



A bottom-up vision for resilience, inclusion and abundance
led by non-profits and community groups

May 2025

onemillionneighbours.ca

ONE MILLION NEIGHBOURS WATERLOO REGION

A bottom-up vision for resilience, inclusion and abundance led by non-profits and community groups

May 2025

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Published on the territory of the Chonnonton, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe peoples.

Hold The Line Waterloo Region authored the report, led by Sam Nabi. With special thanks to the contributions from roundtable participants, the research team, and the organizing team (for more information, see the “About One Million Neighbours” section in this report.

This report has been commissioned by Waterloo Region Community Foundation (WRCF), with funding from WRCF and Hold The Line Waterloo Region. Our charitable partner is Pat The Dog Theatre Creation.

To cite this report:

Hold The Line Waterloo Region (2025). *One Million Neighbours Waterloo Region*.
<https://onemillionneighbours.ca>

Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	4
Land acknowledgment.....	6
About One Million Neighbours.....	7
Funding and in-kind support.....	8
Organizing team.....	8
Research team.....	9
Roundtable discussions.....	10
Population projections.....	14
A day in the life.....	21
Growing up, branching out.....	21
Reflections from roundtable participants.....	25
The vision.....	26
Arts, culture, & sport.....	28
Belonging.....	32
Climate action.....	37
Disability justice.....	39
Education.....	42
Environment.....	45
Food.....	47
Health.....	49
Housing.....	52
Indigenous sovereignty.....	55
Labour.....	57
Multiculturalism.....	60
Organizational capacity.....	62
Public spaces.....	66
Transportation.....	70
Next steps.....	73

*For the millionth neighbour living in Waterloo Region —
may you be welcomed with open arms and thrive in community.*

Executive summary

Waterloo Region, with its three cities and four townships, is a unique community that values both rural and urban living. Our proximity to highway 401 positions us well for commercial and industrial employment, while our proximity to local farms, natural areas, and the Grand River means we value knowing where our food comes from and connecting with nature. We don't have only one downtown; our urban centres are distributed throughout the region, along with several university and college campuses. We rely on groundwater for 80% of our municipal drinking water, which has led to strong environmental policies such as the countryside line and source water protection.

In the last few decades, we've shifted from a growth model of primarily suburban sprawl to one of compact urban growth and redevelopment along the ION light rail transit corridor. And we've been growing fast! We are one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in Canada, expecting to reach a population of 1,000,000 around 2050.

We have certainly had our share of growing pains. As with many other regions in Canada, housing affordability is at a crisis point. The number of unsheltered neighbours keeps increasing, as we race to meet the need for emergency shelters, addictions support, and mental health support. In 2025, we are also looking towards a difficult economic relationship with the United States, as Waterloo Region is one of the most vulnerable places in Canada for tariff impacts.

But we can also look toward the future with another perspective: one that recognizes the immense collective strength and depth of relationships that arise from the thousands of non-profits and community groups across Waterloo Region. We can recognize that we are stronger together, when we realize that our priorities are interconnected and that we can go farther together than we can alone.

One Million Neighbours is a vision that pulls together shared priorities from over 100 participants, representing 62 organizations who participated in roundtable discussions that built bridges between organizations from different sectors.

We chose to use the word “neighbours” to describe people throughout this vision, because we wanted an expansive term that includes everyone — homeowners, tenants, and unhoused people; long-time residents and newcomers; youth and seniors. Other terms that are typically used in political discussion, such as “taxpayers”, “citizens”, “homeowners”, or “residents”, can present an exclusionary view of who counts in a population.

This vision is organized into 15 sections, with the understanding that there is a lot of overlap between them and that they can be addressed simultaneously:

- Arts, culture & sport

- Belonging
- Climate action
- Disability justice
- Education
- Environment
- Food
- Health
- Housing
- Indigenous sovereignty
- Labour
- Multiculturalism
- Organizational capacity
- Public spaces
- Transportation

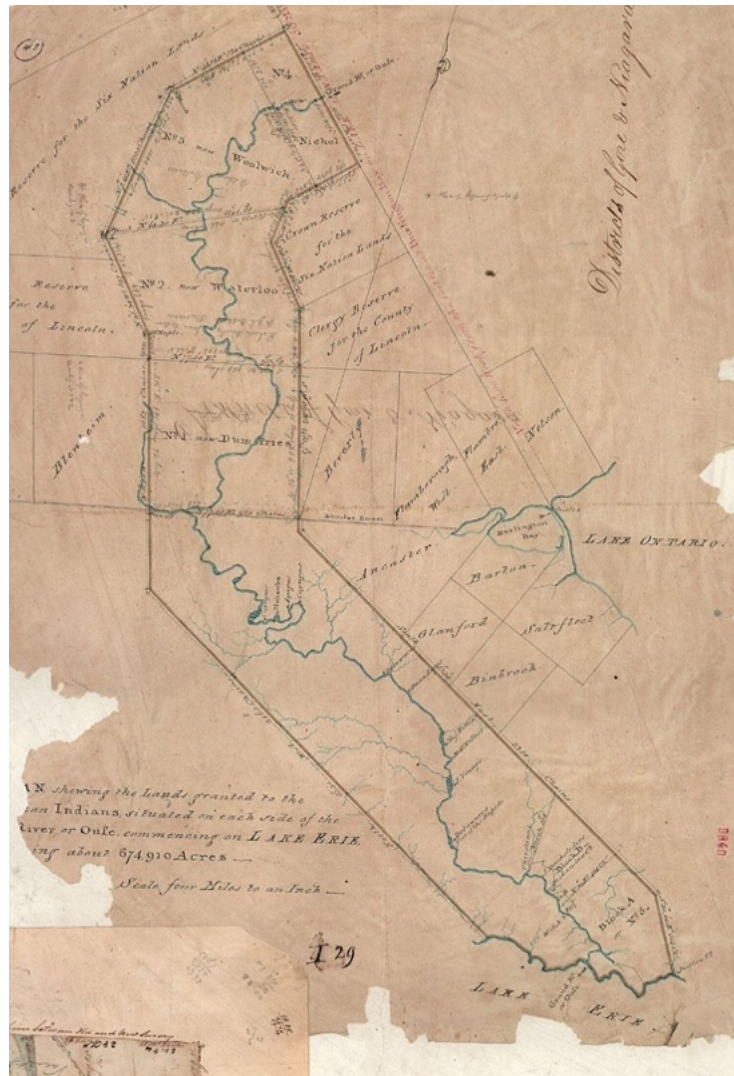
We hope that this report will be a useful tool for non-profits and community organizations to collaborate, share resources, and effectively advocate to government and business partners to achieve a future for Waterloo Region that is resilient, inclusive, and abundant.

Land acknowledgment

Before the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous nations across the Great Lakes region honoured the Dish With One Spoon agreement, which represents the peaceful sharing of land and resources in a spirit of mutual cooperation. The land now known as Waterloo Region has been inhabited and cared for by several Indigenous peoples, including the Chonnonton (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe peoples.

Evidence of a First Nations village and longhouse are located in what is now the southwest area of Kitchener. Willow River Park (Victoria Park) in downtown Kitchener was a traditional wintering ground and meeting place for several Indigenous peoples. When settlers arrived here, their decision to establish themselves adjacent to this park was no accident: it was already a place for gathering, trading, and connecting.

Waterloo Region is largely situated on lands subject to the Haldimand Treaty, which, on October 25, 1784, after the American Revolutionary War of Independence, promised 950,000 acres to the Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation by the British as compensation for their role in the war and for the loss of their traditional lands in Upstate New York. Successive settler governments have failed to honour this treaty, and less than 5 per cent of the Haldimand Tract remains Six Nations or Mississaugas of the Credit land.



*Survey of the Six Nation Indian lands completed in 1821
(Public Archives of Canada)*

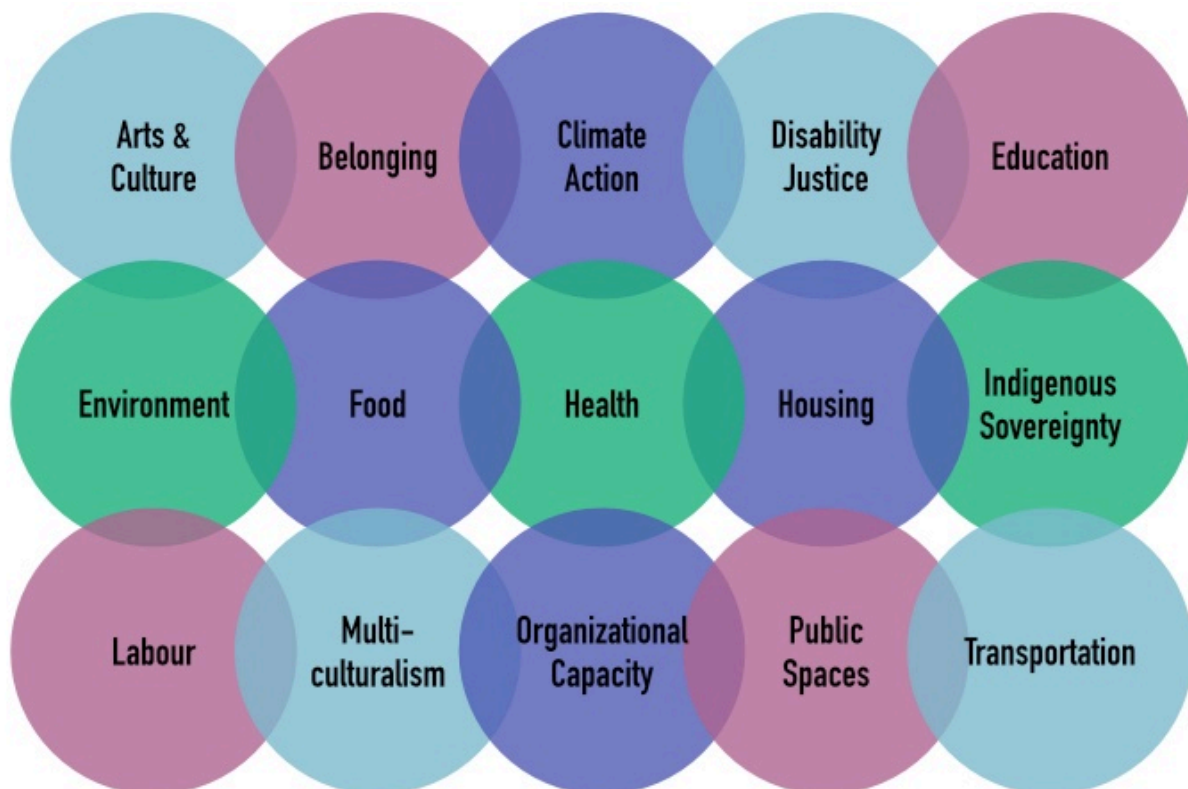
It is important that we take time to acknowledge the land upon which we live and work, to build relationships with the Indigenous peoples who have historically and continue to care for it, and to honour our treaty relationships as individuals, organizations, and governments.

About One Million Neighbours

As Waterloo Region grows from 700,000 people to over a million in the next few decades, we need a vision of the future that is inclusive, resilient, and abundant. Non-profits and community groups already know what strengths we can nurture and what limitations we need to overcome to build a future where everyone thrives.

One Million Neighbours is a bottom-up vision for the future, built primarily over the course of 8 roundtable discussions in 2024 and 2025. These discussions took place throughout Waterloo Region, with participation from non-profits and community groups serving urban, suburban, and rural areas. We identified common priorities and built future scenarios based on the concept of *multisolving*: that is, finding solutions that solve multiple problems at the same time, while advancing equity.

Our discussions brought us to a wide-ranging vision organized around 15 themes: arts & culture, belonging, disability justice, education, environment, climate action, food, health, housing, Indigenous sovereignty, multiculturalism, organizational capacity, labour, public spaces, and transportation. These categories should be considered not as individual silos, but as overlapping lenses with more in common than first meets the eye.



This report lays out a vision for the future led by non-profits and community groups. It is a necessary guiding star to help us counter the burnout that comes from responding to crises day after day. It also offers a different perspective that complements the vision statements developed by governments and by the business sector. By reminding ourselves of the big picture and forming new relationships in solidarity, we can recalibrate our energies. This report illustrates how different priorities can complement each other to achieve a common goal, and to build political will for solutions that have broad-based support from organizations who may not typically work together.

Funding and in-kind support

One Million Neighbours Waterloo Region is possible thanks to direct financial support from the Waterloo Region Community Foundation and Hold The Line Waterloo Region, as well as the support of our charitable fiscal partner, Pat The Dog Theatre Creation.

We are also grateful to the organizations who provided in-kind support in the form of venue space, food, and support staff to help facilitate our meetings: Kitchener Public Library, ArtsBuildOntario, Full Circle Foods, WLU Student Publications, City of Waterloo, Pat The Dog Theatre Creation, Civic Hub, City of Kitchener, Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener + Area (CAFKA), Inter Arts Matrix, Waterloo Region Community Foundation, Galt Collective, MT Space, First United Church, Willow River Centre, Langs, and rare Charitable Research Reserve.

Organizing team

Initial discussions about One Million Neighbours Waterloo Region were instrumental in advising on the scope of the project, and understanding where similar efforts were taking place in Waterloo Region. We also discussed the high-level context of what population growth could mean for non-profits, including the need to present a bottom-up vision for resilience, inclusion, and abundance. The organizing team met in-person and virtually in the first half of 2024, providing the Project Coordinator with a solid foundation from which to launch this project.

Organizing team members

- Alex Glass
- Craig Sloss
- David Alton
- Diane Wiles
- Janice Jim
- Julie Hall
- Kathilee Porter
- Levi Beaton
- Lisa O'Connell
- Mark Connolly

- Mark Seasons
- Melissa Bowman
- Michael Druker
- Ritika Shrimali
- Rodney Chan
- Sam Nabi (Project Coordinator)
- Sean Campbell
- Sean Geobey

Research team

Understanding that our community already possesses vast knowledge, and that the organizations working day-to-day to help their neighbours are the experts in how we should serve them better, our approach began with researching existing publications that could reveal the priorities of non-profits and community groups in Waterloo Region.

To that end, our research team identified public documents such as annual reports, impact reports, and press releases from hundreds of local organizations as a starting point for this report. This approach allowed the research team to include priorities from organizations that could not attend the roundtable sessions. They carefully identified the top priorities in these documents, and summarized them in [a central spreadsheet](#).

The research team also collected information from Statistics Canada to understand the projected demographic shifts in age, immigration, and racial diversity as Waterloo Region is expected to grow.

The groundwork undertaken by the research team gave us a rich and layered starting point for our roundtable discussions. This approach meant that we were able to start identifying areas of overlap between different groups' priorities, and that we could respect participants' time by jumping into more complex discussion topics instead of asking them to continually re-introduce themselves.

We want to extend immense gratitude to the research team for doing the hard, tedious, and essential work of making sense of hundreds of publications from local organizations, and preparing an excellent basis for productive and collaborative roundtable discussions.

