

Kevin Wong → St. Augustine CHS #33

Good Evening Mr. Scarpitti, esteemed town counselors, and concerned citizens. We are students from St. Augustine Catholic High School and we are very concerned with the future of Markham's foodbelt. Markham's farmland is not simply an issue of dollars and cents and the near future, it is one that transcends your generation, our generation and even the next. But we recognize that you are aware of the facts and we do not want to bombard you with more. Instead, we'd like to ask you all to close your eyes.

Imagine a wide open field. Picture the field's lush green vegetation. It's a hot summer's day, the air curls from the heat and humidity. You're walking through a boundless green field in between the bright red sprouts of tomatoes and luscious peppers. Across the pasture a single tree stands, alone. This is a familiar tree. It's been here your whole life, your parents whole life, it's been here when your great parents and your great; great grand parents first cultivated the land. Now imagine walking in the same field, but it's autumn now. A road has sprung up fencing in the four sides the side of the pasture, it's still quite serene, the tomatoes have all been harvested by now, yet the tree still stands. It's flourishing green leaves now warm, vibrant oranges, crimsons and yellows. In the winter houses appear on the other side of the road, still your sanctuary remains, tomatoes buried in the white frost, melting underneath your feet. Sprinkled in icing sugar snow, bare to the bough, stands the tree; still alone. Your tree. Now it's spring time, tomatoes buds peek out of the mahogany soil, you feel the moisture between your toes. A sign has sprung up: "Building Communities Together" but you know this community is slowly being torn apart.

What do you remember?

I remember when I was a camp counselor at a farm that was home to over 300 children/day during the summer months. The land provided a natural environment inhabited with wildlife for the children to explore, crayfish in the creek for them to catch, a corn maze to navigate through, wagon rides where camp songs were sung and barn animals to interact with. - seeing the excitement on the childrens' faces as they fed grass to goats was priceless. For me, this camp was a place to escape the stress of a hectic suburban lifestyle by just simply interacting with the natural environment.

I remember going on a field trip to a Markham farm with my school mates from Toronto, when I told them I lived around the farm, they couldn't believe me. This gorgeous, vast green landscape was foreign to their concrete reality.

I remember being really upset, being stressed from work, knowing that the only way I could feel at ease was to go outside for a walk, be with nature. I remember the silence, the peacefulness, the tranquility of nature in the vast open air. It was this way that I could only feel better. I don't want to lose this sanctuary of mine. I don't think I'll ever be able to feel ha again if nature isn't there to comfort me anymore.

I remember when I was younger the farm at Warden and Steeles was a symbolic place. Every year I would buy fireworks, potted plants and evergreen trees depending on the season. One day I was told that the farm would be torn down. To present day, the once sentimental farmland has now turned into a TNT supermarket. It no longer holds any special meaning.

We are aware that behind your decision may be dollars and cents. But we must be cognizant that behind these tangible things are people supported by their intangible ideals of community, their sense of acceptance, and ultimately their sentiment. We beg you to think of the future generations of Markham, the memories they have already had and have yet to experience if we save this invaluable farmland. We need to feel connected to our physical environment and thus feel connected as a community. We realize the past is the past and the future may be progress but we must also recognize the past is entrenched in our identity, and it is our duty as stewards of this life-giving earth to protect its future so that we may preserve its past. We ask you to try to remember your own memories of Markham, this beautiful, bountiful land and what it has meant to you. Thank you for your time.