abuse, mistreatment, and murder of Indigenous children, creating deep pain and trauma for generations of Indigenous communities. This issue came to the forefront in 2021, after the [discovery of hundreds](#) of children’s remains in mass graves at sites of former Residential Schools. Following this, the Canadian government established a new national holiday, the [Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#), while many organizations and businesses developed commitments to Indigenous reconciliation.

Why this matters: In 2050, these commitments to reconciliation may fundamentally restructure the stewardship and governance of land in Canada, acknowledging the rights of Indigenous communities and their historic ties to specific regions and territories. However, as of 2022, only [13 of the 94 Calls](#) have been completed, suggesting there is still a lot of work to be done.

Democracy under pressure

While political polarization remains [less pervasive in Canada](#) than the USA, experts warn that policy issues, especially energy and climate change, are being used in Canada for political gain at the expense of national unity. Meanwhile, trust in the government's ability “to do what is right” [has dropped](#) to 43% in 2022, from 58% in 2020. More globally, several countries have experienced push back against democratic institutions and processes, including an [attempted coup](#) in Germany, and the [United States Capital attack](#) in January 2021. Recently it has also come to light that the last federal election may have been impacted by [foreign interference](#), resulting in a public inquiry launched in late 2022.

Why this matters: Given rising populist sentiments, and declining trust in government, in 2050, democracy and democratic institutions may face a range of complex social, technological and political disruptions. This will require new ways to engage communities in decision making.

Food system transformation

Agricultural production is highly dependent on weather, which, due to climate change, is becoming increasingly complex. [For example](#), warmer winter temperatures could increase pests who may improve their overwintering survival, while it may also extend the growing season. Building on this complexity, recent years have brought global [supply chain disruptions](#), rising [food costs](#), and significant increases in [food bank usage](#) across Canada. Given these changes,

more Canadians have turned to [home food growing](#), while companies have expanded investments in [3D printed food](#) production. From climate change, to technological advancements, Canada's food system is in a period of transformation.

Why this matters: In 2050, more residents in Waterloo Region may be growing a greater proportion of their food at home. It may also mean that local farmers are able to expand their growing season, producing more food for the community, while developing innovative solutions to new climate-related challenges.

Housing crisis

Canada has some of the [highest housing](#) prices in the G7 and OECD countries. Many have declared that Canada is facing a [housing affordability crisis](#), with soaring [rental prices](#), growing [homeless encampments](#), and average house purchase [prices at \\$716,000](#). The [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#) estimates that 1 in 5 renters are paying more than 50% of their household income on rent, while 25% of Canadian households pay more than 30% of their income to shelter costs. Forecasts also show that Canada does not have [sufficient housing stock](#) to house its growing population, representing an additional layer to the housing crisis.

Why this matters: Looking to 2050, Waterloo Region residents may continue to face housing affordability challenges and housing precarity that may especially impact younger generations and the attraction of newcomers. However, given that housing is identified as a [basic right](#), it is possible that cities and townships may have an expanded role in providing housing solutions.

Equity & Social Justice

As a country, Canada has an international reputation for being a [multicultural society](#) that celebrates cultural diversity. Historically speaking, Canada has a strong track record for [welcoming refugees](#) and newcomers. However, [rising rates of hate crimes](#) across Canada have demonstrated that there is still more work needed to advance reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion in Canada. In response to this, [many organizations](#) have invested in diversity, equity and inclusion commitments, developing [new roles](#) and staff training programs designed to support their focus on these commitments.

Why this matters: In 2050, commitments to equity and social justice may result in strong community connectivity, belonging, and cohesion, welcoming refugees, new immigrants, honouring Indigenous reconciliation, and supporting community diversity. It may also mean tailoring service delivery to different resident needs, requiring new models, training, recruitment and policies.

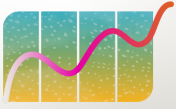
Mental health emergency

A recent [Angus Ried study](#) found that 54% of Canadians have worsened mental health during the last few years. For women aged 35 - 54, this number increases to 63%. Meanwhile, in 2022 a study found that [1 in 3 Canadians](#) are experiencing burnout related to their jobs. Despite a federal government commitment to transfer [\\$4.5 billion to provinces](#) for mental health supports, provinces have yet to see an increase in funding. Should funding not be directed to mental health supports, this could mean that in 2050 mental health challenges will be intensified. This may be due to [climate anxiety](#), burnout, [technology use](#), [growing loneliness](#) and social isolation.

Why this matters: Rising mental health challenges may lead to shifts in how people prioritize work-life balance, or innovative responses. For example, a group in Iowa is [using AI powered software](#) to watch for mental health issues, and [barbers](#) in the United States have been trained to provide mental health support for their clients.

5.2 Four Provocative Futures

To further understand how these trends might interact, this phase of work concluded with the development of four provocative scenarios exploring Waterloo Region in 2050. For more details about these scenarios, see Appendix C.



6. Identifying Priorities: Key Themes

To support the identification of near-term strategic priorities, Creative Futures facilitated a series of activities that supported the exploration and understanding of possible and preferable futures for the Waterloo Region in 2050. This work built on data collected to date, and included two additional key inputs - a resident online engagement survey (Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey) and five Immersive Futures Workshops. For more details about the approach for this phase, see Appendix D.

Over the course of this work, several key themes emerged. These themes are: Affordability & Accessibility, Liveable Vibrant Growth, Safe and Equitable Communities, Economic Growth & Equitable Prosperity, Thriving Countrysides, Climate-focused Decisions & Actions, Community-Based Decision-Making, Car-free Mobility, Health & Wellbeing, and A Municipality Fit for the Future. Each theme is described below in detail, including related qualitative and quantitative data points, as well as their relationship to existing strategies and the Region of Waterloo's previous strategic plan.

6.1 Affordability & Accessibility of Services

With an [inflation rate of 2.8%](#) (June 2023), cost of living and affordability is increasingly a challenge for many Canadians. In 2020, Waterloo Region's median total household income was \$92,000, up 18.7% since 2015. This is higher compared to both Ontario (\$91,000) and Canada (\$84,000) (Census 2021). However, there are many residents in Waterloo Region that are experiencing challenges with affordability. In 2020, 9.3% of residents were living on low income.

The cost of housing is contributing to a lack of affordability. Cities within the region reported [rental increases of up to 20% in 2022](#). With the cost of housing increasing, 21.8% of households are spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs and 6.0% of households are living in unsuitable housing (Canada Census, 2021). In addition, there are over 7,600 residents on the waitlist for community housing units across the region, demonstrating broader accessibility issues.

Homelessness is also a key concern in Waterloo Region. In 2021, there were 1,085 people experiencing homelessness (Region of Waterloo Point in Time Count, 2021). Of these, 412

people were living rough (living in encampments, on the street or staying in their vehicle), 335 people experiencing hidden homelessness, 191 people in emergency shelter, 84 people in transitional housing, and 63 people in institutions (hospital, police custody, women's crisis services).

The [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Program](#) (CWELCC) has begun implementation with the goal to get to \$10 per day by 2026. By the end of 2022, the childcare facilities who are participating in the program had reduced their fees by, on average, 50%. As of November 1, 2022, 98% of licensed child care centres and 100% of licensed home child care agencies in Waterloo Region are participating in the CWELCC. There are still concerns about childcare costs, particularly for families in unlicensed child care centres. According to the 2022 Early Years and Child Care Systems Plan survey, 50% of families identified childcare as not affordable.

According to the most recent resident survey, housing and homelessness are identified as the most important issues facing the region and should receive the greatest attention from local leaders. To respond to this concern, the Region of Waterloo allocated \$193 M this year for housing and homelessness that includes the continuation of the Interim Housing Strategy, increasing shelter capacity and accelerating new affordable housing developments, and a strategy to end chronic homelessness.

Given how much residents have been impacted by rising cost of living, maintaining the affordability and accessibility of housing, transit, childcare and other services emerged as a key theme from the Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey. Many survey residents expressed concern about the future affordability of the region, while others noted service accessibility challenges.

