

To my community,

As you may or may not have heard, I no longer work for the FIC. This is a big shift for the FIC, and a big deal for me personally. It wasn't a decision I made lightly. You are my friends, family, and colleagues who've worked with me or watched me in my role as Executive Director. It feels important to me to be open and vulnerable and let you know why I'm leaving the FIC and what's going on for me. Thank you for reading as much of this as you feel inspired and for helping hold my story in this time of major transition in my life.

The short story is that I've spent 4 years holding a lot of responsibility for the FIC and the intentional communities movement as a whole. It's been an amazing experience. I've learned so much and I'm unspeakably grateful. Part of that experience was a continuous struggle to keep things going financially and respond to the needs of the movement as best we could with the limited resources we had available. I feel weary and demoralized and I just don't have the heart to keep at it. But I'm grateful that there are others who do.

I feel really proud of everyone involved for how smoothly we're effecting a major shift in personnel and operations. I'm excited for the new team and am doing everything I can to make it easier for them. Please continue to give the FIC your love and support.

The slightly longer story is that we were unable to fundraise for the start-up costs identified in our new business plan. This plan was an effort to finally find a way out of the cycles of financial crisis the FIC has struggled with for a long time. I knew it was going to be a long shot, but I was hopeful. I was looking forward to actually having the resources available to develop our platform and be able to meet certain needs in the movement in a way that would generate enough revenue to continue developing and meet even more needs.

Having failed to raise the funds, the rest of the team and the Board wanted to look at how to keep things going. At our recent retreat, we developed a plan for consolidating and streamlining current operations to fit within a more predictable level of revenue. At the same time, we began retooling the new business plan for an incremental approach that wouldn't require a large amount of start-up capital or compromise basic operations.

Short of folding the organization, this is the only direction I think is possible for the FIC at this time. I'm skeptical that even this new plan will work, and I could say why, but I'm also burnt out and I don't think my judgement should be followed. If anyone can pull it off, it's the new team. I'm proud to have helped bring them together and I want you to support them. I also feel proud that I'm leaving the FIC in better financial shape than it's been in for a very long time. The role the FIC plays is crucial to the intentional communities movement. It doesn't have to be the FIC, but if the FIC stopped existing, people would notice. As long as there are people who think it's worth keeping the fire burning I will support them and I hope you will too.

So, why am I leaving?

You could say I'm burnt out, but it would be more accurate to say I feel heartbroken.

I've been in the thick of the intentional communities movement for over 20 years, plus my work with worker co-ops and community organizing, and the inter-organizational and inter-movement networking and organizing I've done. Intentional community and my belief in its impact have been core to who I am and what I've done for my entire adult life. My parents met in an intentional community and some of my earliest memories are from there. I raised a child (who is about to turn 18) in that same community. I've seen what intentional community can do for people and the planet. I think this movement is one of the places where we're figuring out how to stop causing mass extinction and I believe that it's worth making it available to more people and share what we're learning to even more. I want so much to help manifest the potential that I see, and I know I'm not the only one.

But there are gaps. The extent to which this movement actually is a movement is spotty.

The understanding of what makes an intentional community (or a cohousing community, or an ecovillage, etc.) is spotty. The extent to which individuals in intentional communities are even aware that there are other communities, and that there is a larger movement, is spotty. And the extent to which they identify with it is spotty.

The extent to which groups you could call intentional communities identify with similar groups is spotty. And their connections to organizations that network with and support those groups is spotty.

I totally get it. Everyone's stressed. Everyone's strapped. Every individual, every community, every organization. There's just not enough money, time, energy, skills, whatever. These are the times we're living in. We desperately need to slow down but we don't have the time.

There is a growing interest in intentional communities, both as alternatives and responses to larger issues, as well as a growing cohesion within the movement. The FIC as well as other organizations in this movement get lots of requests for support, input, and feedback about what the movement needs in order to continue growing. We've also managed to reach a pretty massive audience through ic.org, social media, and other media attention (possibly in the range of 1 million people annually). People are clearly looking for something that is leading them to check out this intentional community thing and we have something to offer them.

But there's a gap between what people want and what, collectively, as a movement, they're willing and able to support. I could say a lot more about why and how I've seen this play out. Suffice to say, for a long time the FIC has struggled in a constant state of catch 22, where we don't have the money we need to build the infrastructure to do the fundraising to run the programs we want.

Part of my job with the FIC has been to listen on an ongoing basis to as many people as possible, and cross-reference, synthesize, reflect, and respond. And I'd like to think I did a pretty good job at that. It has been incredibly sad and frustrating to hear so clearly from people within the movement about programs and services they want for themselves or their communities and not be able to make them happen simply because we don't have the money. And it does come down to money. People have to make a living; what's needed is far bigger than can be accomplished with volunteers. Even though there is broad consensus on what people want us to be doing, we haven't been able to get enough support from individuals, communities, foundations, financial institutions, or philanthropists.

After years of striving to get the movement to see itself as a movement, striving to get communities and organizations to come together to support each other and grow, striving to help the movement find a voice and have a bigger impact on people and the planet, and feeling like we're just never really getting anywhere, I feel an increasing sense of futility from a perception that just not enough people have the capacity to give a shit.

