

**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.

*My aim is to bolster expert submissions made by Planners representing the City of Kitchener and Friends of Olde Berlin Town – and uphold the Provincial Planning Framework - by bringing to life the importance of the case for preserving this area as a community asset (my words) for future generations.*

For context, I've lived in this area since 1983, well before it was designated a Heritage District. When I moved in, the area was largely derelict and deemed unsafe -the epicentre of "Take Back the Night" marches. For years, one house, then the next, fell into disrepair. Beautiful old homes were neglected, abandoned, boarded up, inhabited by squatters, sites of fires and ultimately condemned and torn down.

Fortunately, a growing number of owners invested in restoring properties and bringing them up to date. This is costly: e.g., our house was built without indoor plumbing or electrical services; it had been a rundown rooming house. It needed a lot. Our sense of stewardship spurs us to upgrade and maintain it.

To establish this Heritage District, as citizens/property owners, we voluntarily assumed, as a civic responsibility, significant restrictions (e.g., not altering exterior appearance of homes) and obligations (e.g., either salvage/reuse or replication of architectural features when renovation is done) designed to retain the character of homes and properties as our contribution to preserving the Heritage District.

It's a big commitment when owners agree to be stewards of historically significant properties, and assume both the additional costs associated with maintaining our properties to meet Heritage standards and the restrictions on what we can do with our properties, which are now "community assets."

We partnered with the City to maintain this area as a public asset. Owners committed to protect properties via their care and investment; the City committed to protect the area via zoning restrictions. This was meant to preserve the District as an asset to benefit the community for generations to come.

*This District is ever more valuable as a community asset as housing intensification increases. Green space on private property is rapidly disappearing as high-rises proliferate; lots they are built on are often almost totally paved, as is proposed for 22 Weber Street. In our downtown – near us - there are entire blocks with no green space; small trees struggle to survive and die on our downtown main street. In this context, a heritage district "green space" is a valuable asset for the promoting health and wellbeing of the community - perhaps most of all the growing number of our neighbours who live in towers.*

Thousands of people who will live in high-rises are at risk of losing ready access to areas where they can find sun, see grass, gardens and trees, hear birds and enjoy the sight of historical houses preserved by property owners acting as stewards. This is urgently needed green space.

There are an ever-decreasing number of dwellings – single family or condos – suitable for families in the downtown area as family friendly units are displaced by towers with small units. A growing number of young families are moving into this area – one of the few areas downtown with family sized dwellings.

22 Weber is a welcome development, *if it respects the Heritage District*. If it overpowers the lot and nearby properties, ruins the streetscape, and disrupts the Heritage District, this will erode the commitment of people to invest in properties at the level required to maintain Heritage standards.

This could well trigger the creeping deterioration I described above; I saw glorious homes on Margaret Avenue neglected and falling into disrepair, one after the other, as neglect moved down the street.

The likelihood of this happening is related to the costs – effort, time and money – of meeting Heritage Standards. Imagine, for instance, the costs of rebuilding ornate wooden porches, some two stories high wrapping around 2 sides of houses, reusing salvaged original materials or replicating architectural features. The very substantial costs of such work, in dollars and time (e.g., getting approvals for design, materials, etc.), would be tough to justify if the area degrades.

We live with major restrictions, as well as extra cost. For instance, we can't develop our attic as a living space because of restrictions on changing the roof line. Such firm restrictions, as well as the extra costs, create a disincentive to stay committed to stewardship of heritage if the area degrades.

Given requirements and restrictions borne by people living in the area, acting as stewards, it's hard to see a development proposal that egregiously disregards reasonable effort to fit into this Heritage District. To me it signals no interest in preserving the area, despite commitments of citizens and the City.

**If the proposed development disincentivizes nearby owners from maintaining properties to meet Heritage Standards (because they have lost light, the ability to grow plants, privacy, etc.), and sets a precedent that enables other similar developments in this area, the broader community risks losing a public asset, whose maintenance cost is borne mainly by private home owners, not government.**

In the process, citizens stand to lose trust in government. In good faith we freely entered into a covenant with the City to jointly protect this area. The City is backing us. If the OLT does not stand with citizens and the City by upholding this area as a Heritage District, how can we not be cynical?

I'm a senior. I didn't go to the effort of writing this statement out of self-interest. I just want to do all I can to help preserve a rare urban environment that will benefit future citizens for generations.

What we destroy can never be recovered. I want to see 22 Weber go ahead – in a way that minimizes the risk of compromising the Civic Centre Neighbourhood Heritage District as a community asset.

I believe that the case I make here supports the Provincial Planning Framework, and that supporting the development as proposed would run counter to the Province's direction to meet "projected needs of current and future residents of the regional market area. *This is accomplished by permitting and facilitating all housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and well-being requirements of current and future residents [italics mine].*" Provincial Planning Statement 13.

Sincerely,

Roy Cameron