"Everyone has a liveable income." - Desired futures headline from in person engagement

"I am hopeful that in 2050, every child has the opportunity to access and belong to quality child care / early years experience." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

"I hope for affordability. I would like to still live in the region as it is where I was born and lived for 40 years but at this point I won't be able to afford to stay if things keep getting more expensive." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

This was reiterated in the Immersive Futures Workshops. Youth expressed a desire for everyone to be able to afford a home. They also wanted to be able to afford groceries, transportation, cell phone plans, etc., and universal basic income and / or living wage to be a priority that is implemented on a global scale. The community roundtable participants built on this,

expressing desire for affordable and diverse housing options in the region. They also felt there was a need to protect existing public services even if that means increased taxes.

For staff, they also expressed a need for continued focus on providing a range of housing options, with a focus on safe, sustainable and affordable housing for all. They also conveyed a desire for more equitable wealth distribution to maintain services and meet everyone's basic needs.

Council also identified this as an important theme with a desire to end chronic homelessness, decommodify housing, provide affordable and attainable housing, and where residents have access to a universal living wage.

Alignment to existing strategies:

Currently, the Region of Waterloo has several strategies that support this theme, including the 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, the Affordable Housing Framework, the 2022 – 2026 Early Years and Child Care Service Plan, and the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

In the Region of Waterloo's 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, there is a strategic objective to make affordable housing more available to individuals and families. To date, existing strategies have focused on housing affordability and ending chronic homelessness. Based on the above data, it is clear housing affordability, homelessness and overall affordability is an important theme for the upcoming strategy.

What could this mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Explore viability of expanding free public transportation for specific populations, while possibly reducing investment in the growth of road networks;
- Continue to focus on Early Years Plan, expanding and supporting the availability of affordable childcare, and related advocacy;
- Continue to focus on the 10 year housing and homelessness plan, expanding options for affordable and permanent housing options, which may mean less investment in other municipal services due to significant costs associated;
- Continue to communicate the relationship between municipal taxation affordability and affordable services to broad understanding of taxation challenges; and
- Work with other levels of government to advocate for needed resources to reduce pressure on the local tax base.

6.2 Liveable, Vibrant Growth

Waterloo Region is a mid-sized community with a mixture of urban and rural areas. It is one of the fastest growing regions in Ontario, with an expected growth from 617,000 residents in 2021 to 923,000 residents in 2051, an increase of 49.6%. By 2041, it is expected that about 1 in 4 people in the region will be 65 years and older and that the working age population will drop to 62.0% (compared to 67.2% in 2021). About 63,700 full-time students live across Waterloo Region attending the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College.

In 2021, the population by municipality:

- City of Cambridge - 138,479 residents
- City of Kitchener - 256,885 residents
- City of Waterloo - 121,436 residents
- Township of North Dumfries - 10,619 residents
- Township of Wellesley - 11,318 residents
- Township of Wilmot - 21,429 residents
- Township of Woolwich - 26,999 residents

The average age in Waterloo Region is 39.4 years, younger compared to Ontario and Canada (Census 2021). As well, the region has a diversity of households. The average household size is 2.6 people. Out of the 222,430 households in the region, 53.9% are couples with or without children, 8.9% are one-parent families, 5.3% non-family households and 3.4% multigenerational households (Census 2021).

Residents, youth and community that participated in the strategic plan engagement expressed that as the region grows, they want to see balanced growth. Residents from rural communities expressed a desire for growth that acknowledges existing community identity and feel. Through the Waterloo Region in 2050 survey, residents told us they want to see higher density neighbourhoods, rather than sprawl, with proximity of services and walkability, while maintaining outdoor and greenspaces, quality of life and agricultural land.

"I am hopeful that [we have] balanced growth as well as green space protection." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

"I am hopeful about how the region can control urban sprawl and build up instead of out. I'm excited to have more people in the region and more culture, events, and nightlife come to the Region." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

"Protecting agricultural land from development" - Priority from in-person engagement

This theme was strongly expressed throughout all of the Immersive Futures Workshops. Youth want the region to build up, not out as well as create walkable neighbourhoods with nearby access to amenities, rather than sprawling communities that require personal vehicles. The community roundtable participants reiterated this perspective, expressing a desire to see expanded public spaces and greenspaces to accommodate population growth (e.g. parks, environmental preservation, transformation of parking spaces into vibrant spaces, abundant agriculture).

For staff, they want population growth to align with additional services, housing densification, quality of life, agricultural land protection and increased green and outdoor public spaces.

This theme was echoed by Council with a desire to balance growth land and farmland where the region achieves 15 minute community status. Rural residents, specifically, would like to see sustainable communities where they have access to their key services in their own communities. We heard that Council wants to stop sprawl into farmland, advocate to protect the greenbelt, support biodiversity, and expand public transit. Overall, rural residents, youth, community, staff and Council want the region to be proactive in the approach to growth where the Region continues to plan and invest in infrastructure to support growth, and re-imagine what service and municipal infrastructure growth in a township context looks like.

Alignment to existing strategies:

This theme is closely related to the Regional Official Plan to 2051. This Plan received support from Regional Council, and hundreds of community members and seeks to: build an equitable, thriving and sustainable community that includes plans for the addition of new residents, jobs and housing units; develop 15-minute neighbourhoods in all cities and townships; protect the Region's natural and agricultural resources; and, ensure supply and distribution of employment lands for job growth and economic development.

This theme is however not explicitly mentioned in the Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023. There is an action to develop planning policies that encourage more compact, walkable, transit oriented communities in both the built up and greenfield areas in the Region.

Throughout this most recent strategic planning engagement process, the importance of explicitly identifying how to accommodate such a large growth in the population came out as an important theme.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Protect agricultural land and the Countryside Line;
- Support local agricultural system and food system sustainability;
- Seek ways to enhance fiscal resilience that aligns with growth of the communities;
- Expand accessibility of regional services and infrastructure in all communities; and
- Advocacy to other levels of government to support new tools and funding to achieve these actions.

6.3 Safe & Equitable Communities

The diversity of Waterloo Region is expected to transform dramatically over the coming years. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of racialized people in the region increased by 59% (Census 2021). In 2021, 27.5% of Waterloo Region's residents were part of a racialized group and 7.1% of residents identified as Indigenous. This is expected to grow, with the [Indigenous population in Canada growing faster](#) than the non-Indigenous population, by 9.4% from 2016 to 2021.

Even though the diversity of the population has increased over the last few years, according to the Community Well-being Survey (2022), 25% of residents experience discrimination often or sometimes due to ethnicity, culture, race or skin colour. This is consistent with the Immigrant Survey conducted in 2021 that found 24% of immigrants experienced discrimination or being treated unfairly in the past year. In addition, according to the survey, 11% feel that Waterloo Region is not welcoming.

According to the most recent Resident Survey, 56% of residents said a healthy and safe community that is welcoming to everyone and celebrates health, diversity, equity and inclusion is important for the region.

This theme of safe and equitable communities consistently emerged throughout the most recent engagements. In the Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey we heard that residents want a safe place to live, want the region to focus on equitable access to critical goods and services so that no one is left behind, and want a place where everyone is accepted and welcomed.

"I am hopeful that we don't lose our sense of community as the region grows. Our heritage and cultural blend is our strong suit. Make the region inclusive to all, regardless of religion, belief or political affiliation." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

“More compassion and love for others and yourself.” - Priority from in-person engagement

"I hope for a multicultural region that accepts everyone, clean, safe and affordable for all people." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

Through the Immersive Futures Workshops, most participants expressed the need to focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and reconciliation. Youth want to eliminate hatred, discrimination and racism in the region, and want more community interactions, events and activities to enable more trust amongst neighbours. The community roundtable participants want a strong sense of community, social responsibility and connections, as well as equity and diversity where diverse voices are valued and amplified. They also want indigenous wisdom to be incorporated into mental health care, leadership models and stewardship of the land.

For staff, they expressed a desire for equitable, safe, connected and strong communities where every person has access to the supports and services they need. They want to ensure there are supports for aging community and resources for seniors, as well as stronger community relationships and collaboration.

