

Letter in Support of the Gustavus Natural Lands Lease Project Proposal FY 2025

I have read all the endowment grant requests, and I don't envy the Council their decision - making faced with all these requests for money.

In looking at all the requests for grant funds (which greatly outdistanced the amount of money available) the request that stands out to me to be to be the most important and far-reaching for the community is the Gustavus Natural Lands Lease Project. This area composing the golf course, adjacent uplands and meadows plus the beach area that is now is the Gustavus Beach Park, to me is the heart of Gustavus. I can't think of any valid argument to suggest that the 235 acres of land owned by Ben and Donna DeBoer encompassing this area isn't the most valuable property in Gustavus, not just monetarily, but for Gustavus itself. Having access for walking, berry picking, dog walking, taking photos, enjoying birding and for enjoying the open views of the landscape, this undeveloped area benefits Gustavus residents of all ages, as well as visitors. In addition, it has value as bird and wildlife habitat.

But these 235 acres are private land which for many years has been very generously made available to the community for anyone who wants to enjoy it. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't relish walkers on my property any time of day or night. It's really incredibly amazing that we have been welcomed to freely have access to this property. I have walked the golf course/beach trail innumerable times. The snow is gone there sometimes 2 months before it is all gone back at our property. It contributes so much to the health of the many folks who are able to take advantage of the trails.

No one knows what the future holds, but I certainly don't believe this generosity can go on indefinitely. At some point, there will be a need or desire to monetize the property. I can't imagine what 235 acres would bring on the open market. The timing is right to start setting in motion plans that could move toward hopefully creating a temporary easement, with the goal of a permanent solution. Allowing the public to continue to have access to these areas for the proposed 2-year lease gives the Southeast Land Trust time to work for a longer-term easement, and hopefully a permanent one. Doing so would cost a lot of money and SEALT, particularly if it has the support of the community, would begin seeking grants that they believe would fit this project and are potentially available. My understanding is that a one-year lease is not enough of a commitment to allow this to happen.

I urge you to please totally fund this request

Thank you,


Annie Mackovjak

12/16/24