

# Solution: Home Sharing in Waterloo Region

Developed by: Susan Grant, David Guerin, Allison Henshall

## PROBLEM

### Introduction

Waterloo Region is facing an unprecedented rise in house prices and home rental costs, driven largely to a lack of available supply. [The Kitchener Waterloo Housing Market Outlook \(2022\)](#) report indicated the average price for a single-detached home grew by 26.8% between 2019 and 2020 (to \$912,690). Meanwhile, prices for townhomes are up 32.3% (to \$620,587) and condominiums are up 10.8% (to \$440,022) during the same period.

Further aggravating the situation are delays in new home construction, particularly the building of new non-market housing units (designated for low-income individuals and families). Building new homes is embedded within the Current City of Waterloo's Housing Goals, Objectives and Policies found within the [Affordable Housing Strategy](#). But these solutions are expensive and will take an extended time to have an impact. In addition, the lack of available land in our urban centres often results in non-market housing projects being in less-than-ideal areas without easy access to transit or necessary community services.

This lack of available and affordable housing impacts a wide spectrum of people, from those on government assistance to working professionals wishing to be a part of Waterloo Region's thriving technology sector. The opportunity cost of not resolving this situation is significant to the growth and development of our Region. If people cannot find a place to live or afford anything that is available, they will take their talents and tax dollars elsewhere. Those forced out of their existing homes for economic reasons may ultimately increase problems of homelessness and the need for social assistance.

We believe the Region should examine strategies to increase population density in under-utilized spaces, particularly those close to transit, shopping, and community services. This broader strategy could include:

- Re-zoning and renovation of existing unused properties that might be suitable for accommodations, such as churches, schools, commercial and industrial properties
- Encouraging new entrants in the marketplace to consider purchasing homes together with another individual or family
- Facilitating the renovation of existing homes to create apartments with a unique entrance to be rented to others
- Allowing the building of "tiny homes" in backyards or available space
- Enhancing and expanding the existing Home sharing programs in the region

This report will focus on Home Sharing, in particular, to enhance, promote and expand existing home share programs, which we believe would be both the most economical and quickest solution to implement.

### Why Home Sharing?

Our Region, like the rest of Canada, faces an aging population. Senior citizens over the age of 65 years old are predicted to make up an increasingly large percentage of our population in the years to come. Many, but not all, of those individuals are living independently in a home whose size may exceed their everyday needs. [A Report by the Canadian Centre for Economic](#)

[Analysis](#) estimates that over half of the population of Ontario is “over housed” with over 5 million empty bedrooms in Ontario alone.

If a system could be developed that would allow those with available space in their existing home to safely share space (including a kitchen and bathrooms) with another individual or family, it would have numerous benefits for both the home provider, the home seeker, and the community at large (which will be discussed in more detail later in this report).

## **Problem Drivers**

There are many factors contributing to our housing shortage problem. This is a brief summary of **the Housing story by numbers** reported in the April 2022 City of Waterloo’s [Affordable Housing Strategy](#):

Since 2015, Ontario’s population has **grown by over a million residents**—driving an increased demand for both ownership and rental housing:

- Affordable housing is defined as when a household can still pay for their basic needs after their housing expenses are paid – and that housing cost is **no more than 30% of a housing income**, yet over the past 10 years average house prices have climbed +180% while average incomes have grown +38%
- We are losing our affordable supply of housing with an **average 4% rent increase in 2019** (guidelines indicate increases should not exceed 2.2%) and wages are not keeping up with the rising costs of living
- **‘New’ asking rents are 43% higher as compared to the rent of an occupied unit rent** – if you pay \$1,000/month rent, your new neighbour may need to pay \$1,430 for the same size apartment.
- We have a long waitlist for affordable housing with approximately **6,919 households applying for community housing units**, and 3,267 have identified the City of Waterloo as their preferred location
- The supply of affordable housing is not keeping up with the demand as reported in both [Housing need and demand](#) report and the [Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan](#)

We need to consider short and long-term solutions. How can we ensure adequate housing for all?

