Regional Municipality of Waterloo

2022 Plan and Budget Public Input Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 8, 2021
6:00 p.m.
This meeting was held electronically
150 Frederick Street, Kitchener, Ontario


Members absent: G. Lorentz

Land Acknowledgement

Chair Jowett provided a Land Acknowledgement.

Roll Call

The Regional Clerk conducted the Roll Call.

Declarations of Pecuniary Interest under the “Municipal Conflict of Interest Act”

None declared.

Delegations

1. Judah Oudshoorn, Kitchener

   J. Oudshoorn provided a presentation asking that the proposed police budget increase be denied and to reallocate those funds to affordable housing, the establishment of an Indigenous community hub, mental health supports and creating a police-free community care model. A copy is attached to the original minutes.

2. Kelly Smith, President, FRIENDS of Waterloo Region Museum

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K. Smith appeared in support of continued financial stewardship with the Waterloo Region Museums in order to help Waterloo Region thrive post-pandemic.

2. Selam Debs, Waterloo

S. Debs appeared before the Committee to highlight the systemic racism and fear she has experienced with police and to endorse the five Call to Action requests issued by Reallocate Waterloo Region.

3. Suhanya Keteeswaran, Cambridge

S. Keteeswaran appeared before the Committee in support of the five Reallocate Waterloo Region Community Call to Action requests to reject the Waterloo Region Police Services budget increase proposal and to reallocate those funds towards implementing a police-free community care model, an Indigenous community hub, a community-led homelessness and housing affordability strategy, and funding mental health resources.

*B. Vrbanovic entered the meeting at 6:27p.m.

4. Lisa O’Connell, Artistic Director, Pat the Dog

L. O’Connell appeared before the Committee regarding the proposed changes to the discretionary grant application process. The organization received over 176 applications over the last two years for micro-grants and can only fund 35. She stressed that these organizations are important for economic development and attract people to Waterloo Region.

5. Sam Nabi, Kitchener

S. Nabi appeared before Committee to request that the Waterloo Region Police Services proposed budget increase be denied; to use the $250,000 that was approved in the 2021 Budget to design a community-led safety model; and to implement a budget in 2022 that fights homelessness and housing affordability, creates an Indigenous community hub, and to supports additional mental health resources.

6. Martin Asling, and Kevin White, Waterloo Region Yes in my Backyard

M. Asling and K. White appeared before the Committee to formally ask Council to allow encampments in Waterloo Region, to consider a housing first approach, to increase the supply of affordable housing, and to support the Reallocate Waterloo Region five Calls to Action.

7. David Alton, Kitchener
D. Alton spoke to the Committee about his personal experience of homophobia and racism in Waterloo Region and in support of reallocating money towards police-free community services outlined in the five Calls for Action from Reallocate WR.

8. Peter Benninger, Kitchener

P. Benninger spoke to the Committee about the delays to the River Road Expansion Project. He believes these delays stand in the way of building an amazing neighbourhood and requested that the Region put mechanisms into place to prevent further delays on this project.

9. Sana Farooqui, Kitchener

S. Farooqui spoke to the Committee about her volunteer work supporting a family’s personal experience of police violence and the importance of lifting people out of poverty, of promoting equality, and making LGBTQ+, Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities feel safe. She endorsed the five Calls to Action put forth by Reallocate Waterloo Region.

10. Jennifer Laurie, Kitchener

J. Laurie addressed the Committee requesting that the Region send the proposed WRPS budget increase back to the Police Services Board and approve a 0% increase. She is employed in the social profit sector that is filling the gap of underfunded social services. She would like to see the proposed WRPS budget increase go towards ending homelessness.

11. Nigel Gordijk, New Hamburg

N. Gordijk appeared before the Committee to speak in opposition to the removal of the homeless encampment by Regional Staff at Charles Street and Stirling Avenue that took place at the end of November 2021. He asked that the Region’s review answer why these decisions were made, for the Region to stop criminalizing less fortunate residents, and instead invest in ways to prevent crime.

