

# Galloping growth

## Region's residents to reach 729,000 by 2031: province

By Jeff Outhit, Record staff

**WATERLOO REGION** — Louise Lanteigne fears the worst for the environment, if this community grows as big as planned.

"The first crisis that's going to hit with those numbers is water," warns the Waterloo environmentalist.

Ontario has directed local councils to plan for a population of 729,000 by 2031, up from 507,000 in 2006.

To reach this population means adding 9,000 residents a year, continuing the pace of growth that's happened since 2002.

Because women aren't having enough children to replace parents, growth will only happen if people move here from elsewhere in Canada or abroad.

Lanteigne contends population growth at the planned pace will:

- Overwhelm the environment in her neighbourhood in northwest Waterloo, causing flooding.

- Overstress the Grand River, which will fail to absorb treated sewage.

- Strain groundwater supplies and stress Lake Erie, when it is pressured by a thirsty pipeline by 2035.

These concerns are partly why she has asked a provincial planning tribunal to reject three subdivisions approved near her home, in northwest Waterloo.

Lanteigne is also lobbying for legislation to restrict development on the Waterloo moraine, the valuable groundwater source beneath much of Kitchener and Waterloo.

"We've always been trained in the mindset that growth is a positive thing. But uncontrolled growth is like cancer."

Kevin Eby, regional director of community planning, disagrees with her worrisome assessment. "Growth is part of maintaining the quality of life we have right now," he says.

Based on studies to date, Eby contends the local environment, including the Grand River and groundwater supplies, can support all the growth planned to 2031.

This differs from Guelph, which contends the Speed River can't handle growth to 185,000 people that's being planned there.

"There are points in the Grand River where likely, at some point in the future, we will hit those constraints," Eby said. "Are we there yet, or are we there within the planning horizon or the numbers we're talking about? The answer, certainly through our master planning, is no."

In weighing competing views on growth, keep in mind that population predictions are uncertain.

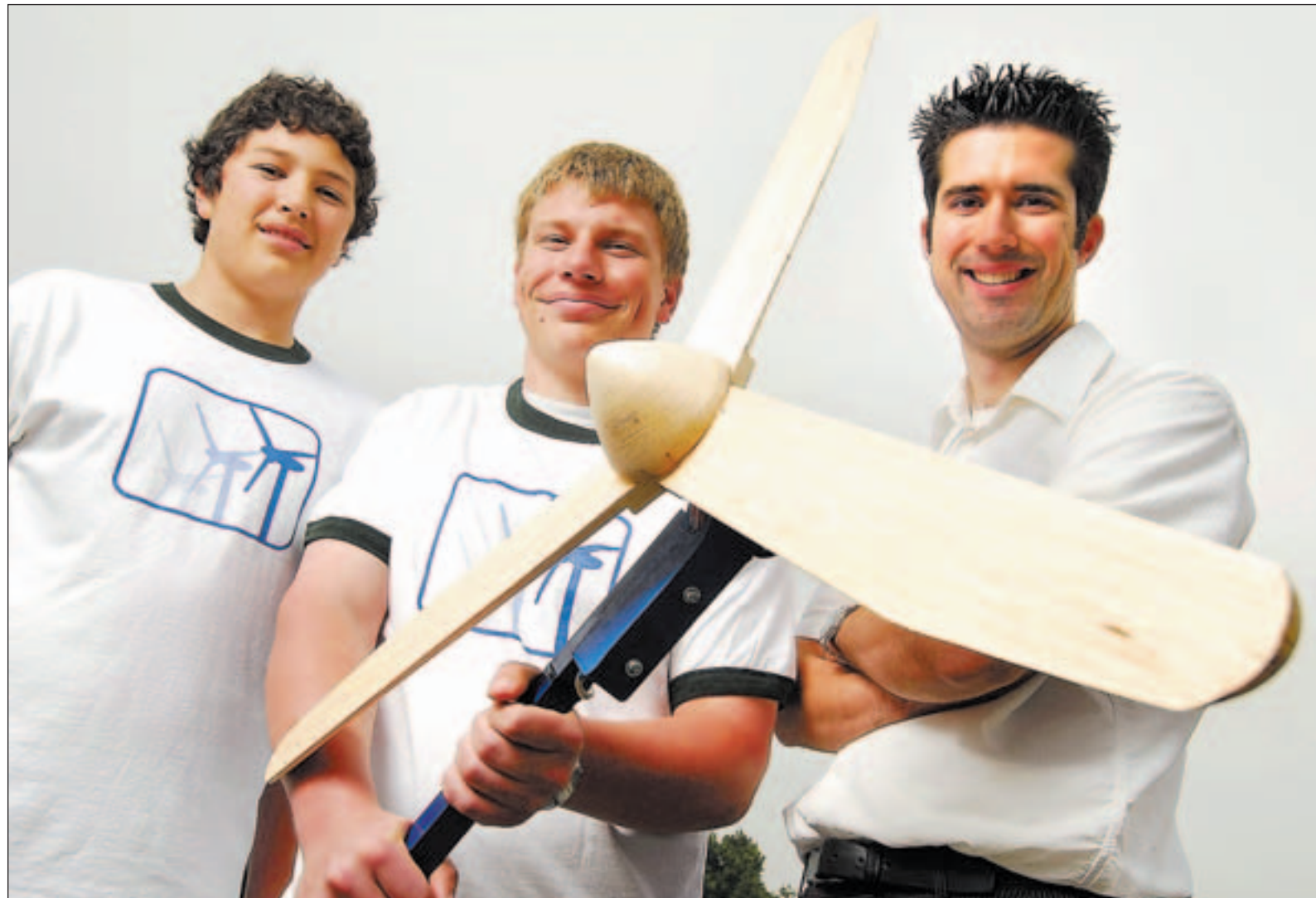
This is partly because people move about freely, regardless of government plans. Also, much will happen before 2031 that could alter migration trends.

