



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Summary of Discussions from the Community Conversation WOOLWICH TOWNSHIP

DETAILS

THURSDAY, APRIL 27TH

Number of participants – 54

Interviewer – Jane Humphries

Guest Speakers – Chief Bryan Larkin – WRPS, Denise Squire – Woolwich Community Health Centre

WHY COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation, Wellbeing Waterloo Region, Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation and the United Way Kitchener Waterloo & Area partnered to host a series of four **Community Conversations**.

The goals of the Community Conversations were:

- To continue the recent momentum related to the latest release of the Waterloo Region's Vital Signs® and other community priority focused discussions and work.
- To provide an opportunity for members of the community to provide input into the priority setting work of Wellbeing Waterloo Region.
- To discuss what wellbeing means to you!

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION GATHERED BE USED?

The information gathered from each of the four community conversations will be compiled with other input to help determine the priorities for Waterloo Region. The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation will also use the information in the next cycle of Waterloo Region's Vital Signs® reports.

WHAT DID WE TALK ABOUT?

Each community conversation was structured in two parts. The first part featured a conversation with community leaders from Waterloo Region, which set the stage for the second part, where the participants were invited to have a conversation with others at their table.

The following questions were asked by a volunteer facilitator at each of the tables:

- What are the things that make living in Waterloo Region great for you and your community?
- What gets in the way of wellbeing for you and your community?
- What can you do for yourself or for your community to improve wellbeing?
- What do you think is the most important priority to focus on in order to improve wellbeing?

A volunteer scribe recorded conversations and the results are below.

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WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the major themes that were discussed at this community conversation. The actual responses of participants from each discussion follow in the subsequent pages:

- 1. Access to Services:** Lack of adequate social services, or access to social services (especially in the rural communities) is a strong theme.
"For years worked in city. Collaboration is there in city but it is in a different way. Fearful of stepping on toes in the urban area. In rural there is so few providers and big gaps. So literally instead of figuring out roles – pick up the phone and say this is the need what can we do about it different way of doing work. "
- 2. Overdevelopment,** especially in smaller, rural communities is a strong theme. This includes the sense that the rural environment and culture needs to be protected from hasty development.
"With the larger growth in smaller rural areas, this sense of community that currently exists may be lost as so many new residents are coming to the area (especially if they are a commuting population)."
- 3. Inclusion/Belonging:** The idea that systemic racism/discrimination needs to be addressed is a common theme, including the need to create a more inclusive and open community while maintaining the connectivity and culture ties that are already there.
"People not being accepting of different religions (small communities) / Difficult for urban immigrant people to feel welcomed"
"There are a lot of positives in the community, but sometimes the positives are what bring the negatives...strength of a small town tight knit community, can be a barrier of new people coming in."
- 4. Cultural Identity:** The loss of "rural" identity is a common theme. This includes the sense that people from urban spaces are moving in, creating disconnected "sleeper" towns and a possible clash of values. This ties into standard of living as housing costs rise due to a rise in housing demand.
"...The expectations that they may be bringing to the area from a previous urban community may cause a disconnect between what is realistic for these areas with limited resources. Difficulty with preventing an "us" vs "them" mentality with the dichotomy of people who have grown up in the rural areas, vs newcomers from larger urban areas."
- 5. Community Welfare:** The increase in vulnerability of the senior's population (and other marginalized populations) is a recurring theme, especially as development occurs and the cultural/economic landscape of the community changes.
"Increase in number of people who are struggling – as much as we are prosperous – how do we bring people in who are living in poverty, homeless. It is increasing. We see changes in seniors now too – they don't have people to help support them no kids in town, mental health issues. As much as we are moving ahead we are still leaving people behind. How do we address most vulnerable?"

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The following information was collected from participants.

What are the things that make living in Waterloo Region great for you and your community?