Research team members

- Adam Cilevitz
- Craig Sloss
- Eva Hellreich
- Justin Barca
- Kae Elgie
- Levi Beaton

- Lynn Intini
- Marta Berbés-Blázquez
- Melissa Bowman
- Neeraj Nachnani
- Rebecca Petricevic
- Sam Nabi
- Zeyana Musthafa

Roundtable discussions

From October 2024 to March 2025, over 100 people from 62 different organizations participated in our roundtable discussions, which were held in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo over the course of six months. Participants included organizations that are active in all three cities as well as the rural townships of Waterloo Region.

These discussions incorporated a multisolving approach: that is, finding solutions that solve multiple problems at the same time, while advancing equity. Recognizing that service providers are often pitted against each other by a scarcity mindset and limited funding, multisolving lets us reframe our thinking about the future. Instead of focusing on the limits within which we currently operate, we can imagine futures based on cooperation, mutual aid, and abundance.

Our roundtables intentionally brought together organizations from different focus areas, in order to break down silos and emphasize the interdependencies between them. It was an opportunity to build common understanding across various sectors that may not think of each other very much in their day-to-day activities. From art to healthcare, from newcomer settlement to local food, from green energy to housing, from labour to Indigenous sovereignty, and more, the sheer diversity represented by our participants is the core strength of One Million Neighbours.

We started each discussion by introducing the research summaries that had been completed by the research team, as well as summaries of previous roundtables. This constant feedback loop was an iterative process that helped us identify gaps, think about whose voices are not being represented, build knowledge, and go deeper with our vision for the future.

The guiding questions for each roundtable shifted slightly as we refined our process, but all the roundtables spent a significant amount of time answering these two questions:

1. **Describe a day in the life of a future resident** in a community of one million people that is inclusive, resilient, and abundant. Start with one of the Vision Cards, and expand from there.
2. **How could we measure our progress** toward this future? What measurable indicators could we track?

In addition to these two questions, we included other prompts depending on the session, such as:

- What attracted you to move to your current neighbourhood? If you grew up there, why do you stay in this neighbourhood?
- What do non-profits and community groups need in order to prepare themselves for the future we want?
- List two or more priorities from the research summary that could be achieved together.
- Of the priorities we've discussed, what are some co-benefits and what are some potential adverse side-effects?
- What can we stop? What can we start? What can we continue?

Roundtable discussion dates and locations

- October 22, 2024
Visitors Information Centre, Waterloo
Hosted by Pat The Dog Theatre Creation
- November 22, 2024
Civic Hub, Kitchener
Hosted by Social Development Centre of Waterloo Region
- December 4, 2024
Globe Studios, Kitchener
Hosted by CAFKA (Contemporary Art Forum of Kitchener + Area)
- December 9, 2024
Galt Collective, Cambridge
Hosted by Early Learning & Literacy Alliance (ELLA)
- January 6, 2025
First United Church, Waterloo
Hosted by Strong Towns Waterloo Region
- January 24, 2025
Willow River Centre, Kitchener
Hosted by O:se Kenhionhata:tie Land Back Camp
- February 19, 2025
Langs Main Site & Community Health Centre, Cambridge

Hosted by Langs

- March 27, 2025
Lamb's Inn Administrative Centre, Cambridge
Hosted by rare Charitable Research Reserve

Participating organizations

1. 519 Community Collective
2. Adventure4Change
3. African Women's Alliance Waterloo Region
4. Alison Neighbourhood Association
5. Basic Income Waterloo Region
6. Brilliant Labs
7. Cambridge Family Early Years Centre
8. Cambridge Food Bank
9. Cambridge Public Library Art Gallery
10. Citizens for Cambridge
11. Coalition of Muslim Women Kitchener-Waterloo
12. Conestoga Students Inc.
13. Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener + Area (CAFKA)
14. Dumbo Octopus Consulting
15. Early Learning & Literacy Alliance (ELLA)
16. Faith Climate Justice
17. Fiddlesticks Community Centre
18. Food Systems Roundtable Waterloo Region
19. Grand River Artists Collective
20. Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis
21. Greenway Chaplin Community Centre
22. Heart of the Region
23. Hold The Line Waterloo Region
24. Homer Watson House & Gallery
25. Hospice Waterloo Region
26. Inter Arts Matrix
27. Kinbridge Community Association
28. Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
29. KW Sport Facilities Committee
30. Langs Community Health Centre
31. Langs Shower Program
32. Laurier Centre for Music in the Community
33. Lightning Banjo Productions
34. Live with SWAY
35. Muslim Social Services
36. Neruda Arts

37. Pat The Dog Theatre Creation
38. Pinch Arts Company Inc.
39. Porchlight Counselling and Addictions Services
40. Preston Heights Neighbourhood Association
41. Puppets & Shadows Theatre
42. Rad Riot Books
43. rare Charitable Reserve
44. Region of Waterloo Seniors' Advisory Committee
45. Sandhills Parlour
46. Sanguen Health Centre
47. Screaming Fox
48. Silverheights Neighbourhood Association
49. Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
50. SPECTRUM: Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space
51. Stirling Mennonite Church
52. Strong Towns Waterloo Region
53. Sustainable Waterloo Region
54. Union Sustainable Development
55. Volunteer Waterloo Region
56. Waterloo Region Age-Friendly Network
57. Waterloo Region Climate Collaborative
58. Waterloo Region Community Garden Network
59. Waterloo Region Yes In My Backyard (WR YIMBY)
60. Waterloo Wellington Self-Management Program
61. Willow River Centre
62. Women of Dignity International

Population projections

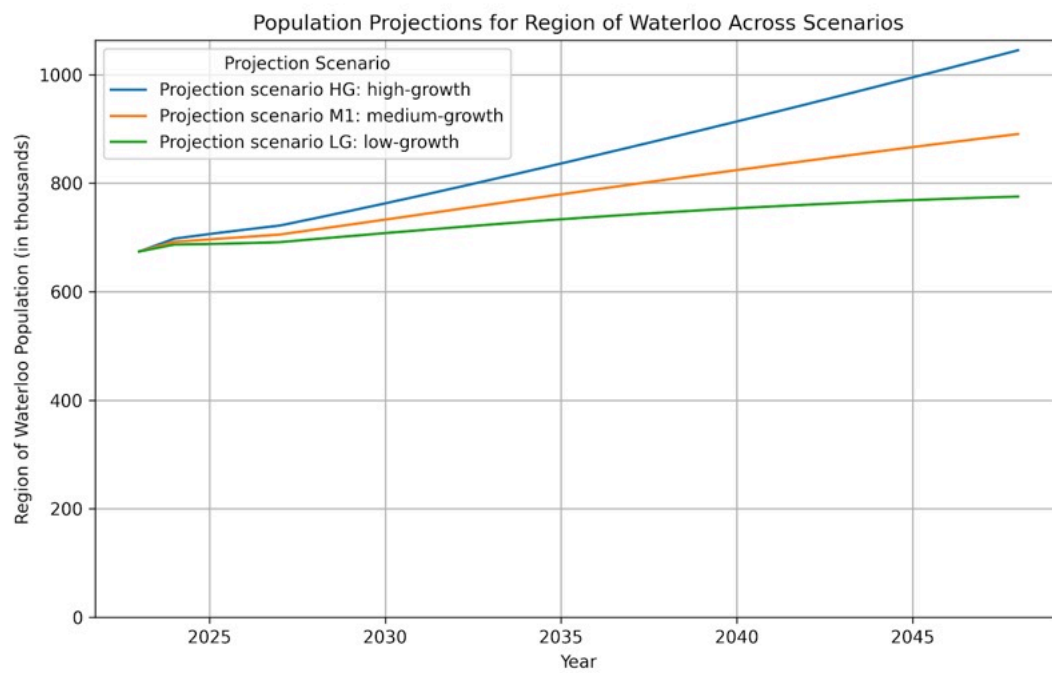
Statistics Canada has projected the future population of Waterloo Region to the 2040s. These projections are provided for both the total population, but also for demographics such as age, immigration status, and visible minorities. Some key observations in these projections include:

- The population of Waterloo Region could reach one million as early as 2046, under a high-growth scenario.
- Waterloo Region is expected to become more racially diverse in the future, with the proportion of racialized individuals reaching 40% by the 2040s. The increase in racial diversity is expected even in low-immigration scenarios.
- Waterloo Region's total population is expected to become older on average by 2041, although the racialized population will be younger on average than the non-racialized population.

Overall population

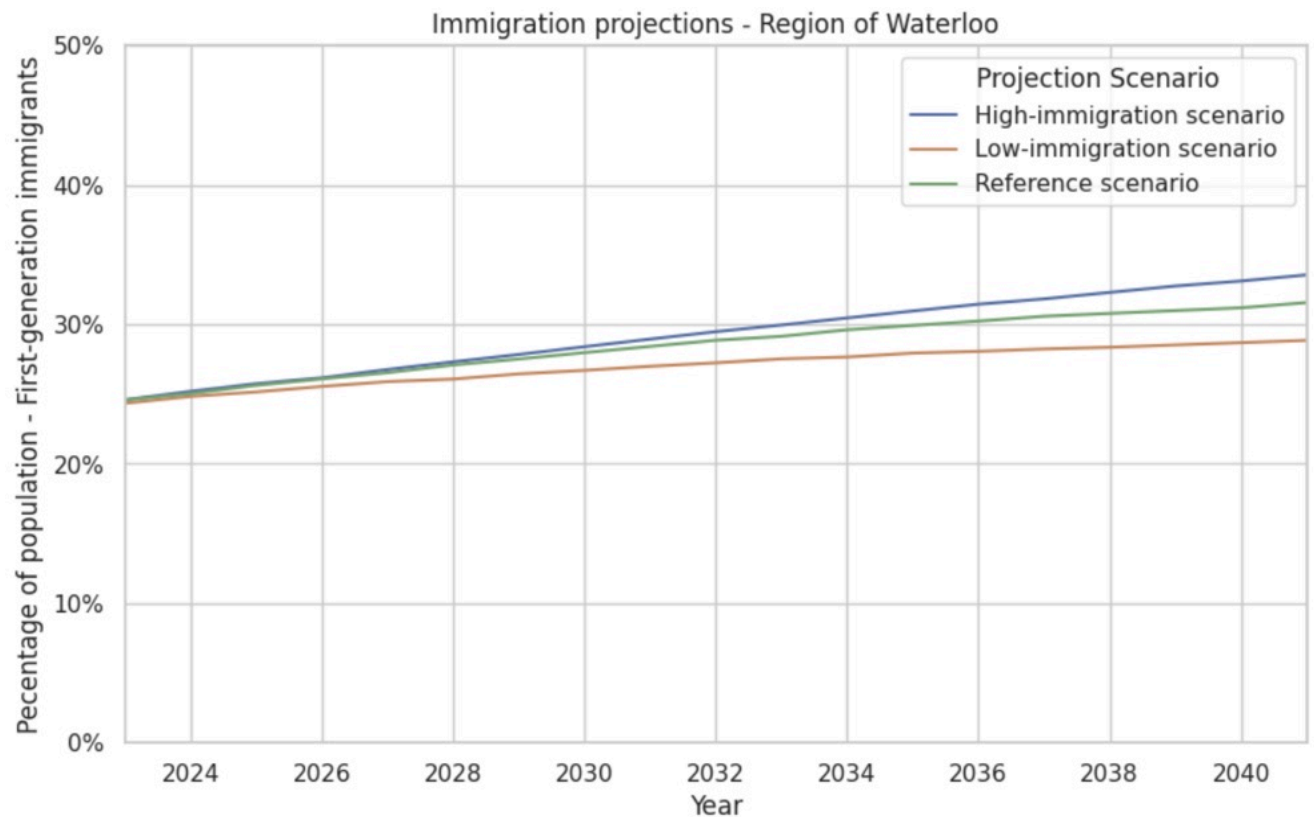
Under Statistics Canada's high-growth scenario, the population of Waterloo Region could grow from 674,000 in 2023 to just over 1,000,000 in 2046. Under a medium-growth scenario, the population would reach 874,000 by this time, and under a low-growth scenario the population would reach 771,000.

These numbers are based on applying Ontario average growth rates to the current Region of Waterloo population. However, [Cambridge-Kitchener-Waterloo is one of the fastest growing regions in Canada](#), so we expect population growth to be closer to the high-growth scenario in this graph.

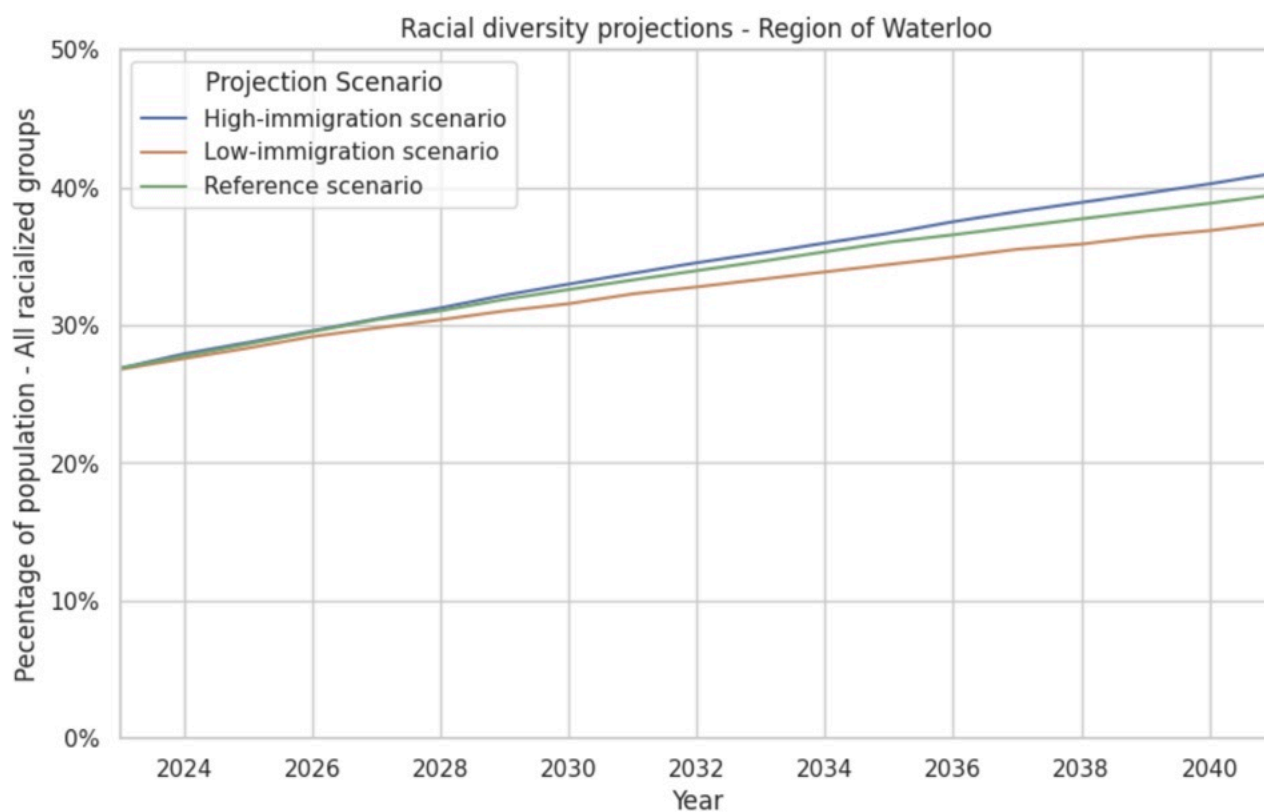


Immigration and race

Today, first-generation immigrants make up 25% of the population of Waterloo Region. This is projected to grow in the future, even under a low-immigration scenario. By 2041, Statistics Canada projects that between 29% and 34% of Region of Waterloo residents will be first-generation immigrants.