12. Samantha Estoesta, Kitchener

S. Estoesta appeared before the Committee in support of the five Calls to Action put forward by Reallocate Waterloo Region, including rejecting the WRPS budget increase proposal, to invest in a police-free community care model, and more mental health resources.

13. Melissa Bowman, Kitchener
M. Bowman addressed the Committee regarding the lack of affordable housing, decriminalizing poverty, and allowing encampments while working towards ending homelessness. She highlighted the increases experienced to the cost of food and that more than 33,000 people are currently accessing emergency food services through the Food Bank of Waterloo Region.

14. Rebecca Lanteigne, Waterloo

R. Lanteigne had technical issues and was unable to join the meeting.

15. Melissa Valant, Kitchener

M. Valant highlighted the increase in homelessness across Waterloo Region, the increase to the cost of food, the housing affordability crisis, and the opioid addiction crisis. She supported reallocating funding for police services to combating homelessness, addressing the lack of affordable housing, and improving mental health resources.

16. William Turman, Kitchener

W. Turman spoke to the Committee, asking that they reject the proposed WRPS budget increase and reallocate those funds to a community-led housing and homelessness strategy. He also highlighted that housing prices have increased by almost 30%.

The Committee recessed at 7:31 p.m. and reconvened at 7:42 p.m.

17. Charlotte Prong, Kitchener

C. Prong appeared to give her support for the five Calls to Action from Reallocate Waterloo Region, including developing an Indigenous Community Hub in downtown Kitchener, investing in equity, inclusion resources for all, and for the Committee to approve a 0% increase to the 2022 WRPS Budget.

18. Judith Koeller, Waterloo,

J. Koeller provided a presentation; a copy is attached to the original minutes. She teaches a course at the University of Waterloo using mathematics and data to foster peace and strong communities. She spoke about her concerns over the removal of the homeless encampment located at Charles Street and Stirling Avenue and that numerous studies show preventing homelessness costs less than health care and emergency services associated with homelessness.

19. Teneile Warren, ReallocateWR
T. Warren asked Committee to consider the question “What is the definition of a world class community?” They highlighted the number of delegates that are advocating for the Committee to not approve the proposed increase to the 2022 WRPS Budget and instead invest in life affirming and dignity services such as affordable housing, equity and inclusion, and ending white supremacy in Waterloo Region.

20. Laura Coakley, Kitchener

L. Coakley appeared in support of Reallocate Waterloo Region’s five Calls to Action and asked the Region to vote to support a 0% police budget increase and that a thriving economy should include a right to housing.

21. Helen Schafer, Kitchener

H. Schafer appeared before the Committee to express her concerns regarding unsustainable increases to the police budget. She pointed out that Regional Police salaries have increased 40% more than other Regional Employees. She stressed that she felt police are not getting to the root of the problems being faced and that Waterloo Region may get better results if other resources are utilized to combat increases in crime, addiction, homelessness, and lack of affordable housing.

22. Megan Ruttan, Kitchener

M. Ruttan identified herself as a climate organizer and advocate and requested that the Committee approve a 0% increase to the WRPS budget and implement the five Calls to Action put forward by Reallocate Waterloo Region. She asked Waterloo Region not to continue to police the outcomes of policy choices that make people vulnerable.

23. Jessica Hutchison, Waterloo

J. Hutchison identified herself as a Ph.D candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University and an active member of Reallocate Waterloo Region. She believes that ending homelessness is within the grasp of Council. She requested that the Committee invest in sustainable methods to end homelessness and reject the proposed WRPS budget increase, which equals 41% of the proposed property tax increase.

24. Justin Buhr, Kitchener

J. Buhr appeared before the Committee in support of the five Calls to Action of Reallocate Waterloo Region, including rejecting the WRPS proposed budget increase. He highlighted that police disproportionately target racialized communities and would like to see those funds be reallocated to address homelessness, affordable housing, mental health resources and equity.