In the fast-growing 1960s, for example, planners wrongly forecast this region would hit one million residents by 2000. In reality, the community got less than halfway there.

Lanteigne, worried about environmental damage, is persuaded this region can continue to flourish without adding so many people.

This means, in part, developing knowledge industries that need fewer workers. It also helps to build intercity transit, so workers can commute from other places.

"I believe we have the potential to increase our economic growth without having to expand the population," Lanteigne says.



MATHEW MCCARTHY, RECORD STAFF

St. David students Brandon Ces and Christopher Giebat, and teacher Alex Matan show off the winning wind turbine the students built.

## St. David students have wind in their sails: their energy turbine design tops in Ontario

By Jeff Outhit, Record staff

**WATERLOO** — Ontario is looking more to wind power to support growth, in a way that does not damage the environment.

Two local teens understand the potential more than most.

Brandon Ces, 16, and Christopher Giebat, 18, recently designed a turbine judged best in the province at a high school wind energy competition.

"It's a great source of energy, because it's green," Giebat says. "I don't think we're using the wind enough. We should be using it so much more."

"It works even in the dark, unlike solar," Ces says.

Ces and Giebat attend St. David

### Green Region

Catholic Secondary School in Waterloo. For \$55 in costs, they built a test turbine featuring three lightweight balsa wood blades, a steel shaft and wood gearboxes.

Their approach was not to try something new but to refine a proven design and build it sturdy.

When put to the test in a wind tunnel, their turbine demolished 31 other student entries, generating up to 27 per cent more power.

This won them bragging rights and \$1,000 each in an annual contest sponsored by the engineering school at the University of Guelph.

"I like understanding how things

work, and taking that knowledge, and using it practically," Giebat says. He's heading to the University of Waterloo next fall to study engineering.

Ces, who repairs small engines and runs a landscaping business, is also considering an engineering career. "I'm very hands-on," he says.

The students understand wind power has limitations. It needs steady wind and open space. It costs more than conventional electricity produced on a larger scale.

Still, they believe wind power can be a bigger part of a greener future. "It's not going to solve our problems, but it will sure help," Giebat says.