This theme was also expressed by Council with a desire for safe, equitable, diverse communities where more people care for each other. Council identified a number of ways to advance well-being, inclusion, belonging and diversity in the region including creating a centralized newcomer centre, continuing to commit to the truth and reconciliation calls to action, planning for seven generations in collaboration with Indigenous nations, and recognizing and supporting cultural diversity.

Continuing to focus on reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion to enable social justice and stronger community connections emerged as a key theme throughout this process.

Alignment to existing strategies:

In the 2019 - 2023 strategic plan, healthy, safe and inclusive communities is identified as a strategic focus area with some of the strategic objectives aligning with this theme, such as, promote and enhance equity in policies, planning, services, and decision-making in order to positively impact community well-being, as well as enhance community safety and well-being in Waterloo Region.

As such, the region has prioritized and created the following existing strategies, the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, Reconciliation Action Partnership, Children and Youth Planning Table, Senior’s Services Strategic Plan, and Immigration Partnership: Building Community Through Immigration.

What could this mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Focused investment to adapt service and enable more access, and more responsive service for diverse needs;
- Implement Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that relate to municipal government, and provide related staff training and talent attraction; and,
- Continue to invest in upstream interventions that support social determinants of health, enabling diverse communities to engage, to participate in service design, delivery and co-creation.

6.4 Economic Growth & Equitable Prosperity

According to the Waterloo Economic Development Corporation, the region is home to a diverse economy in technology, advanced manufacturing, automotive, business and financial services, food processing, and aviation and aerospace. It has global leaders like Toyota and Google, and the second highest density of startup companies in North America (outside of Silicon Valley), however, this may have recently changed given recent layoffs and slowdowns. It has the largest robotics and automation cluster in Canada and is the #1 small tech talent market in North America. In addition, it is home to over 150 research hubs ranging from AI and quantum physics to advanced manufacturing and supply chain management. The region has high labour force participation with 59.4% of residents aged 15+ who are employed (2021). The thriving economy is evident by the GDP (per capita) for Waterloo Region outpacing the province and the country.

This theme of enabling a thriving, diversified economy with employment land, talent attraction, and many job opportunities for residents in the region emerged as part of this process.

Through the Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey we heard that residents hope to see a vibrant, growing economy with diverse companies. Many see opportunities for growth in tech and manufacturing, while others expressed a desire to see growth that leads to greater equitable prosperity.

*"I am hopeful for opportunity and prosperity for my children and our community as a whole."
- Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant*

"I hope for strong, diverse tech and manufacturing companies."- Waterloo Region in 2050

Survey Participant

“Affordable costs of living in general.” - Priority from in-person engagement

At the Immersive Futures Workshops, we heard youth hope to see an increase in employment opportunities in the future. The community roundtable participants expressed a desire for the region to have a vibrant mixed economy, a point reiterated by staff who want a thriving economy with opportunities for all.

This was further reinforced by Council who wants to attract large businesses to the region and to have a diversified and thriving economy that includes advanced manufacturing and food production/ agriculture. Council also discussed their desire to explore more government, private and not for profit partnerships to support service delivery.

Alignment to existing strategies:

One of the strategic focus areas identified in the 2019 - 2021 strategic plan is a Thriving Economy. The strategic objectives to create a competitive business-supportive community to help attract, retain and grow employers, talent and investments in Waterloo Region as well as ensure an adequate and strategic supply of employment lands in the Region both align with what has emerged through the most recent strategic plan engagement.

There are existing strategies that align with this key theme including the Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan, the Airport Business Plan and Master Plan, the Regional Transportation Master Plan – new Integrated Mobility Plan, and the Infrastructure Master Plans e.g. Water etc.

What could this mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Advance the implementation of a shovel-ready employment lands and other supportive infrastructure and services to support investment attraction and business expansion, considering a sustainability and climate lens;
- Provide transit and transportation connections to employment zones (e.g. to the airport);
- Support regional talent attraction strategy and implementation with a network of area municipalities, businesses and partners.

6.5 Climate-focused Decisions & Actions

According to the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), the number of annual extreme heat days (i.e. temperatures above 32 degrees Celsius) could double by 2050, while the annual precipitation is estimated to be 12% higher for the 2051-2080 period. It is also projected that more frequent storms will occur, with high intensity, leading to flash flooding in urban areas. In Ontario, climate events are projected to increase transportation costs by an average of \$2.2 billion per year, according to the [Financial Accountability Office of Ontario](#). Beyond infrastructure impacts, the broader economy will also likely be disrupted. A 2022 report from the [Canadian Climate Institute](#) estimates that climate impacts will slow Canada's economic growth by \$25 billion annually by 2025. This report also contends that low-income households will feel these impacts most acutely.

Meanwhile, in Waterloo Region, 21.1ha of tree cover has been lost in 2021 ([Global Forest Watch](#), n.d.) which is vital to reducing heat island effects, reducing flooding, and protecting species biodiversity ([National Geographic](#), 2013). Additionally, in November 2022, the [CBC](#) reported that approximately 140,000 tonnes of rock salt is used across the Region of Waterloo each winter. In December 2022, the manager of hydrogeology and water programs for the Region of Waterloo [reported](#) that sodium levels in drinking water was above the recommended 20 mg/L, in part due to road and parking lot salting. It is therefore not surprising that according to the 2022 Resident Well-being Survey, 80% of Waterloo Residents are concerned about climate change.

This concern was echoed by the majority of Waterloo Region in 2050 survey respondents, many of whom wrote support for increased climate-focused decisions.

"In order to achieve the environment and affordability goals, the Region will likely need to take drastically different actions from the past. Continuing to act similarly as we have in the past, the same actions that have lead to problems such as the climate crisis, will not be sufficient to create meaningful change. Some necessary actions may be unpopular with the general public at first. It will be a key responsibility of the Region to plan for and implement these actions, as well as educate the public on the need for and benefits of such actions." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

*"Resilient infrastructure to climate change (flooding, drought, food sovereignty; etc.)"
- Priority from in-person engagement*

However, a few residents felt there were more pressing challenges facing the region's future. This perspective appears to be limited, as the recent Resident Survey results identified the environment as one of the top priorities.

Throughout the five Immersive Futures workshops, climate action was a key theme. Youth expressed a need for greater focus on climate, and the need to apply a climate-lens on all government decision making. At the community roundtable, several community members also expressed a need for a greater climate-focus on decisions. For some community roundtable participants, they saw a need for more extensive corporate action on climate, as well as resident action. They also addressed the need to develop green building standards to ensure the extensive development planned for the Region of Waterloo aligned to climate goals.

For staff, they shared specific areas where the Region could support greater environmental protections. This included expanding the tree canopy, providing drinking water protection, and expanding community food gardens.

These perspectives were further reinforced by Council, who also expressed a need for a climate-lens on decisions. At this session it was also shared that Council has a role to make it easy for residents to make climate-focused decisions through policies.

Alignment to existing strategies:

Presently, the Region of Waterloo has several strategies that support this theme, with tangible goals and actions. This includes TransformWR, and the Community Climate Adaptation Plan (CCAP). [TransformWR](#) in particular lays out a series of detailed actions to help Waterloo Region transition to a “equitable, prosperous and resilient low carbon community”.

In the Region of Waterloo’s 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, Environment and Climate Action was one of the strategic imperatives and priorities. As a strategic imperative, the 2019-2023 Plan identified the need to build corporate and community understanding of the climate crisis, and the need for climate-focused decisions. Based on above mentioned data, it is clear that corporate and community understanding is now high, paving the way for an increased focus on climate-focused decisions.

The 2019 - 2023 outlined strategic objectives such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving resilience to climate change and / or severe weather, directing more waste away from landfills, protecting water resources, promoting efficient use of urban land, and protecting agricultural and natural areas. Based on engagement activities conducted by Creative Futures, it is clear that these objectives remain important.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Incorporate Indigenous wisdom and other cultural knowledge to environmental stewardship approaches;
- Expand climate-friendly mobility options;
- Expand the tree canopy and greenspace to reduce island heat affect, air pollution, enhance species biodiversity, and manage floods;
- Eliminate road salt use to protect drinking water;
- Support employment land growth aligned to climate goals; and
- Continue to prioritize climate adaptation in service delivery, with climate vulnerability in mind.

