



Region of Waterloo

Planning Information Bulletin

Date: May 7, 2024

Subject: 2023 POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS ESTIMATES FOR
WATERLOO REGION

Background:

This bulletin highlights key aspects of Waterloo Region's population and household growth and how recent growth compares to long term trends. The total year-end population and household estimates are used by many Regional and Area Municipal departments, agencies, boards and community groups to plan for growth, support infrastructure and service programs, develop municipal benchmarks and performance indicators, calculate service costs per resident, assess housing need and track population-related trends.

Population and Household Estimates

The total population for Waterloo Region as of year end 2023 is estimated at 673,910 people, including university and college students temporarily residing in the Region. Driven by an increase in post-secondary enrollment, as well as strong housing growth, Waterloo Region's population grew at a significantly higher rate than most years. In 2023, the population grew by 28,490 people, a growth rate of 4.4%. The estimated number of households is 238,800 representing a growth rate of 2.68% or 6,240 more than 2022. The growth of 28,490 people in 2023 significantly outpaces the Region's 5-year average annual population growth of 12,802 (Table 1).

The Region of Waterloo's 2023 total year-end population and household estimates are based on population and dwelling counts produced by Statistics Canada from the Census of Canada, conducted on May 11, 2021, however they also include an undercoverage rate (4 per cent), an adjustment for occupied units to year end 2023, and an estimate of students who are living in the Region while they study at our post-secondary institutions. As such, the Region's total year-end population is recommended for purposes of estimating the number of people consuming services in the Region, such as water, wastewater, police, and ambulance.

Table 1: Year-end 2023 Population and Household Estimates for the Region of Waterloo*

	Region of Waterloo **	Cambridge	Kitchener	North Dumfries	Waterloo	Wellesley	Wilmot	Woolwich
Total Population Year-end 2023*	673,910	152,130	292,240	11,910	154,440	11,650	23,010	28,530
Population in Regular Households	654,600	150,460	288,420	11,820	141,430	11,630	22,770	28,070
Population in Collective Dwellings***	19,310	1,680	3,820	90	13,010	20	240	460
Total Population Year-end 2022*	645,420	145,290	277,970	11,410	148,630	11,530	22,420	28,160
Additional Population	28,490	6,840	14,270	500	5,810	120	590	370
Population Change 2022-2023 (%)	4.41%	4.7%	5.1%	4.4%	3.9%	1.0%	2.6%	1.3%
Households Year-end 2023*	238,800	53,920	107,580	4,080	51,980	3,430	7,990	9,820
Households Year-end 2022*	232,560	52,650	104,210	3,910	50,780	3,410	7,950	9,660
Additional Households	6,240	1,270	3,380	170	1,200	20	50	160
Household Change 2022-2023 (%)	2.68%	2.4%	3.2%	4.3%	2.4%	0.6%	0.5%	1.7%
Persons per Unit+	2.74	2.79	2.68	2.90	2.72	3.39	2.85	2.86
Temporary Student Population (included above)	49,310	4,500	10,700	10	34,550	(40)	(200)	(200)
Students Arriving	58,090	6,530	14,920	160	36,210	50	80	130
Living in Student Residences	10,340	-	540	-	9,810	-	-	-
Living in Other Accommodations	47,750	6,530	14,390	160	26,400	50	80	130
Students Leaving++	(8,780)	(2,030)	(4,230)	(160)	(1,660)	(90)	(280)	(330)

* Based on available data from the 2021 Census, includes adjustments for recent residential development, students and other foreign/temporary residents, net Census undercount, and vacancy rates. Due various corrections and adjustments, direct comparison to previous year's estimates are not valid.

** Municipal totals may not add due to independent rounding.

*** Collective dwellings include student residences, nursing homes, group homes, hospitals, larger lodging houses, etc.

+ 'Persons per Unit' (PPU) calculation is based on the 'Population in Regular Households', not on 'Total Population'.

++ These are students who leave home to attend school. They represent the reverse flow of the temporary students arriving in the Region from elsewhere.

National Population Trends

According to Statistics Canada, in 2022, Canada experienced record-high population growth, with an increase of 1,050,110 people. This growth rate of 2.7% is the highest since 1957 and was primarily driven by international migration, which accounted for nearly all of the growth (95.9%). Non-permanent residents (those who have temporary study or work permits) have contributed significantly to this growth. At the time of writing this report, Statistics Canada has not released 2023 year-end population estimates; however, according to third quarter 2023 estimates, Canada's population continues to grow at a record pace, primarily driven by non-permanent residents.

Locally, in Waterloo Region, roughly half (51%) of the growth experienced in 2023 is a direct result of an increase in international student enrollment at our local institutions. The remaining growth is largely driven by both intra-provincial and international migration.

