

Participant Statement Re: 22 Weber St, Kitchener, Ontario Case # OLT-22-002377, March 4, 2025

I co-own and live in a home at [REDACTED] Ahrens St W., in the Civic Centre Neighbourhood Heritage District.

I respectfully request that the OLT support the expert opinions of the Planners representing the City of Kitchener and Friends of Olde Berlin Town. I have two perspectives to share.

First, I am an immigrant

As a Dutch immigrant to Canada, who grew up in South East Asia and Europe, I have a deep appreciation for the conservation of architectural heritage. There is a long history of this in Holland and other European countries; old soulful neighborhoods draw people, locals and tourists. Properties in old, venerable Districts are seen as belonging to the community, although they are usually privately owned; their value to the community is understood – they are in a sense living “monuments” that are carefully protected to ensure they retain their character.

In Holland they exist alongside complementary, attractive newer housing and community developments, many of which are examples of innovative and sustainable architecture.

When I moved to Kitchener from Toronto in 1999, I looked for a house with old world charm. There was not much to look at here vs other cities. It seemed this City had torn down or let run down many of its historical properties. There were only two intact downtown areas with older houses – the area around Victoria Park and what is currently the Civic Centre Neighbourhood Heritage District, where I now live.

As I understand the documents I have seen, the *Province of Ontario seeks to ensure a full range of housing options. This is relevant to the protection of our area. Young families cannot find enough space, nor the livable community, they need and want in the condo towers being built.*

An increasing number of young families buy the houses that come up for sale in our neighbourhood. This benefits not only its vibrancy, but more importantly, it means that existing schools, playgrounds etc., remain viable and that we are making the most of existing community infrastructure.

Second, I am a homeowner in a heritage district

When we replaced our unsightly, disintegrating front porch, we carefully worked with the City to ensure our new porch met both building and heritage requirements. This was not simple or inexpensive, but we accepted this as a responsibility that comes with the privilege and pleasure of living here.

Owners of properties in this District sought to have it designated a Heritage District, knowing that this would mean some rather onerous costs and restrictions. The kind of development that undermines the value of heritage areas will degrade the area to the point that people will not go through the effort of meeting Heritage Standards and risks properties running down.

This heritage district is an inviting area, where people using walkers, young families, people living in nearby condos, apartment towers, office workers, newcomers and seniors walk regularly, walk dogs, and meet on the street. Progressive degradation would make the area inhospitable to families and many others and a community, an asset, would be lost.

Maaïke Asselbergs

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