

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Community Services**  
**Employment and Income Support**

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**To:** Community and Health Services Committee

**Meeting Date:** October 8, 2024

**Report Title:** Employment Services Pilot Program

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**1. Recommendation**

For Information.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

To provide an update on the Region's Employment Program Pilot (the "Pilot") delivered by Employment and Income Services as originally outlined in report CSD-EIS-23-001 dated May 9, 2023.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

This report addresses the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027, Focus areas, Homes for All, Equitable Services and Opportunities and Resilient and Future Ready Organization. Specifically, it addresses:

Homes for All

- Invest in upstream solutions to reduce housing and economic precarity
  - 3.2 - Employment Services are transformed to support people to sustainable employment

Equitable Services and Opportunities

- Ensure services are inclusive, accessible, culturally safe and appropriate
- Design equitable Regional services that meet local community needs
- Explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships

Resilient and Future Ready Organization

- Explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service

#### **4. Report Highlights:**

- Through our reputation as a successful employment provider, we have developed partnerships with organizations to deliver innovative employment programming. This includes the Grand Valley Construction Association Path to Employment program, designed to assist equity deserving groups to enter the construction industry. In the first cohort of the program, 15 out of the 19 participants attained full-time employment, 89% of whom previously had no income or were receiving Ontario Works and two of whom were in shelter and were assisted to secure housing.
- The Pilot supports the Community Benefits program by placing people from equity deserving groups in regional capital projects as directed by Council. We are working with other departments to further develop this important and successful work.
- We are expanding targeted efforts to newcomers as existing supports are limited and outpaced by immigration. In the 2023 Immigration Partnership survey of newcomers in our region, 49% of respondents named finding work as one of their biggest challenges.
- Staff are seeking additional federal and provincial funding sources to continue the Pilot with no levy investments required by 2026 and beyond.

#### **5. Background:**

The Pilot plays a critical role in the upstream intervention to break the cycle of poverty for Waterloo Region residents. More than 45,000 residents or about 8% of the regional population are living below the poverty line. While a small percentage of the population, those living in deep poverty represent a disproportionate service and fiscal cost to municipalities. Our targeted and innovative employment approach addresses the unique needs of people living in deep poverty, moving them toward financial independence and stability.

On May 9, 2023, council approved the recommendation outlined in report CSD-EIS-23-001 that: “the Regional Municipality of Waterloo continue to be an Employment Ontario (EO) provider until at least March 31, 2025 with the intent of evaluating whether it remains beneficial to the community and fiscally viable to remain an EO provider under the Service System Manager (SSM) model that comes into effect January 1, 2024.”

## 6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

**Area Municipalities:** None at this time.

### **Public:**

Over the course of 2023-24, staff consulted with the Immigration Partnership, Employment Ontario providers, Conestoga College, and industry associations. Staff also reviewed local data and reports, including the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness's Lived Expertise Prototyping Report. This consultation highlighted the need for the Region of Waterloo to engage in targeted employment supports for equity deserving groups, particularly for newcomers and those experiencing homelessness. It also revealed that industry partners are interested to work with the Region to develop innovative programming and that there are viable alternate sources for funding.

## 7. Financial Implications:

The 2024 approved operating budget for the Pilot includes:

- expenditures for 5 FTEs (\$575K) funded by levy (50%) and the Tax Stabilization Reserve (50%). As well as expenditures for 4 FTEs (\$421K) funded 100% by the Province.

In 2024, the Region secured additional Ministry funding for 1 year (Apr 2024 – Mar 2025) through the Grand Valley Construction Association (GVCA) for 1 additional temporary FTE, funded 100%.

Through the 2025 plan and budget process, Council will be provided an opportunity to consider extending the Pilot to the end of 2025 after which it is intended to be fully funded without a regional levy contribution.

## 8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The Region of Waterloo provides specialized employment services to equity-deserving populations within the community, advancing our strategic goal of investing in upstream solutions to reduce housing and economic precarity. Staff are seeking additional federal and provincial funding sources to continue provision of this employment program delivery with no levy contribution and are optimistic given the Pilot's success to date.

## 9. Attachments:

Nil.

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**Approved By:** Peter Sweeney, Commissioner Community Services