



c/o Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo
151 Frederick Street, Kitchener ON N2H 2H2
November 27, 2013

Ken Seiling
Regional Chair

Tom Galloway
Regional Councillor
Chair of the Administration and Finance Committee

Poverty Free Kitchener-Waterloo 2014 Budget Presentation

Since the Ontario Government made its commitment to create a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and reform the social assistance system, Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo and its partners in the Poverty Free Kitchener Waterloo Action Group have hosted many consultation meetings, community conversations and public forums. From all of this has emerged the commitment to eliminate the conditions that create, or keep people in, poverty. From the local perspective, we are following through on a commitment to ensure an integrated system of supports¹ that will accomplish the following:

- Engage our community at a grass roots level to mobilize and advocate for system change
- Contribute to public education campaigns to break the prejudice and stereotypes about poverty that are entrenched in policy making and service delivery
- Advise and lobby all orders of government against taking a counterproductive austerity approach, and continue to educate our political leaders about growing economic inequality and its impact on our community
- Work to disseminate information and help people navigate available support systems
- Monitor the implementation of reforms and participate in local stakeholder advisory activities.

¹ Resolution for 2013 – Poverty Free Ontario Forum Report, Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, February 2013, http://www.waterlooregion.org/sites/default/files/Resolutionfor2013_Report.pdf



A major tool in this work is the Local Framework for Successful Poverty Reduction Outcomes.² We have used this framework, developed out of our many community meetings, conversations and forums, in analyzing a number of initiatives that relate to poverty in our community, including the budget proposal of Regional Council for 2014. In applying the nine criteria that comprise the Framework to this proposal, we make the following points.

First, the discretionary benefits.

Given that the current Social Assistance rates are not adequate to ensure a healthy and dignified life, the amounts allocated to discretionary benefits must be increased to ensure that residents of our Region have access to basic necessities, including shelter, food hampers, and dental and health coverage.

We are asking you to keep the funding of discretionary benefits at the same level as the last year and to continue to lobby the province for the \$1.5 million, while increasing the caps per person in the 2014 budget.

In addition, the list of funded discretionary benefits must be expanded to include other essential supports such as medication coverage, transportation, and bus tickets. Finally, eligibility criteria that are limiting access to discretionary benefits must be made more inclusive, specifically regarding housing and homelessness prevention and dental care.

Second, the communication process.

Every transition takes time, and we ask the Region to invest in improving communication and transparency regarding the availability of discretionary benefits and the eligibility criteria, so that the entire community knows what supports they can rely on. Equally, **more** funds are needed to support the work of community groups that can provide system navigation and individual advocacy for low-income people, so that we can make sure that everyone involved in the benefits system is treated with dignity and respect.





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Third, information gathering.

Again, community organizations that work on behalf of low-income people can play a major role in information gathering together with the Region. We need to take full advantage of the information gathered to understand the need for supports and the use of the supports. Collecting data on non approved requests for discretionary benefits would systematically improve service delivery and has to happen on ongoing basis with community partners and service recipients.

Fourth, the Budget Consultation being more accessible.

The Budget input process itself would benefit from finding more intentional and inclusive ways to gather feedback from community groups and individuals, beyond the two budget hearings. Community groups can provide a number of suggestions for making consultations less intimidating, and for making more people aware of the consultations and feeling they are welcome to take part. As it stands, the information provided is overly complex; by providing more accessible materials and focusing on public education, Council can realize greater and more meaningful public participation.

Finally, employment and labour practices.

