

2025

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Waterloo Region Economic Development Strategy

Presentation to Township of Woolwich Mayor and Council

March 4, 2025

About WREDS

- A **collaborative document** outlining our community's collective economic development priorities.
- Guides economic development activities across Waterloo Region to:
 - increase efficiency;
 - identify opportunities for collaboration; and,
 - support a coordinated, regional, and strategic approach to economic development.
- **The 2025 WREDS builds on the successes and challenges of the 2015 strategy**, and its structure is reflective of the changing needs and priorities held by our rapidly growing community.

Jointly developed by the **WREDS Working Group**:

- Region of Waterloo
- All seven area municipalities
- Waterloo Economic Development Corporation (Waterloo EDC)

The Municipal CAO's make up the WREDS Steering Committee.



Partnership Agreement

Through the Waterloo EDC Partnership Agreement, the Region of Waterloo, Area Municipalities, and Waterloo EDC operate within a framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.



WATERLOO EDC

- Investment Promotion/Attraction
- International Promotion
- Outbound Business Missions
- Inbound Business Missions
- Government Navigation
- Business-Friendly Service/SPOC



MUNICIPAL PARTNERS

- Sector/Cluster/Capability Development
- Data
- Retention/Aftercare
- Infrastructure
- Employment Lands
- Lifestyle/Community Profile
- Arts & Culture
- Tourism



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Tourism
- Events
- Arts & Culture
- Education/Training
- Trade Promotion
- VC Supports and Funding
- Start-ups

Municipal Partner Roles & Responsibilities



AREA MUNICIPALITIES

- Localized Employment Lands Development
- Local business retention & expansion
- Develop projects & services aligning with local & collective economic priorities
- Small Business & Mainstreet/BIA support



REGION OF WATERLOO

- Region-wide shovel-ready employment initiatives
- Aviation & Aerospace sector development
- Regionally significant land development projects (e.g. KCTH, Breslau GO, YKF)
- Provide a business development lens to Regional services

Community Engagement

More than 1800 members of the community were heard.

•Over the course of 2023 and 2024, extensive research and community engagement was conducted . Key focus groups included:

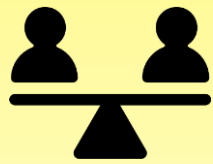
- 348 businesses;
- 205 attendees across 4 newcomer-focused workshops;
- 230 children, youth and students.

•**Five shared regional economic development priorities**, the 2025 WREDS Strategic Pillars, were developed as a direct result.

Research & Engagement Summary



Talent-focused wrap-around services are critical to support our workforce.



WR's ethnocultural diversity is strong, but racialized and equity-deserving groups face workforce **inequities and challenges**.



There is a **misalignment** between **jobseekers** and **employers** in the community.



There is a need to accelerate & incentivize **residential building construction** to address affordability/availability in the real estate/rental market.



Regional sector diversity presents an opportunity to **grow local supply chains** and bolster investment attraction.



WR faces a significant **shortage of serviced employment lands** and associated infrastructure to support investment/expansion.



Business priorities include **climate change**, improved **access to employment land via public transit**, and scaling WR's innovation ecosystem.

Data Snapshot

#1 fastest growing Census Metropolitan Area in Canada, 2023

\$7B in spending leaves the region annually as a result of imported purchases in manufacturing

84% of survey respondents are somewhat or very satisfied with their quality of life in the region

74% of survey respondents had difficulty finding affordable housing within the first four years of living in the region

Research & Engagement Summary

33% of survey respondents who lived in the region for 10+ years had difficulty finding a family physician or dentist

\$10B in investments lost in part due to unavailability of serviced employment lands over the last three years

7.7% unemployment rate as of Q3 2024

12% the year-over-year change in average private apartment rental rates, increasing to \$1,561 in 2023

Strategic Pillars

Shared priorities with **common goals** for all Waterloo Region Economic Development partners.



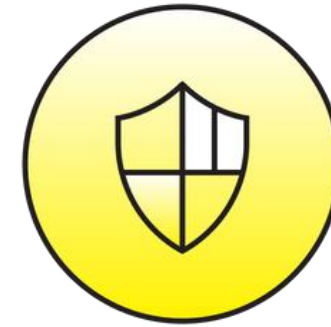
Talent



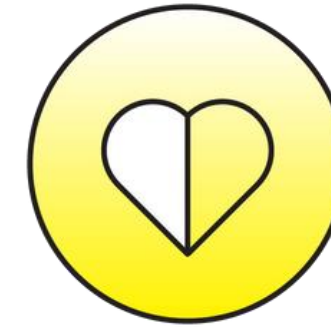
**Land
Readiness**



**Scaling Local
Innovation**



**Strategic
Sector
Support**



**Quality of
Life**

Talent



Engagement clearly identified struggles faced by businesses in securing talent **and** by community in finding employment, representing a disconnect that necessitated a dedicated plan of action.

Recommendations from the consultant-developed Talent Plan focus on:

 **Attraction**

 **Retention**

 **Reskilling**


 **Integration**


Land Readiness




Land development projects and associated infrastructure strategies for long-term planning require increased focus. Proactive responses to this pillar include:

 **Inventory of existing and planned servicing infrastructure**

 **Partner with key public/private partners to accelerate affordable housing development**

 **Developing strategies to expedite shovel-ready status for priority parcels**

 **Regional perspective to lead/ support key strategic projects for community-wide benefit.**

Scaling Local Innovation



Improving investment readiness in key sectors and coordinating advocacy efforts to grow emerging sectors. Proactive responses from the Region, Area Municipalities and Waterloo EDC include:



Identify critical service gaps for SMEs, with a focus on retention



Create connections and working relationships, within and across industries, to foster a collaborative workforce ecosystem



Long-term planning vision for for office, commercial and industrial spaces to support local expansion



Partner to ensure firms exiting the start-up phase have the support and resources needed to grow in the region.

Strategic Sector Support



Supporting local business retention and expansion and increasing collaboration to support entrepreneurship and innovation.



Jointly identifying strategic sector focus for development activities through interest-holder workshops, forecasting, data-driven market analysis and benchmarking.



Municipalities assessing investment readiness in key sectors, improving readiness where gaps exist.



Coordinating advocacy efforts through Waterloo EDC, with support from municipalities, to align/strengthen sector support activities.

Quality of Life



Ensuring that wrap-around supports for talent, amenities, and other services that support our workforce are adequate for our growing community. Region-wide priorities include:



**Initiatives responding to gaps impacting quality of life:
public/active transportation networks, community safety,
cultural enrichment, green spaces, recreational facilities**



Focus on improving wrap-around supports for talent in key areas



Tourism, main-street and BIA programs to support local business and talent retention

Implementation

- The **WREDS Working Group** will **meet biannually** to report on progress towards the Strategic Pillars.
- During these meetings, the Working Group will assess the **alignment of the strategy** with **community needs** and will make changes as deemed necessary by consensus.
- Progress (according to key metrics defined by the Working Group) will be **reported to the Steering Committee annually**. Recommended changes to the Strategy will be brought to the Steering Committee for review and approval as necessary.



Next Steps

Strategy Review/Endorsement (Jan-Mar 2025)

- Area Municipal Councils
- Waterloo EDC Board of Directors

Public Review (Jan-Mar 2025)

- EngageWR

Regional Endorsement

- Spring 2025: WREDS returns to Regional Council for endorsement

Ongoing Working Group Meetings

- Biannual meetings (implementation & reporting of action items) begin May 2025

