

Subject: The beach meadow conservation project deserves approval with full funding

Dear Councilmembers:

The beach meadows on DeBoer land, in combination with the Beach Park (jointly managed by the City and DNR), are much appreciated and utilized by a broad spectrum of the community. Hiking, skiing, dog walks, bird watching, picnics, sketching, and strawberry picking offer pleasure to residents and visitors of all ages. Summer wildflowers and the view of the Fairweather range make this property a spectacular gateway to Gustavus. There are few places, globally, where one can still find large undeveloped tracts of sandy beach connected with their upland meadow ecosystems. For ecological, aesthetic, and recreational reasons, these lands deserve protection.

On June 23 of this year, I walked the DeBoer beach meadows with Margaret Custer, CEO of the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT). I am aware that the DeBoer family have been discussing long-term protection of these lands with SEALT for several years. The endowment project presented to the Council and the public by the Conservation Lands Committee is a means to set the process in motion. The project purchases a conservation easement for a two-year period to forestall competing interests while the parties determine provisions for the long-term protection of the land. The long-term process will involve securing funding sources for purchase of 235 acres of land and for the legal work necessary to transfer the land and to implement the conservation easements that will remain with the land in perpetuity. Our contribution buys time for the process to unfold.

We have an opportunity now to make substantial progress to protect these lands—an opportunity that could be lost if we don't seize the moment. We all know how we felt about almost losing The Nature Conservancy lands, which we, Gustavus residents, selected, and which have meant so much to us. We can't afford to let this special opportunity slip away. Please approve the Conservation Lands Committee's scoping document and provide complete funding for the project—the easements, legal work, staff time, and other costs are all one package. You can't have one piece without the rest. This project provides broad community benefits, not just for today or tomorrow, but for years to come, and the Endowment Fund is the most appropriate mechanism to fund this first step.

My sincere thanks to the DeBoer family for sharing their lands, to SEALT for their work in conserving these lands for future generations, and to the Conservation Lands Committee (on behalf of us all) for stepping up to initiate the City's role in this process.

Thank you,
Karen Colligan-Taylor

PO Box 85 Gustavus, AK 99826