- Community involvement
- Safety – small community everybody is friendly, the larger communities it is more difficult to do
- Community in downtown Kitchener – easy to find people who have similar interests
- The region is a bunch of communities – still has a small town feel but with large amenities
- Symphonies
- Theatres
- Good universities
- Connectedness to others
- Getting involved in the community helps getting to know people
- Sense of community isn't always geography
- Chief Larkin – forward leaders with a passion for the community
- Good community centres
- Good memories
- Ball diamonds
- Urban and rural areas are an asset to the community
- Museums
- Festivals (apple butter, maple syrup)
- Farmers market
- Kitchener market
- People will come together for the kids – sports, children theatre
- Easy to find fresh, diverse food
- LRT
- Love living in Elmira, grew up there. Small but so close to so many amenities.
- Like kids can hop on bikes – don't have to worry about them. My kids are getting to experience how I grew up. Feel comfortable and safe
- Feel people are connected to each other – know who to go to if you have a concern
- Small town feel, less competition and more community spirit. I feel more connected in this community than anywhere else I've lived in Ontario. There is some sort of spirit here that drew me back after university. Small town / farmer spirit
- Why would I go somewhere else?
- Connectedness is important to me – in Woolwich. Different communities overlapping again and again: church, soccer, school, arena always the same people. Does extend to broader region as well.
- Collaboration between community agencies is unique to the region
- Moved here 30 years ago from Vancouver – within a year we called this home – juxtaposition of rural life with BB, University of Waterloo – innovation of tech triangle
- Get on bike and go from RIM to horse and buggies in 10 minutes. The church & YMCA grounded
- Neighbourhood in Waterloo – Pool and tennis community gave a sense of belonging. Safe and secure place to raise a family
- Strong neighbourhoods. Fortunate to live in a neighbourhood that has gatherings, parks, neighbourhood associations. Involved neighbourhood – Facebook page of 1500 people
- Really safe place to live – easy to go out and walk, even at nighttime.



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- Park access – number of parks, variety of amenities, and more people are using the parks.
- Community tolerance – makes a big difference from an immigrant’s perspective
- Investment in providing opportunities – programming, community centres. Big focus on introducing children to new opportunities, healthy living and activities. Opportunities for adults as well as children.
- From an aspect of working in Waterloo region – lots of collaboration, sharing of information. Social services, human service organizations tend to work together. As a service provider, groups are willing to share resources and build one another up. Organizations are able to link to one another to connect individuals and residents to find the correct support. Sense of shared responsibility. There is a big sense that this has improved, especially over the last 30 years.
- There is still room for improvement in these collaborations – if there wasn’t, we wouldn’t be in our professions.
- With the large scale of our rural communities, there is a big focus on sharing with those in the urban centres (especially service providers) what type of challenges and successes work in the rural areas. This builds up a sense of respect, which certainly helps promote service access and use in the rural areas.
- There has been a shift from “citizens in rural areas can come into the urban areas for services” to actively reaching out to meet these citizens’ needs. Partnerships are being built and expanded to meet these needs, especially from organizations with region-wide mandates.
- Willingness for organizations to redefine their definition of what the region is – not just “KW”, but more region-wide. This helps the community to know that they have the same access to these services and community supports.
- Better planning. Coming from Toronto see benefits of planning here. Not just community, there is parks, there is industry, an area or hub of Toronto. Rim and googly – technology, close to Toronto but not have to live in Toronto. Never lived here but am coming back to live here because of the set up.
- Feel more connected to Waterloo region. echo the above. Stuck around for work – diverse working economy. Shoes and shirts were economy and now has transitioned,. For people who want urban elements. You can have urban but be in county in 20 minutes from where ever you live. Urban rural blend. I like that.
- Waterloo region is something about the size. Have amenities but close enough to drive in Toronto and yet far enough away. The size fosters neat things. Work together is easier – don’t know if it is the values. Not too small and not too big. Don’t feel like I am at home until I hit the edge of the express way and see the farmland. Sense of people and connections and being deeply rooted in the values and community with each other. Same Neighbours I have had for 23 years. Values and connection is really important.
- This is how I know I am home – great things that make this home.
- Moved here in 2008. Benefitted from the programs here. Had access to the ymca etc.. met the mayor – how do you maintain the city and balance – there is that aspect of people willing to do things and collaborate and create action. That was a home run for me. people are willing to take initiative. That make this region something.
- Mentality of just do it. see an issue and turn it into an opportunity. People like to take initiative. We know we need to do so just do it and ask for forgiveness later. Don’t let bureaucracy get you down.
- We are not so big you don’t know who agencies are. Willingness to help. Get together and work to solve issues.
- Less competitive and more collaboration.



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- For years worked in city. Collaboration is there in city but it is in a different way. Fearful of stepping on toes in the urban area. In rural there is so few providers and big gaps. So literally instead of figuring out roles – pick up the phone and say this is the need what can we do about it. different way of doing work.
- Community resource officer – love this model. They will stop and pick up staff to go into a clients house when there is a relationship already.
- There are so many services within our community for different groups that need them. There are a lot of resources for children and families that need them.
- Living in Elmira – there are nice people. People stop in both directions to allow people to get across the community. The kids say hello to people on the streets.
- In Bloomingdale – easy to get along with people...you can do what you want and people don't complain. There is a lot of common sense found within the community, no bureaucracy.
- People like their community by their neighbourhood.
- Like each school is its own community, in the WR each neighbourhood is its own community. It's important that those neighbourhoods and communities can be considered positive because it creates a sense of belonging because you know that you can count on those people.
- Loves WR because it has a small town feel with all the amenities of a large city. There is a lot of variety in the region.
- There is a lot of culture in this area. Trails.
- People chose to move here because it was a combination of some of the urban amenities and also the small town fell.

