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Mayor of Kitchener

What is your motivation for running for election?

My motivation for running for Mayor comes from almost a decade of building a life, raising my family and working alongside communities in Kitchener. As a single mother and a newcomer, I have personally navigated many of the systems that residents depend on. I know what it means to find your way through unfamiliar institutions, search for support, raise a family and build a network when you do not already have one.

Over the years, I have worked with newcomer, Muslim, racialized and other communities across Kitchener-Waterloo. Through my work and collaboration with organizations such as Family and Children's Services and the Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener-Waterloo, I have helped build support networks, connect people with services, strengthen community participation and bring voices that are often missing into important conversations.

My local experience is strengthened by my international work. Born and raised in Afghanistan, I began community work at a young age, later studied international human rights law, and have spent years working on women's rights, peacebuilding and community leadership. That experience taught me that human rights are not abstract principles. They are reflected in whether a person can afford a home, access services, feel safe, participate in decisions and live with dignity.

I am running because I know Kitchener from several perspectives: as a mother raising a family, a newcomer navigating systems, a community organizer building networks, and a human rights and peacebuilding professional.

I want to bring these experiences to City Hall and help build a city where leadership begins with listening, where people have a meaningful voice in decisions,

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

Affordability and Housing: Expand affordable, community and supportive housing; preserve existing affordable units; strengthen homelessness prevention and rent supports.

Homelessness, Mental Health and Community Wellbeing: Move beyond temporary responses to homelessness by investing in prevention, transitional/supportive housing, mental health, addiction services and pathways to long-term stability.

Accessible Public Services, Transit and Inclusive Regional Government: Improve affordable and reliable transit, make Regional services easier to navigate, and ensure newcomer, racialized, low-income, senior, youth and marginalized communities have a meaningful voice in Regional decisions.

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

Affordability and Housing: My vision is a Region where people are not forced to choose between paying rent, buying groceries and meeting other basic needs. I want us to treat housing as essential community infrastructure by expanding deeply affordable, community and supportive housing, preserving existing affordable homes, preventing homelessness

before it happens, and working with municipalities and other levels of government to increase housing options for different incomes and stages of life.

Homelessness, Mental Health and Community Wellbeing: My vision is to move from managing homelessness to preventing and reducing it. That means combining permanent and transitional housing with accessible mental-health, addiction, health and income supports. We need a coordinated approach that treats people with dignity while also responding to residents' concerns about safety and the use of shared public spaces.

Accessible Public Services, Transit and Inclusive Regional Government: My vision is a Region where services are designed around people rather than expecting people to navigate complicated systems on their own. Public transit should be affordable, reliable and connect people to jobs, education, health care and essential services. Regional government should also actively remove barriers to participation so that newcomers, racialized communities, seniors, youth, people with disabilities and low-income residents have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them.

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

I would focus on practical measures that create and preserve genuinely affordable housing:

1. Use Regional land for affordable housing by identifying surplus or underused publicly owned properties that can support community, supportive and mixed-income housing.
2. Expand partnerships with non-profit and co-operative housing providers, including providing land, capital support and incentives to increase the number of permanently affordable units.
3. Protect the affordable housing we already have by supporting acquisition and preservation programs that allow non-profits to purchase rental properties at risk of being lost to higher rents or redevelopment.
4. Prioritize deeply affordable and supportive housing, not simply housing labelled "affordable" but still beyond the reach of low-income residents, people receiving OW or ODSP, seniors and others with fixed incomes.
5. Strengthen homelessness prevention and rent-support programs so people are not losing their housing while waiting for new affordable units to be built.
6. Work with Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and the townships to accelerate approvals for affordable and supportive housing projects and reduce unnecessary delays between funding, approval and construction.
7. Aggressively pursue provincial and federal housing funding and advocate for Waterloo Region to receive funding that reflects our population growth and housing pressures.
8. Set measurable targets and publicly report progress, including how many affordable units are created, preserved and lost each year, at what level of affordability, and how quickly approved projects are actually being delivered.