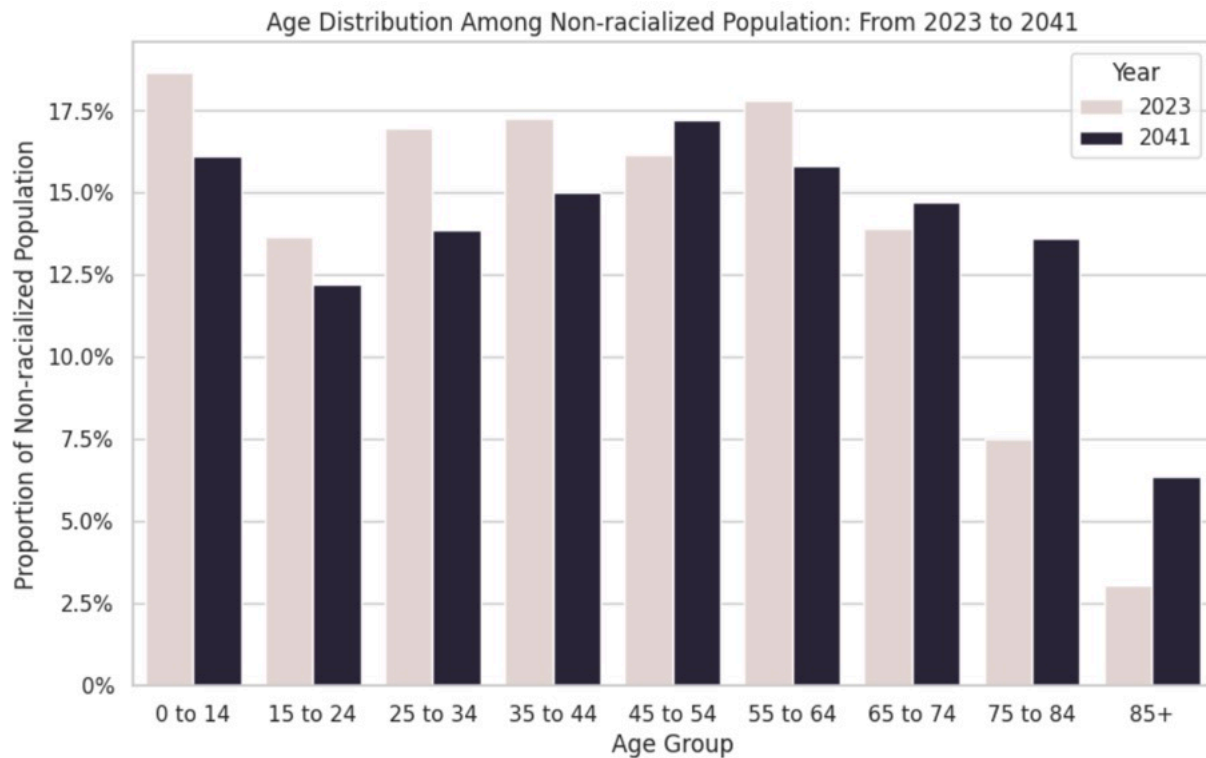
Today, 27% of Waterloo Region residents belong to a racialized group. Racial diversity is projected to grow substantially in the future, with an estimated 39% to 41% of the population belonging to a racialized group by 2041, with the projection varying based on the future rate of immigration.



Aging among different demographic groups

Statistics Canada also provides projections of various populations based on age group, and shows a consistent pattern, across multiple groups, of an aging population between 2023 and 2041. All projections in this section are under the High-immigration scenario.

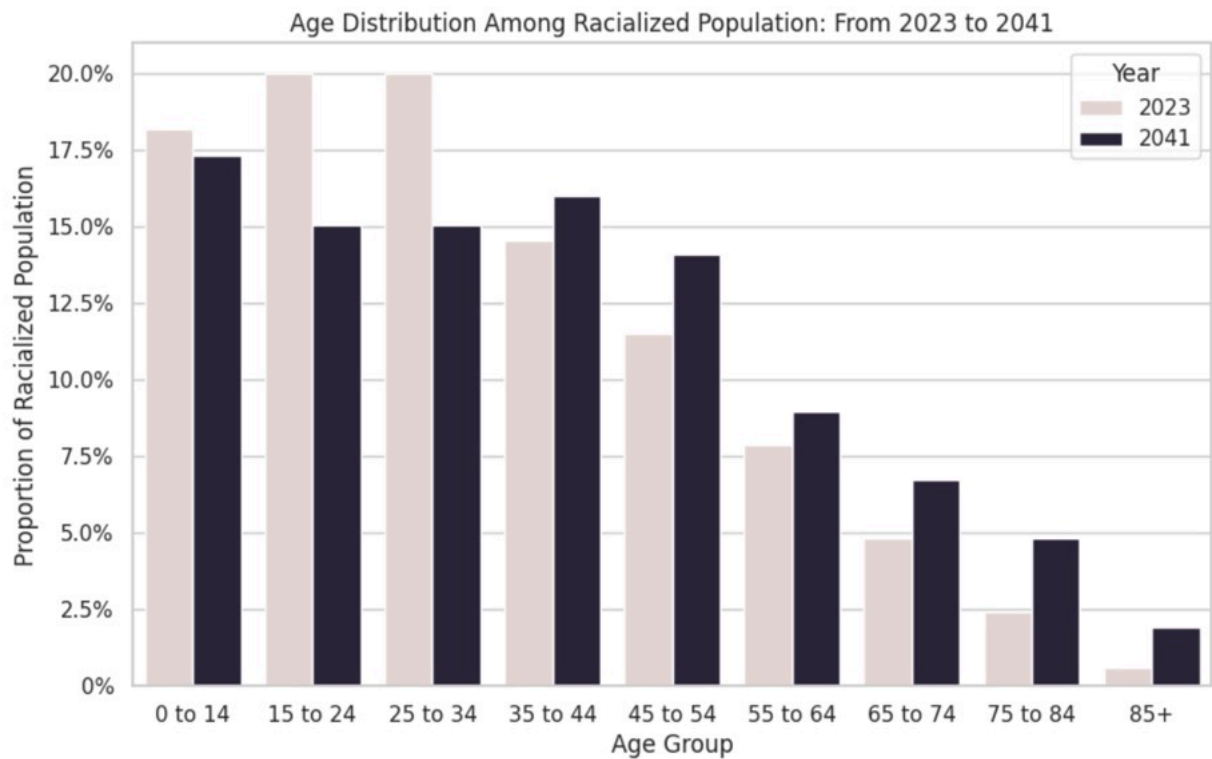
Non-racialized individuals



The above graph compares the age distribution for non-racialized individuals, from 2023 to 2041. By 2041, Statistics Canada projects that a greater proportion of the population will be 45 years or older, and that the proportion of the population under 45 will shrink.

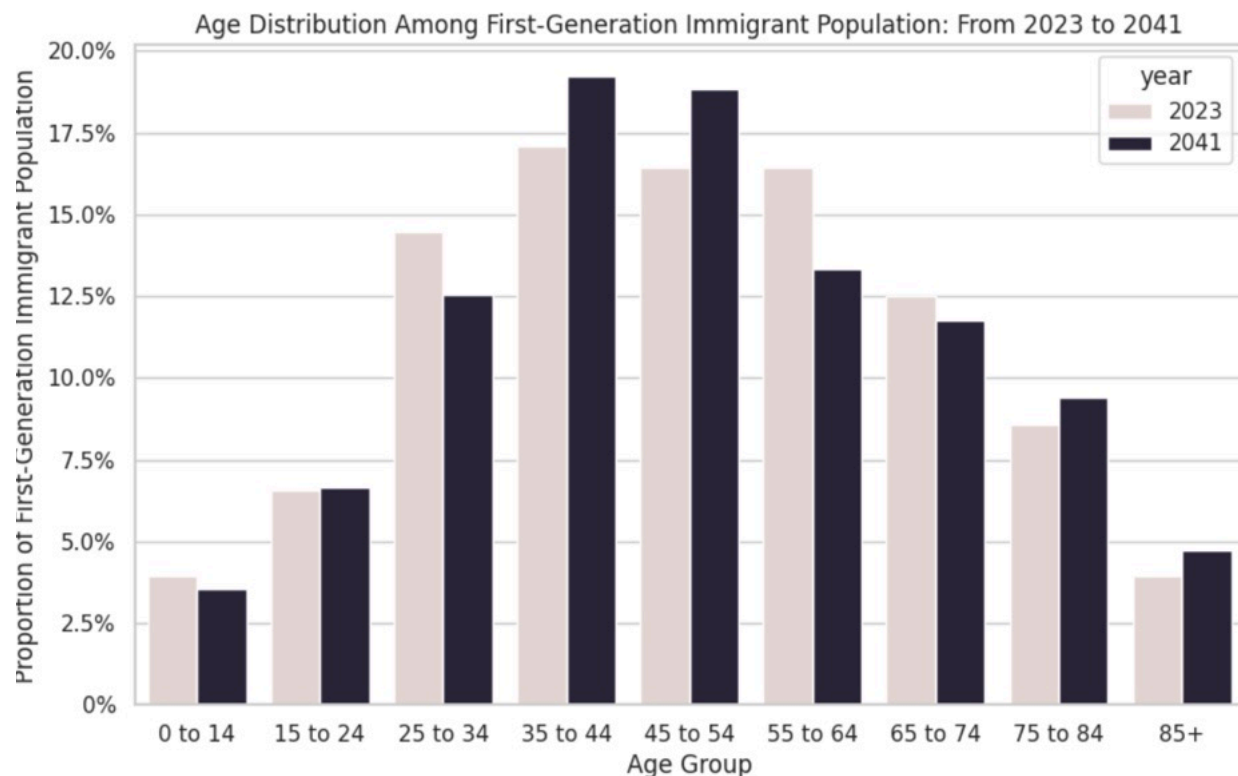
Racialized individuals

For comparison, the change in age distribution among racialized individuals is shown in the next graph:



Among racialized individuals, in 2023 the age distribution skews much younger than the non-racialized population, but still shows an average aging pattern by 2041: the proportion of racialized individuals 35 and older is expected to grow, while the under 35 population is expected to shrink as a proportion of the total population.

First-generation immigrants



The age distribution of first-generation immigrants shows a different pattern: a “bell” pattern peaking in the 35-44 age group. The shape is expected to remain the same in 2041, but shifting to the right to reflect a population that is aging on average.

Data sources

- Growth rates for Ontario were applied to the current Region of Waterloo population to produce the graph “Population Projections for Region of Waterloo Across Scenarios”
 - Data source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/tbl/csv/17100057-eng.zip>
 - Documentation: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-520-x/91-520-x2024001-eng.htm>
- All other graphs in this section were produced using the Immigration and Diversity projection data:
 - Data source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/tbl/csv/17100146-eng.zip>
 - Documentation: <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5126>

A day in the life

We commissioned local writer [Ariel Kroon](#) to imagine a day in the life of Waterloo Region's millionth neighbour, based on the priorities identified in our roundtable discussions with non-profits and community groups. Giving life and personality to our vision statements, this short story gives us a peek at one possible future for Waterloo Region, where neighbours live with abundance, inclusion, and resilience.

Growing up, branching out

by Ariel Kroon

Sapphira was not in a good mood, even though today was a Community Day, and she and her friends had been talking about going to the music festival for weeks. That morning, the seventeen-year-old woke up feeling cranky, and her attitude was not improved by the fact that her dad was in the kitchen that morning making a special pancake breakfast, which was great and everything, but his way of cheering Sapphira up was to make her laugh. This was super annoying as it always worked, even when she was trying her best to wallow in her feels. She scowled at her pancakes, trying not to let him see that his goofy dancing in the kitchen was causing the side of her mouth to twitch into a half-smile. She sat down and grabbed at the maple syrup; it was a new kind she hadn't tried before, from a local farm that they had gotten butter and eggs from for years, but which recently had teamed up with another farm to tap their maples.

"So, where's Mom?" Sapphira asked loudly, hoping her father would know by her tone that she was in no mood to be light-hearted.

"In Toronto with her book club," her dad, Ravi, was undeterred. He jiggled over and slid two steaming pancakes onto a large pile. "Eat up! We're festival-bound!" He waggled his brows at her and started an off-key rendition of "(Always) Love You" by Layla and the Nightingales on his way back to the kitchen.

"Cut it out," Sapphira growled rudely. "Some of us are in mourning."

Ravi, his cooking finished, came out of the kitchen and took a seat across the table. "And why would that be?"

"My plants for bio class." Sapphira slumped dramatically in her chair.

"We're in a drought, sweetie," Ravi said reasonably, as if they hadn't had this conversation about five times over the last week.

“Yeah but EVERYONE else’s plants are like twice the size of mine,” Sapphira grouched. “THEY don’t seem to be having any issues.”

“Your bio teacher won’t mark you down because of the weather,” her father said mildly.

“Okay, fair...” Sapphira admitted reluctantly. “But you know I wanna study bioengineering at university, so it’s important.”

“Not as important as finishing your breakfast,” Ravi’s tone brooked no nonsense. “I’ve already eaten, and we need to be out the door in forty minutes if we want to make it to the park in time to hear Layla and the Nightingales.”

*
**

It was a 20-minute bike ride from their house in a suburb of Waterloo to Three Willows Park, mostly via trails that kept the family away from the buses and light rail trains. Sapphira, having texted her friends, was going to meet up with them at the bike shelter near the entrance to the park, and they made it there with enough time for her to lock up her bike and commence loitering. Her dad almost immediately spotted a group of his Grand River fishing buddies and disappeared.

Sapphira was investigating the new public art piece—which was some sort of sculpture; she refused to read the artist’s statement because that would be cheating—when she was poked in the shoulder and a familiar voice asked her, “Hey, what’s up?”

“Not much,” Sapphira turned to see her friend Bilal, grinning at her. “Check out this new sculpture thing.”

“Yeah, it’s super cool. I saw it last week after soccer practice,” Bilal was from Guelph, but played in the intramural soccer league here in K-W. “Seen BT yet?”

