

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a lifelong resident of the Fredericksburg region. I grew up on a dirt road that was five miles long. My eggs and milk came from the two farms on my road owned by family friends. My playgrounds were the pastures, wetlands, woods, and swamps that bordered the road from beginning to end.

Early in my childhood, that five mile stretch of dirt road felt like paradise. For my brother and I, the only limitations to fun were those we imposed on ourselves or the limits of our own imagination. But, when I hit my teenage years, I felt that dirt road symbolized all that was wrong with my life, with this area, and, to a large degree, with the world. I wanted desperately to be free of a place that seemed stuck in time and to go to places that felt like they represented a more modern and connected world. Regionally, we were in a time of immense disruption due to the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Many of my classmates and their families were suffering and their farms were either in duress or had been sold off to developers who would eventually carve pastures into bite-sized lots for other people's homes. For my friends whose families were unable—or unwilling—to sell, life became nothing short of grim.

I vowed when I graduated from high school to never come back home and, by the time I had graduated, so much had changed for the worse here that making that vow was easy because there was no hope, no promise of opportunity, no future within which I could see myself or anyone my age thriving. So, I left for college, looking only forward and with no nostalgia driving me, my plans, or my desire for home. I felt, finally, free of that dirt road.

Life is a master teacher, as I am sure many of you know, and freedom is a funny thing. During my junior year of college, the first Gulf War broke out and my brother, who was a new Army recruit, got orders to deploy. If we are lucky, we have several life defining moments. If we are honest, those that define us the most are never easy. My brother and I were very different. He loved being on that dirt road and never wanted to leave. His first night away from home was bootcamp and within weeks, he would be facing the biggest change of his life because of those deployment orders. Around the same time, I was starting a new semester at school and joining my fellow students on campus and in DC protesting the War chanting "No Blood for Oil!" and all of the other well-intentioned anthems of a protest based on good intentions but no real plan.

On the ride home, I found myself thinking about how, in that same moment I was protesting, my brother was preparing to go to war. The stark contrasts between our choices and our experiences in that shared moment of time made me question everything about the education I was getting in school. I decided school was not preparing me for life and to be prepared for life, I needed find a way I could create value in the world that was more impactful and more important than the scores on a test and a conferment on a diploma. The day after I got back to school, I went to the registrar's office and resigned, and, months after that, I left the college town I had been in and moved back home.

My parents no longer lived on that dirt road, having moved instead into a house on a bite-sized lot on what used to be a farm. I had no real plan for my life. My only goal was to figure out how I needed to define what value meant to me and then set the course of my life so that I could create it. Over the next several years, I charted my course towards value much the same way a National Geographic explorer sets out to find things undiscovered. Failures and setbacks taught me where my thinking had been wrong, misguided, or uninformed. Successes were fewer in number than failures, but they persisted because they were built on the knowledge I had gained while doing the work, building skills, and taking risks.

I think that it is no coincidence that during this time, I met and became friends with the original founders of Downtown Greens. We were all young, curious, and each yearning to define what value meant to us. We experimented with the arts and business and social causes. We found hobbies that inspired our passions. And we were fueled in our pursuits by the anxiety and fear that comes with great uncertainty, for none of us had taken the well-worn path and the world then, like it is now, was full of disruptive change.

Beyond the space we had created for each other, we had no idea if there was a place in the world at large where we would fit in, where we would have value, and where we could create things that mattered. Downtown Greens, in its earliest inception, was a place where people came together around a shared passion and in the process built a community that brought opportunity to people no matter who they were or where they came from. Everyone had value. Everyone created value. The community garden became a place where real growth for many people started too.

Today, over twenty-five years later, I am the CEO of a technology company that specializes in transformation. My expertise is software engineering and human-centered design. It is not in conservation. My company helps large organizations from a wide array of industry and government navigate disruption with speed and agility and build robust capabilities that harness change and deliver continuous value more quickly and reliably. Despite my education, the greatest influences in the organizational and technical designs I create for my customers come from the three most important things I learned growing up on a dirt road:

- Everything has a season, and every season has its own value
- Collaboration increases survival
- Yield depends on decisions, the environment, and climate. You only control one of those.

