

The Last Wild Place

Kingston was finally changing for the better – or at least, that’s what everyone said.

I looked out the window of the electric bus as it rolled quietly down the street, past the new solar panels, green roofs, and small turbines spinning in the wind. Even the sidewalks were generating electricity now, with piezoelectric panels that made energy when people walked on them. Kingston is changing fast. It looks different every month now – greener, cleaner, and a little more complicated.

I got off the bus at my stop, and walked home. The faint hum of the wind turbines droned in the background, and the air smelled of flowers, maybe because of the new pollinator gardens along the curb. A lot of change has happened in a short time. People finally started realizing that the Earth really needs saving – and fast.

“Hi Hannu!” shouted my little brother Onni as I walked in the door. “What did you do at school today?” I asked, dropping my backpack.

“I made a poster about climate change!” he said proudly, holding it up for me. It had a big green earth surrounded by hearts and animals.

“That’s great,” I said, patting him on the head.

“Do you think people are finally helping the planet now?” he asked suddenly.

“I think so,” I said after a moment. “But sometimes people do the wrong thing for the right reason.”

I went upstairs to my room to finish my own homework and opened my computer to check the news.

That's when I saw it.

A small article at the bottom of the "green news" news page: "New Housing Development Near Conservation Area."

They were planning to fill in part of the wetland and destroy the park next to it to build a new "eco-friendly" neighbourhood.

"How can they do that?" I thought.

The conservation area was one of the few wild places left in the city. I read some more and saw that the conservation authority was going to sell the property to the city soon, after a meeting at City Hall. Kingston needed more housing, but not at the cost of nature.

The next morning, I biked past the conservation area on the way to school. There were orange flags stuck in the ground and survey drones buzzing around, scanning the area. I couldn't stop thinking about it all day. I couldn't believe that the city was really going to be building on the conservation area. Everyone kept saying how Kingston was leading the province in green innovation, but building houses on one of the last green spaces didn't seem green at all. At lunch, I told my friend Adam.

"That can't be right," he said. "Marshes clean water and help prevent flooding. My mom says they're like nature's sponges."

"Exactly," I said. "And they want to cover it in concrete?"

"Maybe it's a mistake. You could write to the city council." Adam said.

"Why would they listen to a Grade 8 student?" I wondered out loud.

"You never know," he said. "There's always stories in the news about kids making a difference in their community."

I sighed. "I don't want to be a 'story,' I just don't want them to wreck the place."

"Then do something before they do," Adam said, grinning.

That night, I pulled up the city's community feedback page, where anyone could write their concerns or ideas to the city. I started typing.

Finally, I wrote:

“Please reconsider building on the conservation area. It's not just a marsh, it's home for wildlife, and a natural water filter. Many people who live nearby walk there everyday, and kids play at the park there too. It is also one of the last wild places where people can explore and learn about nature in the city.”

I read it twice and clicked send.

Before bed, Onni peeked into my room.

“You're still on your computer?” he asked, rubbing his eyes.

“Yeah,” I said. “I just sent a message to the city because they want to build houses where the park is.”

“Oh no!” he replied. “That's my favourite place to play!”

I smiled a little. “I know Onni, that's why I'm making sure they won't.”

The next day, I told my science teacher, Ms. Bernard, about it.

“I think that's a good idea,” she said. “Why don't you present it in Eco Club tomorrow?”

“I'm not really a presenter kind of person, but I can try.” I said.

She smiled. “Sometimes change starts with the people who least expect to start it.”

That night, I researched all about the conservation area and made my presentation.

That afternoon, I stood up in front of Eco Club and showed everyone the problem.

“Building on the marsh would destroy one of the last wild places in Kingston, and many animals wouldn't have a home,” I said.

One student raised his hand. “Where exactly would they build?”

“Right beside the Rideau Trail,” I replied, pointing at the map.

To my surprise, everyone seemed impressed with my speech and willing to help.

“You did a great job!!” Adam said.

“This is actually a big deal,” Mr. Lopez, the club president, said. “We should spread the word.”

“Seriously?” I asked, “You’d all help?”

“Of course,” Mr. Lopez said. “Everyone cares about the environment here just as much as you do.”

People offered to help me make posters, start an online petition, and even contact the local newspapers to spread the word. Within a week, our petition had over a thousand signatures.

Soon, the story spread all across the city. Even people who supported more housing started to question where it should be built.

The next evening, we all went to City Hall. The room was full of people. Students, teachers, parents, and city planners filled every seat. When it was my turn to speak, I was so nervous that my hands shook, but I took a deep breath.

“You call this neighbourhood ‘eco-friendly,’” I said. “But destroying a conservation area that animals, plants, and people all use isn’t eco-friendly at all. If we want a sustainable Kingston, we should build on land that has already been developed, like old parking lots and empty lots, not the few wild places we have left.”

When I was finished, the room went quiet – then people clapped.

“Great job!” Adam said.

“I can’t believe that people actually listened!” I replied.

A week later, the city released its new plan. They would be building on an abandoned parking lot near the train station and an empty field by the Invista Plant. When I biked through the conservation area again, the flags and drones were gone. I stopped on the boardwalk and looked down at the water. A turtle was resting on a log, and dragonflies flew over the cattails.

For once, it felt like people were actually listening, not just talking about being green, but actually doing something about it. The city was changing again – but this time, it was the right kind of change.