“Nope,” Sapphira checked her phone. “I think we’ve got a bit before Layla starts though.”

BT was coming from Cambridge; they had all met and become fast friends while working at an art camp that summer.

It wasn’t long before BT arrived on the LRT, though, and Sapphira took the opportunity to loudly mourn her poor stunted plants and her bio grade as they made their way towards the bandstand.

“We’re in a drought,” BT said bluntly. “Like, we’re not even allowed to have open flame at neighbourhood cookouts, it’s that bad.”

“Same thing in Guelph,” Bilal chimed in. “But Sapphie, can we swing by your school garden after Layla’s set? I wanna see these plants myself.”

“Can you help?” Sapphira asked eagerly, ready for Bilal to reveal himself as a secret treasure trove of gardening knowledge.

“Um, I’m not making any promises,” Bilal perhaps heard the slight edge of desperation in Sapphira’s voice. BT snorted.

*
**

Sapphira had no intention of sitting with the adults; Dad and his buddies were great people, but she wasn’t psyched about hanging out with adults lately, and besides, they needed to find a good vantage point for BT. Luckily, there was space reserved near the front for those with mobility issues and their family/friends so that they could see, and the friends all settled in, chatting amiably about what they’d been up to for the past week. Because transit across the region was so frequent, they had no trouble hanging out with each other whenever they wished, and in fact had seen each other just that past weekend, as they all helped out at the same elders’ residence just outside of Guelph.

Layla and the Nightingales were fantastic. Sapphira felt slightly guilty for slipping away afterwards, but only slightly; there was a huge crowd of listeners and besides, she was only going away for about an hour. She texted her dad to that effect, then headed to her bike.

The arts-focused secondary school that Sapphira attended was a mere five minutes’ ride from her house, housed in a repurposed office tower; flex-work policies coupled with reduced office hours had made a lot of corporate real estate redundant a few decades back, and the school board had seen the opportunity, bought up properties for cheap, and given them new life. Sapphira fixed her bike to the school’s rack just as the electric bus let BT and Bilal off and they went down to the grade 12 bio class’s garden plot. The mulched pathway winding around the bioswales was a little challenging for BT’s wheels to navigate, and Sapphira noticed Bilal helping out with a gentle push whenever BT indicated. Nice.

They came on neat rows of what looked to be ... well, seedlings. They weren’t recognizable yet as the “three sisters” vegetables—squash, pole beans, and corn—that they would grow to become. They were all roughly of a height and were already sending out a second set of leaves... all except for a patch in the corner near the fence, marked “Sapphira Radley-Singh.” These seedlings were about half the size of the others, with only their first set of leaves.

“You planted these at the exact same time as all the others?” Bilal asked, squatting down to inspect the seedlings more closely.

“Yes.” Sapphira sulked.

“And you used the same seeds and soil as the rest of the class?”

“Mm-hmm.” She nodded. They had been learning all about the conditions that were perfect for growing heirloom varieties, and she was confident she’d planted the seeds in the right conditions with the right nutrients for their success.

“Then that’s super weird,” Bilal declared, rocking on their heels to stand back up.

BT was frowning into the distance, no doubt working something out. Bilal peppered Sapphira with questions—what varieties were they, was she watering them regularly, what soil amendments had she used. She answered them all—she was doing everything exactly the same as her classmates, down to using the same rain barrel water and compost tea from the bins at the back of the school where they composted lunch scraps.

“Wish I had a soil test kit,” Bilal said eventually. “Like, maybe someone’s sabotaging you and putting salt in it when nobody’s looking.”

“Oh crap,” Sapphira was dismayed. “I didn’t even think of deliberate sabotage.”

“Got any mean girls out for you?” BT asked, chin in hand. “Got anyone jealous in the class?”

Sapphira truly could not think of anyone. However, they needed to make the trek back to Three Willows as the hour was nearly up, and Sapphira opted to wait the twelve minutes for the next bus with Bilal and BT.

Discussion of the mystery of the seedlings turned eventually to chatter about the upcoming election—Sapphira and BT could vote; Bilal had an unfortunate birthday—when BT suddenly pointed at the corner of the garden with Sapphira’s plants. “Look!”

A tomcat was leisurely marking his territory along the schoolyard perimeter. And when he came to the fence pole closest to Sapphira’s seedlings, well... her plants were most definitely in the “splash zone.” With a chorus of exclamations, the trio each raised their phones to capture the evidence, just moments before Sapphira broke and ran towards the cat, shrieking and waving her arms to scare it off.

Eventually, the cat—a stray, it turns out—was trapped by local volunteers and adopted into a new home in Kitchener. Sapphira’s plants began to thrive without their regular ammonia bath, and she ended up getting a very good grade in bio that semester. But at the end-of-school celebration, she did not eat the three sisters’ soup.

Reflections from roundtable participants

During our roundtable discussions, we asked participants to imagine a day in the life of a future resident. Some of these reflections are dispersed throughout this document. As you read about the priorities and measurable outcomes that matter most to our participants, take a moment to transport yourself to these imagined futures, immersing yourself in the possibility that we can achieve it, together.

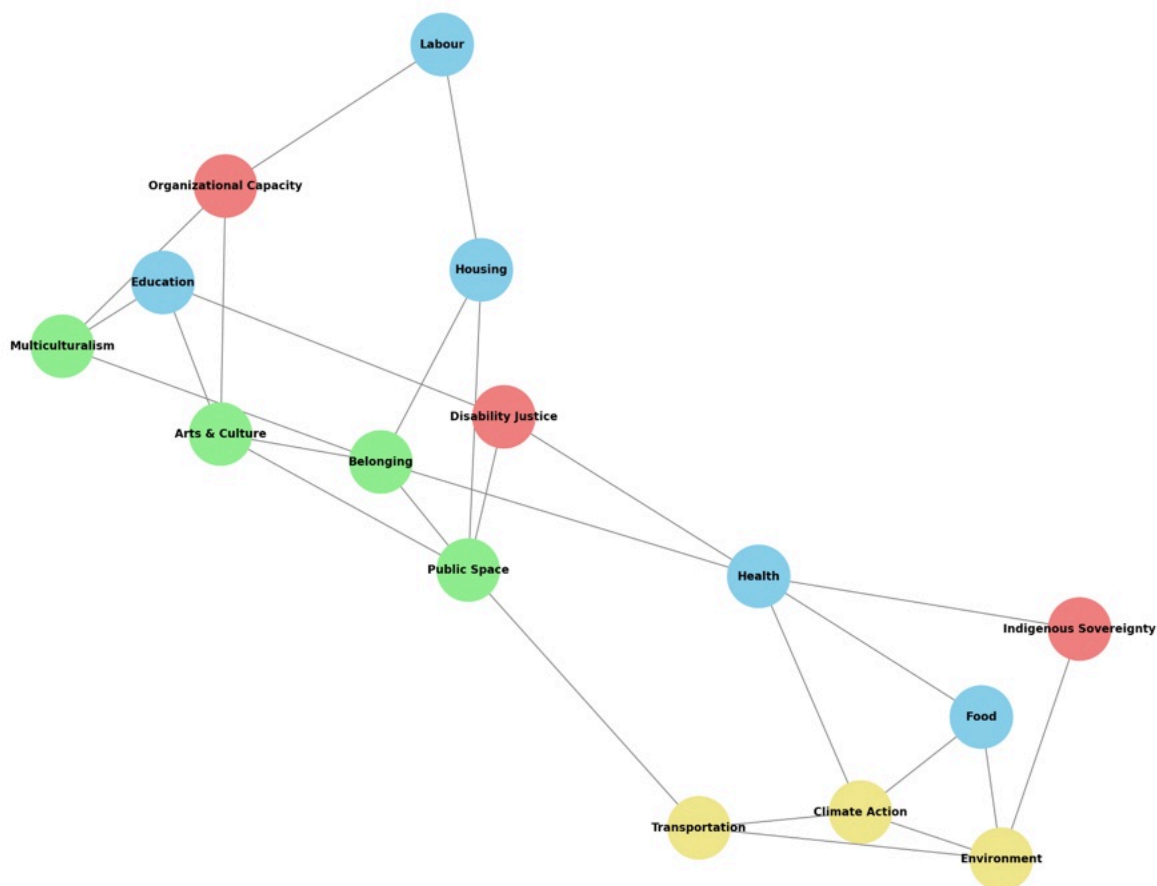
Do you have a story to share? Imagining the future we want to see is the first step toward achieving it. We're looking for more stories on the theme of "a day in the life": what would the ideal future for Waterloo Region look like to you? [Submit yours by filling out this form.](#)

The vision

What could an abundant, resilient, and inclusive region look like? The vision statements in the following 15 sections can help us paint that picture. Each section represents a topic area like disability justice, food, or housing. We chose to categorize our vision roughly according to policy areas, but there are also many interconnections between these sections.

To better understand the relationships between the 15 vision themes, we developed a systems map that shows key interdependencies across sectors. This interdependency map reveals not only how each theme connects to others—such as the tight links between public space, disability justice, and civic belonging—but also how some themes act as hubs for transformation. By mapping these connections, we can better design multisolving strategies that align resources, efforts, and narratives across the ecosystem.

Interdependency Map: Thematic Clusters of One Million Neighbours



Blue – Social Infrastructure: housing, food, health, education, and labour.

Green – Civic & Cultural Life: public space, belonging, arts & culture, multiculturalism.

Red – Justice & Equity: disability justice, Indigenous sovereignty, organizational capacity.
Yellow – Ecological Transition: climate action, transportation, environment.

Feel free to browse the vision statements in whatever order you choose, and think about how they can all connect to create the community you'd like to see.

At the end of each section, we have listed a number of measurable outcomes. These are indicators that we can measure and track to make sure we're on the right path towards achieving this vision. Some indicators are already being monitored by government, academia, or non-profit organizations in our community. Some are brand-new indicators that arose out of our roundtable discussions. As we continue to grow, measuring our progress will be ever more important to non-profits and community organizations.

Arts, culture, & sport



Photo by Sam Nabi

Local arts & sports journalism. We have active, independent media organizations that offer deep coverage of local arts, culture, and sports. They reach a broad audience through traditional and emerging media, informing neighbours and getting them excited about participating in the arts, attending cultural events, and supporting local sports teams.

Professional development for arts workers. A newly-established artists' resource centre provides access to space, materials, information, and logistical support needed to engage with the arts. We have plenty of opportunities for professional development for artists without having to leave the region, including mentorship, paid performance and creation opportunities, and opportunities to exhibit or sell work. There are also opportunities for training and career development in all aspects of arts work, such as sound and lighting, promoters, etc. Local artists are involved in leadership and decision-making for arts institutions and venues.

Public space and public memory. Neighbours identify with and understand the histories of the cultural institutions in our region, as they adapt to reflect new generations. Neighbourhood

festivals and porch parties are embedded into our cultural fabric. People take collective ownership over these events. Public outdoor performance spaces, amphitheaters, and sports fields facilitate free and spontaneous activities, contributing to a community-centered cultural scene. Art and sport is brought to every neighbourhood, including rural ones, and free concerts and performances are the norm at local events. Public art, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, is encouraged as a means to reflect local identities and boost tourism while making art a part of daily life. We celebrate the artistic and athletic achievements of Waterloo Region with statues, plaques, and public spaces named after our hometown heroes.

National-level excellence. Major cultural hubs include Downtown Kitchener, Galt, Uptown Waterloo, St Jacobs Village, and post-secondary campuses. These areas offer artistic, cultural, and sporting attractions for residents of Waterloo Region and visitors from outside the region. They also act as centres of professional development, creating an on-ramp for local artists and athletes. Affordable and accessible studio spaces have been expanded, allowing artists at all career stages to thrive and showcase their work. Waterloo Region is home to many amateur sporting tournaments, including intercity competitions at the high school and post-secondary level. Neighbours know that they can go to any of these areas most days of the week and have a high-quality cultural experience. Waterloo Region is a major destination for arts, culture, and sport outside of Toronto.

A day in the life: art and acts of care

An artist wakes up any day of the week and has events and opportunities to look forward to. They have time to both work in the community and on their own artistic practice. When they have questions, there is an arts resource centre to have their needs met. They meet people through regular gatherings and arts events. Neighbours regularly provide healthy snacks and refreshments as an act of care in the community. There is an understanding and accommodation for all types of accessibility, including physical, cognitive, social, and financial needs. Everyone understands the value of arts and culture.

— Reflection by a roundtable participant

Neighbourhood-level access to art and culture. We bring art and culture into every neighbourhood. While our urban centres have major cultural institutions, every community centre and every neighbourhood has access to programming that enriches the life of all neighbours, from young to old. There is space for artists of all ages to practice their craft and showcase their work, whether they are amateurs or professionals. Everyone has a place where they are comfortable participating regardless of skill level. We have spaces that are physically and financially accessible for people to create and experience art. There is a culture of appreciation and showing up for the arts in Waterloo Region, which starts from a young age. People who live here feel less of a need to go to Toronto to experience world-class culture, and instead find a variety of engaging and critically acclaimed work to experience in their own

Region. Arts programming for youth is as accessible as sports programming in our society, and community recreation centres provide low-cost supplies and equipment for participation in the arts. Youth do not just dream of having a successful art career, they are shown the roadmap to get there.

Funding reform. We have per-capita funding levels for artists in Waterloo Region that are comparable to the national average from grants such as the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. There is fair compensation for artists, with higher-than-living wage compensation and access to health benefits and wellness resources. In doing so, the mental and physical well-being of artists is supported, enabling them to continue creating and contributing to the community. It is common for artists to be paid a salary rather than having to rely on grant writing. The former structure of grant writing wherein artists compete with one another has been flipped on its head: instead, collectives of artists come together to develop a vision, set their terms, and then seek long-term, stable relationships with funders. We have dedicated funding streams for the arts, taking inspiration from Toronto's Billboard Tax or tourism & hospitality fees. The move away from grant-writing changes what is possible and how we conceptualize art. Moving away from competitive grant-writing, the region has adopted long-term, stable funding models, including sponsorships and memberships, to provide artists with financial stability.

Leadership, representation, and cooperation. A revitalized Waterloo Region arts council and sports council are critical in coordinating funding, programming, and advocacy for local arts and culture. These councils act as focal points for fostering a thriving cultural ecosystem, promoting arts and sport as vital parts of the economy. We have representative participation in artists, athletes, funding, and attendees which helps us embody a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. There is mentorship and meaningful participation for new neighbours to deliver culturally relevant programming, especially in schools and in community centres. Arts submission processes are open by default and there is better collaboration between programming spaces to share audiences. Municipalities themselves do not compete with local non-profit arts and sports organizations for funding from provincial and federal governments.