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What gets in the way of wellbeing for you and your community?

- Short of community involvement
- Busy schedules – people don't have time to volunteer
- Difficult to move the old community and the new community together
- Safety – scared to go out at night
- Challenge in bringing in the sense of community when the big city takes over
- Not feeling welcomed into the community when people move here
- People not being accepting of different religions (small communities)
- Difficult for urban immigrant people to feel welcomed
- Commuter communities – the home is only where they sleep or spend the weekend
- Difficult to get people to come to events
- Hard to find volunteers
- Parents will do things for their children but not for themselves
- Getting programs tailored to a specific audience
- Hesitancy – know everyone is so anxious for volunteers people are scared to volunteer and think they won't be able to get out
- Transportation – time and travel to get to services
- Long way between regions – isolates people. Getting around is difficult
- Not owning a car - have to take a bus can take a long time
- Community is very spread out
- No grocery store in small communities
- Chief Larkin touched upon intolerance i.e. zoning for Prayer Centre – balanced against the number of refugees the region has housed in the past year. Intolerance and hatred gets in the way
- Apathy – people don't get involved. Seems to be the same people who get involved and volunteer. Hard to reach people and ask them what they want.
- Try to volunteer and get involved. Why people aren't interested or don't get involved. People feel dismissed without explanation in the past – affects their desire to engage municipally. I won't be able to make a difference anyways.
- Waterloo Neighbourhood strategy didn't go well ... too much history. Aren't overly optimistic.
- Sometimes politicians forget that public don't have all the background and understanding for how decisions get made
- Facebook pages – engagement through neighbourhood or community development
- Social media makes it too easy for people to be outraged in 140 characters. No interaction or dialogue. No connecting
- The power a vocal minority can have – they are loud and sway people in small communities. People outside feel that they can't say what they feel – come back and haunt them in their community
- Lack of time is always an issue – spending time with family, taking care of own health. Business of work, families, programming of children. No time for self care. Juggling everything and feeling overwhelmed.
- Evolved away from the simpler things in life. Take weekends away – unplanned
- TECHNOLOGY: is that a big barrier to our wellbeing???
- Resiliency and mental health issues – some relation to overuse of technology. Lack of experience connecting with others. Hiding behind text and twitter don't learn to have difficult conversations. Lacking human interactions, navigating issues in a human way.



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- Geographical, perceived boundaries, access (lack of transportation, especially to the rural areas).
- Knowing who to connect with – a relationship to partner between organizations hasn't had a chance to grow; with competing needs, different partners may have other priorities or items on the go that they aren't able to provide the staffing support that is needed to build the relationships or provide the supports to the community.
- Mandates and rules that limit the ability to partner easily – overcoming the bureaucratic red tape that exists (particularly with interacting with the school boards).
- Need to nickel and dime everything – budget restraints. This isn't specific to our region, but certainly affects service providers and organizations in Waterloo Region. In combating the social determinants of health, there is a need for long term commitments to build the community and support all residents. This requires a large budgetary commitment.
- Continuing support – if we are providing supports to families and children, what can we provide to school boards (and how can we overcome their budgetary limitations and ministry requirements) so that they are able to continue the work through middle childhood.
- While we are doing a good job building community links and supports, especially between organizations, these are still being built. Lack of awareness of all the resources that are available in the community. With how large our region is, being able to make these connections in a geographically appropriate way that meets the needs of an individual.
- Waitlists for limited resources – making sure we are meeting individuals' needs when they need it. If you need assistance with something, being able to meet that need in a year and a half leaves the individual struggling for that time.
- Because of safety concerns, we often respond with fear – locking of doors on schools, limiting access to family centres. Rather than dealing with the problems, the fear-based approach limits the ability of community to build and foster growth.
- With the larger growth in smaller rural areas, this sense of community that currently exists may be lost as so many new residents are coming to the area (especially if they are a commuting population). The expectations that they may be bringing to the area from a previous urban community may cause a disconnect between what is realistic for these areas with limited resources. Difficulty with preventing an "us" vs "them" mentality with the dichotomy of people who have grown up in the rural areas, vs newcomers from larger urban areas
- Sustainability – my line of energy sustainability – we were on fore front of this in past. Trying to engage community on this – people on think in short term. Need to look at long term for the next generations. Seems to be leadership there but needs to be continued.
- Waterloo region is largest municipality to not to draw water from great lakes. Sets the tone that resources are limited so has impacted our view of sustainability – in the back of our minds.
- Social perspective of things – arts in waterloo city - did not think of diversity of the community. Were not well received. Need to think about the diversity of the community. Interesting to see how the leaders keep diversity in mind. Tremendous opportunity but it take s some change in thinking to embrace the opportunity of diversity.
- Trying to create programs that match what people like. How do you define your community. leadership things about that but in the]interesting see how they will use diversity as an opportunity.
- Breslau – is diverse but also mostly commute to work. history of the community has been lost because there is new and old bbreslau, how do you create a connected community. Waterloo region is a community fo communities. Take multiple strategies – but resources are limited.so how do we act as a region but we have all these settlements.