25. Greg Thornton, Kitchener

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G. Thornton stated that the Waterloo Regional Police Service’s budget of $197.8 million is 1/3 of Region’s entire operating budget. He spoke of the annual increases to the police budget over the past five years and his personal negative experience dealing with police while attending a Waterloo Region Black Lives Matter rally in 2020 where protesters were ticketed.

26. Blair Corbett, Kitchener

B. Corbett appeared before Committee to express his concerns regarding the requested increase to the police budget. He stressed that the police admit they cannot do the jobs they are being tasked with. He stated that we cannot keep throwing money at the police with the same results and asked the Committee to reallocate the proposed increase to the police budget to services that provide healing.

27. Nina Deeb, Kitchener

N. Deeb appeared before the Committee to highlight the increases in her property taxes and to share her disappointment in the removal of the homeless encampment on Regional property on November 26, 2021. She added that people cannot be policed out of poverty and she would like to see more housing units, not more housing services.

28. Daniel Brotherston, Director, WNCC 131

D. Brotherston appeared on behalf of the Queens Place Condominium Corporation to express concerns for the decision to remove the garbage collection rebate for multi-residential units. Renters do not receive garbage collection services from the Region. Landlords will transfer the increase of these costs to their renters. He feels this decision is in conflict with the Region’s goals of improving housing affordability and is harmful to low income renters.

29. Sarah Pearson, Kitchener

S. Pearson appeared in response to the $40 million the Region has committed for the expansion of the Waterloo Regional Airport and the conflict this creates with the Region’s declaring of a climate emergency and commitment to reducing their emissions.

30. Tom Haapanen, President, WSCC 556 (Arrow Lofts)

T. Haapanen appeared to share his concerns about the proposed discontinuation of the multi-residential garbage rebate and the impact it will have on property owners and low-income renters. Kitchener Housing would lose this rebate and the added costs would be incurred by the City.

31. Henriette Thompson, Coordinating Team, and Ron Hiller, Actions and Policy Advocacy Working Group, Faith Climate Justice - Waterloo Region (FCJWR)
H. Thompson and R. Hiller provided a presentation; a copy is attached to the original minutes, as is a copy of their speaking notes. They represent a network of faith based communities across Waterloo Region and ask Council to refresh the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan focus on Environment and Climate Action, to encourage other levels of government to implement measures to boost the Region’s ability to reach Transform Waterloo Region’s targets of 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

32. Aashay Dalvi, Kitchener
Aashay Dalvi spoke to the Committee about his experience with discrimination and threats of violence in his personal interactions with police and the racism and white supremacy he has experienced since coming to Canada. He called for Committee to implement the five Calls to Action from Reallocate Waterloo Region, especially fulfilling its commitment of $250,000 to facilitate community conversations and a police-free community care model.

33. Ruth Cameron, Executive Director, ACCKWA
R. Cameron appeared before the Committee to express their concerns regarding the current opioid overdose epidemic and the lack of HIV testing available during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has also been an increase in homelessness, and housing is a good determinant of health. She asked that money be restored to social service supports and not be given to the police budget.

34. Marina Josic, Kitchener
M. Josic spoke to the Committee about her concerns regarding the proposed increase to the police budget. She requests that Council reallocate those funds to social service supports that will help people suffering from homelessness, poverty, discrimination and racism.

35. Kevin Thomason, Wilmot
K. Thomason appeared before Committee in support of the River Road Construction deferral being recommended in the 2022 budget in order to protect nature, save money and address the climate crisis.

36. Isaac Horvath, Kitchener
Isaac Horvath did not appear when called.

Call for Delegations
H. Jowett called for other delegations wishing to address the Committee; no one came forward.