Audience development. We have developed a strong culture of arts participation. For those who are not professional artists, neighbours have the opportunity to create art for fun and to participate as audience members. There is curated programming for all ages. Cultural programming reflects the racial, gender, and cultural diversity that exists in Waterloo Region, and neighbours see themselves reflected in the events that happen in their neighbourhoods. We cultivate audiences that embrace diverse and challenging experiences, and pride themselves on taking risks both as artists and as an audience. We have made arts programming available at various times throughout the day and week, ensuring that people with diverse schedules can attend and participate. Every child has access to arts participation in school with qualified teachers, and arts are interleaved with other subjects such as language, math, and science. The ArtShine program expands and is offered for free to students. Those that work in science, technology, engineering, and math fields understand the benefits of art beyond its applicability

for professional development. Galleries, events, and venues have high attendance across the entire region.

Arts, culture & sport: measurable outcomes

- Awareness of local artists, athletes, venues, and events (audience survey)
- Number of free community arts, culture, and sporting events (by neighbourhood)
- Number of visitors in the local hospitality sector
- Municipal Accommodation Tax revenue collected
- Per-capita funding for arts and athletics in Waterloo Region
- Participation of racialized artists and athletes
- Employed / financially stable artists in the region
- Number of residents with Artist as their primary occupation
- Number of ticketed events

Belonging



Art by [Sean Bodley](https://seanbodley.com)

Strong relationships between neighbours. Everybody knows at least a few neighbours by name who live on their street or in their building. Volunteerism is common, and an increasing number of residents choose to invest their money locally. People have a strong sense of belonging, including creating space for hard conversations. A strong local community is reflected in our media consumption: social networks have oriented themselves towards locally-focused spaces and groups. We know about international politics but also about the public meetings and festivals happening in our own neighbourhoods. People see and meet a variety of people of different backgrounds and isolation is lessened. Neighbours have the time to start the day with a friendly greeting as they get the mail, shovel snow, take in the recycling, or walk to school and work together. We have plenty of freely-accessible informal gathering places

for people of all ages. We've developed a culture of generosity in our daily lives by offering space, sharing ideas, lending a hand, and making food for one another.

Mutual aid, support, and solidarity. We enjoy art, cultural activities, and informal gatherings with our neighbours. We form relationships across class differences, ages, disability, and ethnocultural identities. A culture of solidarity takes the place of charity-oriented approaches to social cohesion. There are self-organizing peer support groups for new mothers, 2SLGBTQ+ neighbours, retirees, newcomers, and other affinity groups. There is an increase in representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in organizations to reflect their proportion of the population. People have more meaningful relationships with those of different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds than they had growing up. Everybody has a support system, and those whose families do not live close by can rely on their neighbours for help with childcare, sharing food, meal prepping, gardening together, recreational activities, or working together on a community project. Newcomers, including international students, quickly find support and connection in their new home.

Civic identity. Neighbours participate enthusiastically in civic life by voting, sitting on committees and attending council and school board meetings. We have built strong relationships with sister cities and neighbouring urban areas to promote friendly rivalries and encourage collaboration on larger regional, provincial or national issues. We have built a strong sense of civic identity and pride, while making space for acknowledgment and reconciliation of harms. We come together in religious and secular ceremonies to mark the passing of the seasons, major holidays, celebrate local achievements, honour our heroes, and uplift youth. These ceremonies revive our collective purpose and have replaced some of the consumer behaviors that kept us isolated, such as shopping and staying inside to watch TV and movies. We have strong city-level and neighbourhood-level identities, and take pride in daily interactions with our community. Our idea of community has expanded to include future residents, non-human neighbours, groundwater and ecosystems. Everybody has a meaningful life and purposeful work, and people feel safe inside and outside their homes. Everyday interactions with neighbours are normalized, and this fills us with a sense of hope about the present and the future. We have time to slow down and savour important relationships.

Intergenerational solidarity. We have supportive relationships between older adults, caregivers, and youth that strengthen intergenerational ties. Families and caregivers who have been under-represented in the school system are provided with the resources to be able to effectively advocate for their children and participate in parent involvement committees. Generational segregation and loneliness has significantly reduced with the expansion of multi-generational housing options.

A day in the life: aging collectively

I'm a senior citizen and wake up in my affordable, rent-controlled apartment that is part of an environmentally sustainable cooperative housing collective. In the morning, I walk my dog on the 7km of trails I can access directly from my house and stop several times to chat with neighbours who use the community infrastructure in my neighbourhood. I enjoy watching a group of youths working on a community art piece and I'm invited by someone to join the local pollinator patch and community garden as a volunteer. In the evening, I enjoy a shared meal at my collective that was prepared with locally grown food. Tonight, I will fall asleep easily because I feel connected, I have a support system, and due to better affordability, tenant protections, and a universal basic income, I no longer need to stress about basic needs.

— *Reflection by a roundtable participant*

Youth independence. Youth grow up in an inclusive and nurturing environment. They have opportunities to change things and make a difference in their communities. Children have agency to do things on their own, safely, in their neighbourhoods. This includes walking to school, going to the corner store, or playing in the park with their friends. As they get older, youth have freedom of movement throughout the region, helping them achieve independence as they begin to work their first jobs, or go to recreational activities without the need for parents to drive them. Children are not isolated in their own homes. They have a thriving web of relationships, including family- and neighbourhood- level connections, connections in their school, and connections in region-wide activity and interest-based relationships. Children are able to advocate for themselves to educators, healthcare professionals, and other service providers with the support of parents and caregivers.

Civic participation. Neighbours are aware of decisions being made at the neighbourhood level and regional level, and we have a meaningful voice when advocating to decision-makers. We have embraced our identity as a mid-sized region in southwestern Ontario: we don't seek to become a bedroom community for Toronto. We have established our own arts and culture communities, our own economic anchors, and our own centres of social life that contribute to the identity of Waterloo Region. There is meaningful representation of nonprofits and community groups on school councils, neighbourhood associations, and city committees in order to build connections and identify gaps. People with lived experience are involved in decision-making, making bureaucracies easier to navigate and better able to meet neighbours' needs. Community organizations are more connected and have more collective power than before. Neighbours have an understanding of local governance and of their ability to participate in democratic processes. Service providers, including governments, have an intimate knowledge of the neighbourhoods where they operate.

Basic needs met. We work to relieve poverty, and ensure that everyone has adequate housing, food, and clothing. Everyone wakes up under a roof and has a nutritious breakfast. People are

able to live without anxiety about the necessities of life, affordable, reliable, sustainable housing and food, and a healthy environment free from undue nuisance, pollution, and conflict. Food is affordable and healthy. Activities for children are affordable and there is financial support available for equipment and training.

Safety and representation. We have active participation and representation from women, nonbinary, two-spirit, queer and trans folks in positions of leadership. Gender-diverse neighbours feel comfortable and safe in their neighbourhoods and in public spaces region-wide. Queer and trans folks are safe and comfortable in public life, and we have zero reported hate crimes against 2SLGBTQ+ neighbours. Instances of everyday aggressions and workplace discrimination on the basis of gender has significantly declined. There are safe spaces and supports for those fleeing intimate partner violence, including financial support, childcare, housing, food and community-building.

Allyship. Men are active participants in allyship and gender-based equity programs, such as Male Allies. Allyship is a key part of the shift away from gendered violence. Allyship programs in general, including bystander intervention training, is commonplace for all age groups in workplace and community settings. The widespread adoption of these programs has produced measurable reductions in the violence they seek to prevent.

Universal washrooms. Gendered washrooms in public spaces and workplaces have transitioned toward single-stall facilities. These renovations have multiple benefits for all neighbours including increased availability of healthcare and menstrual products, infant and toddler care, privacy, accessibility, safety, and efficient use of space in buildings.

Belonging: measurable outcomes

- Rate of volunteerism (formal and informal)
- Number of neighbours people recognize and know by name
- Levels of child well-being
- Number of childcare spaces (by neighbourhood)
- Number of seniors' assisted living facilities (by neighbourhood)
- Instances of gender-based violence
- Rate of domestic labour and caregiving
- Reported rates of suicidal ideation
- Self-reported levels of belonging [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Voter turnout at municipal, provincial, and national levels
- Gap in percentage turnout between older and younger voters [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percentage of children aged 0 to 5 years for whom there is a regulated centre-based child care space [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percentage of population living in poverty (based on Low Income Measure After Tax LIM-AT) [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]

- Average daily amount of time spent with friends (minutes per day) [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Rate of bullying [Children and Youth Planning Table Youth Impact Survey]
- Participation in civic activities [Children and Youth Planning Table Youth Impact Survey]
- Participation in public consultation activities

Climate action



Art by [Sean Bodley](https://www.patreon.com/seanbodley)

Greenhouse gas emissions. By recognizing unequal climate impacts, we have transitioned away from fossil fuels and towards clean electricity. We've reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, with net-zero emissions by 2045. Electricity use from emerging industries such as data centres has been regulated, so that our efficiency gains are not wiped out by a massive increase in demand. Emerging sources of energy demand such as artificial intelligence are required to meet power and water efficiency standards before scaling up.

Development standards. For new buildings, retrofits, and infrastructure projects, we've established green development standards that take a lifecycle analysis approach. Total home and business energy use is trending downwards, even as our population has increased to a million people.

Green energy. All of our electricity is generated with zero carbon emissions, with renewables making up at least 50% of Ontario's electricity supply. We have phased out the use of fossil fuels for electricity, heating, and transportation, with stringent standards for new buildings and

vehicles. Retrofit incentives have replaced the need for natural gas heating and internal combustion engines in cars and trucks. Municipally-owned utility companies have embraced electrification, taking the lead on installing new heat pumps at scale for every household.

District energy. We have successfully implemented district energy systems in our most dense neighbourhoods, which provide heating and cooling in a centralized area, then distributing it through a network of insulated pipes. District energy represents a major new focus for utilities that were previously focused on maintaining fossil fuel infrastructure.

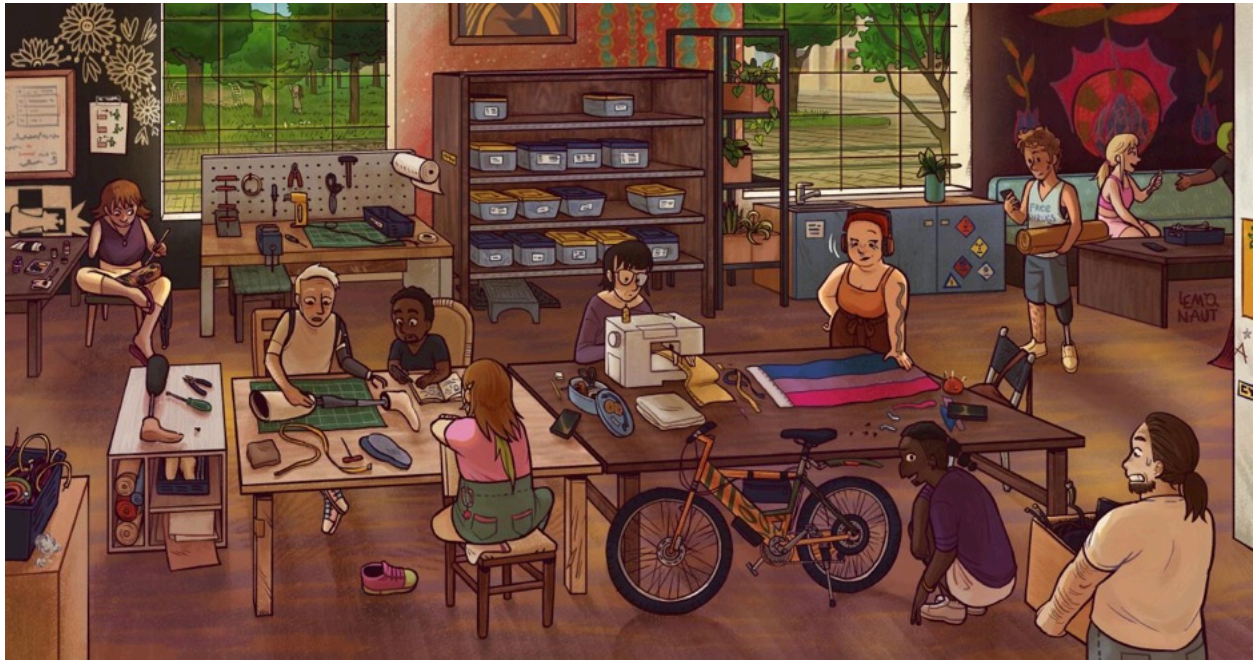
Food waste and animal agriculture. Methane, emitted from livestock and from organic matter decomposing in landfills, has been reduced to 2010 levels. All organic matter is composted thanks to the expansion of a municipal green bin program to all multi-unit buildings and businesses. Neighbours are able to collect free, nutrient-rich compost from waste collection facilities for their own gardens. We waste less than 10% of the food we buy. Our current Waterloo Region landfill can continue to meet the needs of 1,000,000 people in perpetuity.

Recycling. Improved tracing of recycling process, upcycling into industrial or infrastructure needs, local processing of recycled goods, improved sorting and diversion rates, reduced hard-to-recycle plastics.

Climate action: measurable outcomes

- Rate of energy use from local sources, and from zero-emission sources
- GHG emissions (by sector) [SWR, CIW]
- Waste diversion percentage
- Diversion of Organics [SWR]
- Number of buildings constructed to passive house standards
- Proportion of zero-emission vehicles (personal and commercial)
- Proportion of food wasted in homes and in businesses
- Electrical Vehicle Ownership [SWR]
- Number of people working in green jobs

Disability justice



Art by [The Lemonaut](#)

Autonomy & agency. People with disabilities are able to create individualized plans for the life they want to live, and can get the support they need to overcome any remaining barriers, while we work to dismantle those barriers on a societal level. People with disabilities experience strong community bonds and a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods.

Education supports. Students with disabilities, including physical, cognitive, and learning disabilities are supported in the school system with adequate staff and funding. Across Ontario, the K-12 Education Accessibility Standard has been fully implemented, including oversight and guidance regarding isolation and sensory rooms in schools.

Public space retrofits. AODA policies have been fully implemented. Zero-interest loans are available to small businesses and property owners to make their buildings accessible, with mandatory compliance by 2030. Low sensory public spaces with rest areas are common throughout downtown. Hostile architecture that prevents people from sitting and resting in public spaces has been removed. All public spaces disclose their accessible design “report card” in a standardized way (i.e. stairs, power doors, washrooms).

Inclusive programming. Recreational activities include those with disabilities by default. Accessibility that considers physical and cognitive needs is normalized in public programming. Equity, diversity, and inclusion practices ensure equitable service access. Participation of neighbours with disabilities is commonplace, and they feel welcomed in all aspects of public life.

A day in the life: inclusion and community

Kali moves into her neighbourhood and her neighbours start popping by to introduce themselves and welcome Kali and her family to the area. Kali instantly feels seen and supported. She registers her children for school and is thrilled that there is no longer a lottery system for enrollment in French Immersion programming — anyone who wants it can have it! Kali's son, who has a disability, receives the personalized support he needs to thrive at school and feels welcome in the local restaurants, cafes, parks, and libraries — he doesn't have to find segregated places for connection and community. Both of Kali's children travel to school on foot with other kids in their neighbourhood and parents take turns carpooling when there's inclement weather or late-night extracurricular activities or school events.

