

Solution: Time is Now, Community Advocacy Network

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Introduction

While learning about affordable housing, some key points were identified:

- The majority of the new projects being developed in the region do not include affordable housing units.
- Vacant land is limited and not readily available for purchase. In most instances land has been purchased by developers decades in advance. This makes it extremely difficult for organizations who want to provide affordable housing units to acquire land through normal market channels.
- The Region of Waterloo is experiencing growth at an alarming rate. According to StatsCan data from 2020, Waterloo Region has the fastest growing population in Canada.
- Affordable Housing initiatives have always been Provincially and Federally funded. Leaving communities dependent on unpredictable allocations.

Who We Spoke To

- Ryan Pettipiere – Region of Waterloo - Director of Housing Services
- Karen Cooper – City of Kitchener
- Julieta Perucca – TheShift
- Jeffrey Schumacher – Region of Waterloo - Supervisor, Housing Supply Initiatives
- Shawn Campbell - Union Co-op

What We Learned

- Over the last 10 years rents for one- and two-bedroom units have increased twice as fast as inflation: 37% vs 17%.
- In 2018 8.8% of those with below average income could not pay their mortgage or rent on time at least once per year.
- Over the past 20 years in the Greater Toronto Area, housing prices have increased at three times the rate of income.
- Real Estate Investment Trusts make up to 300 Billion Dollars a year and are a major contributor to gentrification in our cities. There simply is no effective regulation in place to control this massive industry. The other significant contributor to the skyrocketing cost of owning or renting a home is individual or private investors. As new condominiums become available for sale, the vast majority of the units are purchased by investors that

NANOS POLL:

CANADIANS SUPPORT URGENT END TO HOMELESSNESS

72% of Canadians believe it is **urgent** to work to end homelessness in Canada
(score of 7-10 out of 10)

36% of Canadians **have been homeless** themselves or know someone who has been homeless

84% of Canadians **support or somewhat support** investing in building new affordable housing to stimulate the economy and help end homelessness in Canada

21% of Canadians know a friend/acquaintance who has been homeless

10% of Canadians know a family member who has been homeless

5% of Canadians report they have been homeless themselves



16% of Canadians are **worried or somewhat worried** about paying their housing costs next month
One in four renters are **worried** about making rent next month

 NANOS

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness commissioned Nanos Research to do this poll. The poll was conducted from July 26 to 30, surveying 1,014 people over 18 years old—accurate to 3.0 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

 RECOVERY FOR ALL

do not even reside in Waterloo Region. These investors then ‘flip’ the units to make a quick profit, or they rent the units to tenants to cover the cost of their investment. There is very little opportunity for residents of Waterloo Region to purchase one of these condominiums until after the prices are driven up 20, 30, or even 40 percent above the prices that they were initially offered.

- A condominium project currently underway in downtown Kitchener had a temporary sales office on the property prior to construction. Shortly after the sales office opened, we spoke with a sales person about pricing and availability. Amazingly, it was learned that *over 80% of the units were sold through an office in Toronto* prior to the opening of the sales office in Kitchener.
- Existing affordable housing solutions, in most cases, are not sustainable. Lease agreements often come with expiry dates that range from ten to twenty-five years. Once these agreements expire, the tenants can be removed to allow for renovations, resulting in significant rent increases, which means the units are no longer affordable and thus reducing the supply of affordable housing units exponentially.
- There are many different groups and organizations working on housing all along the affordable housing continuum but not always with a unified approach.

Challenges

People think this “is already being done” but this mentality lacks accountability and does not take a stand against human rights violations. During our research, we received direct feedback that although each municipal government in Waterloo Region is doing something to address the crisis, there is little coordination of effort between them and any opportunity to collaborate for greater effect is being lost.

Waterloo Region has a complicated governance structure with many layers – THREE SEPARATE CITIES, 4 TOWNSHIPS AND ONE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT. These layers increase duplication of effort and because each entity is focused on their own interests, this decreases the opportunities realized through collaborative efforts.

What is Missing

The area that encompasses Waterloo region is missing a unified approach to ending homelessness, providing affordable renting options and certainly affordable home ownership. There are many great things being done by great people, but in most cases, in separate ‘silos’. So, what is missing? The major missing component is a place (land) for people and organizations to put their wonderful ideas into action.

