

BUILD NOW

— WATERLOO REGION —

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BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region Partnership is Building 10,000 Affordable New Homes

First-of-its-kind community-led housing initiative in Ontario will produce ‘half price housing’ for local residents.

WATERLOO REGION | July 20, 2023 — Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region, in collaboration with local developers and a wide-range of community partners, is excited to launch “BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region”, a first of its kind community led partnership that will create 10,000 new affordable and attainable homes for Waterloo Region individuals and families. The partnership is looking to work together with all four orders of government to ensure these homes are built by 2030.

“The number one cause of the affordability crisis in Canada is the high cost of housing,” said Philip Mills, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region, “When affordable housing is out of reach for middle- and lower-income families, the entire community is held back. We all have a stake in ensuring that our region can grow sustainably and affordably and, with this ‘all hands on deck’ partnership we have a plan to do just that.”

The BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region partnership utilizes the experience and insight of regional not-for-profits, charitable organizations, home builders, construction association members, the business community, and academic institutions to plan and build housing that will be placed on the market for approximately half-price. Working together with all orders of government, the group is aiming to provide a local stock of 7,000 attainable homes for purchase, and 3,000 attainable homes for rent by 2030.

Drawing on Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region’s expertise of screening and placing deserving families in attainable housing, every one of these homes will go to a buyer or renter who needs a place to live – and none of them will be available as investment properties.

The impetus for this innovative partnership is the need to ease the supply-and-demand crunch for housing that exists not only within Waterloo Region, but across Canada.

“Waterloo Region has always been home to innovators and leaders. That is what I love about this community - we nurture the brilliance of minds that dare to dream big,” said Scott Higgins, President of HIP Developments and a major proponent of the BUILD NOW initiative. “Why should housing be any different? We know what can be achieved when individuals come together with a shared purpose and a collective vision and we are excited to see BUILD NOW’s vision come to life.”

Speaking alongside local mayors and officials, Region of Waterloo Chair Karen Redman underlined the need to make housing affordable so the community can continue attracting top talent and maintain a high quality of life.

“Our growing community needs more people in nursing, farming, hospitality, child care and the skilled trades,” said Chair Redman. “In order to attract and retain talent, we first need to make it more affordable to live here. We’re ready to work with our municipal partners and the BUILD NOW coalition to deliver housing affordability and meet the Province of Ontario’s goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2030.”

BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region will remove cost drivers not directly tied to the material and labour necessary to build new homes. Under the stewardship of Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region, partners will transfer undeveloped land for housing construction, development charges will be waived through Bill 23, and home builders will eliminate pricing mark-ups beyond that which allows them to build new housing at cost. Additionally there is hope that there will be private transfers of underdeveloped land at free or nominal costs. Based on Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region’s analysis, these three factors alone account for approximately 50 per cent of the price of a new home.

“BUILD NOW is a great example of community stakeholders, not-for-profits, municipalities and the province working together to make homeownership a reality for more residents of Waterloo Region with flexible financing options and 10,000 affordable homes by 2030,” said Nina Tangri, Ontario’s Associate Minister of Housing. “Our government is working hard to ensure every community’s housing needs are met, and we are pleased to eliminate development charges and parkland fees for non-profit housing projects in order to increase housing supply across the province.”

“The goal of ‘half priced homes’ is realistic and achievable as long as we embrace innovative policies that replace short-term self-interest with a long-term commitment to sustainable growth,” said Mills. “There is land available. Builders have the skills and labour to build the homes. Local not-for-profits and charities have experience working with rental providers to ensure that affordable rentals are available. The provincial government has the vision and resources to fast-track development approvals and help fund servicing and infrastructure requirements. And Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region brings the experience in governing affordable housing projects.”

BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region homes will consist of buildings from four to six storeys in height, with unit sizes ranging from one to three bedrooms. Leaning on years of experience and established tools, Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region will ensure homeowners can gain the security and equity of home ownership while specifically preventing ‘flipping’, investment property acquisition, or other profit-seeking market activities that could artificially inflate the resale market.