6.6 Thriving Countrysides

According to the 2021 Census, 16% of Canada's population lives in rural communities. In Waterloo Region, approximately 7% of residents live in townships, experiencing a different and unique lifestyle from those living in the cities. With Waterloo Region's population projected to grow by 50% in the next 25 years, there has been concern among residents about what this might mean for the Region's countryside.

From an agricultural perspective, Waterloo Region's countryside is vital. In Waterloo Region, there are more than 1,400 farms, and according to [Waterloo Economic Development Corporation](#), the region is the 3rd largest food manufacturing area in North America. However, due to a variety of factors, Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland daily, equal to the loss of one average family farm per day ([Census of Agriculture, 2021](#)). Meanwhile almost 11% of Waterloo Region residents are food insecure, according to the Region of Waterloo's [2022 Survey](#) of cost and affordability of healthy eating.

The protection of local farmland and preservation of rural communities was a key concern among Waterloo Region in 2050 survey respondents. Many survey participants raised concern about urban sprawl, and the development of farmland. Several stated that living in close proximity to farms was what they valued most about living in Waterloo Region. Related to these concerns, several survey responses expressed the need to protect the Countryside Line (the boundary that protects the cultural, economic, and environmental heritage of our rural lands) as the region grows.

“The policies to protect the countryside from urban sprawl give me tremendous hope that the Region actually cares more about economic and environmental sustainability rather than catering to wealthy developers. Instead, by focusing on what space we already have, we can improve our cities for future generations to

enjoy, while also protecting invaluable farmlands!” - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

“I would like to see more growth in areas that do not support agriculture. We need to encourage companies and then people to move up north and leave our farmland producing food.” - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

“[In 2050] I hope the townships are NOT swallowed up into the cities, and that we still retain rural areas and farming.” - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

Some rural residents also expressed a desire for increased key services in their communities, such as public transit. This was a point highlighted by youth at the Immersive Futures workshop, and echoed at the community roundtable and through engagement in the townships. Several community roundtable participants expressed a desire to see stronger policies protecting farmland, and prevent further expansion of new developments into agricultural lands. This need to protect farmland and the countryside was also raised by staff and Council, who described this as a vital element to the present and future of the community.

Alignment to existing strategies:

The Regional Official Plan clearly outlines the need to protect the rural character of the countryside while supporting the development of strong and prosperous rural communities. Maintaining this balance has been core to growth planning decisions.

In terms of agricultural production, the TransformWR strategy identifies the need to grow more of the region’s own food as a key objective towards climate goals. While food security is more complex than local food availability, food insecurity in the region has been noted in several plans including the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, Youth Data in Action identified through the Child and Youth Planning Table, as well as the 2022-2026 Early Years and Child Care Service Plan.

In the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, one of the strategic imperatives is to balance urban and rural communities, recognizing the unique opportunities and needs of each. Based on engagement activities, this imperative has not changed, although growth has added new pressures.

While the 2019 - 2023 Plan makes some mention of protecting agricultural areas, it is related to the Environment and Climate Action priority. While this priority is still critical, engagement activities suggest it may require more emphasis in the next Plan.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

- Explore the feasibility of future public transit to townships;
- Explore service and infrastructure expansion needs for townships; and,
- Identify opportunities to support local agricultural communities, to ensure viability of local agricultural production and food system sustainability.

6.7 Community-Based Decision Making

According to the 2023 Resident Priorities survey, 62% of Waterloo Region residents want a government that provides meaningful opportunities to have their say in important issues. While public engagement activities at the Region are well attended by some, there are many who do not feel engaged and involved. For example, 36% of youth feel they have a weak or somewhat weak sense of belonging in the Region, which is 20% lower than pre-pandemic results ([Youth Impact Survey](#), 2021).

The need for more inclusive engagement and community-empowered decision-making was further identified in the recent Community Safety and Wellbeing plan as being core to building a safe and well Waterloo Region. This plan recommends exploring opportunities for community-led conversations and decision-making, and community-led data collection. These approaches are reflected in the Region of Waterloo's community engagement best practices interim report, which takes an equity-based community engagement approach (Best Practices that are the focus of CSD Community Engagement Training Sessions "Pre-Engagement Reflections" and "Engagement in Action", Fall 2022/Winter 2023).

This point was further reinforced by Waterloo Region in 2050 survey respondents, many who expressed a need for more engagement opportunities between local government and residents, with a particular focus on those who are traditionally underserved by services.

"Need to prioritize and expand public engagement and listening to Indigenous, Racialized, and other minority groups" - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

At the Immersive Futures Workshops, a key theme throughout was the need to provide more opportunities for community-based decision making and engagement. Youth expressed numerous times that they were grateful to have been involved in the strategic planning process, but wanted more ways to be engaged. Several mentioned that they felt there should be a Youth Council and other ways to meaningfully engage youth directly in decision making. The community roundtable participants made similar comments, stating that they felt the Region of Waterloo could do more to empower the community to be active decision-makers. A few participants were also critical of the use of EngageWR online platform as a source for collecting

data, stating it created barriers for some. Several community roundtable participants mentioned the Upstream Fund as being a prime example of how best to empower communities to make high impact decisions, and support service delivery.

Aligned with this perspective, staff said there was a need to empower communities to be active decision-makers, with a specific focus on youth, seniors and underserved communities. They also felt that front-line staff should be more involved in decisions, given the direct impact it has on their day-to-day. Many also mentioned the approach taken by the Upstream Fund, while others mentioned the vaccine roll-out as being another example of community-based engagement and service delivery.

Similarly, Council expressed a need for proactive community engagement, tapping into the wealth of their knowledge and generosity. Participatory budgeting was raised as one way to further empower community decision making, while most Councillors reiterated the need for engagement of youth and older adults.

Alignment to existing strategies:

Building greater opportunities for youth engagement is a core element of the Children and Youth Planning Table, which identifies the need to create more ways for youth to be engaged in decision making and governance (Youth Impact Survey, 2021). Self determination and community-based decisions is also (as mentioned above), a key action and principle related to the 2022 Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan. Community consultation is also a core goal of the Region's Official Plan.

The need to involve and inform the community in decision-making was one of the strategic priorities of the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan. Related actions focused on enhancing digital engagement opportunities, and the capacity for staff to meaningfully engage communities in decisions. While the Region of Waterloo has been successful in meeting this objective, recent engagement activities suggest the next Strategic Plan focus may be to shifting power to communities, and centring voices of those most impacted by discrimination.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on this work, the 2023 - 2027 strategic plan has the opportunity to:

- Expand community-based decision making opportunities;
- Identify innovative opportunities to support community-based service delivery;
- Support implementation of broader Region of Waterloo strategy actions related to community-based decision making; and,
- Support the development of engagement better tools to support coordinated conversations, and limit community engagement repetition.

6.8 Car-free Mobility

Many global cities are investing in car-free mobility, building upon the trend that in the developed world, [young people are falling out of love with cars](#). Earlier this year, [Amsterdam opened 7000 additional bike parking spaces](#), [Paris has created 52 km of new cycling track](#) over the last few years with plans to add an additional 130 km, and [school bike buses](#) are common in Barcelona.

In Waterloo Region, 72.5% of residents use their personal car as the main type of transportation they use to get around the community (Wellbeing Survey, 2022), ridership on the GRT for the first three months of 2023 is higher than the first three months of 2019, and there are 713 km of bike lanes / active transportation facilities.

Throughout this Strategic Plan engagement, residents, community organizations and youth expressed their support to expand and promote public transit and active transportation to encourage car-free mobility throughout the region. This was particularly highlighted by Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey responses, many of which described a future in 2050 where public transit and active transportation is more common.

