

Candidate Details

Colleen James

Regional Councillor (Kitchener)

What is your motivation for running for election?

"I'm running because Kitchener is home. My family has been part of Waterloo Region for more than 50 years, and I was born and raised here. Today, I'm raising my own family here, so I care deeply about the community we are building for the next generation.

After more than 15 years working in municipal government at both the city and regional levels, I've seen firsthand how important strong public services, engaged communities, and accountable local government are to people's everyday lives. I've also seen that the best decisions happen when we listen to the people who deliver and rely on those services.

I'm proud of what I accomplished during my first term as Regional Councillor, but I'm running because there is still important work to do. Housing affordability, transit, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and access to essential community services require thoughtful, long-term leadership and collaboration.

I believe in a local government that values the people who make our communities work. That means supporting strong public services, respecting the workers who deliver them, listening to residents and employees, and making decisions based on what will strengthen our community over the long term.

For me, public service has always been about showing up, asking the hard questions, working with others, and turning community concerns into action. I'm running to continue that work and to help build a Kitchener and Waterloo Region where people can afford to live, move around, participate, and build a good life."

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

Strong public services and infrastructure that residents can rely on. Housing affordability and accessible community services so people can live with dignity and participate fully in our community. Responsible, sustainable growth that protects our resources, plans for the future, and puts residents and the public interest at the centre of decision-making.

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

Affordable, Accessible Housing & Essential Services

Make housing and essential community services more accessible and affordable, while strengthening supports for people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and other barriers.

Strong Public Services, Transit & Infrastructure

Protect and improve the public services residents rely on every day—including reliable and affordable transit, safe infrastructure, accessible transportation, and infrastructure planning that keeps pace with growth.

Responsible, Long-Term Growth & Community Sustainability

Ensure growth is planned responsibly, with sufficient water, energy and critical infrastructure, environmental protection, transparency, and meaningful community input. This includes asking hard questions about emerging pressures such as data centres and ensuring decisions made today don't create problems for future generations.

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

"First, I would continue to leverage Region-owned land for affordable and mixed-income housing, including long-term land leases and partnerships with non-profit and co-operative housing providers. The Region has already demonstrated that this can work, including the 30 Lauris Avenue project in Cambridge, where Region-owned land is being used to create 101 apartments, including 31 affordable units.

Second, I would strengthen and expand the Region's financial tools, capital grants, property-tax incentives and other funding, to make affordable housing financially viable and preserve existing affordable units. The Region's current plan targets creating or preserving up to 3,500 affordable homes by the end of 2029, with 60% intended for very-low- to low-income households.

Third, I would work with our area municipalities to accelerate approvals and use planning tools to support more affordable housing, particularly near transit and other essential services. That means making better use of existing infrastructure, supporting appropriate density, and reducing unnecessary barriers while maintaining appropriate standards for safety and livability.

Finally, we need to preserve the affordable housing we already have. Building new units is important, but losing existing affordable units undermines that progress. I would continue supporting the preservation and revitalization of Waterloo Region Housing and partnerships that keep affordable units affordable over the long term.

The goal should be measurable: more affordable homes, more deeply affordable and supportive housing, fewer units lost from the affordable stock, and housing located where people can actually access transit, jobs, schools and services.

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

Affordable, high-quality child care is essential infrastructure for families and our economy. I would build on the progress through CWELCC by expanding spaces where need is greatest and using public lands, schools and community facilities to create capacity.

I would continue advocating to the provincial and federal governments for sustained funding, more spaces, and stronger support for ECE recruitment and retention, while prioritizing not-for-profit and community-based providers. I would also support fee subsidies and more flexible care options for families who need evening and non-traditional hours.

Creating spaces only works if families can afford them and there are qualified, well-supported educators to provide the 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 publicly owned, publicly accountable, and focused on the public interest—not private profit.

I have concerns about expanding private-sector involvement in the management, operation or financing of these services. Water is fundamental to public health, community growth and environmental protection, and decisions about it should be subject to strong democratic oversight and transparency.

I would continue to advocate to the provincial government for clear safeguards that protect public ownership, affordability, service quality and accountability, while ensuring municipalities retain meaningful control over these essential services. I also believe CUPE workers who deliver these services must have a voice in any changes to how they are governed or delivered."

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

The Region should be a strong steward of publicly owned water services, protecting public ownership, affordability, quality and accountability. It should invest in the infrastructure and skilled workforce needed to deliver reliable services, while ensuring decisions remain transparent and focused on the long-term public interest.

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

"The most significant inequities are often those that create barriers to opportunity, particularly in housing, employment, income, transportation, child care and access to essential services. My work as an equity consultant has taught me that good intentions are not enough; we need to examine how systems and policies actually affect people, who benefits, who does not and where barriers exist.

At the Region, I would focus on using data and community voices to identify those gaps, building accountability into decision-making, and ensuring programs and services are designed with the people most affected, not simply for them. Representation matters, but having a seat at the table matters most when we use it to ask hard questions, remove barriers and deliver measurable results."

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

My commitment to addressing systemic discrimination extends well beyond my role as an elected official. Through Divonify Incorporated, my equity and leadership consulting practice, I have worked with organizations across sectors to identify systemic barriers, strengthen inclusive leadership, build psychological safety, and turn equity commitments into meaningful organizational change.

I have also supported community organizations through leadership development, facilitation, coaching and capacity building, particularly organizations serving marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Through Democracy in Action Waterloo Region, the non-profit I founded, I focus on informing, including and inspiring people to participate in civic life. This includes advocacy around hate, discrimination and democratic participation.

I also believe municipal advocacy can be a powerful catalyst for systemic change beyond our own communities. My recent motion to the senate regarding the inclusion of the noose in Bill C-9 is a clear example of how concerns raised and advocated for at the local level around hate and community safety can contribute to broader national action and policy change. The amendment was passed in June.

My approach is consistent across all of this work: representation matters, but having a seat at the table matters most when we use it to advocate, ask hard questions, remove barriers and create meaningful change.

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

Yes