“While the model we are using might be new for 2023, it is, in fact, a modern version of Canada’s wartime housing program which successfully delivered a combination of affordable rental and home ownership options in the midst of a national housing crisis,” said Jeff MacIntyre, President of Grand Valley Construction Association. “It is also a model that can be replicated in any other community in Canada that is prepared to work together in the long-term common interest the way our community is.”

For more information, please visit <https://buildnowwr.ca/>.

Additional Quotes:

“Kitchener is committed to Housing for All. Overcoming every major challenge that has faced our community was made possible because we rolled up our sleeves with an all-of-community response which involved the private sector, the non-profit sector, community members and participation by all orders of government. Tackling the housing crisis and making sure we have housing options for everyone throughout Kitchener and all area communities requires that same barnraising type of approach. We know that investments are required at all points across the housing continuum, including investments in affordable and attainable home ownership and rentals, and that’s what this new community collaboration proposes to tackle.”

- *Berry Vrbanovic, Mayor, City of Kitchener*

“Once again, the same type of innovative thinking for which Waterloo Region is world renowned has brought a collective of minds together to solve one of the greatest social issues of our lifetime. Having first been drawn into discussions seven months ago, it has been difficult to keep the lid on the percolating excitement, yet here we are today celebrating the coming together of unlikely partners for the betterment of people living in our City and throughout the region. In Cambridge, we look forward to working alongside the development community as we work through the finer details to make dreams of home ownership, for those who had given up all hope, come closer to reality.”

- *Jan Liggett, Mayor, City of Cambridge*

“The City of Waterloo is eager to discuss initiatives to increase the supply of affordable, attainable, and missing middle housing, in alignment with our community plans and affordable housing strategy. BUILD NOW: Waterloo Region is an ambitious idea to bring such housing to market, and maintain it for the long term. We look forward to more discussion with our municipal and community partners.”

- *Dorothy McCabe, Mayor, City of Waterloo*

“The availability of attainable housing ownership and affordable purpose built rental housing is an issue in the Township of North Dumfries and across southern Ontario. Township Council, as part of the June 19th Agenda, adopted a Report authorizing Staff to develop a series of strategies to access grant opportunities through the Federal Government's Housing Accelerator Fund. It was a privilege to meet with Minister of Economic Development Filomena Tassi this past week as she discussed the Housing Accelerator Fund. The Township is actively working on this matter and will utilize funds from this Federal program to address the “Missing Middle” of the housing profile and to introduce these dwelling units to the marketplace in a shorter time period.”

- *Susan Foxton, Mayor, Township of North Dumfries*

“Missing middle housing is an ongoing challenge in Woolwich as well as the other Townships and Cities. I look forward to collaborating with the BUILD NOW team for the best way to provide appropriate attainable housing for our residents and across the region.”

- *Sandy Shantz, Mayor, Township of Woolwich*

“With the cost of housing becoming unattainable for many residents in the Region of Waterloo, it is necessary to think outside the box to provide more opportunities and options. This initiative does just that and could provide the missing link needed to allow residents to find places to live and enter the home ownership market. When the community works together utilizing the expertise across various sectors, there is nothing we can’t accomplish.”

- *Joe Nowak, Mayor, Township of Wellesley*

“Belonging to a generation that has been told we don’t own homes because of avocado toast, and lattes - and personally as a mayor not being able to afford to purchase a home in Wilmot - it is refreshing to see our voice represented as we address housing affordability.” Said Mayor Salonen. “As such, I am cautiously optimistic the collaborative approach of BUILD NOW, alongside many other initiatives that Wilmot and other levels of government are exploring, will provide young professionals and working families with an opportunity to own a home in the region.”

- Natasha Salonen, Mayor, Township of Wilmot

“The Waterloo Region business community is thrilled to support BUILD NOW. This innovative and collaborative approach to developing missing middle housing is a great step for growing our economy and continuing to attract talent. We look forward to working with Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region and its partners to continue moving this initiative forward.

- Ian McLean, Chair, Business and Economic Support Team of Waterloo Region (on behalf of the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Communitech, Explore Waterloo Region, the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce, and Waterloo Economic Development Corporation