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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 community 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.

Residents often criticize the public engagement process when they feel they have been ignored. But where are they left when there isn't one at all?

One of the most common public engagement exercises realized in Ward 9 involves new development proposals. When they require official plan and bylaw amendments the process is: notify residents with 240 metres and post on City website, then hold a neighbourhood information meeting, discuss and vote on a staff report to the Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee, and finally to ratify the decision at a full meeting of Council. Community members are invited to participate at each step of the process.

I recently learned about a proposal to build a 44-storey building at the corner of Queen and Charles containing 566 residential units. It did not require official plan or bylaw amendments, and so did not require any of these steps.

It went to the Heritage Committee for comments (but no vote), and then directly to Site Plan Review. The community and Council were otherwise left out of the entire process. Some of the questions I still have about the proposal relate to the number of family sized units, whether units are condos or rental apartments, what LEED standard features will be in the new building, how many units will be affordable, how many accessible, how bonusing was calculated (permitting increased height) and how the 'public space' will be used.

It seems to me that we have an obligation to inform residents and give them the opportunity to provide feedback on developments of this magnitude, no matter where they are located.