

23/09/2026 16:34:30
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Mayor of Waterloo

What is your motivation for running for election?

Waterloo has been home since 1997. I was a student here, and have worked at both Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo. I have volunteered across our community, and most recently was the executive director of the Uptown Waterloo Business Improvement Area. I love this city. It has all the ingredients to be the best place to live in Canada, and I believe I can help us reach higher. But I can't do it alone. My entire life has been centred around helping people and building community, and it will take all of us to help Waterloo grow into its full potential. I've been knocking on doors across the city and it's clear that Waterloo residents are concerned about their taxes, affordability, and safety. Residents aren't sure the City is listening. We can change this. My leadership approach is simple: I show up, I listen, and I create solutions by bringing the right people together. I've done this in Uptown, and now I want to do this across the City of Waterloo to help us reach our full potential as the most entrepreneurial, safe and innovative city in Canada.

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

1. Sustainable growth - how do we achieve Vision 1 Million in a fashion that ensures sufficient attention is paid to the availability of housing, sufficient water and related infrastructure, community services and road maintenance and road safety for a regional population of 1 million or more;
2. Affordable housing and shelters for at risk populations;
3. Public transportation and regional connectivity.

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

Sustainable growth - Vision 1 million will solidify our region's standing as one of the 10 largest metropolitan areas in Canada. Let's use that clout to ensure that growth is accompanied by federal and provincial partnerships, and investment, in the services and infrastructure required to make this Region where people want to live and work.

Affordable housing and shelters for at-risk populations - In order to build the vibrant regional economy and cultural environment that many of us envision, we need to address the growing need for affordable housing and shelter spaces across the Region. As Mayor of the City of Waterloo, I'll advocate strongly as a member of Regional Council to our federal and provincial partners for increased funding to address the growing need for both affordable housing and shelter spaces and supportive housing. As it stands, current wait times for residential addiction treatment beds can stretch into months. This is unacceptable for both the individuals struggling with addiction and the community around them. We need to solve this. We need the Province to come to the table and partner with cities to fund and provide enough spaces so our vulnerable residents can access compassionate and effective care quickly. And across the Region, we need to proactively identify and champion shovel-ready projects, and ensure that we speed up approvals and planning for projects geared to address these issues and the individuals it affects. And we must do all of this while balancing the rights of residents to safely access and enjoy public spaces.

Public transportation and regional connectivity - I support the building and implementation of ION Stage 2. Unlocking the full potential of our region, and of the City of Waterloo, means we need our residents and people who work across this region to be able to move effectively from one end to another. Limitations we face with regards to employment lands also necessitate a well connected region. Further, Cambridge residents helped enable Stage 1 of the LRT, and it's time we delivered for them and finished what we started with Stage 2. But we shouldn't just assume the status quo with funding. Infrastructure costs for transit projects in Canada have ballooned and we need to be relentless in ensuring value for money in our construction processes. Since Stage 1 was completed we have a new federal government that wants to build major infrastructure projects quickly. Between this Federal push and the Province's approach to public transportation in cities like Hamilton and Toronto, there's precedent to seek support from these partners to move faster and in a way that limits the impact on taxpayers across our region.

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

I will advocate strongly as a member of Regional Council, and as a champion for affordable housing in our region to the Federal and Provincial governments, to increase funding for a greater number of shelter spaces and ongoing investments in affordable housing. In Waterloo, our growth plans mean we need to build up to 16,000 new homes over the next five years. However, to make this work, and to make it work quickly, leaders across the Region need to be proactive and accountable by identifying shovel-ready projects and working with our local community and developer partners to find innovative solutions to increase the supply of affordable housing options.

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

We need to prioritize the creation of new child care spaces in underserved neighborhoods or "child care deserts" using equity and evidence-based mapping. At the regional and municipal level, we need to be accountable to our residents by collecting data on the evolution of demand across the Region, and work with local partners to obtain Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) funding for these new spaces. For example, in Waterloo we know that the Northdale master plan calls for additional child care spaces. So let's work with community partners to identify locations, prioritize modular approaches that provide immediate or short-term impact, and ensure that CWELCC funding is obtained when appropriate.

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

The passing of Bill 60 by the Government of Ontario raised fears that the Province was seeking to increase private sector delivery and/or ownership of water resources and associated services. And while the subsequent passing of Bill 98 was meant to provide assurances that privatization was not an option, the language of the Bill still enables a form of privatization of an important if not integral public resource. Ontario's experience with the privatization of wastewater services between 1995 and 2000, where less than one-third of water plants were inspected annually, highlights the significant risks of privatization and weak oversight. We cannot and should not allow this to happen again. We do, however, owe

the residents of our region the knowledge that we operate our regional services as, if not more, effectively than our peers. That our water issues were profiled on the front page of the Globe and Mail is evidence that we have not done so to date. Let's change that. I'll advocate that the Region increase the transparency with which we communicate our effectiveness, and will work across Regional Council, across our Region and with Labour and other stakeholders to ensure we have the most effective and efficient public water service.

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

This past year Waterloo Region was on the front page of the Globe and Mail because of the future water issues that surfaced. These weren't new issues. Reports were written as early as 2015 about them. But not enough attention was paid to those challenges, and to how we need to be proactive to address them. And while we may have found short term solutions to these issues, the long-term growth of our Region means we cannot take our eye off the ball in terms of balancing growth and capacity. As we move forward, Regional Council needs to act with transparency, clarity and accountability to ensure we acknowledge what we need to put in place to ensure our growth targets are sustainable and that the service requirements for water and wastewater are planned proactively and realistically. We need to partner with the Province for funding but ownership needs to remain local. And we should communicate regularly on our plans for water capacity and infrastructure improvements and ensure that as per our governance role, that we take our accountability and the need to be transparent seriously.

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

Amongst the primary reasons I'm running for Mayor of the City of Waterloo is that many of our residents, in particular newcomers, feel left out and that they do not belong. With lower incomes and fewer social connections, their integration into our broader community is often slow if not impossible. We need to fix this in order to build healthy communities and economies across our Region.

As someone who emigrated to Canada as a teenager, I remember feeling that I did not belong. But I also remember how community centres, language classes and access to opportunities for self-development helped me integrate with my neighbours.

So moving forward in Waterloo and across our Region, let's ensure that we treat our neighbourhoods with equity and respect. That community services and infrastructure are accessible to all, and that we prioritize building a sense of belonging amongst our increasingly diverse population to ensure Waterloo Region is the best place to live, regardless of how long you may lived here.

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

I am on the Board of Directors of the Working Centre, an exceptional local organization that provides wrap around services for marginalized individuals in our community including the job cafe, transition to workforce programs, and services and supports for newcomers. They help the vulnerable and invest in making our community a better long-term place for everyone here. I could not be more proud of this organization and the work it does. In addition to this role, I am also on the Board of Directors and was previously president of the Lakeshore Village Optimist Club that works to help enrich the lives of children and youth in

our community. Since 2015 I have worked on the Board to identify areas where we can invest in youth and those allies that are helping them. As part of our work we have invested in Adventure4Change, an amazing organization focused on providing support to children, youth and their families. Similarly, we have allocated funding to the House of Friendship and local public schools, all in the name of ensuring that everyone in our community has access to the support, services and opportunities for development that many of us often take for granted.

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

Yes