— Reflection by a roundtable participant

Access and safety. Buildings, transportation services, public spaces and healthcare are more accessible to people with disabilities of all types, including physical, cognitive, and behavioural needs, who can independently choose how to engage with their community. These improvements to access and safety have co-benefits for other neighbours including youth, caregivers, and elderly residents.

Livable social assistance. We have increased ODSP and OW rates to meet the cost of living, with increases tied to inflation. The ODSP housing allowance has been increased to match the average market rent in the specific neighbourhood where somebody lives. We recognize that cost of living has various factors and can change depending on the city and depending on the neighbourhood, and assistance programs have changed to reflect that. Rates of medical assistance in dying (MAID) due to poverty have fallen to zero, as people have adequate financial and social support. MAID is used in a more limited way, eliminating poverty as a defensible rationale, bringing Canada in line with other countries.

Emergency preparedness. Neighbours with disabilities are included in emergency preparedness planning, and we have planned for accessible evacuation routes and communication tools in the case of an emergency.

Healthcare accessibility. We have overcome the barriers faced by neighbours with disabilities in hospital and healthcare settings, including coordination of care transitions and accessibility

accommodations; communication supports; adequate education and training for healthcare providers; and ensuring that equipment is accessible.

Disability justice: measurable outcomes

- Proportion of fully accessible public spaces (indoor and outdoor)
- Diversity of participants, creators, and collections in arts and culture institutions
- Proportion of transit stops with curb cuts, shelters, and non-visual schedule information (by neighbourhood)
- Representation of people with disabilities in policy decisions and implementation
- Number of public events with sign language interpreters and live captions
- Time spent on waitlist for accessible public housing
- Proximity of accessible housing to transit, healthcare, and essential services
- Use of universal design principles in new public buildings and spaces
- Budget allocation for implementation of accessibility improvements
- Ratio of ODSP shelter allowance compared to median market rent
- Rates of medical assistance in dying (MAID) due to poverty

Education



Photo by [RDNE Stock Project](#)

Equitable access. After-school programming is more widely available to give parents and caregivers more flexibility in their childcare needs. Across the school system, private fundraising, based on the financial resources of families and caregivers, has been made unnecessary by an equitable funding system for schools that levels the playing field. The school that children go to is no longer a predictor of future success because all schools have achieved a standard of excellence and support no matter where students live. Alternatives to standardized testing have grown more common, replacing the one-size-fits-all approach that had hindered student success.

Exposure to multiple disciplines. Cuts to education have been restored, with a reinstatement of the requirement for specialist teachers in art and music. We recognize the fundamental importance of arts, languages, humanities, and trades alongside science, technology, engineering, and math. Various pathways are available for all K-12 students to choose classes that align with their interests. Children and youth are exposed to a wide range of possibilities for skill development and career options outside of the pathways to post-secondary degree programs. Post-secondary education, for those who choose it, is tuition-free.

Early childhood learning. Early childhood education is planned to accommodate a variety of learning styles, and there are strong relationships between early childhood educators and community organizations.

Support for educators. At all levels, educators are compensated fairly. Teachers and service providers reflect the demographics of Waterloo Region (i.e. religion, race, gender expression). School environments are safe and have adequate staffing to support students' learning needs. We have social workers in schools, and educational assistants can offer appropriate individualized support for those students who need it.

A day in the life: impromptu interconnectedness

I bike and walk to most of my activities. There are lots of impromptu happenings on the street. Neighbours carry an arts & culture stamp card that encourages them to attend events and support artists (after attending 10 events, you get a coffee and a kitten). Our high schools are not fortresses: instead, the school day is spent visiting local venues, seniors' residences, and university campuses, making learning a participatory experience where students build strong connections with their neighbourhoods.

— Reflection by a roundtable participant

Learning embedded in the community. Youth have dedicated space for doing homework outside the home with help from volunteer tutors. Learning opportunities are integrated into community organizations with flexible co-op and volunteer programs at the secondary and post-secondary level. In primary and secondary schools, there are ample opportunities for students to learn relevant life skills such as first aid and CPR, food preparation, and repairing clothes and household items.

Early learning. Access to daycare and early learning is inclusive and accessible in all neighbourhoods. Safety in schools and in childcare spaces looks like properly staffed environments, and sufficient teachers and support staff for every student's needs. Schools have benefited from the presence of regular child and youth workers as well. We have expanded the number of EarlyON centres, and there are childcare options during the daytime and in the evening for people who work different shifts. Free childcare is available to all who need it.

Adult education. We enjoy a seamless, learner-centred adult education system that provides opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills for career development and for pursuing higher education. Learners are supported in identifying appropriate pathways tailored to their individual needs, including recognizing prior learning and skills outside the formal education system, and tuition-free learning opportunities at universities and colleges.

Education: measurable outcomes

- Attendance rate (by race, income, language, gender, special populations)
- Participation in extracurricular activities, clubs, and student leadership
- Gap in graduation rates and academic achievement (by ethnicity, income, language, disability, and gender)
- Teacher retention and turnover rates
- Staff diversity rates relative to student population
- Post-secondary persistence and completion rates
- Alumni tracking for wage data or employment in field of study
- Family participation in school events, parent-teacher conferences
- Percentage of teachers with certifications or advanced degrees; ongoing professional development hours per educator
- Number of partnerships between K-12 schools and local organizations, businesses, or postsecondary institutions
- Access to multilingual resources and culturally responsive communication
- Ratio of students to educators in public schools [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Number of post-secondary students who stay in Waterloo Region after graduation
- Level of education

Environment



Art by [Karl Schulschenk](#)

Ecological preservation. We have a culture of strong public support for natural areas, both for their ecological function and for recreation opportunities. Conservation easements and land trusts are commonly used as a way to preserve environmentally sensitive land in perpetuity. Natural areas are connected, and we've reduced habitat fragmentation by rewilding underused land. We have established streamlined lot severance and zoning processes to facilitate ecological gifts. The Greenbelt has expanded to include Waterloo Region, with provincial-level protections for the Paris-Galt moraine, the Waterloo moraine, the Grand River, and the protected countryside in our region. Hidden Valley has remained a celebrated jewel in the heart of Kitchener, with strong public support for protecting it against future road extensions. Conservation authorities have resisted the disposal of their lands, keeping natural spaces under public control for the long term. There is a safe and sustainable groundwater supply for all residents of Waterloo Region.

Non-extractive thinking. We act to undo the root causes of climate change such as colonialism and extractive economic development. More land is owned and stewarded by Indigenous groups. There are opportunities for youth to practice environmental stewardship, integrated into their recreational and learning activities. We monitor biodiversity in the region and create

conditions to increase biodiversity. We have built a region that is friendlier to birds, bees, and species-at-risk. We consider the countryside line a permanent limit to urban sprawl, and welcome new neighbours without destroying any farms or natural areas.

Social bonding in an ecological worldview. Our public spaces allow us to express collective grief, celebrate, and motivate collective action for climate justice. Advocacy intersects with social, cultural, and religious ties, and we develop new rituals to make meaning and pursue accountability. We recognize humanity as a keystone species that is enmeshed in an ecosystem that we must steward appropriately. We strive to live in an ecosystem, not a hierarchy. We have developed meaningful relationships tied to the Grand River, Waterloo Moraine, the protected countryside, woodlands, natural areas, and naturalized rivers and creeks in our region.

Urban form & transportation. We've created more green spaces in cities while also increasing the number of people in each neighbourhood through higher-density development that makes efficient use of space and is paired with investments in the public and natural realm. We have achieved density without crowding, a sustainable city where people have the choice to walk, bike, bus, or take transit to any destination in their daily life. Cars are used less, not because we were forced out of them, but because the alternatives have become irresistible. We have eliminated the need for surface parking lots, turning them into gardens, affordable housing, and neighbourhood services. Every neighbourhood has experienced an increase in green space, as well as more neighbours living in various housing types, that meet the needs of every stage of life.

Environment: measurable outcomes

- Rate of groundwater recharge
- Water quality in our watershed's rivers and creeks
- Concentrations of road salt, fertilizers and mining by-products in the environment
- Biodiversity (count number of species)
- Tree canopy coverage (by neighbourhood)
- Rate of children diagnosed with asthma or other air quality related illnesses
- Number of hectares protected by Conservation Authorities, municipal/provincial/national parks, conservation easements, land trusts, and other environmentally-sensitive areas
- Rates of participation in outdoor recreation & sport
- Vehicle kilometres travelled (by transportation method)
- Total km of roadways vs multi-trails and sidewalks
- Air Quality [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Grand River downstream water quality

Food



Wilmot Township Countryside — Photo by Sam Nabi

A circular local food system. We have strong connections between community gardens and food donation programs. Everybody has access to healthy food, whether at home or in public settings. Community gardens and greenhouses are commonplace in schools, places of worship, community centres, libraries, and other hubs. We have established an infrastructure for processing, preserving, and distributing local seasonal food. Access to fresh, nutrient-rich food strengthens relationships between neighbours, and we have improved our efforts to eliminate food waste. There is a strong sense of solidarity with local food distribution programs, with neighbours looking out for each other to make sure that nobody goes hungry. These programs are multiple and abundant and offer different approaches to food access, meeting different people's needs in different ways. Urban and rural neighbours have strong cultural connections, with active participation across city and country life, and a deep understanding that local agriculture feeds us.

Food security. Food sharing programs are plentiful, including those where people are not required to register or provide personal information. Community gardens and greenhouses have expanded massively and there is no longer a wait list as we are able to rapidly create new community gardens and greenhouses through a combination of public spaces and donated private space in neighbours' front or back yards. Access to food supports such as the food bank have been destigmatized thanks to a culture of volunteerism and philanthropy, and an increase in the number and type of food security initiatives.

Affordable and nutritious food access. We are guided by a definition for the “nutritious food basket” which is an indicator to measure inflation, and we've removed financial barriers to accessing nutritious food. We have eliminated “food swamps” (i.e. neighbourhoods without healthy and fresh food access), starting with neighbourhoods near our university and college campuses. Local food producers are supported, and we've strengthened our local supply chain to minimize the disruption of international trade policies, wars, pandemics and natural disasters. Children at school always go to school with a full belly, whether by eating breakfast at home, or through school nutrition programs without stigma. We have abundant food cupboards, food fridges, and pantries throughout neighbourhoods. Learning how to prepare, store, and distribute food is a part of everyday life for neighbours of all ages. Food access is tied to recreation activities at community centres and parks. Healthy food access has become an act of care in everyday interactions, with neighbours feeding each other as a matter of course at community events and meetings.

Strong farms. Farmland has been protected from urban and industrial development, and the share of local food in our diet has increased. The demographic makeup of our region's farmers is younger and more diverse, reversing the trend of older farmers and consolidation of farms that occurred in previous decades. Younger people of diverse ethnocultural backgrounds are able to secure land for growing food, and there is better succession planning for family farms. Farmers have a significant voice in the region's rural investment readiness strategy. Land earmarked for the Wilmot land assembly project has been preserved permanently for agriculture. We have increased the number of farms, types of crops, and the total amount of food being grown in Waterloo Region since then. Due to increased local demand, farmers have to spend less time, money, and fuel shipping products farther afield.

Food: measurable outcomes

- Number of productive farms in WR (by crop)
- Total farmland [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Rate of food bank usage (by demographic group)
- Rate of food insecurity (by neighbourhood)
- Number of community gardens and greenhouses
- Number of children served through school food programs
- Percentage of population that is moderately or severely food insecure [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]

Health



Photo by [Thirdman](#)

Culturally-relevant counselling. Everyone can access mental health supports that are culturally sensitive, including for women, youth, newcomers, and gender-diverse neighbours. Healthy conflict resolution is considered a key part of our mental health and social services. We have eliminated waitlists for counselling services in the region and access to mental health support is covered by OHIP. We have seen a reduced need for crisis-oriented supports. In

addition to counselling, neighbours regularly participate in social therapy including culinary, sports, and art in community with our neighbours.

Drug use & harm reduction. Drug use and mental health are addressed from a public health perspective, not as a criminal issue. Those in at-risk communities have convenient access to health services, including community health centres, mobile health support, drug testing, safe supply, and wound care. Public health efforts are informed by harm reduction principles. Supportive services including mental health, addictions, and skill development are integrated into shelters as well as assisted living facilities. Thanks to an increased awareness and the availability of supports, rates of HIV, hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections have been reduced. Widespread drug testing is available anonymously and conveniently, mitigating the effects of the drug poisoning epidemic, and hundreds of lives have been saved as a result.

Increased healthcare access. Health care is accessible to anyone, including refugees and those without a fixed address. Health insurance is available to all neighbours, including pharmacare, dental care and eye care. Access to family doctors in one's neighbourhood is no longer a major challenge in people's lives. The types of healthcare clinics have expanded to include nurse practitioner-led facilities. New forms of family health teams have been able to adapt to the growing and changing needs of our neighbours. Pharmacists are able to provide an expanded range of services. When appropriate, doctors prescribe social interventions, nature interventions, and artistic interventions instead of pharmaceutical treatment. Average wait times in our hospitals' emergency rooms have fallen significantly. Specialized supports are available across the region, not only in one area. Those who need intensive mental health services, respite care, or supportive care, can do so without leaving the social cohesion of their own neighbourhood.

Supports for caregivers. Communities of care are not restricted to the formal healthcare system. Family and friends who care for one another are supported both financially, and with resources including training, scheduling, programming, that helps them take care of each other while being rooted in community. Social connection and social cohesion is intimately linked with good health outcomes. This approach helps reduce the degree of isolation and loneliness, and increase the feeling of belonging in the region. Respite programs are widely available to help ease the burden of care work.

Social and environmental determinants of health. We have made significant progress on reducing the disparities in health outcomes among different populations, by addressing the social determinants of health. Human health is understood in relation to the health of the animals and ecosystems who we share this land with, as well as the health of the water that comes from this land. We are prepared to respond to the next pandemic-level crisis with mutual aid networks, as well as robust standards for clean air, clean water, and sanitation. We have successfully reduced disease transmission by mandating clean air standards in all public spaces, including public services and businesses, and through public vaccination campaigns.

Sick pay is sufficient to ensure neighbours don't have to choose between going to work sick and staying home without pay.

Crisis support. There are resources for individuals escaping abusive relationships, including shelters, and people know where to turn to find a safe neighbour to talk to for support. Community care is a vital part of life, and we have multiple non-police emergency response services to call for support with vulnerable neighbours who may be in crisis. We are a community that has developed a culture of healthy conflict resolution. The Waterloo Regional Police Service has taken a more focused role, transitioning responsibility for community safety, crowd control, overdose response, school safety, and mental health crisis response to other organizations that are more suited to dealing with those specific issues. Our paramedic service is well-resourced, with average response times under 6 minutes and no "code zero" occurrences (i.e. when there are no ambulances available).