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- Sometimes we miss out – regional planning principles beautiful blvds but don't work for rural areas. Tractors don't fit. Can't apply urban principles always to rural areas.
- Have communities that spend their days outside of the region working so how do we get them engaged.
- Growing community – build core up and keep countryside protected. That is good planning.
- Urban rural mix is such a value to this community.
- It is a community of communities - Breslau is not part of Woolwich township mentally. It is much more a suburb of Kitchener. Not sure you have to do anything about it but be conscious of it. There are different communities.
- Planning to engage youth in physical activities but I am a student I don't have an organization or resources to do this but I want to give back. I used the same benefits from my community and I want to reinvest in my community – how do I do this for example book facilities? Go through big process and expense in order to use facilities.
- Interested to see how I can do this? Expense and process are barriers. But there would be a lot of support to do this if we had the spaces and places to congregate.
- Bureaucracy is limiting – swim lessons are so far. And so many forms – dual level of government is frustrating.
- In some of the highest risks neighbourhoods, there are people there who have a sense of belonging and togetherness. But other neighbourhoods where its hard to get people engaged.
- In Elmira, it would help if there were neighbourhood associations. Neighbourhood parties really bring people together.
- One of the things that gets in the way of wellbeing is commuting. People who may commute to Toronto can be considered useless to the community because those people are exhausted. So those people can't contribute to their community.
- Trails that are connecting communities and neighbourhoods
- Access to services and activities that are reasonable.
- In regards to services for people, the financial piece can be a real challenge. If you don't have the ability to navigate through certain forms that provide subsidies then it makes it a great challenge. It makes it difficult to obtain education. It also makes it difficult to access activities for kids.
- People may not even know that there are places within the community that can help you. There are resources available for people on the fringe, but people need to know where and how to access it.
- Employment within the townships: there isn't a policy as to what kinds of businesses they want to attract. Zone changes need to be happening that actually affect the community vs just an economic investment. How do we want to grow our communities. We don't have to give our communities away just because they are willing to be here.
- Ignorance from ourselves of not knowing what is happening in the community. Getting out and knowing the entire region will help us understand how great we are.
- There is a constraint on the township level in regards to financial for transportation. Currently there are now bike lanes that are implemented with each new road. It is creating a friendlier biking community.

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If you could choose one issue to address wellbeing in our community what would it be?

- Transportation issue – can be solved with “neighborhood Uber” concept, where people would drive neighbors to places. Need a way to connect – community car share could help people get around and build community
- Relationship broke down – some people volunteer for everything
- Commitment issues – difficult to get people to stay
- Episodes of volunteering – only volunteer for a short period of time
- Lack of volunteers
- Lack of building relationships – can be solved by simple things like saying hello
- Multigenerational workplace – different focuses
- People have different ideas of what needs to be improved
- There are a lot of positives in the community, but sometimes the positives are what bring the negatives ex) strength of a small town tight knit community, can be a barrier of new people coming in
- More of the “W” in the urban centres. Building that sense of ownership.
- Strengthening the sense of community / neighbourhood throughout the Region. Building connectedness
- Density of new dwelling – municipal parks and public spaces for people to gather
- Social detriments of health – connectedness. All play a vital role in strong neighbourhoods i.e. community garden, grassroots community leaders, community ice rink
- Leverage community / neighbourhood leaders. Build our “village” (strong connected neighbourhoods)
- Important to not isolate communities – places to bring different neighbourhoods together i.e. arts, festivals, events
- People who want to live independently in their homes – strong neighbours, care and concern is critical. Aging in Place is important
- Concept of Intentional Living (Elmira Community Living). Focus is on being a good neighbour, bringing people together. Living and supporting each other. Discussion of video from Holland where students and seniors are living together.
- Services and support for families and parenting: literacy, socialization, feeling secure and safe are so critical to wellbeing of community. Early years centres etc.
- Parenting – parents feeling heard, understood, supported, educated. This is at the heart of wellbeing for the entire community.
- Epidemic of being “busy” – this seems to be a right of passage, something that is a good thing. If you are relaxing, taking time with your family, this might not be perceived as valuable as people who are busier. What is the reason – is this because we want to feel important? Is this an excuse for not having to commit to more activities.
- Finding an approach to reach those that you are trying to support. Regardless of age or need, being able to build the systems to meet everyone’s needs.