## **Actors**

Home Seekers:

- Students wanting to move to the Waterloo region to attend university or college
- Health care workers, teachers or professionals in the tech industry that have been hired in this region and are unable to find affordable housing (or housing at all)
- New immigrants to the region looking to find short or long-term housing options
- Citizens who have experienced a traumatic experience such as a home fire or people/families that are in a domestic violence crisis, need to find new and safe shelter
- Citizens who have fallen on hard times and are unable to afford the cost of utility, rent and food costs. How can they stay in their homes if bills keep rising?

Home Providers:

- Homeowners not wanting to downsize and have space to share
- Homeowners who would benefit from extra income or help around the house.

Third Parties:

- Housing advocates and local community groups to advertise and potentially administer a home sharing program.

- Province of Ontario/Region of Waterloo/local Municipalities to set rules and regulations and potentially be able to provide funding/grants

## **Barriers to Solving the Problem**

Concerns over safety and potentially negative consequences for someone willing to share their living space with an unknown person.

- The current [Application for Community Housing](#) for the Region of Waterloo does not include an option of 'shared accommodation' selection within section 6 of the application. How can the Region assess the interest and demand of sharing as a short or long-term solution to affordable housing?
- Despite the fact that there are many references to home sharing in pop culture (such as TV sitcoms like [The Odd Couple](#), [The Golden Girls](#), [Hot in Cleveland](#), and [Friends](#)), our culture does not typically see home sharing as a viable option for most. Can we continue to socialize the value of sharing accommodations within our community?
- Determining incentives, such as a reduction of City Taxes, for Home Providers

## **Places to Intervene**

- Look at bylaws that inform people of rules associated with single-family homes
- Look at real estate agents to market housing stock to co-ownership
- Housing prices are continuing to rise and so people are using homes as a source of investment and so the house is accruing value even if left empty.
- Where and how do seniors downsize and use the equity in their homes?
- How do we advertise for home providers?
- Incentives on taxes
- Rules associated with vacant homes

## **PROPOSED SOLUTION**

Home Sharing is a short or long-term solution to connect those who would benefit from home sharing across different types of housing and housing needs at different stages of life. We consider home sharing to be offering space in a house (including a shared kitchen and bathrooms) for lower than market rent or even in exchange for services such as maintenance or buying groceries.

We envision a large-scale home share program that would match those who have space with those who need space. A database of properties that have been inspected and are owned by those wanting to offer a home space would be available to staff to be able to match applicants with homeowners. Applicants would fill out the Housing application on the Region of Waterloo's website but would check off an option stating they are willing to home share. This application would then be sent to a third-party not-for-profit organization to screen and match the applicant with a homeowner from the database. Information in the database would consist of:

- What type of housing is being offered (Single family, townhouse, or apartment)?
- Who the homeowner would like to share with (older person, family etc.)?
- Is the home compliant with all building and fire code requirements?
- Is the home suitable for a person who requires an accessible space?
- Basic information about the homeowner?

The not-for-profit staff would be responsible for interviewing and screening the applicant and selecting the best possible match. They would facilitate a meeting between the two parties to determine compatibility and would follow up with the applicant and homeowner over time to

ensure sharing a home is running smoothly. They would be able to provide mediation services to resolve minor conflicts and services to help merge and maintain more than one household in the space.

A very specific set of rules or guidelines would have to be developed and agreed upon by both parties. These rules would need to outline:

- Who is responsible for what around the house – who is cooking, buying food, cutting grass, etc.?
- Amount of payment or what is being provided in exchange for living in the home?
- What happens to the home seeker if the home provider has a change of circumstance (such as an injury/illness, the need to go into long-term care, or passes away)?
- Consequences of breaking agreed-upon rules.

A criminal records check would need to be obtained to ensure the suitability of the match, and we need to consider where we could house an applicant who cannot be matched and also where we would house someone who needed to leave a home for any reason.

While there is more than one type of home sharing (intergenerational, buying together, etc.), we chose to focus on helping those who need a place to live right now. They should be able to apply, participate in the screening, meet potential matches and move into a new safe space.