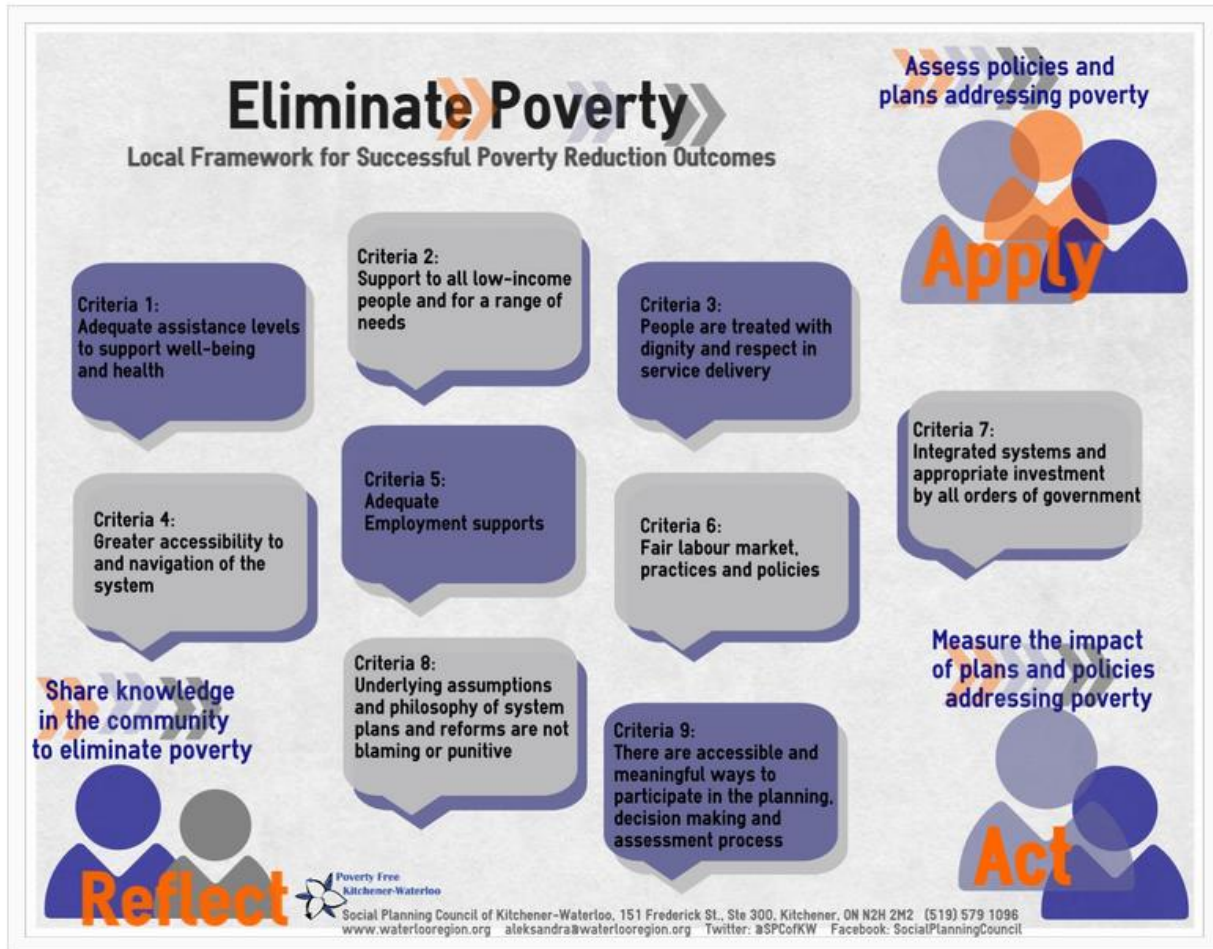
We ask that Council adopt a policy of wherever possible employing people who are transitioning out of social assistance. This is not so much a budget issue as a policy issue that would contribute to poverty reduction.

Waterloo Region has been doing a commendable job to date of finding ways to combine supports and funding from different departments and orders of government to provide the best possible service delivery to its residents. This is the leadership we have come to expect from you, and we look forward to seeing it continue.

Sincerely,

Barbara Spronk and Brad Ullner
on behalf of Poverty Free Kitchener-Waterloo





² Framework for Successful Poverty Elimination Outcomes www.waterlooregion.org/poverty-reduction

