

23/09/2026 17:30:41
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Cindy Ward
Mayor of Kitchener

What is your motivation for running for election?

I'm running for Mayor because I love Kitchener, and I believe this city is capable of so much more.

Kitchener is vibrant, hardworking, creative, diverse and resilient. But people are facing real pressures—from housing and affordability to homelessness, infrastructure and a city growing faster than our long-term planning can sometimes keep up.

As a social psychologist and researcher, I've spent much of my career understanding what helps people and communities thrive. I believe good leadership starts by listening, bringing people together, and having the courage to pursue new solutions when the old ones aren't working.

I'm running because I believe Kitchener needs fresh leadership, fresh ideas and a stronger focus on people. I want a city where everyone has the opportunity to feel secure, included and hopeful about their future.

For me, this isn't about holding a title. It's about serving the city I love—and helping Kitchener become the kind of community we can all be proud to call home.

What are your top three priority issues you want to address at Regional Council?

1. Housing, affordability and homelessness,
2. Water, infrastructure and responsible growth,
3. Long-term regional planning and accountable leadership
4. Small business development, infrastructure and training

What is your vision for each of the issues you identified above?

Housing, affordability and homelessness — making sure regional growth translates into affordable, secure housing, while taking a more humane and practical approach to homelessness and supportive housing.

Water, infrastructure and responsible growth — ensuring that development does not outpace our water capacity and infrastructure. This includes protecting the Waterloo Moraine, respecting neighbouring communities whose wells are under pressure, and improving coordination between Kitchener and the Region.

Long-term regional planning and accountable leadership — bringing greater transparency to major regional decisions and making sure growth, transportation, housing, health and infrastructure are planned together rather than addressed in isolation.

Small business development, infrastructure -- Small businesses are the heart of our neighbourhoods and a major part of Kitchener's entrepreneurial spirit. I want City Hall (and the Region) to be a partner rather than a barrier to small business start-ups and

development: Making it easier to navigate approvals, access information and connect entrepreneurs with available supports, training and resources.

What tangible steps would you take to increase the supply of affordable housing across the Region?

1. Put publicly owned land to work. Identify every suitable Region-owned and surplus property and prioritize long-term affordable, supportive and co-operative housing on those sites, using partnerships with non-profits and community housing providers. The Region is already doing this; I would expand and accelerate it.
2. Expand incentives for affordable construction. Increase Regional capital funding, property-tax incentives and other tools that make affordable projects financially viable, while requiring long-term affordability in return.
3. Make better use of existing buildings. Support the conversion of suitable vacant or underused commercial, institutional and residential properties into affordable housing—not every solution has to start with a new building.
4. Build more deeply affordable and supportive housing. We need a range of housing, including homes for people with the lowest incomes and people experiencing homelessness, with appropriate mental-health, addiction and other supports integrated where needed. Regional housing projects are already using this model.
5. Make affordability part of growth planning. Work with Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and the townships so that transportation, infrastructure, employment and housing are planned together—and so that new growth contributes to a meaningful supply of affordable homes.

My goal would be simple: use every tool available to us—public land, partnerships, incentives, creative conversions and smarter planning—to get more affordable homes built, and to keep them affordable for the long term.

What is your plan to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and create additional child care spaces?

My goal is to make sure families in Waterloo Region can find high-quality child care when and where they need it—without child care costs becoming a barrier to work, education or family life.

At Regional Council, I would work to accelerate the creation of new licensed child-care spaces, particularly in neighbourhoods experiencing rapid growth and communities where families are currently underserved.

I would prioritize partnerships with non-profit and community-based providers, schools, employers and housing developers to identify opportunities for new spaces—including incorporating child care into new affordable and mixed-use housing developments.

I would also work to reduce the administrative and infrastructure barriers that can prevent providers from opening or expanding, and advocate to the provincial and federal

governments for the funding and workforce supports necessary to make expansion sustainable.

Affordability has to go hand in hand with quality. That means supporting the child-care workforce, improving access for families with different needs and ensuring that growth in our region is matched by the services families depend on.

Families shouldn't have to choose between being able to afford child care and being able to work. My vision is a Region where every family has a realistic pathway to accessible, affordable, high-quality child care.

What is your position on the Provincial government's efforts to increase private sector involvement in drinking water and wastewater services?

I believe drinking water and wastewater are essential public services and should remain locally accountable. I am cautious about greater private-sector involvement.

I would prefer Kitchener and Waterloo Region to retain control over these services and make decisions based on the needs of our communities—not have provincial government overreach determine how we manage something as fundamental as water.

What role should the Region play in protecting publicly owned water services?

The Region should be a strong steward of our publicly owned water services and protect them as an essential public good. Water is life—not a commodity. We need local control, strong public oversight and long-term investment in infrastructure to ensure safe, reliable and affordable water for everyone.

The Region should also stand firm in protecting our water resources and our ability to make decisions based on the needs of our communities, rather than allowing outside interests or provincial overreach to undermine local accountability.

What forms of inequity do you believe are the most significant challenges in our community? How would you address them?

There are many forms of inequity in our community, and I don't think we can reduce them to just one. Some of the most significant are economic inequality, systemic racism and discrimination, gender inequity, and the way we treat people experiencing poverty or homelessness.

Too often, we judge people by their income, housing status, race, gender or circumstances rather than seeing the human being in front of us. That is not the community I believe Kitchener should be.

As a social psychologist, behavioural scientist and researcher, I bring a unique perspective to these challenges. I listen to people to understand their lived experiences and their true needs, and I use evidence-based practices to identify the behavioural, institutional and discriminatory barriers that can prevent people from fully participating in our community.

As Mayor, I would bring these humanistic and evidence-based insights to City and Regional Council—examining policies and practices for systemic barriers, ensuring marginalized

voices are meaningfully included in decision-making, and investing in affordable housing, accessible services and community supports.

My work has taught me that people thrive when they have a genuine sense of belonging, dignity and agency. I want Kitchener to be a city where nobody is treated as less worthy because of who they are, what they earn, or where they sleep.

What organizations, initiatives, or movements have you supported that work to address systemic discrimination or oppression? Please describe your involvement.

I have engaged with and supported organizations including Community Justice Initiatives, the Social Development Centre, Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre, YW Kitchener-Waterloo, Spectrum, Bring on the Sunshine, Waterloo Region Community Foundation and Take Back the Night. My involvement has included attending community events and marches, making donations, listening and learning from people doing this work, and sharing their stories and initiatives with others.

My commitment to understanding systemic discrimination also goes back decades. In my undergraduate years, I studied racism and other forms of systemic oppression with Dr. Mark Zanna as part of my thesis research.

I want to be honest that my involvement with these organizations has been largely supportive rather than formal. But I have listened, learned and cared deeply about this work—and I want to do much more. As a social psychologist and behavioural scientist, I believe my research background and ability to understand behavioural and systemic barriers can help me contribute meaningfully to this work at City and Regional Council.

Can you commit to publicly speaking up in favour of these demands, including at Council meetings?

Yes