## **Persona**

Peter is a retired teacher and once travelled the world, however, a genetic disease has impacted his sight and he has been legally blind for many years. He divorced over 20 years ago and his one daughter lives in a different city. She has a new baby and doesn't really have the time to keep checking in on him and although they have a close relationship, she cannot afford to help her Dad and his savings are running low. When Peter originally moved into his current apartment in a house he thought it was fairly priced yet over the years the condition of his apartment has been deteriorating. He recently was told that the rent was increasing – this is beyond what Peter can afford.

The affordable housing situation is affecting Peter personally. He needs to find housing that is safe, in good condition and affordable and is willing to share with someone if it is mutually beneficial. Sharing the rent would allow Peter to pay for his basic needs and to have income left to visit his grandchild and reduce his stress of running out of money and possibly not having a place to live. He said that having the peace of mind of an affordable place to live 'would give him a better outlook for the future.'

Peter doesn't want to be a burden to anyone and he doesn't want a housemate to feel they would be obligated to care for him if they shared space. Finding the right person who won't take advantage of his blindness is an important consideration.

Miguel is a retired widower. He is not ready to downsize and give up the memories of his family home. His adult children live elsewhere and he only sees the occasionally. He is lonely and finds the upkeep around the house to be a bit challenging on his own. Miguel's family wants to help him and heard that there is a successful home sharing program within the Region. Miguel is able to connect with the not-for-profit organization to express his interest in opening up his home and is eventually matched with Peter. The two men may have some challenges to overcome at first, but with the support and guidance of the program staff they are soon doing well and enjoying the companionship and may even be ready to add another person to the home.

## Solution Details

To assess the needs and interest in home sharing as an option, we propose adding 'shared accommodation' as a type of accommodation within the [Application for Community Housing](#) for the region of Waterloo. Currently, under section 6, applicants are asked if they prefer a townhouse, apartment, or no preference. We propose to add to the form a section to indicate that the applicant would be open to sharing accommodation. See Table 2.

**Table 2** Proposed section within the Application for Community Housing where shared accommodation could be added

 Shared accommodation' at the bottom." data-bbox="121 252 592 497"/>

The image shows a screenshot of the 'Application for Community Housing' form from the Waterloo Region. The form is titled 'APPLICATION FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING' and 'WATERLOO REGION'. It is specifically 'SECTION 6 - ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS'. The form includes several sections with checkboxes:

- How many bedrooms do you need?  Bachelor  1  2  3  4  5
- Which locations do you prefer? (Please check all that apply)
- Cities:  Cambridge  Kitchener  Waterloo
- Townships:  North Dumfries (Ayr)  Wilmot (New Dundee, New Hamburg)  Woolwich (Elmira)  Wellesley (St. Clements, Wellesley)
- If you are 60 years of age or older, do you prefer senior housing sites only?  Yes  No
- What type of accommodation do you prefer:  Townhouse (2+ Beds)  Apartment  No Preference

At the bottom of the form, there is a section labeled 'Add a section:' with a checked checkbox and the text 'Shared accommodation'.

Those who select shared accommodation would be reviewed for the Home Sharing Program. Although the City of Waterloo would determine the interest in shared accommodation through the housing application form, the Home Share program would be run by a 3rd party Non-Profit such as Community Justice Initiatives ([CJI](#)), with the municipality funding the program. In speaking with representatives from CJI, they believe they could run the program for approximately \$50,000/year. Regional government could look for opportunities to incentivize the program to increase home provider participation.

Currently, [Community Justice Initiative's Waterloo Region Home Share program](#) offers a free supportive process for Home Providers and Home Seekers in their search for a compatible individual with whom to share a home, and to assist them in completing a Living Arrangement Memorandum of Understanding. A big focus for CJI is the creation of a "Memorandum of Understanding" between the people sharing the home. They define Home Share as a housing style where two or more people, usually unrelated, chose to share a home. The recent passing of [Bill 69, the "Golden Girls" Act](#) will help support the legal implications of Co-Housing/Home Sharing. Although the bill is aimed specifically at seniors, the bill will support affordable housing solutions for all ages and stages of life.