Persons per Unit (PPU)

Trends in average housing occupancy, quantified as persons per unit (PPU), are shaped by demographic shifts and age structures within the population. Over time, the overall persons per unit (PPU) has exhibited a gradual decline, from 2.75 people per unit in 2006 to 2.70 in 2016. Since 2016, the PPU in Waterloo Region has remained steady, with an estimated 2022 PPU of 2.70, reflecting the interaction of various factors.

Recent population growth, particularly driven by migration from GTHA municipalities, has been notably concentrated among individuals aged 25-39, a demographic known for its propensity for family formation. As Waterloo Region attracts more families, the average occupancy per unit experiences an increase. This upward trend in PPU is typically counterbalanced by the effects of an aging population, which tends to lead to a decrease in housing occupancy over time, thus maintaining a stable PPU for Waterloo Region.

However, in 2023, the landscape saw a notable shift, with estimated occupancy rates rising to 2.74 persons per unit, indicating a relatively sharp year-over-year increase. This increase can be attributed to a combination of factors, including post-secondary student enrollment rising at rates that are faster than housing construction. This along with escalating housing costs have led to denser living arrangements further contributing to the increase in average housing occupancy within Waterloo Region in 2023.

Population and Household Trends

A forecast of growth anticipates the Region's population to grow to 686,950 people by 2024 year end, a growth of 13,040 people. Through 2023, building permits were issued for around 4,700 units. The time from building permit to construction completion and occupancy varies by project, but that figure provides an indication of how many housing units may be occupied in the near future.