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

As a mother who has personally navigated child care while working and building a life in this community, I see child care as essential infrastructure for families and our local economy. My plan would focus on:

- Expanding licensed child care spaces, particularly in neighbourhoods with long waitlists and growing numbers of young families.
- Prioritizing affordable non-profit and community-based child care and using available federal and provincial funding to increase spaces under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system.
- Addressing the early childhood educator workforce shortage by advocating for better recruitment, retention, compensation and working conditions. We cannot create spaces without qualified people to staff them.
- Use Regional facilities and partnerships creatively, including working with municipalities, schools, community organizations and housing providers to identify suitable locations for new child care spaces.
- Improve access for families facing additional barriers, including low-income families, newcomers, shift workers, single-parent households and families with children with disabilities or additional needs.
- Make the system easier to navigate, with clearer information about available spaces, subsidies, eligibility and waitlists, so parents do not have to navigate a maze simply to find care.

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

I support keeping drinking water and wastewater services publicly owned, publicly accountable and operated in the public interest. Safe water is an essential public service, not a commodity.

I would oppose privatization or arrangements that reduce public ownership, transparency or accountability. Private-sector expertise can be used for specific projects where appropriate, but decisions about our water infrastructure, service standards, long-term planning and rates must remain under strong public control.

At Regional Council, I would prioritize protecting our water systems, investing in resilient infrastructure, maintaining high safety and environmental standards, and ensuring that residents are not exposed to higher costs or reduced accountability through privatization.

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

The Region should be a strong steward of publicly owned water and wastewater services. Its role should include:

- Keeping water and wastewater infrastructure publicly owned and accountable, and opposing privatization that weakens public control.
- investing consistently in infrastructure renewal and climate resilience** to protect the long-term reliability and safety of our water systems.
- Maintaining strong water-quality, environmental and safety standards, with transparent public reporting.
- Protecting affordability, ensuring decisions about water rates are based on providing reliable public service rather than generating private profit.
- Planning for population growth so water and wastewater capacity keeps pace with new housing and development.

- Advocating to the Province for municipal authority and sustainable infrastructure funding to protect these essential public assets for future generations.

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

The most significant inequities I see are income and housing inequality, unequal access to services and opportunities, and systemic barriers experienced by racialized communities, newcomers, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, women and other marginalized residents. These inequities are interconnected. When someone cannot afford stable housing, access transportation or child care, find culturally appropriate services, or participate meaningfully in decision-making, their opportunities become increasingly limited.

Having spent almost a decade working with newcomer, racialized and marginalized communities in Waterloo Region, I have seen how difficult systems can be to navigate, particularly for people facing language, financial or cultural barriers.

I would address these inequities by applying an equity lens to Regional budgets, policies and services; expanding affordable housing, transit and child care; improving access to culturally responsive services; strengthening partnerships with community organizations already trusted by underserved populations; improving accessibility for people with disabilities; and ensuring affected communities are involved in designing policies rather than consulted only after decisions have been made.

Equity also requires accountability. I would support measurable equity goals and public reporting so we can see who is benefiting from Regional investments, where gaps remain, and whether our policies are actually improving people's lives.

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

For nearly a decade in Waterloo Region, I have worked directly with organizations and communities addressing systemic discrimination, gender inequality, racism, hate and barriers facing newcomers and racialized communities.

I have worked closely with the Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener-Waterloo, including initiatives supporting Muslim women and girls, addressing gender-based violence, racism and Islamophobia, and strengthening access to rights and community services. Through the Centre for Mutual Wellbeing, I have supported community-based work on anti-hate initiatives, civic participation and access to justice, including rights-awareness work that engaged hundreds of young Muslim women.

I have also collaborated with Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region, particularly around supporting families and communities that face barriers in navigating institutions and accessing services.

Through the Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO) Canada, which I founded, my work has focused on women's rights, peacebuilding and women's leadership, particularly Afghan women and girls whose fundamental rights have been systematically restricted. My international human rights and peacebuilding work has consistently centered women whose

voices are excluded from formal decision-making. I continue to work with over a 100 newcomer families in Waterloo Region.

Locally, I have also worked with newcomer and racialized communities to build informal support networks, connect people with services, increase legal and civic awareness, and create spaces where communities can speak directly about discrimination and barriers they experience.

My approach has always been to work with communities rather than speak for them, and to connect lived experiences with institutions, services and decision-makers capable of creating systemic change.

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

Yes