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Correspondence

Correspondence from the following was received for information:

- Denis Longchamps, Executive Director and Chief Curator, Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, re: Discretionary Grants to Organizations
- Hanna Domagala, Senior Project Manager, Pearl Valley Development Corp, re: River Road Extension
- Charles Nichols, re: Housing and Homelessness
- Graham Baechler, re: Destruction of Homeless Encampment
- Cory Albrecht, re: Charles St / Stirling Encampment Removal
- Mike Morrice, Kitchener Centre MP, and Laura Mae Lindo, Kitchener Centre MPP, re: Reallocation of Police Funding to Upstream Social Services
- Rick Chambers, re: GRT Free Rides

Adjourn

Moved by K. Kiefer

Seconded by J. Nowak

That the meeting adjourn at 9:12 p.m.

Carried

Committee Chair, H. Jowett

Committee Clerk, C. Gillis
1. Policing is harmful (systemic racism).
2. Policing is ineffective (it does not prevent crime; it’s mostly crime-causing).
3. Policing is wasteful (most expensive option).
4. Policing is unnecessary (other services can do it better for cheaper).
5. Policing is fear-based/punitive (we need reallocation into services that provide love/care).
Policing is harmful.

- Disproportionate targeting of Indigenous, Black, & racialized people by the Waterloo Regional police service (e.g., intelligence notes, use of force).
- Disproportionate targeting of people struggling with poverty, mental health issues, and addictions.

The need to cancel the SRO program because of harms to IBR children and youth:

- “When police are in my school, I feel fear not safety” (WRDSB student on WRPS in schools).
- “They [SROs] make us more afraid. All students of colour need to watch ourselves and every action we do, every choice we make, in fear of being suspended or even worse” (WCDSB student, on WRPS in schools).
Policing is ineffective.

- Intervention by the criminal justice system with a youth, increases their likelihood of future criminal justice system involvement by a factor of almost 7x (Oudshoorn, 2015).
- Criminogenic: crime-causing.
- The cycle will continue: “He’ll do drugs in prison, the place is more violent than the streets, then he’ll do drugs on the streets” ~ WRPS officer in the Break & Enter Unit.
Policing is wasteful.

- 1/3 of property taxes into a harmful, ineffective system.
- A $12.4 million budget increase for police would be equivalent to giving more than 500 people unhoused people a Housing First option (Nelson, 2021).
- Average police salary with benefits is close to $140,000, with 90% of local costs for policing being salary.
Policing is unnecessary.

- Statistics Canada estimates that 50-80% of police work is noncriminal.
- Locally, close to 20% of calls for service are for mental health, welfare checks, or addictions.
Policing is fearful.

- “Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you live in better conditions” ~ Hafiz

**Better conditions = say “no” to police budget increase.**

- 1. Indigenous community hub.
- 2. Housing and homelessness issues.
- 3. Police-free community care model.
- 4. Investment in mental health supports for those harmed by policing.

We need a loving, caring Waterloo Region!
I teach a course at University of Waterloo on the use of mathematics and data in fostering peace and strong communities.

We’ve studied occurrence data made public by Waterloo Regional Police. ¹

We’ve heard first-hand from WRP staff that police are often called to so-called “wellness checks” for vulnerable people, when professionals with other skill sets would be better able to help these situations. There have been numerous cases in Canada where wellness checks by police result in a person’s death. ²

I’m sickened by the bulldozing of the few possessions that were keeping alive some of our community’s most vulnerable people. The fact that this was done without regard for where the people would go is further evidence of the need for a wider skill set than the police to address these issues.

Even if all that matters to you is the money, there are numerous studies showing that preventing homelessness costs less³ than the health care and emergency services associated with homelessness.

All of this aligns with calls to defund the police – which recognizes that dealing with the root issues is more humane, more effective, less costly.

I urge you to reject the proposed increase to the WRP budget, and focus on sheltering our most vulnerable people.

¹. HTTPS://WWW.WRPS.ON.CA/EN/ABOUT-US/REPORTS-PUBLICATIONS-AND-SURVEYS.ASPX
². HTTPS://WWW.CBC.CA/NEWS/CANADA/NOVA-SCOTIA/POLICE-WELLNESS-CHECKS-DEATHS-INDIGENOUS-BLACK-1-5622320
Good evening, Chair of Council, Ms Redman and members of Region of Waterloo Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Ron Hiller and I are here to speak to you on behalf of Faith Climate Justice Waterloo Region, a network of faith communities focusing on climate justice that emerged in late 2019.

