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Jamie Hari
Mayor of Waterloo

What is your motivation for running for election?

I first entered into politics in 2025, when I ran for Member of Parliament for Waterloo in the federal election. My two main motivations for running again this year remain: to spend time with my son, who is attending Wilfrid Laurier for Political Science this fall, and ultimately to make a better future possible for him.

We had a fun (and educational) experience last year going through the process to get nominated, collecting nomination signatures, preparing for the debate, and even doing a local radio show together on Radio Waterloo. I am looking forward to more of that time with him this election, too.

With that said, things are seriously wrong and getting worse at an alarming rate, locally and globally. Unemployment, homelessness, food insecurity, and the cost of living are all at multi-year highs. Federally and provincially, our democratic rights are being eroded at an ever-faster pace. Ontario Bill 100, for example, made Regional Chairs an appointed position and gave them absolute veto powers over elected city councils.

Municipal governments are consistently underfunded and scapegoated by the provincial government. I don't blame municipal politicians for this, except for staying quiet about it. I think mayors need to get loud and actively fight back against the corruption at Queen's Park and in the House of Commons.

I believe human needs are human rights and that it's the government's responsibility to ensure they're provided to everyone.

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

While I believe all human needs are human rights and so should be priorities, municipal governments have been intentionally depowered and underfunded for decades, leaving them largely incapable of solving issues on their own.

My top three priorities for the City of Waterloo are food, shelter, and transit; issues the city still has significant influence over.

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

Food: We need to immediately supplement established food banks with enough resources (i.e., cash, foodstuffs, and sundries) to entirely meet all Waterluvians' current needs.

Launching at least one city-owned not-for-profit grocery store which is fully union-operated, introducing bylaws which hold corporate grocers accountable locally for using real estate contracts to eliminate small business competition, and creating programs to incentivize the creation of community food gardens and other food production and distribution cooperatives would be part of a longer-term solution.

Shelter: In the interim, I would introduce a mandatory rent registry and licensing bylaw, as well as bylaws which mandate 75% of new-built units must be ""affordable,"" as defined by less 30% of the median gross income.

The eventual goal would be to create a city-owned municipal housing corporation to build and operate non-market housing.

To ensure municipal employees themselves have reliable access to food and shelter, I would introduce a bylaw mandating a living wage be paid to all employees, effective immediately and indexed to local cost of living increases (e.g., consumer price index (CPI), median residential unit purchase price).

I would gladly commit to no frontline staffing reductions during my full 4-year term!

Transit: Fully subsidize seniors' and students' Grand River Transit passes, eventually transitioning to free transit. To help fund this and other social programs, I would propose slashing the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) budget, raising fees and taxes on massive corporations operating in town (e.g., Walmart, Sobeys, Metro, Zehrs) and luxury and vacant homes.

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

I would introduce a mandatory rent registry and licensing bylaw, which requires landlords to: publicly disclose all their global rental holdings, publicly disclose all their units' monthly rent rates, and pay an annual landlord registration fee, which scales up based on the total number of units they own globally.

Additionally, bylaws which mandate 75% of new-built units must be "affordable," as defined by less 30% of the median gross income.

The eventual goal would be to create a city-owned municipal housing corporation to build and operate non-market housing.

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

Children's Services is the second largest public services expenditure in the Region, after the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS). That seems backward to me.

Expanding funding for existing children's services and would be funded in part at the significant reduction of WRPS funding. Creating city-run (i.e., unionized) and cooperative daycare options would add non-market service capacity.

I'm a fan of the German Kita system, or something similar, where daycare is integrated with Kindergarten (i.e., K-6 schools with daycare) and is completely funded under the public school system umbrella. I don't understand why we only start supporting children at 5 years old; that seems arbitrary and something we can fix - starting with cutting funding for WRPS' newly deployed AI surveillance cameras.

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

Water is a human right and must remain exclusively a public service. I would resist any and all privatization attempts with every tool in my Mayoral toolbelt, including Strong Mayor Powers.

I vehemently dislike Strong Mayor Powers and think they shouldn't exist, but I won't hesitate to use them to ensure food, water, and shelter for every Waterluvian.

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

With the recent passing of Bill 100, the Regional Chair position will now be appointed instead of elected and given veto powers over both regional and city councils. While I'd like to say that the Region should be fighting against privatization of public services, the reality is that the Region has become an extension of the Premier's office and will ultimately do his bidding.

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

Racism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of prejudice plaguing society are all rooted in capitalism. When people have everything they need to thrive, coercive people and structures lose their power to victimize the vulnerable.

Take, for example, women who are victims of domestic violence; the single largest barrier to their ability to escape their situation is financial. The same is true for the ability for people to leave abusive, dangerous, and underpaid jobs. When people don't fear homelessness and starvation, they are better able to stand up for themselves and leave a bad situation.

While abandoning capitalism is not possible, municipal governments can begin the process of de-privatizing public services and ensuring all city workers are unionized. A big part of why companies are able to underpay and even steal from workers (i.e., wage theft) is because the Canadian labour force has been de-unionized from about half of all workers down to less than a third.

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

Although my support for them so far has been primarily financial and word-of-mouth support, I am a big fan of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA). They are in the trenches on many fronts in the fight for our rights.

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

Yes