Health: measurable outcomes

- Availability of emergency rooms, urgent care clinics, and walk-in clinics (by neighbourhood)
- Reduction in 911 calls
- Levels of anxiety, mental well-being (survey)
- Number of emergency room visits for mental health & addictions (by neighbourhood)
- Number of people on waitlist for mental health care
- Number of people on waitlist for primary care physician
- Overall health outcomes (by neighbourhood)
- The gap between life expectancy and health outcomes in the richest and poorest neighbourhoods has significantly reduced.
- Percentage of population that received influenza immunization in past year [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percentage of population with a regular medical doctor [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percent of children vulnerable, Physical Health & Well-Being [Early Development Instruments]
- Percent of children vulnerable, Emotional Maturity [Early Development Instruments]
- Out-of-pocket costs for healthcare, including mental health

Housing



Art by [The Lemonaut and Scandinavian101](#)

Homelessness. Everybody wakes up housed. Shelters are available for temporary and transitional uses, including for refugees, those experiencing homelessness and addictions, and those experiencing domestic violence. We allow encampments on public land while working to make them unnecessary. Unhoused neighbours have wrap-around services and the means and

options to truly make a choice about where to live. Those living in encampments are offered options for shelter that meet their needs, rather than being pushed off to another encampment or out of sight.

Housing types. A wide variety of housing types are allowed to be built as-of-right across the region's entire urban area, including multifamily homes, lodging homes, rental, and mid-rise apartments. High-rise apartment buildings are built close to major transit stations, with a portion of this increased density earmarked for affordable housing to replace homes that would be lost. We have removed zoning restrictions that prevent gentle density, such as parking minimums, minimum lot sizes, yard setbacks, and restrictions on single-stair building designs. New buildings are built with climate resilience in mind, including energy efficiency, insulation, renewable energy, and integration with district heating and cooling. There are a wide variety of homes available in each neighbourhood, meeting the needs of people from a young age, to being a single adult, to growing families, to retirement. People are able to move between different housing types without losing the connections that they've made in their immediate neighbourhood. Housing is built to be accessible, and grants and loans are available to retrofit existing buildings to be accessible.

Public space. There are more neighbourhood-scale parks and intensive street landscaping in the public realm, including tree planting funded by the city and designed by neighbours. Accessible and uplifting public spaces are the norm, and neighbours feel less of a need to have a large private yard for the purposes of recreation and relaxation. The arrival of new neighbours is paired with investment in public infrastructure and new housing options for people transitioning through different life stages and cultural settings. Existing neighbours are enthusiastic to welcome newcomers in their neighbourhood and build communities that provide more housing options. Neighbourhood associations have permanent community centres that are open to the public, and are operated at arms length from municipal government.

A day in the life: affordable pleasures

I wake up in the morning in an apartment I choose to rent, although I could buy if I wanted to. I am surrounded by varied types of housing with financially diverse neighbours. I can easily walk down the street to a local cafe to read a library book. I take the LRT to my job downtown and, in the evening, I enjoy a picnic dinner in a park close to my home.

— *Reflection by a roundtable participant*

Tenant protection. We have protected existing residents from displacement. Renovictions (forced displacement by bad-faith renovations) have been eliminated, with real enforcement of tenants' right to return and an end to unfair eviction practices. Rental replacement by-laws ensure that those who are displaced by redevelopment have adequate transitional homes and the opportunity to return to the same neighbourhood. A landlord registry is established to ensure proper maintenance and repairs of rental properties.

Preserving affordability. Existing affordable rentals have been protected through reforms to rent control laws and a cap on rent increases between different tenancies. There are a variety of financial mechanisms to increase housing stability, including rent-to-own programs, rent banks, rental top-up programs, and financing that is available at fair rates for newcomers who have not had the opportunity to build up a credit score yet. Housing is affordable for all people in all income levels. Ownership of a second home is discouraged through regulation and licensing requirements, and housing is viewed as a human right, not as an investment.

Non-market housing. There is a massive increase in funding for nonmarket housing, including non-profit, co-op, and First Nations owned housing. The region's affordable housing wait list has been fully addressed, and everybody has a place to call home. There is more access to land via cooperatives and affordable housing unions in collaboration with First Nations. The nonprofit housing community has developed a real expertise in project management, construction, and financing. This makes it easier to rapidly build new affordable and supportive housing projects, with collaboration from multiple agencies serving various demographic and needs based groups. Public and non-profit housing providers have the capacity to build the housing we need.

Housing: measurable outcomes

- Average housing costs vs. income (by neighbourhood, tenure, and age of housing)
- Distribution of homes by number of bedrooms, number of units, and built form (by neighbourhood)
- Number of homes in non-market housing (by neighbourhood)
- Number of neighbours experiencing homelessness, including hidden homelessness (by demographic group)
- Number of people who own multiple homes
- Rate of housing insecurity
- Percentage of households paying 30% or more of average monthly household income on housing [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percentage of youth experiencing homelessness or hidden homelessness [Children and Youth Planning Table Youth Impact Survey]

Indigenous sovereignty



Two Row Wampum, St. Mary's Reconciliation Garden — Photo by Sam Nabi

Land back. A wide variety of land justice initiatives have been established to honour treaty relationships with First Nations. Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives are also common across the region. Indigenous neighbours have access to culturally safe and affordable housing. Informed consent for development is achieved through meaningful consultation with Mississaugas of the Credit, Six Nations, Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and Métis Nation of Ontario. Land is considered as a sacred trust, and we work together to keep it healthy for future generations. Our relationship to land has moved away from a focus on private property, towards a sharing relationship with all neighbours and with all parts of the web of life. The Haudenosaunee Land Rights Statement is respected by municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and development on the Haldimand Tract proceeds with the consent of the Six Nations band council and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Cultural events and ceremony. There is an abundance of culturally relevant community gathering spaces for Indigenous neighbours, where groups can host events such as feasts, educational seminars, workshops, peer support, and other meetings. There are opportunities for

settler neighbours to participate, learn, and build relationships with Indigenous communities. There is a centralized space for Indigenous people to gather, grow, learn, and build culture for future generations. A friendship centre or community hub is present in all three major urban centres of the Region, and in rural communities as well.

Decolonizing service delivery. Indigenous-centric programming, including changes to administrative and bureaucracy processes, are implemented in public facing institutions. Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods are integrated into community programming and service delivery for all neighbours.

Developing a more-than-treaty relationship. We have developed strong economic, tourism, and recreational relationships with nearby Indigenous communities along the Grand River including Six Nations and Mississaugas of the Credit. These cultural, employment, and economic ties are an extension of our treaty relationship.

Strong families. The number of Indigenous children taken into care by Family & Children's Services has significantly reduced. Indigenous child care centres have been established that take a holistic approach to education and well-being, in a culturally- and spiritually-appropriate setting for Indigenous families. Communities acknowledge the impacts of residential schools and have developed ways to make a healthier community through improved relationship-building and undoing harms caused by colonial systems.

Decision-making. First Nations leadership, including the Six Nations of the Grand River, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit are directly involved in all planning and development within their traditional and treaty territories.

Indigenous sovereignty: measurable outcomes

- Use of data collection and research methods that honour Indigenous data sovereignty
- Use of Indigenous-developed evaluation methods (e.g., Two-Eyed Seeing, community-based indicators)
- Feedback from Indigenous partners on the quality of relationship and mutual respect
- Number of Indigenous people in decision-making roles
- Training provided to non-Indigenous service providers on decolonization, anti-racism, and Indigenous rights
- Hectares of land returned, protected, or transferred to Indigenous governance
- Prevalence of Indigenous place names and languages in public signage and documentation
- Number of organizations that have integrated Indigenous knowledge systems into curriculum, research, and planning processes
- Workforce participation rates for Indigenous peoples in leadership roles
- Contracts awarded to Indigenous-owned businesses

Labour



Photo by [Department of Energy Solar Decathlon](#)

Secure jobs and living wages. Neighbours have stable employment that pays them enough and enables them to prepare for emergencies and retirement. We live affordably and have true living wages. Household debt levels are reduced. A universal basic income eliminates the bumps of life and creates a minimum standard for how employers should treat and compensate their employees.

Employment standards. Workers have adequate paid sick leave, vacation time, advance notice for scheduling, and job protection after returning from a leave of absence. Anti-burnout policies acknowledge emotional labour and trauma-informed employment standards.

Local ownership and strong communities. Cooperative and locally-owned employers commit to long-term, good-paying jobs that support the local community in more ways than one. Employees get good jobs, wealth remains in the community, and high standards of living reduce the pressure on social services.

Health and safety. Every industry has safe workplaces. On-the-job serious injuries and deaths have fallen to zero. Workplaces provide robust conflict resolution tools to protect employees against discrimination, harassment, and mental health crises. All workers understand their rights, including the importance of labour history and collective solidarity actions.

A day in the life: flexibility and high morale

Sindhu is a father with two children who he/they have every other week. They are able to walk their children to school and to work. They live close to work, which is a studio. Hours are flexible and rent is cheap. Buses are free. The household shares chores and daycare duties. There are communal spaces and gardens. Because everyone has a living wage, morale is high and crime is low. Artists are paid fairly for their work. Businesses sponsor artists and pay them to run programs in large workplaces.

— *Reflection by a roundtable participant*

Gig work and temporary foreign workers. Gig workers, who are dependent on work assigned through a platform that controls their rate of pay and terms of work, are considered employees. They have the full rights and responsibilities of employment (including employment insurance and a public pension), and are no longer erroneously classified as independent contractors. The temporary foreign worker program has been replaced with a system that offers workers a path to citizenship and the right to change employers.

Academic work. Research assistants, teaching assistants and sessional instructors at post-secondary institutions are compensated fairly for their work, including research, teaching, preparation time, and grading. The use of short-term contracts has been significantly reduced, and a larger proportion of instructors are tenured.

Labour: measurable outcomes

- Rate of poverty (by demographic group and neighbourhood)
- Number of gig workers (by industry)

- Number of living wage employers
- Number of people working multiple jobs (by neighbourhood)
- Number of workers injured or killed
- Proportion of tenured teaching staff at post-secondary institutions
- Post-secondary funding for operational expenses, net of tuition
- Number of locally-owned employers (profit stays in community)

Multiculturalism



K-W Multicultural Festival — Photo by [wyliepoon](#)

Meaningful work for newcomers. Newcomers can work in their area of expertise without overly cumbersome recertification processes. They are able to participate in workplace integration and upskilling programs of their choosing. There are opportunities for mentorship, onboarding, and orientation for career development.

System navigation. Bureaucratic systems in government, non-profit, and community groups are made more accessible by reducing their complexity and by meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of neighbours. Programs and services are offered in multiple languages. There are strong support networks of mutual aid among people with similar experiences. Navigating healthcare systems is easier thanks to new cultural and linguistic options. Mental health programming is adapted to take into account cultural awareness and the growing diversity of our community. Interpretation and translation services are abundant and affordable in all areas of the region. Newcomers can easily find resources in their language.

Opportunities to belong and contribute. Newcomer and marginalized youth have access to academic mentoring, after-school programs, arts, and sports and recreation opportunities that help them build social bonds. Refugee claimants have legal support, housing, employment opportunities, and opportunities for well-being and self-expression. Processes that welcome and integrate newcomers into civic and professional leadership are trauma informed.

Opportunities for career growth. We have abolished the temporary foreign worker program, transforming those jobs into permanent positions with a path to citizenship, pension, employment insurance, and health care benefits. Newcomers are offered experiences to learn how to interact with the Canadian job market, including resume building, interview skills, and entrepreneurship guidance.

Cross-cultural, cross-generational learning. Ethnocultural groups have access to the spaces and relationships they need to maintain and promote their heritage. We champion our identity as a multicultural society, and there is a genuine curiosity for intercultural learning and understanding. We continue to address systemic racism in schools, and we bridge cultural divides between different generations of immigrants.

Welcoming neighbourhoods. Anti-immigrant sentiments, discrimination, and hate crimes have been significantly reduced, as we resist the tolerance of intolerance. As communities become more diverse and more interdependent, we have come to realize that scapegoating marginalized groups is not productive or useful. We have overcome this scarcity mindset to achieve true inclusion and belonging, and we celebrate Waterloo Region as a multicultural community. Newcomers feel welcome in their new neighbourhoods. Newcomers are important contributors to the social fabric. We counter systemic racism and discrimination wherever it shows up in public life.

Solidarity. We support international efforts for humanitarian relief and social justice, through leadership by diaspora networks rooted in Waterloo Region. We have sufficient awareness of cultural differences to ensure healthy multiculturalism, while helping people feel rooted in their own cultures. Cultural exchange happens freely and widely on the basis of respect for others' humanity.

Multiculturalism: measurable outcomes

- Rate of onward migration (immigrants who leave within 5 years)
- Number of hate crimes and reports of discrimination (by demographic group)
- Rate of foreign-trained professionals working in their field (survey)
- Number of ethnocultural groups with dedicated, permanent meeting/gathering space
- Wait time for refugee claims
- Social mobility for second-generation neighbours (ability to improve relative to their parents)

Organizational capacity



Art by [Lemonaut](#)

Funding reform. Nonprofits and charities have been able to rebuild their fundraising capacity after a drop in donations and volunteerism since 2020, and have now reached new records of volunteers and donations. We have diversified our funding sources, including social enterprises that are directed by nonprofits and charities. Impact investing via local credit unions has surged in popularity, letting individual neighbours contribute to causes they care about in their own community. Organizations have financial stability, with funding sources that are less ad hoc and more sustainable over the long term. Eligibility for funding programs does not depend on charitable status. There are strong philanthropic ties between local businesses and nonprofits. Grants that had previously only covered program funding have expanded to include operational funding and professional development, and value staff being paid a living wage over short term, minimum wage contract work.

Collective approaches to sharing resources. Organizations have access to permanent spaces as well as shared spaces in the neighbourhood that are collectively managed. There are collaborative relationships between different institutions such as municipalities, school boards, student unions, labour groups, and philanthropic networks. There is good communication across different community groups tackling different issues. We have a sense of collaboration, not

competition, and reject a scarcity mindset. The non-profit sector is able to advocate effectively for shared priorities. Nonprofits and community groups respect one another's autonomy, while working together to avoid duplicate work and foster collaboration. We use our collective bargaining power to purchase land, technology, supplies, health benefits, and other group buying opportunities.

Representative & effective teams. Organizations are able to attract and retain a diverse and representative group of board members, staff, and volunteers. Governance is approached in the spirit of decolonization and “nothing about us, without us”. Staff in the nonprofit sector are not burned out by the demands of their job, are paid appropriately, and receive good health benefits. We recognize that the success of charitable programs relies on the well-being of the people that deliver them. Decisions that affect communities are taken with significant input, reflection, and leadership from those who have lived experience with the topic at hand. Our social services and community resources are culturally competent. We continually work to remove barriers to service delivery for our neighbours.