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- Combating isolation – especially with the increase of technology, lack of transportation. People are more individualistic, and don't come out of their houses to meet their neighbours.
- Sense of belonging – if you feel like you belong, you'll have a role to play. This builds a good foundation to supporting the social determinants of health.
- Housing – now it is not affordable, lots of pressure now – people coming here to buy and work outside. Impacts ability to purchase a home. It is more affordable here than Toronto. But compared to Regina it is crazy here.
- Housing is only going to be more of an issue. Magnified in the townships. The housing is limited plus the availability of housing options. How do you stay in this community as a senior – don't want single family unit anymore but there are no options. The variety of housing is not there. End up moving them into the city. Affordability and Diversity of housing is an issue.
- How do we create those hubs or places for people to come together to build those connections. They are closing the schools in the smaller communities. How do you foster those relationships when those places are not there.
- Loss of schools we need to be aware of and work at looking at when this happens what are the impacts on the community.
- Mayor was saying that the municipality has to charge because province doesn't provide them with enough funding. Influence the provincial government to provide the local municipality with enough money so they don't have to charge. Spaces for people to congregate are important. But fees are a barrier. Good repurposing in some communities. Old church in a downtown turned it into a community centre.
- Make sure multi use is part of the conversation in the planning.
- Need to rethink the community rec centres not the big rim parks anymore.
- Increase in number of people who are struggling – as much as we are prosperous – how do we bring people in who are living in poverty, homeless. It is increasing. We see changes in seniors now too – they don't have people to help support them no kids in town, mental health issues. As much as we are moving ahead we are still leaving people behind. How do we address most vulnerable.
- Anything to do with Children because they are the future. It helps prevent problems for the future. Help the children not make the mistakes that we do.
- In regards to 18-21-year-olds – they know very clearly that they will never experience what their parents have experienced. They are very concerned about the environment issues. They are expected to innovate impossible situations. No sane person would have good mental health if they were concerned with the environment.
- Everybody needs love and be cared for. Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- The ability to change, especially environmentally, it would bring hope for the next generation.
- Imparting the importance to our younger generation civic involvement. Helping them move from self-absorption to being more concerned with the responsibilities of the community and how they can effect change.
- Instilling values so that they trickle down to our youth so that they can grow up strong and have a shared sense of responsibility.
- It's hard to get volunteers in Breslau



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- The difficulty of Millennial generation being super concerned with just themselves. Want children to give back to the community. Worried about the sense of entitlement in the next generation.
- Somehow giving the access that is more in KW to the smaller communities that respects the smaller communities ways of doing things. There is a challenge for those in Cambridge to access all the services that are found in KW.
- In Cambridge it is so difficult to get to the central location. It can take 1.5 hours for some people to bus to the centre of Cambridge.

Community Conversation Flags

Participants were asked to write one thing they could do for themselves or for their community. The following responses were placed on flags and were hung up around the room.

- Be proactive and ask citizens directly what they want
- Introduce someone who may see themselves as disconnected from my community to someone in my community
- Time to give back
- Get more involved in neighbourhood events – meet new neighbours
- Encourage and support the unofficial leader in my neighbourhood (Dave)
- More time for self-care: be less programmed!
- Meet someone new and introduce that person to someone I already know
- Recruit others to be active in community activities
- Slow down and engage more in my community
- Create “space” for conversation, for play, for social activities
- Invite my neighbours for a BBQ (and no “devices” allowed)
- Engage in the neighbourhood activities as a family modelling positive community connections for the kids
- Listen actively
- Be a leader and teach the neighbourhood how to grow our own food
- Adopt a neighbour: say hi, smile, offer a ride
- Reaching out to newcomers
- Connect with a new neighbour
- Turn off my phone and say hi!
- Support community based initiatives; Let them thrive
- Increase access to services for vulnerable residents
- Keep in touch with my neighbours and offer to drive them to appointment or shopping
- Invite a friend to volunteer
- Lead by example to empower change
- Walk more!
- Take the kids tree planting
- Get more sleep!
- Continue to be friendly – smile, talk to new people and ask questions and get more info as to what they want

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