On the record

Every month, the Kitchener Citizen publishes "Notes from City Hall" which Kitchener City Councillors can use to communicate with residents.

In addition to highlighting upcoming communiity events, I often use this as an opportunity to present my position or invite discussion about issues that pertain to citizens.

Here is one that I think bears repeating.

...housing is a human right where 'government is accountable to the people'.

At a recent City of Kitchener speakers' event on The Value of a Human Right to Housing Framework for Local Governments with Leilani Farha, a Canadian lawyer and former UN special rapporteur on adequate housing. Her talk was based on the premise that housing is a human right where 'government is accountable to the people'. It is a right that grants individuals the entitlement to be adequately housed.

She defined 'adequate' housing as

1. having security of tenure without the fear of eviction,
2. being affordable based on the household income rather than a percentage of market value,
3. being a decent place in good repair free of such things as rodents, lead pipes and mould, and
4. being culturally appropriate.

All pretty basic standards, I'd say.

Across the country and the Region the number of homeless people is rising. She criticized the current approach to housing, arguing that it is feeding investors and not addressing the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of society. She said we need to 'reboot' and find an alternative approach to housing.

Some suggestions included focusing on the most marginalized groups, introducing greater protections for tenants, setting maximum rent thresholds, creating longer-term leases, introducing rent freezes, and regulating investors.

Her talk ended with two suggestions - the goal should be to stop building new housing supply unless it meets the needs of vulnerable sectors, and we need a 'big game plan'. All levels of government have a responsibility. We must do better!