The Region has land and the ability to acquire more land. How do we ensure that the Region uses this valuable resource to help end homelessness?

Proposed Solution

Due to the inherent challenges of regulating the 300-billion-dollar real estate industry, we decided to adopt a change in mentality and assist Waterloo Region in developing a clear vision to uphold the human right to housing. If we can successfully encourage the Regional Municipality of Waterloo to take a unified approach to the preservation of land, while utilizing more socially conscious developers, such as co-op unions, Waterloo Region can become a national or even international example for addressing the affordable housing crisis.

Getting the Region of Waterloo's 3 cities and 4 townships to take on a more unified approach and come together at the same 'table' to proclaim the Waterloo Region Land Declaration (WRLD).

Scope

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo (Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Wellesley, Wilmot, North Dumfries and Woolwich) prides itself on being an innovator in municipal governance (Eg - Blue Box program, Communitech). We believe Waterloo Region is a place to start the movement and become a testing ground and a model for Canada and beyond.

We want the Region of Waterloo to recognize and address the role that the commoditization of housing has played in creating homelessness, the rise in informal settlements, unaffordability, and the current precarious nature of housing within the Region.

Through our learning, we viewed "PUSH – The Film". (www.pushthefilm.com) PUSH focused on the need for a worldwide movement to reclaim the fundamental human right to housing. PUSH became our motivation and spawned OUR realization that any effective solution to the housing crisis must include governments taking greater control over real estate development and affordable housing initiatives in their jurisdictions.

Our group started with thoughts surrounding enhanced regulation of the housing market, but we quickly came to the realization that regulation exists, but it is highly ineffective and when applied in isolation of other efforts, will not address the crisis. We determined that what was needed was a set of guiding principles focused on managing the acquisition, development and conservation of government owned, undeveloped and vacant lands.

The WRLD would request an immediate cease in the sale of any lands owned by the Region of Waterloo, unless the funds gained by the sale were used to purchase more suitable land for affordable housing projects. Further, any development of lands owned by the Region of Waterloo must be viewed through the lens of the WRLD and used for affordable housing initiatives. The WRLD would ensure that the Region investigates the possibility of purchasing any public lands offered for sale which will ensure the availability of land for future affordable housing needs.

There is a need for a unified approach to the affordable housing crisis that can be overcome in the Region of Waterloo by asking the 3 cities and 4 townships to come together. Actions are required immediately and we would propose a delegation to a Regional Committee, with the help of community organizations, to facilitate a strategy to overcome the finite availability of land and create a clear set of regulations going forward. (WRLD)

The WRLD would then be proposed through a Delegation to a Regional Committee or at a Council Meeting.

Intended Outcomes

To have the Region of Waterloo's cities and townships come together and work as one cohesive unit, aimed at eliminating homelessness.

The Waterloo Region Land Declaration (WRLD) would have a layered effect on the Housing Continuum. The primary or short-term effect of the WRLD would include Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Social Housing, Affordable Rental Housing and Affordable Home Ownership. The secondary or long-term effect of the WRLD would include the Homeless, Market Rental Housing and Market Home Ownership components of the continuum. The reality is that the WRLD would eventually have an effect on the Housing Continuum in its entirety.

The Housing Continuum



The purpose of the declaration will be to maintain and protect land resources by forming a greater collaboration with municipalities to ensure a supply of housing cohesive with the housing continuum and work with socially conscious builders. The ROW has the ability to be one of the first Regions in Canada to acknowledge the violations on human rights and set the standard for how this Nation will be successful in overcoming the challenges of the housing crisis and maintain our reputation for innovation.

Other Resources

- Waterloo Region - Community Well Being Survey
- CAEH - The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
- CTV News Dec 10, 2020
- KitchenerToday Oct 28, 2020
- TheShift.ca
- Push - The documentary

Suggested Partners

- TheShift
- The Housing Innovation Roundtable (HIRT)
- Social Innovation Lab
- Conestoga College Affordable Housing Grant Research Project
- Socially conscious property managers such as Union: Sustainable Development Co-operative