We currently represent faith communities from Jewish, Hindu, Christian and universalist traditions. We continue to grow and welcome members of all faiths and people of goodwill.

Faith Climate Justice also appreciates the active participation of Interfaith Grand River and Christians Together Waterloo Region. We reach close to an estimated 200 individuals who themselves are connected to small and large faith communities in Waterloo Region. This means that the climate justice work we engage in reaches several thousand people.

We advocate for a sustainable, low carbon local economy that generates prosperity for all. Through collective action we strive to ensure no one is left behind or on the sidelines.

We see our role as bringing a faith perspective to the broader work of climate justice in the community. We acknowledge the wisdom of Indigenous peoples on the Haldimand Tract and in the Great Lakes region to the care of the whole creation – that “all my relations” means all human and non-human relationships.

Faith Climate Justice is active in the following ways –

- Hosting Open Dialogues on faith leadership for climate justice – three in the past 18 months.
- Displaying a dozen 4ft x 10ft climate justice banners, designed by Heather Lee and Ahbi Dewan, on faith community buildings and properties in
Waterloo Region. (The banner design is replicated on this slide presentation.)

- Animating our work through several working groups
- Supporting new participants in hosting worship services and starting new dialogues.

And... this is critically important to us! --

- Engaging municipal councils – which is why we are here today.

(Slide 4) This past spring, we presented to Regional Council, and encouraged you to adopt TransformWR Climate Plan and 50by30 campaign targets for greenhouse gas emissions. We deeply appreciate the adoption of these climate targets by Regional Council and across all eight municipalities!

Today, you are holding final consultations on the Region’s 2022 Plan and Budget regarding Regional implementation of these climate goals. We wish to make two points for your consideration --

(Slide 5) First, Faith Climate Justice urges Council to take bold steps to refresh the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan focus on Environment and Climate Action, and,

...to engage other levels of government to be able to implement measures that will boost the Region’s ability to reach TransformWR and 50by30 targets.

(Slide 6) Second, the future climate crisis is here now. We recoiled at the destructive power of the heat dome that produced daily temperatures of over 40 degrees in BC and led to suffering and death; we witnessed the power of an atmospheric river that took lives, destroyed infrastructure and livelihoods; and, we continue to witness the ongoing effects of the melting permafrost in the Arctic on its people and on the land, waters and air.

(Slide 7) In all these situations, faith communities play an important role in community preparedness, response and recovery. Many examples have been shared in excellent webinars on Citizens and Emergency Preparedness, hosted by the Tamarack Institute and Vibrant Communities, and in case studies by Faith and the Common Good.
Not to mention that we have senior academic research and knowledge in Waterloo on the operational and policy dimensions of community disaster preparedness that also reflect on the role of faith communities and others!

One of the Region’s Strategic Plan Actions is 3.2.3: (to) **Develop a Climate Change & Health Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment to review local climate projections, current and projected health risks and identify adaptive measures to strengthen resilience to the health impacts of climate change.**

As you review the Strategic Plan approximately half-way through the term of Council in early 2022, we ask you to consider if there might be a place to engage faith communities to help strengthen climate disaster preparedness, response, and recovery across the Region.

**(Slide 8)** As the Tamarack Institute notes in its case study on Strengthening the Role of Faith-based Organizations, “Faith groups can add great value to local emergency response structures and systems. Many of them already serve their most vulnerable neighbours through regular drop-in or meal programs. Others provide overnight shelter... Faith groups offer local community connections, volunteer mobilization, and locally relevant resources that can enhance response and recovery effectiveness.”

We leave that with you for further consideration.

**(Slide 9)** I’d now like to ask Ron Hiller to offer some concluding reflections.

My name is Ron Hiller, and I’m a resident of Region of Waterloo and member of Faith Climate Justice WR.