My heart is broken. I've lost faith. I've lost perspective. My skepticism in what's possible for the FIC at this point in time is infused with cynicism and probably shouldn't be followed. So, I shouldn't be leading. I was ready to just drop the torch. I'm grateful there is a group of people who are here to take it from me.

I also think the team understands my perspectives on things. They understand what they're getting into, and they believe it's possible, which renews my faith a little. I want them to prove me wrong.

Am I done with movement building?

Maybe I'm just being cynical, but I'm not sure large-scale movement building is where we should be focusing our efforts right now. Having driven 27,000 miles last year visiting several dozen intentional communities, and driving through all manner of towns and cities in every region of the country, I was continually struck with the sense that we're acting like we have more time than we do and that we're underestimating the problems we need to solve in order to stop global warming and other interconnected problems. Our efforts are not informed by a realistic assessment of what we're dealing with, what we have to work with, and how much time we have. My heart breaks seeing so many organizations and movements spinning their wheels when I so desperately want us to figure out how to stop causing so much suffering and death in the world.

We have to consider large scales of organizing. Human society is global. That's not going to change, and I don't think it should. We need to figure out how to have a peaceful, just, and sustainable global human society. But I also think we're running out of time. Given the storm that's coming, I believe the focus should be on helping our local communities affect a just

transition to become as resilient and regenerative as possible, in case shit really hits the fan, but also because it's just the right thing to do.

Intentional communities are certainly part of that, as long as they support the needs of the larger community of which they are a part. With success on that level reaching out to a larger network makes a lot of sense, and to some extent we need to be developing that network in parallel. But I think there's still some serious cart before the horse stuff going on when it comes to generating capacity for effective movement building.

To the extent that I think large scale organizing for the intentional communities movement might be viable, there are two areas that deserve attention. The first is regional networks and affinity networks, like the Northwest Intentional Communities Association and the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. They're few and far between, and also struggle to get the capacity and participation they need, but they have the potential to help individual communities build capacity and then connect to the national-scale networks.

The second has to do with facilitating mutual support between communities. When the FIC was founded in 1949, it was much more like the FEC now. I think the folks who revitalized the FIC in 1987 were on the right track. But where I believe the FEC is too limited, I think the FIC is too broad. I have a fantasy about an organization that creates a stronger sense of values and mission alignment that is more inclusive than the FEC and more selective than the FIC, and that brings together the FEC's focus on mutual support and the FIC's focus on networking, education, and outreach. The communities involved would offer more direct support, get more benefit, and play a central role in governance. I still think this probably needs to be based on local and regional organizing, because it's a whole lot easier for communities to be mutually supportive if they're in close proximity.

So, what's next for me?

I have lots of ideas, and I have no idea. Right now my home base is Chico, CA, which is the closest thing I have to a hometown. My dad owns a unit in a cohousing community here and I have a rent-free room. Yes, I'm almost 40, unemployed, and back living at my dad's house.

I'm trying to give myself some space to mend my heart. Not just from the FIC and the movement, but from leaving Twin Oaks, my son, and another break up with my long-term karmic entanglement. It's been a hell of a year. I need to figure out where I want to re-root myself. I need to figure out what feels like the right thing for me to be doing at this time and point in my life (it's funny how much 39 feels like 19; I guess this is my midlife crisis). I'm excited about the space of possibility before me, and I'm terrified, both for myself and for the world.

I'm trying to make space for the multi-faceted grief I'm going through, while also holding close the gratitude I feel for all of the support and many opportunities I have. I want to allow time to both heal and explore while also not taking advantage of my privilege too much.

I feel attracted to the kind of work I did for 4 years in Charlottesville, where I lived in a radically sustainable collective house, helped start two worker co-ops, helped start Ecovillage Charlottesville, and was involved with various local community organizing efforts. I'm considering a massive "career change" to become a licensed plumber, while also taking a Permaculture Design Certification course and learning about alternative water systems, including catchment systems and constructed wetlands. I'm fascinated these days by city parks, as expressions of community and as one of the closest things we still have to the commons. I'm also inspired by some of the indigenous led organizing that's happening around Chico right now and feel called to be of service to them.

When it comes down to it, I feel pretty open to where I live and what I do, but I want to find a place and people where I feel like I belong, where I can do work that I enjoy that is useful to the people around me, that is helping address major problems like climate change, racism, and capitalism, and that allows me to do my part to make money for whatever community I'm part of.

And I'm scared that maybe I'll never find this and will always just feel alienated, dissatisfied, and hopeless. I know I'm not the only one in the world going through this. I'm trying to give myself space to feel these feelings while staying constructive and not letting myself fall into a downward spiral. I'm so grateful for all the love and support I have from people in my life, all the amazing communities out there that I know I'm welcome at, and all the internal strength and skills I've had the opportunity to develop to get me through this terrible and wonderful time of transition.

Thanks so much for reading. I'm open to receiving any response you care to share.

Much love,

Sky

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