

Candidate Details

Stephanie Goertz
Mayor of Wilmot

What is your motivation for running for election?

I decided to run because I became increasingly concerned about the direction Wilmot was heading and how some of our biggest decisions were being made.

We are facing major decisions about water, growth, housing, farmland, infrastructure, taxes and the services people rely on. I have spoken with many residents who care deeply about these issues but do not feel their concerns are being heard or reflected in decisions.

I also know what that feels like. I have spent years working with residents and community organizations, researching issues, developing policy recommendations and delegating to municipal councils. Too often, people put hundreds of hours into trying to help solve a problem and leave feeling like their involvement made little difference.

For the past 12 years, much of my work has involved running businesses and community organizations, managing budgets and staff, developing partnerships and bringing people together to solve problems.

I have seen what can happen when governments, businesses, charities, churches, service clubs, volunteers and residents work together instead of working in separate silos.

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

1. Protecting our water, farmland and rural character while planning thoughtfully for growth.
2. Transparent financial planning and stronger accountability
3. Strengthening the community voice at the municipal table

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

1. Protecting our water, farmland and rural character while planning thoughtfully for growth

Our current Council has set the path for significant growth in Wilmot. I am not against growth, but I do not believe it should come at the expense of what makes our Township worth living in. Our farmland, groundwater, wetlands, streams and natural areas are connected, and decisions about development, roads, fill and drainage can affect all of them.

I want to protect farmland from unnecessary loss, strengthen how major land-use changes are considered, and bring information about farmland, groundwater, wetlands and waterways together so Council can understand the bigger picture. I also want to help farmers, landowners, businesses and community groups connect with funding, volunteers and expertise for restoration projects.

For major planning applications with significant potential groundwater impacts, I will advocate for staff reports to include a clear Water Impact Summary before Council votes.

2. Transparent financial planning and stronger accountability

Residents should be able to understand where their tax dollars are going, what major projects are coming and how Council plans to pay for them.

I would propose a Finance and Accountability Committee to review spending, reserves, debt and major capital projects throughout the year, not just at budget time. It could also look for grants, partnerships and other funding options before relying on property taxes.

Before approving a major expense, I want us asking not only, “How much will this cost taxpayers?” but also, “Who else benefits, who could we work with, and is there another way to get it done?” The Region, other governments, service clubs, businesses, community organizations and neighbouring municipalities may share our goals and help us stretch taxpayer dollars further.

3. Strengthening the community voice at the municipal table

I want residents to feel they have a real voice in decisions and know how to use it. Information should be clear enough that people understand what is being proposed, why, what the options are and when they can still influence the outcome.

I want to make it easier for residents to contact Council, submit comments, ask questions and delegate. I would also advocate for more committees and working groups so residents can participate directly in areas where they have knowledge or experience.

I want to hold community visioning sessions in New Hamburg, Baden, New Dundee, St. Agatha, Mannheim, Petersburg and our rural areas. Each community is different, and residents should help identify what they want to protect, what is missing and what they want their community to become.

As Mayor, I would also bring Wilmot’s concerns to the Regional and Provincial levels and help residents understand where decisions are being made and how they can have a voice there too.

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

Wilmot Township does not administer subsidized/community housing—that is primarily the Region’s role, but Wilmot controls land-use planning, local zoning, approvals, some taxes/fees, Township-owned land and partnerships.

We need more housing people can afford, but I do not believe the solution is simply building more of the same housing we already have.

I would support using Regionally and municipally owned land for affordable housing where it makes sense, including partnerships with non-profits, co-operatives and other housing providers. The Region is already using surplus public land for affordable housing and, in some cases, retaining ownership of the land and leasing it for development

In Wilmot, we need to build a mix of housing — smaller homes, townhomes, apartments, secondary units and housing for seniors. I want communities involved in deciding what types

of housing fit their needs while still making sure we are creating opportunities for people of different ages and incomes to live here.

Priorities:

I will advocate to Township-owned land for housing instead of automatically selling it. First create an inventory of Township-owned properties and ask whether any are suitable for housing. Where appropriate, Wilmot could keep ownership of the land and provide a long-term lease to a non-profit, co-op or other affordable-housing provider.

I will advocate to create a faster, clearer process with one place for residents to get help, step-by-step guides, checklists and pre-reviewed plans or templates for common types of secondary units. The goal is to remove unnecessary barriers so existing homeowners can create more rental housing, multigenerational housing or a place for an aging parent without having to navigate the entire process on their own.

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

I will support expanding affordable licensed child care, but I also think we need to recognize the reality of child care in our rural communities.

In places like Wilmot, families do not always have a licensed child-care centre nearby or an available licensed space. Home child-care providers have filled that gap for years. They are also small business owners, often operating directly out of their homes and providing smaller, flexible care arrangements that work well for some families.

The introduction of CWELCC has made licensed child care much more affordable for families, which is positive. But unlicensed home providers are not eligible to participate in CWELCC.

I have already heard from local home child-care providers who are losing children because families understandably choose the lower subsidized fee. At the same time, families are still telling us they cannot find child care.

I do not think the answer should be to allow these small rural child-care businesses to disappear.

I would advocate for more licensed spaces in underserved rural communities, while also bringing unlicensed home providers into the conversation. I want to understand what they need to remain viable, what barriers they face, and whether some would like to become part of the licensed system.