jouthit@therecord.com

**Politicians are planning for Waterloo Region to reach 729,000 residents by 2031, up from 507,000 in 2006.**

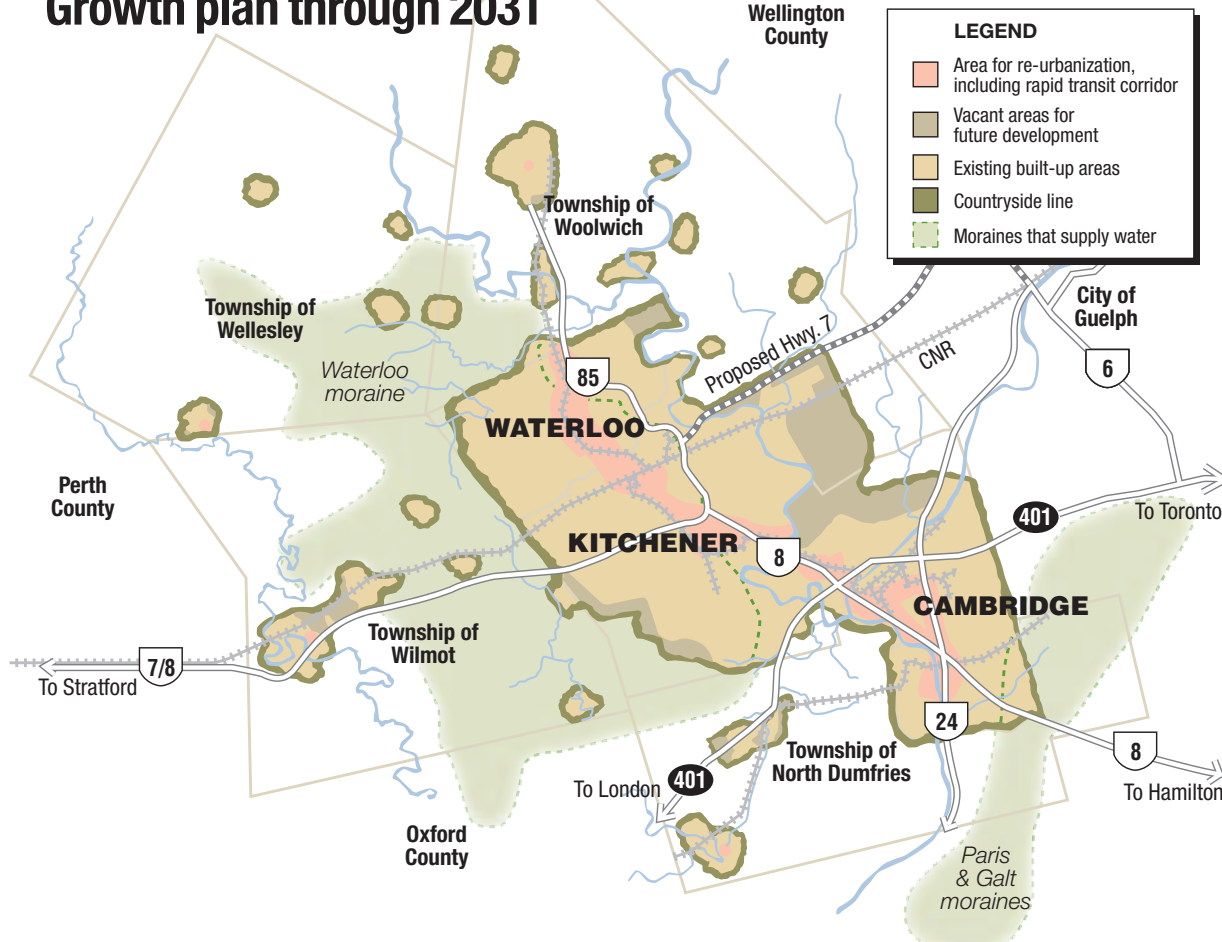
**Some upsides of growth:**

- Provides new people to fill jobs as workers retire.
- Stimulates demand for goods and services.
- Builds diversity and enriches the cultural life of the community.
- Provides more taxes for government projects.
- Builds demand for private development.
- Makes better use of underused infrastructure.

**Some downsides of growth:**

- Strains the natural environment. This includes the Grand River, which must absorb treated sewage, and underground sources that supply most drinking water.
- Encourages traffic congestion.
- May increase pollution, by residents and industry.
- Increases public spending on infrastructure and services.
- Farmland and sensitive areas may be consumed.
- May strain social networks and public services.
- May boost the cost of detached family homes, if land values soar.

### Growth plan through 2031



University of Waterloo planning professor Mark Seasons agrees communities can prosper without population growth, in part by focusing on technology.

But "growth is an article of faith," says Seasons, also a dean in environmental studies. "It's part of conventional wisdom. It's something that's deeply ingrained in our culture. So it's hard to shake."

Look, for example, to the last time the regional population almost stalled. It was 1993 to 1995, when the Ontario economy was battered by recession, and local poverty and welfare levels soared.

"Growth is always viewed as a positive thing by people involved in business and the economy," Eby says. Without population

growth, Eby warns, the region would not have enough young workers to replace older workers as they retire. This could see local jobs go unfilled.

"What happens then is businesses pack up and leave," Eby says. "You're not going to move to a place where you have trouble filling jobs."

He also warns that without growth, our children and grandchildren may have to go elsewhere for work.

Local planners had been predicting this region would hit 700,000 people by 2041. Ontario has advanced this growth by a decade.

The province expects environmental and community constraints imposed in greater Toronto will push more residents and jobs to

outlying areas.

Local councils contend their plan to manage the expected growth will maximize its benefits and minimize the downsides.

"The numbers are manageable," Seasons said. "I think they've done a first-rate job."

Key components of the local growth plan include:

- Opening up vacant lands on the east side, north of Cambridge, to support new industries and homes. It's believed this area poses less risk to groundwater than the west side of the region.

- Drawing a countryside line around urban areas, beyond which growth will be restricted. This is to protect farmland.
- Nudging some new homes and businesses in-

ward, into existing neighbourhoods. This will make the community more compact, and make infrastructure (roads, transit, water, sewer) more efficient.

The growth plan is expected to lead to smaller lots, more townhomes and apartments, and to building up rather than out.

Detached family homes, long the dream of many, are expected to become more costly as land values increase. This may put them out of reach of some families.

"That's going to be a major challenge to deal with, and I'm not sure people quite understand that in this region, that this is one of the consequences," Seasons warns.

jouthit@therecord.com