

Good evening,

My name is Lily Merrill and I am a 16 year old student here in Guelph.

Unfortunately, I will be camping this week and will not have the opportunity to delegate at the council meeting for the final decision regarding parkland dedication. However, below is what I would have said if I were able to.

In my young childhood, I had the privilege of a family, school, and a community all in which the power and creativity of time and experience in the outdoors were deeply valued. As I got older, there was less emphasis on free play time in forests and community gardens, but my friends still continue to meet in the parks for picnics, large games of hide and seek, and simply to lie and watch the sunset.

Parks are valuable spaces not only as fields for baseball diamonds, soccer matches, splash pads, and play structures for children, but also simply as natural outdoor communities where children and adults alike can involve themselves in exploration, quiet observation, and neighbourhood-driven outdoor events.

The magic of the best community parks is that, even if buried in the heart of the city, they are spaces which bring people together, as well as allowing for gentle self-reflection in the groves of trees planted by those who came before us.

Let's talk about the multicultural festival, sparkles in the park, the guelph dance festival, the guelph outdoor handmade market, the pottery market, 2 rivers festival, and various indigenous ceremonies, all of which are incredibly important to so many people and are beautifully hosted by parkland that those before us had the thoughtful foresight to ensure were kept as outdoor spaces into the future. Newer neighbourhoods should have the same opportunity and access to parks to create culturally significant community gatherings.

More personally, I cannot count the number of times I have ridden my bike to the park, alone or with a friend, because it was an easily accessible quiet outdoor space to clear my head and find some deeper appreciation for the world as it is. The health benefits of fresh, clear air for people and the planet cannot be overstated and should be accessible to everyone in this city.

Let's use this opportunity to think magically and creatively, in the same way children do when given the freedom of natural parkland. By respecting and continuing the foresight of others, we are actively impacting our city, our planet, and our own mental-health.

As a community, let's maximize the magic of that impact by doing everything we can to ensure each person in this city has access to natural parkland. We need to make the decision to preserve parkland into the future now, or we will not have the chance.

This can be done by ensuring that Guelph City Council updates this bylaw for maximum land that Guelph is entitled to, without waiting to review whether caps are needed first.

Thank you.

Best,
Lily Merrill