A high-level Overview of CJI's process includes:

1. Initial conversation/intake and Interview with both sides. They want to ensure a safe situation for all involved. Safety is number one and understanding the level of needs and mutual understanding with questions such as:
  - o Boundaries
  - o Expectations
  - o Upkeep - who will be doing it?
  - o Expenses - how will they be split?
  - o Smoker/Non-smoker

- Pets; Children
- What would transition / termination look like? Help them plan to part in a healthy way.
2. Get police checks and/or reference checks (CIJ can do the checks or people can fill out forms).
3. Once the decision is made to move forward, CJI sends participants to arrange insurance and get legal coverage.
4. Work on a Memorandum of Understanding with the clients.
5. Always the participant's choice to proceed or not.
6. If issues arise, CIJ offers Mediation services and continued care. Their mediators help people manage natural conflicts that arise when living with others.

### **Intended outcomes- what do we hope that the solution will achieve?**

Benefits of Home Share include:

- Minimal cost compared to other solutions
- Environmentally friendly
- Minimal wait-time (no need to build a new building)
- Supporting the community that we all want to live in.
- Another benefit of using a non-profit like CJI is their expertise in Conflict Resolution, which is a key component for the success of getting anyone to live together.
- Provides extra income or savings on expenses
- Sharing of home responsibilities such as chores, yard work, cooking
- Reduces loneliness- the issue of social isolation is on the rise - [The loneliness pandemic](#) | Harvard Magazine
- Can stay in your home and remain in your community while welcoming someone to share your home

### **Unintended consequences**

- Storage solutions and the service of a professional organizer or de-clutterer
- Increasing density could increase the need for resources (medical, etc.) and could potentially become a drain on these resources
- Romantic relationships
- Strain on relationships or conflict between home sharer and any adult children who do not support the idea
- Danger of one party being taken advantage of
- -Increasing the number of occupants in a home could create parking issues and increase the output of garbage and other refuse
- Upkeep of the house could increase or decrease - are all the home sharers pulling their weight?
- Could create more vacancies throughout neighbourhoods as people begin to share homes.
- Could contribute to better health, learning about and gaining new interests

A few organizations in the Region of Waterloo who have programs associated with Home Share:

- CJI: [Elder Mediation Services | Community Justice Initiatives \(cjiwr.com\)](#)
- Reception House Waterloo Region: [Afghan Resettlement in Waterloo Region - Immigration Waterloo Region](#)
- Multicultural Centre: [Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre \(kwmulticultural.ca\)](#)
- Extend a Family, Waterloo Region: [Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region \(eafwr.on.ca\)](#)

## **Who We Spoke To**

- Julie Friesen, Community Justice Initiatives
- Wendy Meek, Community Justice Initiatives
- Sharon Livingstone, Interim Chairperson Cambridge Shelter Corporation, Chair Cambridge Council on Aging

Speaking to Julie, Wendy, and Sharon made us believe in this solution even more so. We really love their concept of walking alongside individuals who are matched to together throughout their home share journey. We learned more about the different types of home sharing such as intergenerational home sharing, the legalities that revolve around opening your home or buying together and different funding options. Our aha moment came when we learned that a large-scale home sharing matching program would be better run through a third-party not-for-profit organization such as CJI which have the skills and experience to screen and match applicants and also to follow up with ongoing support.

- Michelle Lee, City of Waterloo Senior Policy Planner
- Jim Bowman, City of Waterloo Director of Community Programming and Outreach Services

Michelle and Jim were instrumental in pointing us in the right direction. From Michelle, we learned that Cities are exploring home sharing as a viable option for an Affordable Housing Strategy. Jim discussed how a program would work and who would be the best organization to facilitate it.

- Joe Mancini, The Working Centre

Joe was one of our first conversations. From him, we learned so much about some of the options that are out there for new Canadians and lower-income families. From that information, we were able to pinpoint a solution that we felt would be a good option for people across the housing spectrum.