Figure 1: Population Growth for Waterloo Region, 1999 - 2023

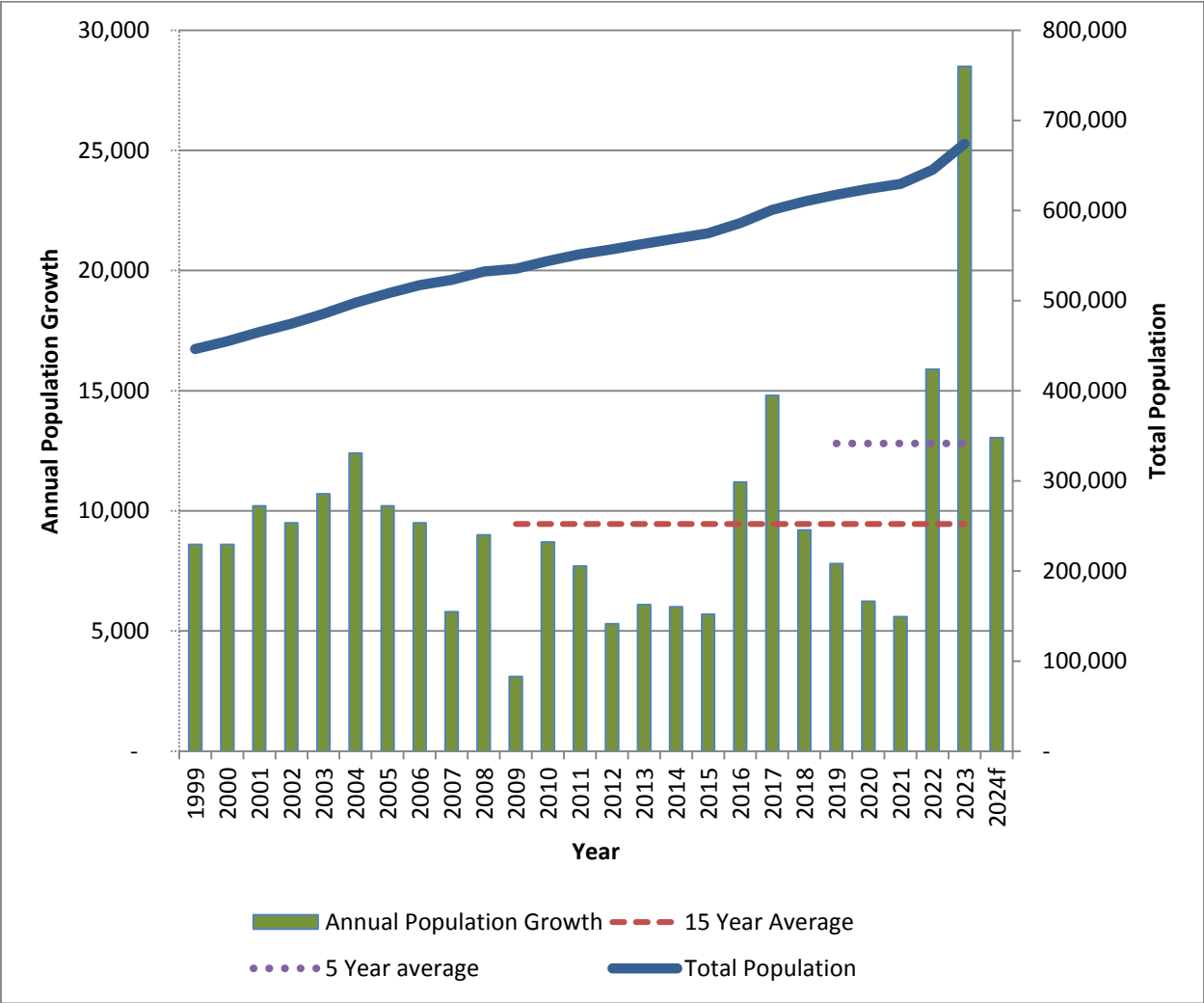


Table 2: Long-term Trends in Population and Households: Waterloo Region

Year-end	Population			Households		
	Total Population	Annual Growth	Change %	Total Households	Annual Growth	Change %
1999	446,200	8,600	1.97%	158,270	3,320	2.14%
2000	454,800	8,600	1.93%	161,590	3,320	2.10%
2001	465,000	10,200	2.24%	164,600	3,010	1.86%
2002	474,500	9,500	2.04%	167,530	2,930	1.78%
2003	485,200	10,700	2.26%	170,820	3,290	1.96%
2004	497,600	12,400	2.56%	175,080	4,260	2.49%
2005	507,800	10,200	2.05%	178,780	3,700	2.11%
2006	517,300	9,500	1.87%	182,200	3,420	1.91%
2007	523,100	5,800	1.12%	185,130	2,930	1.61%
2008	532,100	9,000	1.72%	188,800	3,670	1.98%
2009	535,200	3,100	0.58%	189,820	1,020	0.54%
2010	543,900	8,700	1.63%	193,230	3,410	1.80%
2011	551,600	7,700	1.42%	196,490	3,260	1.69%
2012	556,900	5,300	0.96%	198,480	1,990	1.01%
2013	563,000	6,100	1.10%	200,830	2,350	1.18%
2014	569,000	6,000	1.07%	203,660	2,830	1.41%
2015	574,700	5,700	1.00%	205,990	2,330	1.14%
2016	585,900	11,200	1.95%	209,240	3,250	1.58%
2017	600,700	14,800	2.53%	213,220	3,980	1.90%
2018	609,900	9,200	1.53%	216,220	3,000	1.41%
2019	617,700	7,800	1.28%	218,900	2,680	1.24%
2020	623,930	6,230	1.01%	222,300	3,400	1.55%
2021	629,520	5,590	0.90%	227,420	5,120	2.30%
2022	645,420	15,900	2.53%	232,550	5,130	2.26%
2023	673,910	28,490	4.41%	238,800	6,250	2.69%
2024 ^f	686,950	13,040	1.93%	243,510	4,710	1.97%
5-year average		12,802	2.02%		4,516	2.01%
15-year average		9,454	1.60%		3,333	1.61%

f - Forecast

Estimates of Post-Secondary Students

The temporary student population contributes substantially to the total population of Waterloo Region. Estimates of the post-secondary student population and housing is based on recent data acquired from the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College.

As of November 2023, there were 90,800 post-secondary students enrolled in full-time programs at Conestoga College, the University of Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier University, on the campuses that are located in Waterloo Region (Figure 2).

Prior to 2016, growth in international student enrollment was minimal. Between 2016 and 2022, international enrollment accounted for roughly 20% of the total enrollment in local institutions. However, in 2023, growth in international students increased significantly, now accounting for 37% of total enrolment. The increase in the number of

international students has an effect on Waterloo Region's population since most require housing within the Region, compared to domestic students, many of whom commute from other jurisdictions or already live within the Region. Overall enrollment growth in 2023 was significantly higher than previous years. Between 2016 and 2022, total enrollment increased by 3.4% annually, on average. In 2023, enrollment grew by 16.5%. This growth was entirely fueled by the increase of international students.

Of the full-time students studying on local campuses, it is estimated that in a typical year over 73,400 would reside in Waterloo Region, and the remaining 17,300 students live outside the Region (Table 3).

Table 3: University and College Enrollment by Institution (Fall 2023)

	Conestoga	Waterloo	Laurier	Total
Full-time Local Enrolment	36,100	39,300	15,400	90,800
Commuters, co-op work term, etc.	9,400	7,300	600	17,300
Resident in Region	26,700	32,000	14,700	73,400

Students attending the three post-secondary institutions in the Region contributed an additional 49,310 to the Regions total population.. Figure 4 shows the temporary student population by municipality, net of those student who live in Waterloo Region and move elsewhere to study.

Table 4: Temporary Student Population Estimates for Waterloo Region

	Region of Waterloo **	Cambridge	Kitchener	North Dumfries	Waterloo	Wellesley	Wilmot	Woolwich
Temporary Student Population (included above)	49,310	4,500	10,700	10	34,550	(40)	(200)	(200)
Students Arriving	58,090	6,530	14,920	160	36,210	50	80	130
Living in Student Residences	10,340	-	540	-	9,810	-	-	-
Living in Other Accommodations	47,750	6,530	14,390	160	26,400	50	80	130
Students Leaving++	(8,780)	(2,030)	(4,230)	(160)	(1,660)	(90)	(280)	(330)

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