

**April 14, 2021**

**From: Braehead Buffer Group Members**

**Subject: Letter of Support for Downtown Greens Proposed Acquisition of Land Surrounding Braehead Farm**

**To: Emily Nelson White, Virginia Outdoors Foundation**

We write this letter of support for Downtown Greens as members of the Braehead Buffer Group – we are a group of concerned citizens, parents, business owners, conservationists and others that formed over a year ago in an effort to help preserve the land around Braehead Farm. In addition, we cost-shared the payment for a property appraisal with the Fredericksburg Economic Development Authority, and we have received helpful guidance and commitment from the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust in our quest to find ways to save the land.

As you may be aware, the Fredericksburg region is in the grip of severe food insecurity that has only grown worse through the pandemic. The proposed use of the space that buffers Braehead Farm by Downtown Greens as a dedicated asset and food supply would make a significant difference in mitigating this situation. In addition, it would expand the Downtown Greens campus in ways that would enable access to additional underserved communities.

Fredericksburg is home to a significant number of people who are food insecure, including many children. Based on a 2016-2017 Community Needs Assessment <https://thriveva.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/FINAL-CNA-DRAFT.pdf>:

- 26.31% of the population of Fredericksburg have Low Food Access (i.e., live in Food Deserts)
- 16.08% of the population of Fredericksburg is Food Insecure.
- 51.9% of the children in Fredericksburg are living at or below the Federal Poverty Level
- 100% of the population of Fredericksburg lives in tracts that have Low Healthy Food Access

You can see some of these severe challenges in graphic form

at: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=3e7c558364a64c8ca9bcca206634c20e> .

Downtown Greens [www.downtowngreens.org](http://www.downtowngreens.org) is a wonderful organization that already manages 2.7 acres, including community gardens in downtown Fredericksburg. Its mission is to foster community involvement and growth by protecting and nurturing greenspace. Along with growing food for the community, it conducts educational programs on gardening for adults and children and teaches young people how to garden and grow food for family consumption.

In fact, Downtown Greens has been bringing the community together for more than 25 years and its intrinsic value to the city as a whole is undisputed. A second campus for the organization would mean conservation of the last agricultural space in the city of Fredericksburg, additional outdoor education and recreation opportunities, and a protected wetlands space that is nurtured and open to the public.

For these reasons, we hope that you will consider the substantial social and environmental benefits to the Fredericksburg community at large, including the following specific considerations:

- a. Our beloved local nonprofit, Downtown Greens, sees the non-wetland areas as space in which to expand its community gardening programs, support new farmers, enable workforce development, and grow food to mitigate the food insecurity issues noted above; and, it sees the wetlands areas as opportunities for environmental education,
- b. The Fredericksburg community would benefit from a community-wide effort to farm the land and produce affordable and healthy produce for food insecure families.

Sincerely,

Members of the Braehead Buffer Group: **Gerald Anderson**, Community Member; **Robert Courtnage**, Community Member; **Amber Dawson**, Brompton Community School; **Sarah Hurst**, Fredericksburg Clean and Green Commission; **Kate Moga**, Community Member; **Rich LaRochelle**, Community Member; **Elizabeth LeDoux**, Community Member; **Anne Little**, Tree Fredericksburg; **Bridget McGregor**, Community Member; **Alan Rowsome**, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust; **Rebecca Rubin**, Environmental Consultant; **Jonathan Stevens**, Community Member