## **Projected/Anticipated Partners**

We envision the Region of Waterloo adding an option to their housing application that would indicate whether someone was interested in home sharing. They then partner with an organization such as Community Justice Initiatives which would take responsibility for screening applications and hosts and finding suitable matches.

The matching organization would be able to use existing partnerships and resources such as counsellors to help matches work together to live in harmony.

We would like to partner with an organization that would be able to provide services to help de-clutter and organize when merging two households together.

## Lessons Learned

- Several community organizations and programs across North America are already exploring or successfully operating home sharing programs. We need to find a way to make it more mainstream.
- Need to find a way for these organizations to come together and collaborate with each other to make home sharing a strong viable option.
- There is no one solution to tackle all levels of the housing continuum
- Does the Memorandum of Understanding protect the Home Provider's estate? What happens in the event of an emergency, health crisis, hospitalization, or death? They said it can be included.
- Does CJI provide any input/rules into Rent? No. However, they can facilitate negotiations around what chores/duties/etc. could reduce the amount of rent to be paid.
- How deep a dive does CJI do in terms of a person's drug or alcohol use? Extensive.
- Law Society of Upper Canada has provided templates to lawyers for anyone considering a home share agreement
- If you share a kitchen and bathrooms, you do not fall under the purview of the Residential Tenancies Act.
- Depending on the Municipality, a license or permit may be required to offer home sharing in your house

## Other Resources/Sources

- The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2022-2026 Corporate Plan: [2022-2026 Summary of the Corporate Plan \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/2022-2026-summary-of-the-corporate-plan)
- [The loneliness pandemic | Harvard Magazine](https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/04/the-loneliness-pandemic)
- [Property Prices in Canada | Canadian Real Estate Prices \(globalpropertyguide.com\)](https://www.globalpropertyguide.com/canada/property-prices)
- <https://cohousing.ca/>
- [WR Housing Action Plan \(regionofwaterloo.ca\)](https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/housing-action-plan)
- Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan [Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan - Region of Waterloo](https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/housing-master-plan)
- [Community Housing and Access - FACT SHEET \(regionofwaterloo.ca\)](https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/housing-access)
- Affordable Housing Strategy. Retrieved from <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/livinghere/resources/Documents/Housing/Affordable-Housing-Strategy-2014-2019-access.pdf>

## Existing and/or Alternative Solutions

### [Canada HomeShare](#)

[NESTERLY](#) - In Boston, Nesterly has developed an innovative solution that tackles two big housing affordability challenges with one solution, connecting senior households and students. Students are looking for affordable places to live while they are going to school in the Boston area and senior households have homes and space but need additional income to live and pay their expenses. Nesterly provides an electronic platform that matches the students with the senior citizens, and the added benefits are often companionship for the seniors and friendly support for the students.

University of Western Ontario – Music students live rent-free in a London Retirement Home. The student live-in program requires 10 -12 volunteer hours per week practicing music or vocals through recitals in common areas. The program is modelled after one in Cleveland Ohio and has been described as a win-win for seniors and students. Students gain valuable mentorship from their elderly neighbours and seniors love hearing the music and companionship.

McMaster University – Symbiosis 2.0 is a program that connects students with seniors for a living arrangement that is mutually beneficial. The concept is to connect students who need low-income housing to seniors who have a spare room. Seniors benefit from help around the house, international students utilizing the program can benefit from being able to practice conversational English and both parties benefit from a sense of community and reduced isolation.

Intentional Community of strangers ages 39-78 purchased a house together in Winnipeg Manitoba. Residents share chores, food and downtime together. The group formed a co-op which owns the house. Those who want to join the co-housing community buy shares in the co-op. Benefits reported are having people around you as you age, combatting seclusion and sharing experiences. The co-op members are looking for others to buy in and continue to grow the community.

Ohio Shared Living provides an option for someone with a developmental disability to get the support they need while living with a paid caregiver. Caregivers are paid to provide hands-on care and supportive services. Caregivers provide or help to coordinate the services outlined in a person's service plan. That can include things such as cooking meals, providing transportation, and planning activities during the day. Caregivers may also aid with personal care, supervision, housekeeping, and involvement in community activities.