For me, high-quality child care should mean safe, reliable care where children are supported and families have confidence in the person caring for them

Priorities

Child-Care Businesses & Spaces

Child-Care Businesses & Spaces

If elected, I would work with the Wilmot & Wellesley Resource Centre and the Region to create or strengthen a local, opt-in child-care directory where independent home providers can post available spaces and families can find them.

The Township would not endorse or inspect providers, but the list would make it easier for families and local child-care businesses to find each other.

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

I would support keeping our water and wastewater systems publicly owned and publicly operated. I would also speak up if there were efforts to move those services, assets, or decision-making into private hands or into a structure that reduces public accountability.

This is especially important in Wilmot, where we are already dealing with serious questions about groundwater, increased pumping, private wells, growth and future water capacity. I want residents to have access to the data and studies behind those decisions, and I want concerns raised by residents to be taken seriously.

Protecting public water also means protecting the source. We need to look at groundwater recharge, development, water taking, wetlands and future demand together, not as separate issues.

I would oppose any future move toward private ownership or operation of our water and wastewater systems. I also do not believe contracting out should be the default way of delivering these services.

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

Waterloo Region is heavily dependent on groundwater, and the Region is currently planning how to meet increasing water demand as our population grows. It has also confirmed water-capacity constraints.

I want water capacity considered before major growth and development decisions are made. We need to understand what our wells can sustainably provide, protect recharge areas, and look at the cumulative impact of development, water taking, drainage and changes to the landscape.

I am particularly concerned about what happens when additional municipal water is taken from an area where surrounding rural residents depend on private wells.

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

There is an equity issue here. If groundwater is being taken to serve growth in the urban areas, a rural homeowner should not be left carrying the cost if their well is affected. They should not have to spend tens of thousands of dollars drilling a deeper well or finding another water source while the broader municipal system receives the benefit.

I advocate for stronger groundwater monitoring, public access to pumping and monitoring data, protection of recharge areas, and independent reviews.

I am also concerned about the Region acquiring large areas of land for future development without giving enough public attention to how changing that land could affect local groundwater recharge and the surrounding water system. The Wilmot Land Assembly is an example.

Paving farmland, changing drainage, removing vegetation and changing how water moves across a large area can affect where and how water returns to the ground. Before the Region acquires or advances major development sites, I want to see the impacts on groundwater, recharge, nearby wells, wetlands and waterways considered together and clearly shared with the public. We should understand what we may be changing or losing before we commit the land to development.

Transportation: If you do not drive, your options in Wilmot are limited. Route 77 is weekday-only and ends in the early evening. This affects seniors, young people, lower-income residents and anyone who cannot drive or afford a vehicle. I would advocate for evening and weekend transit and better connections to jobs, health care and services.

Housing: Young adults are struggling to afford to stay in Wilmot, while seniors who want to downsize may not find a suitable home nearby. This can mean leaving family, friends and community. I will advocate for more housing choices, including secondary units, smaller homes, townhomes, apartments and seniors' housing.

Health Care: Rural residents often travel farther for care and may have limited transportation. I would work with health organizations, not-for-profits, seniors' groups and residents to identify what is missing. I would review zoning to ensure suitable locations are available for health-care providers and work with partners to help recruit and retain them.

Racial Diversity and Inclusion: I want people to feel welcomed and included. I would bring newcomers, racialized residents, community organizations and existing residents together to identify barriers and practical solutions. I would support a community advisory group or working group to bring those experiences to Council. We should also look at who is represented on our committees and public engagement. If parts of our community are consistently missing, we should ask why and do more to reach them. I would work with the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership to help newcomers connect with community groups, recreation, volunteering and services.

Community Voice: People who understand municipal processes and know how to delegate have an advantage. I want clearer information, more ways to participate, community visioning sessions, committees and working groups, and support for residents who want to bring an issue to Council.

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

From 2021 to 2022, I volunteered with the Wilmot Ecumenical Working Group. I helped with events and communications and advocated to the Township to increase awareness of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

In 2022, I founded Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis. Our work has supported displaced Ukrainians arriving in Waterloo Region, including creating housing and settlement supports and bringing together volunteers, businesses, churches, service clubs, community organizations and governments to help newcomers establish themselves here.

I was also the KW Mompreneurs franchise owner, where I organized workshops, networking opportunities and mentorship for women entrepreneurs. The goal was to help women build their businesses, strengthen their skills and connect with other women facing many of the same challenges

I volunteered with the Waterloo Region Health Coalition, attending meetings and rallies and helping with outreach around publicly funded health care.

My work with Citizens for Safe Ground Water also involved advocating directly to municipal and other levels of government. I researched policies, helped develop recommendations and delegated before councils on issues including water, air, transportation, soil, habitat, noise and dust. Protecting water has remained an important part of my work because clean, publicly accountable water is something every resident depends on.

As Chair of the Food System Roundtable of Waterloo Region, I worked on issues related to food equity, access to local food, and strengthening our local food system. I helped organize community meetings and conferences, researched municipal and provincial policy, wrote reports, recruited volunteers and delegated to municipal councils.

I helped to coordinate 50by30WR, where I helped engage community members, organize events, review municipal policies and bring community concerns to Council.

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

Yes