"I am hopeful that in 2050 there is improved public transit and decreases in traffic and car-dependent infrastructure." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

"Ensure infrastructure for new transportation modes." - Priority from in-person engagement

"I am hopeful in the future...there is a decrease of car ownership because of convenient bike infrastructure and better transit in, around, and out of the region." - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

Throughout the five Immersive Futures Workshops, car-free mobility was commonly raised. Overall, youth, community and staff expressed the need to support a cultural shift to active transportation, public transit and walkable neighbourhoods. Youth expressed a desire for an expanded public transit system where transit is the norm (rather than personal cars) for transportation around the region. The community roundtable reiterated this hope, and wanted to see expanded public transit and alternative transportation (trails, bike lanes) to enable car free neighbourhoods. For staff, they also shared that they want to explore the viability of providing affordable transportation for specific populations.

This theme was also expressed by Council, with a desire for better transit, transit links and active transportation systems.

Alignment to existing strategies:

There are a number of existing strategies that align with this theme. TransformWR has set goals that by 2050, most trips will be taken using active transportation, with the support of a robust public transit system; and remaining personal and commercial vehicles are zero emission vehicles.

This theme is consistent with one of the existing strategic focus areas from the Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023, sustainable transportation. In 2019, the strategic objective to enhance the transit system to increase ridership and ensure it is accessible and appealing to the public, as well as the objective to increase participation in active forms of transportation (cycling and walking) still remains quite relevant based on the engagement activities completed to date.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on past work and existing work related to this theme, the 2023 - 2027 Strategic plan provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Explore a “car-alternative” model and public transit that works for townships as well as cities;
- Expand the public transit network, including commitment to Phase 2 of the LRT expansion. This may mean reprofiling infrastructure spending towards transit over roads;
- Expand and enhance connectivity of the active transportation network, including bike lanes and walking trails.

6.9 Health & Well-being

According to the 2022 Community Well-being Survey (2022), 41% and 45% of residents have physical or mental health challenges respectively that limit their ability to fully participate in community. Aligned with this finding, the 2021 Waterloo-Wellington CMHA survey found 39% of respondents said mental health had declined since the start of COVID-19. The 2020 Integrated Drug Strategy further reports that there has been a 158% increase in suspected opioid related deaths from 2016-2020. It is therefore unsurprising that health and well-being was a key theme and area of concern raised throughout the strategic planning engagement process.

Despite healthcare largely sitting outside of Region of Waterloo’s mandate, the Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey found that many residents are concerned about the state of support for healthcare services in the region, especially the lack of support for mental health. One resident felt that the Region of Waterloo needed to consider the mental health implications of urban

design. Another felt that there needed to be greater investments in supporting people to get active, expressing that they felt it would help solve other critical issues.

“If all residents are unhealthy nothing else matters” - Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

These points were further reinforced at the Immersive Futures workshops, where support for community health and well-being was raised as being a critical component of the future participants wanted. Youth in particular felt the Region of Waterloo should advocate for increased healthcare funding for healthcare workers and mental health supports. Community roundtable participants also expressed a need for improved social and mental health services.

For staff, many mentioned the need for mental health services to be more integrated, broad, and free to access. They also expressed that budgetary constraints had negatively impacted their own mental well-being, expressing that unfilled positions had created challenging work loads, and that burnout was a concern.

Many of these concerns were also expressed by Council, who was concerned about addiction rates and mental health challenges facing residents. They expressed a need for increased collaboration between planning and mental health, and that more investments in mental health were needed.

Alignment to existing strategies:

Community health and well-being is a strong theme among several existing strategies including the Community Safety and Well-being Plan, Paramedic Services Master Plan, 2022-2026 Early Years and Child Care Service Plan, Affordable Housing Plan, Seniors’ Services Strategic Plan, and the Integrated Drug Strategy to name a few.

In the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, health and well-being is centred in one of the strategic priorities, which has associated strategic objectives including: improving child and youth well-being, promoting and enhancing equity to positively impact community well-being, reduction and prevention of problematic substance abuse, and enhance community safety and well-being.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on this work, the 2023 - 2027 strategic plan has the opportunity to:

- Expand support for upstream interventions;
- Continue to focus on the social determinants of health to foster well-being;
- Expand investments in active transportation infrastructure; and,

- Continue and expand advocacy work to engage other levels of government to expand access to health services.

6.10 A Municipality Fit for the Future

As mentioned above, it is projected that Ontario municipalities may face an annual shortfall of \$1B due to recent changes to development fees through Ontario Bill 23 (AMO, 2023). For Waterloo Region, the 2024 budget modelling suggests a tax rate increase in the range of 9%-10% for Regional services, excluding Police (Administration and Finance Committee Report and Presentation slide, June 6 2023). Drivers of the projected increase include an elevated level of inflation, capital cost escalation and interest rates, as well as service expansion predominantly related to transit service routes and hours, paramedic services and homelessness programs.

Municipal finances are challenging for all Ontario municipalities, including the Region of Waterloo. While there is no single answer to this challenge, the coming years will require new approaches to service delivery and fiscal sustainability.

Based on recent data from The Perry Group Digital Transformation maturity assessment, digital transformation may be one area to help create new efficiencies. The report shows there is work needed to move the organization from its current low level of digital maturity, which may create one avenue for cost savings. However, long term investments are required to see these efficiencies grow.

In general, throughout strategic plan engagement activities, fiscal constraints were a common topic, as were the need for embracing experimentation with innovative solutions. Many of the Waterloo Region in 2050 survey participants expressed that the region is home to innovation, and felt there were opportunities to invest in new innovative technologies and approaches. One resident expressed hope for a future where innovative approaches to active transportation and public transportation were embraced. Others mentioned specific examples of how the Region of Waterloo could make innovative improvements to demonstrate how innovative the region is, further attracting more innovatively-minded residents.

“We have a tradition of hard work and innovation.” Waterloo Region in 2050 Survey Participant

In general, survey respondents felt that innovation was a core value of the region, and saw an opportunity to further embed this culture in regional service delivery.

This point was reinforced at the Immersive Futures workshops where community roundtable participants expressed a need to continue innovating processes. They felt that the approach taken with the Upstream Fund demonstrated the Region’s ability to be innovative, and provided a successful approach to build from. Youth expressed that they do not view government at any level as being a place for innovation, and felt new approaches to decisions were needed.

For staff, it was clear that many saw opportunities to be more innovative in their approaches, but felt “red tape” and “silos” prevented this from happening. Many mentioned the need for more innovative collaborations across divisions, and the need to embrace pilot projects to test ideas. Several expressed concern that there was limited room for the risk inherent in innovation, and felt more work was needed to build comfort with this risk. Others suggested a dedicated fund for seeding innovative projects and partnerships.

Council also expressed a need for innovative, bold decisions. Some felt there were opportunities to expand investments in digital technologies, such as the use of AI.

Alignment to existing strategies:

In 2023, the Region of Waterloo adopted a Service Transformation Strategy which identifies several areas for investment and action to strengthen digital service delivery. Continuing work in this area will be critical to supporting innovative service delivery.

The 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan outlined the need to ensure the Region provides value for money and long term financial sustainability as a strategic objective. This objective had three associated actions which identify ways to support the annual budget, finance future infrastructure, and assess property taxes. Since this Plan was developed, COVID-19 has created new fiscal pressures, while policy changes at the Provincial level have further complicated the picture. Looking forward, innovative solutions and partnerships may be key to achieving long term fiscal sustainability.

What could this theme mean for the 2023 - 2027 strategy?

Building on this work, the 2023 - 2027 strategic plan has the opportunity to:

- Advocate for a new fiscal and revenue relationship with the Province in order to:
 - Address the mismatch between the expectations of municipalities to solve a growing list of complex 21st century social health and welfare problems with a 19th century funding and revenue model;
 - Ensure that municipalities are able to adequately plan, design, build and finance the infrastructure needed to accommodate growth;

- Ensure that municipalities, are able to implement and finance the necessary asset management and renewal programs to keep this infrastructure in a state of good repair to deliver service; and
- Generate new revenue to help municipalities achieve climate action goals and climate-related infrastructure mitigation/adaptation targets.
- Continue to invest in digital transformation, including a data strategy;
- Develop innovative partnerships to explore new funding models and service delivery models with business and nonprofit organizations; and
- Create an internal innovation seed fund that encourages collaboration across divisions.