A day in the life: arts education

Every child gets access to arts participation in school and outside the classroom. Parents are supported to integrate in communities, and arts participation (making and watching art) happens everywhere. The artists they see have a living wage and affordable housing, with lots of cooperatives. Arts projects are integrated into professional settings, education, and in community. Artists access training and performance spaces. All K-12 students are able to choose artistic pathways. They can access postsecondary or alternate forms of training here in the region. Live performances happen every day with huge audience turnout.

— *Reflection by a roundtable participant*

Volunteerism. Thanks to more stable employment, liveable wages, and better work-life balance, neighbours have time to make regular volunteering a part of their daily life. There is widespread awareness of the work that non-profits and community groups do, and they are noticed and celebrated by neighbours. Flexible volunteering opportunities allow neighbours to contribute where they can with the time that they have. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities that families can do together.

Flexible solutions for sharing space. Empty storefronts, homes, and public buildings are a thing of the past. We have created strategies to repurpose vacant spaces, including those in transition like the former Charles Street Transit Terminal. Any spaces that can be used for ad-hoc gatherings and community programming are available for neighbours to use. Schools host evening events; places of worship facilitate mid-week events, and other spaces that were busy only for certain days of the week or certain times of day are now used more effectively. Common logistical issues such as door access, cleaning, first aid, and liability issues have been

resolved with frameworks of community care. By sharing knowledge and pooling risk, we lower the barrier to entry for opening up new spaces for public use. Civic hubs operated by non-profits and community groups are present throughout Waterloo Region.

Capable neighbourhood-level organizations. We have accessible and well-resourced community centres, with an abundance of spaces for both programmed and non-programmed activities. The creation of co-ops, including housing co-ops and worker-owned co-op businesses is a testament to the strength of our community bonds. Community members feel empowered to improve public space while being supported by city staff and resources. Schools are not islands; they are integrated into the community and teachers are able to apply their curriculum to local events and services. Learning happens in relationship with the neighbourhood. Public spaces are safe and well-used, and child-centric spaces incorporate amenities for their parents and caregivers. There are strong connections between local businesses and social services. New residents know where to go to find resources and information, and newcomers are involved in decision making.

Organizational capacity: measurable outcomes

- Land and buildings owned by co-ops, First Nations, unions, and land trusts
- Number of social enterprises owned by non-profits, charities, co-ops, and First Nations
- Increase in permanent, full-time staff receiving a living wage in the non-profit sector
- Amount of time spent on grant-writing vs. grant funds received (grant acquisition success rate)
- Number of joint programs and shared resources between organizations (level of collaboration)
- Number of stakeholders involved in an organization (clients, participants, volunteers, donors, staff)
- Number of significant stories of impact (by sector)
- Proportion of revenue from government, philanthropy/sponsorship, and other revenue
- Gap in compensation and benefits between non-profit, government, and private sector
- Operating reserves (e.g., number of months of expenses covered)
- Number of people on waitlists for daycare, co-op housing, studio spaces, therapy, primary care, trans healthcare, etc.
- Percentage of organizations participating in citywide strategic planning efforts or cross-sector partnerships
- Funds available to support capacity-building (not just programs)
- Staff retention rates in non-profit organizations
- Number of non-profit leadership development programs in Waterloo Region
- Geographic service coverage by sector (which neighborhoods are underserved?)
- Percentage of population volunteering for a charitable or non-profit organisation [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Percentage of population that made a donation in the past year to a charitable or non-profit organisation [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]
- Total amount of charitable contributions

- Ratio of director-level compensation vs lowest paid employees
- Number of meeting spaces which do not charge a booking fee

Public spaces



Photo by [Masood Aslami](#)

Abundant community programming. Mentorship and training programs for children and youth are plentiful in community centres and schools, to prepare them for success in career development and life skills. We have a community-led, prevention-oriented approach to social development, which meets our neighbours' basic needs and creates opportunities for social connection. Ethnocultural groups form bonds of connection between members of their own communities, while also supporting collaboration between different groups. This happens through festivals, multifaith and interfaith dialogues, volunteering, and joint programming. We have a community hub in every neighbourhood that is free to access and provides social, recreational, and health services. We have inclusive and accessible childcare, accessible after-school programs, affordable extracurricular activities, and well-connected community centres. Our neighbourhoods are peaceful and energetic: there's always something to do, and there's always a place to belong. Community programming is expected to offer a variety of scheduling options, disability accommodations, and sliding-scale pricing in order to be accessible. Municipalities facilitate sharing of resources, including space, to neighbourhood associations and community groups. Some community groups own and manage their own spaces, and attitudes of NIMBYism have decreased as people understand the opportunities that come with neighbourhood change.

Discouraging vacancy & neglect. Heritage conservation policies are applied equally to renovations and to new builds. We protect buildings against demolition-by-neglect, and vacant properties are subject to a land value tax to encourage their productive use.

Abundant public amenities. There is ample public access to clean and accessible washrooms, drinking fountains and showers. We have more public plazas and parks that can be animated without special permission. There is more green space in urban areas, with the introduction of new parks, street trees, planters, and natural areas. We have reduced barriers for the turnkey operation of public performance and event spaces. Placemaking takes into account multi-age, multi-cultural, and multi-neighbourhood needs.

Everything close by. Our communities are all walkable, with trails and safe streets connecting all of our daily needs. Neighbourhoods that are too spread out to easily support community infrastructure have welcomed new neighbours in order to attract the local businesses and community services they need, and to establish new public transit routes. We have vibrant community centres that are centres of teaching, creation, and collaboration. Many neighbours have shorter and more flexible working days, so people have time to enrich their life with after-work activities and rich cultural experiences. Children are able to walk to school and adults are able to walk to work. There is more connection and integrated planning between school boards and neighbourhood associations. We have established a map of baseline neighbourhood resources, identifying the gaps and the opportunities for sharing those resources. Playgrounds are accessible and they are a safe space for all. Third spaces are common, including outdoor and indoor spaces, recreational facilities, social spaces that are free to access, and spaces that are integrated with healthy food options and public washrooms. Parks, libraries, schools, places of worship, and community centres are hubs of connection in every neighbourhood.

Distributed regional structure. Core services are located all throughout the region recognizing our distributed nature with multiple urban downtowns, post-secondary campus nodes, and rural hubs.

A day in the life: suburban siblings

We are twins, and today, Saturday, April 2, 2040, we turn 16 years old. We live in the suburbs (alas!) so we walk to the train/tram stop. We could easily take the GO train to Toronto, or the tram to Kitchener or Guelph, all for free! We decide to go to Kitchener because it's the most fun. First, we go thrift shopping and browse a used bookshop. We get brunch at a cafe near the market. Then it's on the tram again to get to our dance class. We enjoy coffee and tea with friends, and then go to a jazz club in the evening — our friends are performing. We feel safe in the city and take transit home. Our parents were out at the Syrian theatre company's opening night for their new show. We read the news, and we like to stay informed about what's happening in the region, so that we can make an informed choice in the upcoming election (now that 16-year-olds can vote)!

— *Reflection by a roundtable participant*

Third spaces. People feel safe in their neighbourhoods, with positive and spontaneous casual interactions among neighbours. There are plenty of third spaces to meet others, including spaces that are free to access. This includes libraries, parks, community centres, schools, and other social infrastructure. Public spaces encourage joy, connection, spontaneity and play, through artistic interventions, recreational spaces, equipment, programming, and events.

Safety. Safe consumption opportunities are built into public spaces as a stigma-free amenity. Public spaces are well-lit, surrounded by a mix of uses at different times of day. Safety ambassadors and community-led safety initiatives ensure that there is healthy conflict resolution and maintenance of common amenities.

Decision-making. Our land use planning has been reoriented around public abundance, rather than short-term profits, NIMBYism, and fear of the other. Neighbourhood parks are designed with collaborative input and participatory budgeting from the people who live nearby. Meaningful public consultation guides official plans, zoning by-laws, station area planning, and secondary planning, with a narrower scope of public process for individual projects. Those who have traditionally been underrepresented from public consultation, including future residents, are taken into account.

Public spaces: measurable outcomes

- Green space per capita (by neighbourhood)
- Capacity vs. actual usage of public spaces like libraries, community centres, places of worship, schools
- Number of commercial, employment, recreational, and community amenities (by neighbourhood)
- Vacancy rate, residential and commercial (by neighbourhood)
- Rate of neighbourhood stability (residents staying in neighbourhood after 5, 10, 20, 50 years?)

- Number of sport facilities (by neighbourhood)
- Number of bookable community spaces (by neighbourhood)
- Number of rent-free meeting spaces (by neighbourhood)
- Number of schools, community centres, parks, and libraries (by neighbourhood)

Transportation



Photo by [Stuffedbox](#)

Active transportation. Our society is less reliant on the automobile, and bicycling and walking and transit have become a convenient and safe way for people to get around town. Pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and serious injuries have been reduced to zero. Standard street designs now include elevated crosswalks, wide sidewalks and boulevards, and other safe pedestrian infrastructure. We have expanded the crossing guard program around schools to include

publicly-funded “walking school bus” initiatives. Sidewalks, trails, and intersections are effectively cleared of snow and ice in winter.

Abundant public transit. Transit is affordable and equitable, and connects every neighbourhood in our region. Transportation between city centres, university and college campuses, employment centres, and rural hubs is convenient. We have taken creative approaches to reducing the need for farebox revenue on transit. People who live in suburban neighbourhoods can easily walk or take transit to intercity transit connections to Toronto, London, Hamilton, or Guelph. Neighbours can move with ease within Waterloo Region. We have prioritized coverage and service level over financial performance for transit.

Affordable public transit. Transit is free for those 18 and under, and GRT offers an affordable annual pass that encourages wide adoption even among those who only use transit occasionally. This approach has successfully reduced costs for riders while ensuring financial stability and predictability for GRT. The massive adoption of the annual pass means per-ride farebox revenue is far less of a concern, and the need for transit security staff is significantly reduced. Conversely, we have introduced new revenue generating measures for roads, including tolls, which are intended mainly as cross region or intercity transportation corridors.

A day in the life: a connected region

I wake up with a roof over my head and food in the fridge. I can turn on the tap and expect clean, safe drinking water. In winter, the sidewalks are shovelled by the city before I leave home for the day. I have lots of transportation options and there are pedestrian streets in my neighbourhood. I bike to a job that pays enough to afford a decent life, dropping the kids off via bike-bus on the way to work and school. There is convenient and affordable daycare available for kids who are not yet in school. We are energy resilient, with a city-wide and neighbourhood-level solar grid that provides a reliable supply of renewable electricity. Amenities like BBQs, swimming pools, movie theatres and tools are shared among neighbours. We live in mixed-use neighbourhoods with mixed-use buildings. New towers are not only building one-bedroom apartments, but also ones big enough for families. Community centres and other public spaces are bustling hubs all day long, and every day of the week. Churches and other public/non-profit landowners have used their excess land for affordable housing.

— Reflection by a roundtable participant

Connectivity. Our neighbourhoods form connected constellations. Not every neighbourhood is the same, but they all have core services. For larger-scale services, connections between different neighbourhoods are safe and convenient. Regional-level services are available in multiple cities and townships, not necessarily concentrated in Kitchener and Waterloo. We

promote healthy and active living with active transportation networks that are accessible to neighbours of all ages and abilities.

Intercity travel. When we travel to other cities, we have easy and quick transportation connections thanks to two-way, all-day GO Train service to Toronto, as well as an expansion of frequent intercity buses and VIA Rail to other urban and rural communities. There is equitable access to services throughout the entire region, including in Cambridge and the rural Townships. We have embraced our identity as a multi-node region, centring services and amenities around our post-secondary school campuses, city centres, and rural hubs. All of these centres are connected with high-frequency rapid transit.

Transportation: measurable outcomes

- Number of children walking or biking independently to school
- Number of neighbourhoods achieving transit-supportive density
- Proportion of trips taken by active transportation, transit (by neighbourhood)
- Transit service levels: frequency, coverage, reliability (by neighbourhood)
- Walkability and safe pedestrian infrastructure (by neighbourhood)
- Percentage of population 15 years and older with long commutes to work (over 45 minutes) [Canadian Index of Wellbeing]

Next steps

To unlock the potential of this vision, we see the need for shared infrastructure to support coordination, measurement, and learning across sectors. This could include a regional dashboard to track progress on the measurable outcomes named in this report; a community “multisolving fund” for projects that bridge at least two sectors; and working groups that bring together public, nonprofit, and community partners to co-develop integrated pilots. These mechanisms help turn vision into action, and support the long-term alignment of efforts that will be needed as our region grows and evolves.

These next steps chart a few possible directions, but they are not prescriptive. We encourage non-profits and community groups to use this report however they wish, as they pursue stronger partnerships, more effective advocacy, and better outcomes for their neighbours across Waterloo Region.

Establish a shared measurement and data commons. To track progress on the vision’s measurable outcomes, Waterloo Region could develop a shared dashboard that draws from existing data sources and track new indicators that are currently missing. This would include traditional datasets (e.g. Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT), Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR), municipal open data...) and participatory indicators (e.g. stories of impact, community perception surveys, citizen science). A data working group could begin aligning methods, identifying gaps, and building capacity for community-led measurement in partnership with local institutions and researchers.

Deepen neighbourhood-level connections. To measure progress on the ground, and to gauge priorities of different neighbourhoods, One Million Neighbours could regularly engage with neighbourhood associations and tenant unions to map places in their neighbourhoods where progress is happening, or where gaps are present.

Launch a regional multisolving fund. A key barrier to cross-sector work is siloed funding. A pooled multisolving fund, co-designed by community partners, funders, and local governments, could provide flexible, multi-year resources for initiatives that span at least two themes. This fund could support both small-scale community prototypes and larger system-changing coalitions. It would reward collaboration, equity, and complexity-aware design, empowering non-profits and community groups to move beyond short-term project cycles and into long-term transformation.

Convene a yearly One Million Neighbours assembly. To deepen relationships and civic engagement across sectors, One Million Neighbours could host an annual assembly. This convening would bring together neighbours, non-profit leaders, service providers, youth, elders, and municipal decision-makers to celebrate progress, exchange practices, and shape the next

iteration of the vision. It would serve as both an accountability mechanism and a space for collective joy, learning, and recommitment to shared purpose.

Integrate the vision into public policy and procurement. This vision can inform municipal and regional strategies, including Official Plans, zoning bylaw updates, cultural plans, and procurement policies. By aligning public investments with these 15 themes, and prioritizing projects that deliver cross-sector co-benefits, governments can embed systemic equity and multisolving into the DNA of regional growth. Community organizations can advocate for this alignment and propose pilot projects that demonstrate what's possible.

Create a youth civic leadership track. Many of the region's most innovative ideas come from youth voices. A youth civic leadership program could build on this momentum by offering paid fellowships, mentorship, and co-design opportunities for high school and postsecondary students. Youth could help animate community hubs, steward data projects, facilitate storytelling circles, and serve as neighbourhood ambassadors for One Million Neighbours. This would invest in the next generation of civic systems thinkers: people who see Waterloo Region as both a home and a place to lead from.

