

Proposed Option 4

A Community Proposal for a Better Option Based on Intensification

Currently, as part of the provincial Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process the Region of Waterloo is undertaking a review and update of our Regional Official Plan – the master plan that will determine our growth and development for the next 30 years until 2051. With hundreds of thousands of new residents anticipated in the years ahead it will be important that we plan carefully to ensure the highest possible quality of life for everyone.

Regional Staff are proposing three possible Growth Options, however the three Community Area (residential) options being proposed are either incongruent with current trends, insufficient, or overly complicated:

Growth Option #1 (Significant Farmland Loss) – Option 1 with massive amounts of urban sprawl would represent a clear abandonment of the leadership in growth management that the Region of Waterloo is renowned for and likely require breaching the Countryside Line in numerous places.

Growth Option #2 (Some Farmland Loss, Inequity) – still destroys almost 1,000 acres of local farmland and creates inequity issues between area municipalities treating some quite differently than others.

Growth Option #3 (No Farmland Loss, High Density Challenges) – is overly complex, difficult to achieve, and places too much density at the periphery rather than the core of our communities.

Citizens, community groups, and local planning experts deeply concerned about these three proposed growth options are suggesting a simpler, more achievable fourth option focussed on intensification:

Growth Option #4 (No Farmland Loss, Continues Current Trends) – uses an easy to understand and straightforward intensification rate consistent with current growth and that continues the smart growth leadership of the Region of Waterloo with no urban boundary expansion or farmland loss.

The following is a comparison of the four Community Area Options:

	Historical Rate (past 10 years)	Current Rate (past 5 years)	Option #1 Provincial minimum, significant farmland loss	Option #2 Some farmland loss	Option #3 No farmland loss, high density challenges	Option #4 No farmland loss, closest to current trends
Intensification Rate	59%	64%	50%	60%	60%	65%
Density Target	54	54	50	60	66	60
Farmland/ Greenfield Required			2,208 hectares (5,456 acres)	376 hectares (929 acres)	0 hectares (0 acres)	0 hectares (0 acres)

The advantages of Option #4 are numerous:

- **Protects Farmland** - In an era of global climate change, Option #4 is a visionary choice that protects rural lands for farming, local food, groundwater recharge, biodiversity, and recreation while focussing growth more sustainably, affordably, and efficiently in areas where infrastructure and services already exist.
- **Easily Achievable** - With current intensification rates for the past 10 years averaging 59.5% and for the past five years averaging 64% intensification, the 65% intensification target for Option #4 is easily achievable and very congruent with the current growth efforts of Waterloo Region.
- **Better Growth Patterns** - Option #4 is focussed on intensification throughout the entire region, with growth and development encouraged in every neighbourhood and community, rather than Option #3 that focusses on intense new high-density development on currently undeveloped lands mainly at the periphery and edges of communities. It's absurd to place new high density developments in the most distant and remote parts of our community.
- **Encourages Accessory Units** - Over the past decade, there has been rapid growth in more affordable accessory apartments added to existing homes, such as basement suites, granny flats, laneway houses, and duplex conversions. The potential for this type of soft intensification is huge and the underprediction of accessory units is a major flaw in Options #1, #2 and #3. Option #4 focusing on intensification better facilitates accessory units which are often more affordable units better sized for smaller households and that make better use of existing infrastructure.
- **Huge Housing Turnover Coming** - Our aging population creates huge potential for the recycling of single-detached units from seniors to younger families over the next 30 years. The potential exists that upwards of 80,000 to 90,000 existing single-detached units will be re-sold back into the marketplace between 2016 and 2051. For context, only 18,071 new single-detached units were built in Waterloo region in the past decade and a half. Option #4 prevents the massive over-designation of likely unneeded single-greenfield detached homes proposed in Option #1 and #2 and keeps the focus on more sustainable growth within existing communities with these resold homes, new accessory units, and creating complete, walkable 15 minute communities.
- **Allows Time for Better Tools** - Option #4 provides time to complete the development of more robust economic planning forecasting tools under development by the University of Waterloo that could better reflect the rapidly changing world we live in.
- **Avoids Over-Committing Lands for Destruction** - By not committing to large amounts of land development and farmland loss like Options #1 and #2, Option #4 serves as a no risk placeholder (particularly if lands aren't going to be needed for decades) to see how the post pandemic world, efforts to promote intensification, development of the missing middle, and climate change initiatives unfold over the years ahead.
- **Future Transit (iON LRT) Funding** - Competition for senior government level funding for transit systems will be intense over the coming years – particularly as other Ontario communities adopt levels of intensification equalling or even exceeding Waterloo Region. Option #4's higher intensification rate than Option #1, #2 or #3 will allow us to compete more effectively for limited transit funding and ensure we have the best possible growth patterns to support transit.

- **Time Is On Our Side** - With mandated Official Plan updates every five years, and so much land already designated for development, it could be approximately 2047 or even later before existing inventories are used up – even at aggressive growth rates. Thus, there will be at least four opportunities for any required course corrections in future ROP updates if needed.

Why a focus on intensification in Option #4 is a better approach than density utilized by Option #3

Unlike Designated Greenfield Area (DGA) density targets used in Option #3, intensification targets utilized instead in Option #4 are not retroactively applied to lands already built, thereby making them simpler to implement and easier to adjust through future processes if the need arises.

Option #3 proposes a 66 people and jobs per hectare (pj/ha) DGA density target but requires an average density of 73 pj/ha on any new development occurring in the DGA from 2021 to 2051. This higher density is required to compensate for the lower densities on the 1,331 ha of DGA lands developed in the Region of Waterloo since 2006.

Achieving of an average density of 73 pj/ha on all new development lands over the next 30 years after achieving only 54 pj/ha in the past 15 years will not be an easy task – particularly when these will be focused at the edges of communities in some of the most remote and distant new developments.

Alternatively, for Option #4 it is estimated that an intensification rate of approximately 65% is required. Over the past five years the Region of Waterloo has averaged a 64% intensification rate and has exceeded 70% in some years, making the long-term goal of 65% quite achievable and congruent with current regional growth. This intensification is distributed across the entire community and not just focussed on the edges like Option #3's DGA lands are.

This is not to say that higher densities should not be pursued over time... they should, and thankfully the marketplace will likely accomplish that even without policy requiring it.

Conclusion

Option #4 has clear advantages over both Options #1, #2 and #3 through a combination of:

- Continuing the legacy of forward-thinking planning and innovative leadership for which the Region of Waterloo is renowned,
- Making a clear statement that Regional Council is serious not only about responding to climate change, but also is willing to take a leading role in doing so,
- Promoting a higher rate of intensification generally consistent with current trends, making it the most easily achievable of the no Community Area expansion options,
- Continuing to enhance support for expansion of LRT and other higher order / high frequency forms of transit consistent with the long-term vision of Waterloo Region,
- Delaying consideration to commit to farmland destruction until a better forecasting methodologies are developed,
- Serving as a low / no risk placeholder to see how the post pandemic world, efforts to promote intensification, development of the missing middle, and climate responsive changes/initiatives unfold,

- Providing the opportunity for simple course corrections, if necessary, through future Regional Official Plan processes,
- Allowing resources to be directed to implementation measures aimed at solving near-term problems rather than being wasted on the process of allocating limited areas of expansions associated with Option 2 to only some municipalities, which, even if eventually required (which is questionable), would not be needed for decades to come.

We urge you to join with citizens and groups across the community to support Option #4 for the best possible future quality of life for everyone in Waterloo Region.

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