We want to thank you for saying “Yes” to the Transform WR strategy and for adopting the **goal of “50 by 30.”** We’re here today to affirm our support for you in your efforts to successfully implement those strategies.

And now, a bit about the personal journey that brings me here: I’m a very musical guy. After graduating from teachers’ college in 1989, I chose to combine my strong music background with my teacher-training, to become children’s singer-songwriter, RONNO. Soon I was presenting my songs – some of them being **environmental** songs – in schools all over Ontario, including, over the years, in the
great majority of Region of Waterloo elementary schools.

That’s what began for me in 1989 – and now here we are, almost third of a century later. And where are we at? Some progress has been made in caring for our environment – but, sadly, not enough. We haven’t kept up, and now we’ve got a climate crisis and related problems that are more urgent than ever.

The years have passed soooo quickly. The coming years will also pass quickly. We must be acting urgently and boldly now. The tradeoff for not doing so is just too great – a tragedy really, considering what has been lost already, and what we risk losing.

And yes, sacrifice will be needed to respond appropriately and get the job done. My parents and all their siblings – all growing up in this region – knew about sacrifice, first being raised in the depression, and then sacrificing, serving, and tightening their belts thru WWII. And now it’s our turn – it’s our great challenge!

Admittedly, such sacrifice and tough choices will not be popular with everyone. But you can count on faith communities to be supportive, and to stay engaged in the work of climate justice for the long haul. We’ll be paying attention, and be there to encourage you, our regional government representatives, to implement the increased climate targets of TransformWR and 50by30. We deeply appreciate all your efforts. Thank you very much.

(Slide 10) Closing slide with visual of Faith Climate Justice Waterloo Region, and email address and website.
Faith Climate Justice Waterloo Region

JOIN COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

ACT NOW

www.FaithClimateJustice.ca
Faith Climate Justice WR

A growing network of faith communities.

Deeply concerned for a double crisis: climate, and a just pandemic recovery.

Bringing a faith perspective to the conversation.

Partnering with other local climate action organizations.

Working for a sustainable, low-carbon local economy that generates prosperity for all.

https://www.faithclimatejustice.ca/
Actions taken by Faith Climate Justice and members (2020-2021)

Open Dialogues for faith leadership in climate justice

Over a dozen climate justice banners, media attention

Starting FCJ Working Groups

Sharing resources between faith communities

Hosting workshops, services and starting new dialogues

Delegations and statements to local councils
All 8 municipalities in Waterloo Region endorsed a community greenhouse gas emission reduction target of an 80% reduction (based on 2010 levels) by 2050 (80by50). They also adopted an interim community GHG reduction target of 50% by 2030 (50by30).
...urges Council to take bold steps to refresh the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan focus on Environment and Climate Action, and, ...to engage other levels of government to implement measures that will boost the Region’s ability to reach TransformWR and 50by30 targets.
Reading the moment: the future is now

2021 and ongoing climate catastrophes in Canada -- heat domes, wildfires, atmospheric rivers, massive floods, melting permafrost…
For Council’s consideration…

Given faith communities’ ability to connect, mobilize and provide resources in varying circumstances, plus knowledge and expertise by local academics and community research organizations such as the Tamarack Institute,

…what might be some ways to engage faith communities in helping to achieve Strategic Objective 3 Improve resilience to climate change and/or severe weather.
Faith communities as resilience hubs in extreme weather

“Faith groups can add great value to local emergency response structures and systems. Many of them already serve their most vulnerable neighbours through regular drop-in or meal programs. Others provide overnight shelter through initiatives such as Out of the Cold. Faith groups offer local community connections, volunteer mobilization, and locally relevant resources that can enhance response and recovery effectiveness.”

Source: Tamarack Institute case study.
Concluding reflection

Ron Hiller, member of Faith Climate Justice Advocacy Policy Working Group
JOIN COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

ACT NOW

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www.faithclimatejustice.ca