In this same 25 years, Downtown Green's mission has expanded beyond the beautiful community collaboration it started as to become a mission-focused organization that has built infrastructure, services, and processes that create opportunities for a diverse range of people in the region, helping them to find their own path to value through hands on development in nature and in their community. They have transformed an entire generation of young and old alike far beyond the little garden where they still work.

I am writing this letter to you, not as a conservationist (although, I am a supporter of conservation efforts) but as the head of a company that has spent years architecting change for organizations that need to transform. Many of my customers seek our services only after they have started to suffer and this suffering is always—without exception—the result of their unwillingness to accept that everything has a season, including their own business model. By the time they come to me, their organization is in deep duress because their entire structure and all of the processes for making decisions were implemented to sustain a yield harvested during a business climate in political and economic environments that no longer exist. By the time they come to me, their own employees are often deeply entrenched in a scarcity mindset and a Darwinian-like competition for resources that prevents innovation from taking root, much less growing.

By the time they come to me, any mission or vision or sense of purpose has been carved up into bite-size bits of rhetoric and the value of the organization is wholly unrecognizable if not entirely lost.

Which brings me to my purpose in writing this letter.

As I see it, there are three existential threats facing humanity: pandemics (more are coming), climate change, and artificial intelligence (AI) (although I am a die-hard technologist, I believe without hesitation that until we solve for the problems related to the lack of ethics and the immense bias in algorithms and code, we will create solutions that scale harm).

Our greatest opportunity to adapt and overcome these threats depends on three things:

1. Strengthening our communities by reducing food, economic, and health insecurities
2. Doubling down on innovations in food production, water conservation, environmental stewardship, and green waste management
3. Structuring educational programs that integrate hands on learning with complex and integrated systems so that people—especially young people—have the opportunity to experience the process of creating tangible value that is real, quantifiable, and impactful

Unlike the corporations and government organizations I have worked with, Downtown Greens has never wavered in their mission nor have they been hidebound to a vision that lent itself to a specific moment in time. Instead, their pursuit of innovation has been resolute and as a result their mission and the impact and value it is creating have outgrown the original space within which the organization first took root.

The land they are working to acquire is not only worthy of conservation because of its ecologically important wetlands or the historical significance or the fact that it is the last remaining tract of farmland in one of the first cities of this great country. This land is worthy of stewardship by Downtown Greens because of the transformation it will allow them to scale beyond the region at a time when the world needs it more than ever. Acquiring this land will allow Downtown Greens to implement innovations in sustainable agriculture as the effects of

climate change are impacting yield and the food supply chain. It will provide training for a diversity of people from around the region including underprivileged youth, Agriculture and Horticulture students from regional colleges, and environmental organizations that will support reducing food insecurity and increasing environmental stewardship locally, regionally, and beyond. It will provide the space and resources they need to connect more people with opportunities to find and create value while working in a “living classroom” and allow them to develop collaborations with local and regional partners to scale environmental innovation programs and services.

It is my sincerest hope that you will support Downtown Green's bid for the acquisition of the land because in so doing, you will be supporting an organization that, for 25 years, has proactively harnessed change to create value. You will be enabling them to increase opportunities for a new generation of young and curious people who, like those of us 25 years ago, are themselves each yearning to define what value means to them and filled with the anxiety and fear that comes from not having access to or taking the well-worn path at time when the uncertainties and disruptive change of the world are infinitely greater and the implications of them graver.

Fredericksburg was pivotal in the creation of the United States as we know it. George Washington and many of the other founding fathers spent their youth on the farms and the land in the region. It was this connection with the land—with the things they learned about it and from it—that became foundational to the strategy and tactics they employed which secured independence from the British and founded this country. The greatest startup ever launched—the United States of America—was conceived, designed, and committed to in the taverns and pastures in Fredericksburg. And while a lot of time has passed between now and then, the spirit of innovation still runs deep in the psyche of this region.

Your support of Downtown Greens in securing this land is not only creating an incredible opportunity for conservation and environmental stewardship. It's continuing a regional legacy of innovation and adaptation, one rich with mission, vision, and impact at scale.

Kind regards,



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