6.11 Council Insights

Beyond the themes described above, Council, staff and residents expressed a strong desire to prioritize and focus, instead of attempting to address every single need of the region. Aligned with this desire, we heard strong support for longer-term planning, and the need to identify long-term priorities, with aligned near-term goals.

To help clarify long term goals, Councillors were asked to describe the future they hoped to see in 2050 at the May 29, 2023 Special Meeting of the Region of Waterloo Council. These future visions included:

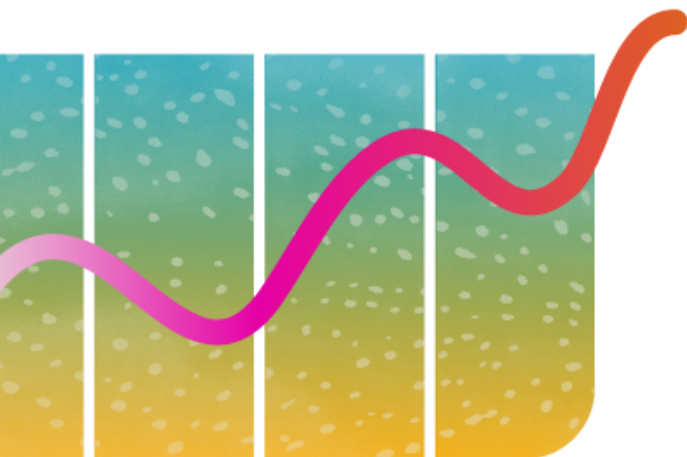
- Waterloo Region is named the #1 place to live in Canada.
- Waterloo Region meets climate targets and announces carbon zero operations.
- Waterloo Region celebrates the anniversary of poverty eradication, achieves affordable housing for the most vulnerable, announces the end of chronic homelessness.
- Waterloo Region has implemented a 20 year transit plan and use of cars has diminished.
- Waterloo Region has protected farmlands and continues to hold the Countryside Line.
- Waterloo Region has a diversified and thriving economy and attracted new businesses to the region.
- Waterloo Region has examples where the private and public sectors have collaborated to balance economic growth and environmental protections.
- Waterloo Region is an equitable and accessible community.

Building on this discussion, Council was asked to identify a series of actions to start, stop, and continue doing in the near term to advance these visions. Over 100 actions were identified by Council through this exercise, including the following, listed in order of frequency they appeared:

- Expand public transit routes and services.
- Refine fiscal framework, exploring collaboration and innovative service delivery models.
- Expand public engagement opportunities for residents.

- Continue and expand reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion commitments.
- Expand a climate-first approach to decision making.
- Provide more affordable housing.
- Support sustainable growth in the Region that protects the countryside and agricultural production.
- Expand active transportation infrastructure.

There is a clear desire to address every pressing issue facing the region, making it challenging to focus and prioritize. However, focusing on one key area does not mean forgetting the rest, nor ceasing delivery of the services which the Region of Waterloo is currently mandated to deliver. Instead, identifying strategic priorities for the 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan provides an opportunity for Council to declare clear focus areas, from which decision-making over the next four years can be directed.





7. Next Steps

The purpose of this report is to provide recommended strategic priorities for the Region of Waterloo's 2023 - 2027 Corporate Strategic Plan. These recommendations are based on strategic planning activities conducted to date by Creative Futures in close collaboration with the Region of Waterloo Council, Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team, Strategic Plan Team, REDI Team, and informed by engagement activities with youth, community roundtables, and front-line staff. These recommendations are informed by rigorous research into key changes impacting the future of the region, and resident perspectives on what they hope Waterloo Region may look like in 2050.

These recommendations will be presented to Council at the August 15th Committee Meeting that will table the strategic priorities for approval. A Council workshop in September will support the transition from strategic planning to the 2024 plan and budget.

***Creative Futures Studio Inc.** helps public, nonprofit, and socially-minded leaders plan and prepare for their future. Using applied futures research, we help organizations navigate complexity and embrace uncertainty, arming them with the tools to think beyond present-day issues and imagine, prepare for, and navigate multiple potential futures. Learn more: www.creativefutures.studio.*

Appendix A: Future-Focused Approach & Methodology

Strategic foresight provides a systematic framework to make better and more informed decisions in the present. Using a strategic foresight approach, the Region of Waterloo is able to explore potential future situations and implications in 2050, to help clarify what and how to prioritize in the present.

To take a future-focused approach, it requires a set of research methodologies designed to explore the future, which is precisely the purpose of strategic foresight. According to the [OECD](#), strategic foresight is “a structured and systematic way of using ideas about the future to anticipate and better prepare for change. It is about exploring different plausible futures that could arise, and the opportunities and challenges they could present. We then use those ideas to make better decisions and act now.”

Strategic foresight has traditionally been used by private sector companies to maintain a competitive advantage, identify new business opportunities, and limit corporate risks. However, given foresight’s ability to make sense of complexity and uncertainty, the practice has more recently been adopted by public sector organizations. Since 2020, as the external environment has become increasingly complex, uncertain and volatile, public sector organizations, such as municipalities, have found strategic foresight approaches increasingly useful.

As such, the Region of Waterloo’s strategic plan approach incorporated strategic foresight methodology to ensure the plan identifies future-focused priorities. The methodology includes four key steps:

1. Signals of change - Scan a range of sources, stakeholder and resident surveys, community profile, and public engagement activities to identify hundreds of signals of change that may impact the future of Waterloo Region.
2. Key trends - Distill signals of change into key trends across a range of categories - social, technological, economic, environmental, political and values - that might present challenges and opportunities for Waterloo Region.
3. Future scenarios - Develop four possible futures of Waterloo Region, that represent the interaction of key trends in the future, to spark new thinking about the future of the region.
4. Scenario application - Use scenarios in a series of workshops to identify key strategic priorities and stress test current strategies against a range of possible futures.

In addition to these activities, the Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan team conducted extensive engagement activities with a range of targeted communities to ensure broad input into the strategic planning process. For more details, see Appendix C.

3.1 Why 2050?

Over the course of this work, community, residents, staff and Council were asked to imagine and explore the world in 2050. While the Region of Waterloo’s strategy is meant to reflect nearer-term goals and priorities, a focus on a longer time horizon ensures the strategy will align with where the world might be in 25 years. This will allow the organization to not only respond to current challenges but to anticipate and imagine unexpected changes and new paths forward, and to adjust strategy as required. In taking this approach, Council, residents, community, youth, and staff were given the opportunity to think big, bold, and ambitiously about Waterloo Region’s future, without constraints of near term or day-to-day commitments.

3.2 Project Phases

To execute this methodology, the Region of Waterloo engaged Creative Futures to design and deliver a range of strategic foresight activities to support the development of the Region of Waterloo’s future-focused Strategic Plan. This work is divided into five key phases, and incorporated insights from the Region of Waterloo’s Strategic Plan team’s engagement activities.

Phase 1: Project Kick-off (March - April 2023) with the following key activities:

- Confirmation of work plan, engagement strategy and finalized scope of work; and,
- Kick-off with Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team, and Council.

Phase 2: Uncovering the futures of Waterloo Region (March - May 2023) with the following key activities:

- Review of existing data sources and surveys;
- Secondary research to understand the range of changes impacting cities in the future;
- Staff survey;
- Resident survey;
- Trend discussion with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), Internal Leadership Team (ILT), Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team (REDI), and Council;
- Scenario development workshop with youth; and
- Scenario development and validation with the project team.

Phase 3: Identifying future-focused strategic priorities (May - June 2023) with the following key activities:

- Five immersive futures workshops with youth, community roundtable, staff engagement group, Internal Leadership Team, Strategy Leads, Corporate Leadership Team and Council;
- Resident survey about Waterloo Region in 2050, and what it will take to get there;
- Refinement session with Corporate Leadership Team; and
- Interim report presentation to Internal Leadership Team, Corporate Leadership Team and Council.

