

## **Infrastructure deficit poses threat to our resiliency**

### **We need to invest in infrastructure to deal with threats posed by climate change**

Opinion Sep 18, 2019 by Susan Koswan Waterloo Region Record

There are two broad approaches to climate action — mitigation and adaptation. We must drastically reduce greenhouse gases and sequester carbon, but we also have to prepare for the warmer, wetter and wilder weather forecast by the University of Waterloo's [Localized Climate Projections for Waterloo Region](#).

With this past winter's multiple freeze-thaw cycles and freezing rain, followed by record-breaking spring rains, the melt and stormwater found its way into many basements. This is costly and stressful with the potential for health issues from mould growth if the water damage is not properly dealt with.

As homeowners and property owners/managers, we can reduce the potential for flooding by ensuring the land slopes away from the building foundation, and downspouts lead well away from it or into a rain garden. We can also improve soil quality, reduce hard surfaces like driveways, patios and walkways, and clear stormwater drains of litter and leaves. REEP's [Rain Program](#) can guide you. Even without owning a property, anyone can get involved in tree planting and creating naturalized habitats in public places that also act as pollinator havens.

But what are we doing, collectively, to prepare?

Our regional government has drafted a Community Climate Adaptation Plan to consolidate the community's activities. Based on extensive expert, academic and community consultation over the past two years, the plan identifies four impact areas: health and community; built environment; natural environment and water; and energy and economy. Within these high-level categories, there are 15 objectives and multiple actions to be taken. Development of the plan was funded with \$175,000 from Infrastructure Canada's Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program to match our contribution of \$172,000 from the tax stabilization fund.

The words common to all of these objectives are "building resilience" and being both supportive of and working with "diverse actors across the region." There are no specific targets or deadlines, as all the objectives and actions involve community members and groups. The plan will be monitored on a five-year cycle.

Overall, the intent of the plan is good, but I was concerned that the wording was too soft and five years was too long to wait to review it, especially with no specific targets or deadlines laid out in the plan.

But Kate Hagerman, the Waterloo Region's manager of environmental planning and sustainability, assured me the plan is very much a living "process document." It is intended to provide an overall snapshot of who's doing what. She was impressed with the work that is already being done to prepare the region for the worst nature can throw at us.

A core group of stakeholders were brought together who will continue to be key participants to oversee and implement the actions, many of which are already in motion through corporate and strategic plans.

The plan is intentionally flexible and agile, with annual reviews, to move resources as needed. Both the community emergency response and [Alert Waterloo Region](#) are using climate adaptation to prioritize their actions. As well, public health is working with vulnerable populations for climate adaptation.

Waterloo Region may be well on its way to preparing for the worst, but most urban areas were not built to handle semi-annual century storms. About 60 per cent of public infrastructure is owned by local governments, according to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. By all accounts, Canada has an infrastructure deficit. The [2019 report](#) by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANSEA) concludes: "Systematic infrastructure underinvestment by the federal, provincial and municipal governments poses significant risk to Ontario's economy." The most recent budgets at all levels of government reflect a downward trend in investing in infrastructure that could jeopardize our community's resilience to meet the threats posed by climate change.

Former Ontario deputy minister Michael Fenn writes in "[Megatrends](#): The Impact of Infrastructure on Ontario's and Canada's Future," that we have to build in, "resilience and redundancy in stormwater infrastructure, bridge designs, water and wastewater treatment facilities, and electrical distribution networks."

He also wisely advises that "today's infrastructure seems horrendously expensive, but yesterday's investments look like incredible bargains."

The region welcomes your input to the draft Community Climate Adaptation Plan. You can do so before Oct. 7 through a [survey](#) on the Engage Region of Waterloo website.