Phase 4: Recommendations to support final strategic plan (July - August 2023) with the following key activities:

- Refinement of strategic priorities to support strategic plan;
- Youth and community feedback loops; and,
- Identification of goals, objectives, actions, and key performance indicators (KPIs) that support each strategic priority.

Phase 5: Supporting future-focused decisions (Sept - Oct 2023) with the following key activities:

- Finalize trend and scenario content;
- Graphic design of materials to support further use; and
- Final presentations to Internal Leadership Team and Corporate Leadership Team.



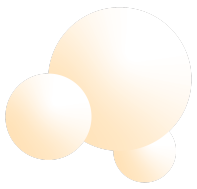
Appendix B: Four Provocative Futures

According to Canada’s federal foresight agency, Policy Horizons,

“Scenarios are descriptions of plausible alternative futures. They are used as a way to visualize how trends and drivers of changes could mature in the future. The objective is NOT to predict the future, but to explore a range of plausible futures, to identify potential challenges and opportunities that could emerge and to develop robust strategies that may help cope with these surprises.”

To help ensure the strategic planning process contended with the broad future implications of the key trends, while also testing current assumptions about Waterloo Region’s future, scenarios were developed. Using a common scenario development framework, a preliminary structure of scenarios was developed. To add detail and narrative to these scenarios, youth from across the region were invited to a session held April 24, 2023 to co-create these scenarios. Over the course of three hours, youth engaged in a variety of participatory activities designed to translate the key trends into possible scenarios. This content was further refined by Creative Futures, with support from the Region of Waterloo’s Strategic Planning and REDI teams. The goal of the scenarios (summarized below) was not to describe a preferred future of the Region, but to provoke broad thinking about Waterloo Region in 2050, helping identify possible futures that could result from present-day changes, and future-oriented strategic priorities.





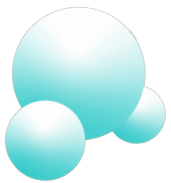
Scenario 1: The Great Balancing Act

It is 2050, and the economy in the region is strong with significant growth of the tech and advanced manufacturing sectors. As a result, the population has grown to 1.2 million residents. Housing density has increased, and former agricultural land has been converted to housing developments. Funding for public services has not kept up with the growth in the region, and as a result there have been reductions of publicly funded services and a rise in privately funded alternatives. There is now a significant divide among residents who can pay for services they need and those who cannot.



Scenario 2: Persevering Communities

It is 2050, and the world continues to grapple with multiple health, economic and environmental crises. As a result, governments at all levels struggle with the financial resources needed to deliver services, and communities have turned to each other for support. Due to disruptions of global supply chains and climate-related growing challenges, food has become the most valued commodity, often bartered between neighbourhoods. Communities have become increasingly tight knit, looking after each other as an act of perseverance. They have also become more insular and polarized.



Scenario 3: Predictive Government

It is 2050 and climate comes first for every decision made by governments. In order to protect the environment, residents trust governments to collect real time data to inform data-based decision making. As a result, the regional government has a large influence over the day to day activities of its residents. By digital monitoring of the health of communities and promotion of climate friendly behaviours, governments are continuously optimizing service delivery and regaining public trust every step of the way.



Scenario 4: All for All

It is 2050, and the world has changed dramatically. Following a global conflict fought over scarce natural resources, the world has pledged to a new era of peace. Embedded in this commitment is a global shift to decarbonization, decolonization, racial justice, and community well-being. Governance systems have embraced long-term thinking, making decisions based on future generations. Peace and safety are top priorities, and Waterloo Region has become known as one of the best places to raise a family in the country.

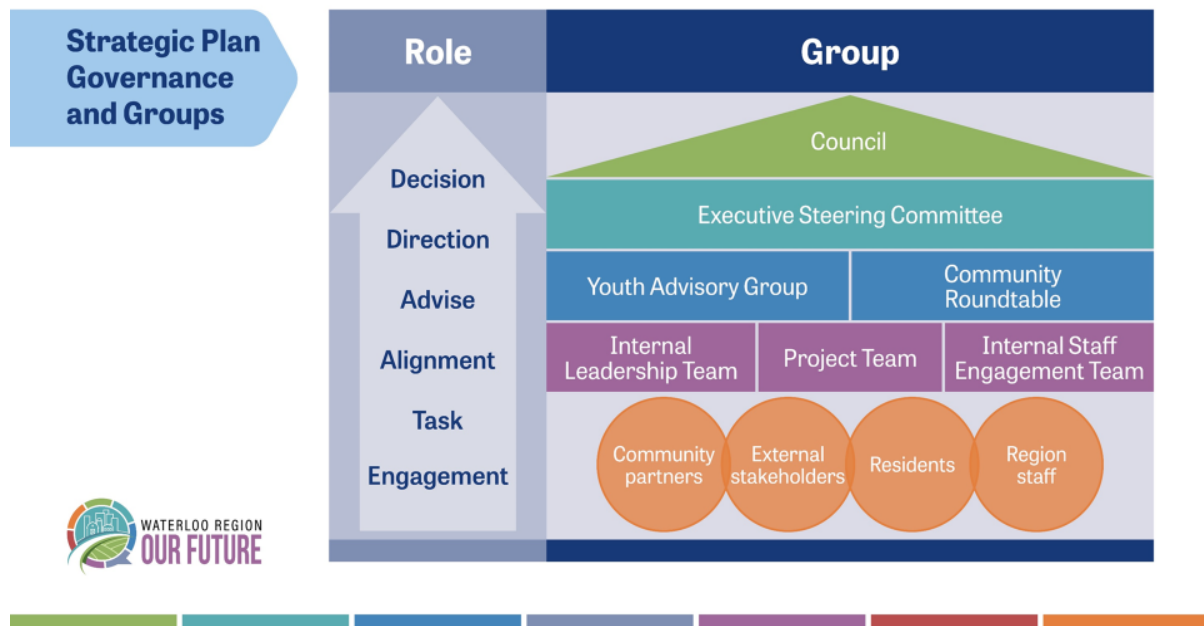
Appendix C: Summary of Community Engagement Approaches

Engagement Approach

The strategic planning process was supported by an extensive community engagement and communications plan that aimed to build relationships, embed equity, build trust and ensure multiple ways for all communities across Waterloo Region to participate. The plan included formal and informal approaches, with a focus on in person interactions. Online engagement was available for those who we were not able to reach in person.

The engagement strategy was built on the following governance and groups:

- Regional Council set the direction and approves the Strategic Plan.
- The Executive Steering Committee was comprised of Regional Corporate Leadership Team members. This group supported Council in setting the direction and overall approach to developing the Strategic Plan.
- The Youth Advisory Group and Community Roundtable supported the engagement process, ensuring the voices of youth, diverse sectors and community leaders were included in the process.
- Regional staff teams supported the overall planning, engagement and development of the plan. Staff teams helped to identify and implement tactics with their teams and colleagues.
- A team of Community Connectors were hired to support outreach and engage with stakeholders and residents at various locations and events across the region.



The strategic planning process has engaged thousands of people from across the region. Together these voices have shared diverse lived experience, community priorities and hopes for the future.

The engagement plan focused on reaching a broad audience across all cities and townships in Waterloo region. Targeted efforts were made to reach those that are not often included, such as residents living in countryside, youth, seniors, Indigenous peoples, and equity seeking groups. The engagement approach sought to build upon conversations already happening across the region to build trust, relationships and ensure input the community has already provided was incorporated fully into the work as well as providing new opportunities to engage.

Various methods of engagement were used, including formal workshops, surveys, attendance at community events, one-to-ones, community conversations, and online opportunities. A summary of the formal engagement activities is provided in the table below, completed to date.

Immersive Futures Workshops

Creative Futures hosted five in-person engagement workshops where participants explored the four provocative futures of Waterloo Region in 2050. The purpose of these workshops was to identify a preferred future along with aligned strategic priorities.

At each workshop, participants were invited to immerse themselves in the four scenarios at scenario stations. At each station there was a facilitator who shared a story about their life in 2050, provided an opportunity for participants to engage in a related activity, followed by a discussion of what participants liked and did not like about this future world. With this in mind, participants worked in groups to identify the future they wanted for Waterloo Region in 2050. Following this activity, participants identified the key actions that would need to start, stop and continue in the near term to make this preferred future happen.

The following groups participated in these sessions:

- Youth between the ages of 14 and 24 years old;
- Community partners and stakeholders;
- Internal staff engagement team comprised of frontline staff from across the organization;
- Corporate Leadership Team, Internal Leadership Team and Strategy leads; and
- Council.

Overall, 202 participants attended the Immersive Futures Workshops, sharing over 500 actions needed to get to the future they aspired for Waterloo Region. Combined with online engagement ideas, over 2,000 ideas were collected throughout engagement activities.

Community Events/ Outreach and Online Engagement

Six Community Connectors were hired with a variety of lived experiences, including two youth connectors, to hold conversations with community about the the future of Waterloo Region at community events and open houses across the Region. An online survey was hosted through the Engage WR platform, for people who could not attend workshops or community events. Through these engagement methods, residents were invited to share thoughts on the future of Waterloo Region in 2050. All questions were focused on 2050 and asked questions such as:

- What are you most hopeful about?
- What is one thing that may seem small today but could have a big impact in 2050?
- Thinking about a possible future where we might see extensive population growth in the area, what do you hope that might mean for life in the region?
- Reflecting on a possible future that might face ongoing economic, environmental and health challenges, what do you think will be the most important priority for the Region of Waterloo?
- If governments used more predictive AI to plan and deliver services, what do you hope that might mean for the region?
- If there was a significant societal transformation that prioritized climate and racial justice, what government programs and services do you hope would be prioritized and expanded?
- Overall, what types of government services and programs do you think will be most important?

Summary of Engagement Activities

A summary of the formal engagement activities is provided in the table below, completed to date. Engagement efforts will be ongoing to help shape how the plan is implemented as we go forward so that ongoing relationships can be nurtured and built with community and staff.

Activity	Completed
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Council Strategic Priorities Workshops (including one All Councils meeting) • 5 Community Strategic Priorities workshops (3 Youth focussed) • 3 Leadership Staff Strategic Priorities Workshops • 2 Broader Staff Strategic Priorities Workshops • 2 Staff Vision, Mission, Values workshops

Community Events and Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Dundee Artisan Festival • KW Multicultural Festival • Township of Wellesley Backyard BBQ • Hespeler Music Festival • Waterloo Jazz Festival • Rural Drop In Sessions Woolwich Town Hall and Wellesley Community Health, Ayr Library • Public Health Outreach Clinic (Cambridge, Wilmot, Woolwich, Waterloo) • Seniors Lunch – Ayr • Youth Action Council - Kitchener
Online engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EngageWR online public survey for those who we are not able to reach through other in person methods. (340 responses, approximately 1,500 ideas) • Staff engagement online site for those we cannot reach through other in person methods. (81 respondents, just over 700 ideas)
Staff Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Staff at Ken Seiling Waterloo Museum • 4 Building wide open houses (Cambridge, 2 in Kitchener, Waterloo) • 3 Waste Management drop ins (Waterloo and Cambridge) • 3 GRT Staff BBQs (Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge) • Transportation operations BBQ • Facilities and Fleet Management BBQ • 3 Library Staff Meetings (virtual) • 1 Public Health and Paramedic Services All Staff meeting (virtual) • 1 Transportation Services All staff meeting (virtual)
Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple presentations at various community and staff meetings.

Additional Background Data

In addition to the engagement activities listed above, the following table outlines key survey and data that informed strategic priority development.

Background Survey and Data collection	Purpose
Community wellbeing survey (2022) (4,936 responses)	This survey will provide individuals and organizations in the Waterloo Region with crucial information to better understand the well-being and needs of our community, so we can work together to make Waterloo an even better place to live and work.

<p>Region of Waterloo Resident survey (2022); (1,000 responses)</p>	<p>1,000 responses were received for this statistically representative telephone survey that asked residents about their experiences with Regional services, engagement with the Region and gain insights to inform the strategic direction of the organization.</p>
<p>Engage Plan and Budget online survey (2022); (1,652 responses)</p>	<p>This survey was available through EngageWR to inform the 2023 Plan and Budget Process and provided valuable input on priorities for Regional government from residents.</p>
<p>Waterloo Region Immigrant survey (2021); (1,507 responses)</p>	<p>The findings provide a snapshot of immigrant experiences of living in Waterloo Region, as perceived by immigrants themselves, and some of the many benefits immigrants bring to the community. They highlight some challenges in the delivery of service supports to immigrants, as well as the need to tackle systems and policy-level change.</p>
<p>Youth Impact Survey (2021) (1,074 responses)</p>	<p>This survey assesses youth well-being. As the survey was completed in the summer of 2021, this report provides an excellent overview of how child and youth well-being was impacted by the pandemic.</p>
<p>Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (2021);</p>	<p>Extensive community consultation occurred with groups and individuals who face the most significant impacts to safety and well-being to develop the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.</p>

Appendix D: Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action Relevant to Municipalities

	Call to Action	Rationale
3	Fully implement Jordan’s Principle to ensure First Nations children are not denied or delayed in accessing essential public services.	Municipalities can review all municipal services to children to ensure access is equitable and without discrimination. Where possible, municipalities can also support local healthcare, social, and educational professionals to remedy systemic and institutional practices so that Indigenous youth can access the services and supports they need, when they need them.
17	Enable residential school survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving any administrative costs.	Municipalities that charge a fee for any name changes are encouraged to waive this fee if it is for the purpose of reclaiming a family name.
40	In collaboration with Indigenous people, create Indigenous-specific victim programs and services with appropriate evaluation mechanisms.	There are opportunities for municipal governments to advocate, create, and expand victim services programs in partnership with the Government of Ontario and local organizations.
45.iii	Renew or establish Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future.	Municipal government leaders can build relationships with local and regional Indigenous organizations and leaders to open space for conversation on issues of mutual interest.

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| 57 | Educate public servants on the history of Indigenous peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous law, and Indigenous–Crown relations. | Possibly one of the most impactful ways that municipal governments can support reconciliation is to update internal training programs to regularly educate staff about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including the residential school system, and how that impacts relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people today. This training may include a focus on intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism. |
| 66 | Establish funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation. | While this call to action is directed to the federal government, municipalities can also collaborate with local organizations to raise awareness and encourage conversations with youth about reconciliation. |
| 69.iii | Encourage libraries to commit more resources to public education on residential schools. | Municipalities can partner with libraries to host speaker events and sharing circles and promote literature that will increase awareness about the history and legacy of residential schools. |
| 77 | Work with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system. | Municipalities can explore historical corporate and cemetery records to identify and deliver any relevant documentation to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. This may include collaborating with the local museum(s). |
| 93 | Create/revise information kits for newcomers to reflect the history of Indigenous peoples, including information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools. | Municipalities can develop a handout about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples in the region and share it with immigrant serving agencies as well as make it publicly available online. Consider developing the handout in |

multiple languages to better support newcomers to understand the cultural context.

The following calls to action are most relevant to municipal governments that are located near a formal residential school site.

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| 75 | Implement strategies for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. | This call to action is directed at the federal government, however, due to the municipal role in oversight of land use planning and cemetery management, municipal governments can take active steps to meet this call to action. |
| 79.iii | Implement plans to commemorate residential school sites, the history of residential schools and contributions of Indigenous peoples to Canada's history. | This call to action is directed at the federal government, but municipal governments can also implement plans to commemorate the history to build awareness and support reconciliation. |
| 82 | In collaboration with survivors and stakeholder organizations, install publicly accessible and visible monuments to honour survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities. | This call to action is directed at provincial and territorial governments, but municipal governments can also support reconciliation through local installments. |

Source:

https://www.abmunis.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs_Initiatives/WIC/a_municipal_guide_to_the_trcs_calls_to_action_july_2021.pdf