Subject: Re: Regarding the Endowment Grant decision

I wholeheartedly support and agree with this letter, as an individual community member, a single mother in need of child care, a local business owner, and as the President of the Rookery.
Thank you, Laura, for putting this into writing.
This is important business for the City to attend to.
I will add, as well, for what it is worth, the Rookery was previously denied a grant that sought partial funding for a land purchase (prior to acquisition of our current building), and the reason given was that it was not a discreet project. I believe it was the same year funds were awarded to another local entity for partial construction of a building. I say that to make the point that discrepancies in awards within grant cycles is not a new issue, but one that absolutely deserves remedy.
Thank you all for your attention to these important matters.

Kelly McLaughlin, President

On Sun, Dec 29, 2024 at 12:46 PM Laura Marcus <laura@gustavusrookery.org> wrote:

> To the Gustavus City Council:
>
> I write to express my disappointment and frustration with the Council's funding decisions – and more importantly, funding *process* – for the most recent cycle of the city's Endowment Fund grant. Much has been said already on this topic, so I will try to refrain from retreating old terrain.
>
> My most pressing complaint has to do with the Council's decision to award funding

to compensate various individuals associated with the Gustavus Community Center and Lands Committee projects. As for the first, I understand that the Senior Lunch coordinator will now be a paid position, thanks to the Endowment Grant. As for the second, funds awarded by the city for "legal review," "title work, GIS, and project planning," and "monitoring, stewardship, and enforcement" clearly will go to compensate the people performing those tasks.

I first wish to say that I personally have no quarrel at all with these very worthy projects. Nor do I have any quarrel with the city disbursing Endowment Grant funds for the purposes of compensating people whose work serves this city (more on that below). However, the Rookery's grant request was explicitly denied based on the rationale that the Endowment Grant cannot fund staff time. It is therefore galling that the Council chose to ignore its own rules and award compensation funding to not one but *two* different projects. If you are going to have such rules, they need to be implemented fairly and consistently. (And please spare me the artless dodge of contrasting "staff time" with a "stipend" or "paid services." There is no meaningful difference here between such workarounds and the one I proposed in the Rookery's application.)

Furthermore, the policy that prohibits the Endowment Grant from funding "staff time" or "operating expenses" is a ridiculous one regardless. It assumes, quite wrongly, that discrete projects (capital or otherwise) are more a boon to the city than ongoing programming. The funding of the Girl Scout project is case in point. Again, I am truly delighted to see that project get funded – even more so for the Girl Scouts themselves than for the Rookery, who will be the ultimate beneficiary of their project. But surely even the Council can see the absurdity of funding play equipment for a child care facility *that cannot legally offer child care services.* The Rookery's licensure process is the blatantly obvious, uncontenstable priority in terms of the benefit for the Gustavus community.

And if "staff time" isn't funded out of concern that no single Gustavus individual or entity ought to benefit so disproportionately from the city's coffers, consider the consequences of city funds leaving the community. Asset purchases are explicitly permitted by the Endowment Grant rules, and in most cases that money leaves the community and never comes back. In the best case scenario, it goes into the pockets of the working people who built the asset. In reality, it goes into the investment accounts of a millionaire executive somewhere across the country. In both cases, it has now left the Gustavus economy for good. But funds that go to pay a local person for "staff time" or "operating expenses" stays right here: it gets spent at Toshco or the Fireweed, Mama Bear Kitchen or Steller Botanicals. In terms of sustainable economic development – one of the city's stated strategic priorities – it does far more good than an asset purchase.

These latter two points the Council must address before the next funding cycle. In the meantime, however, the Council is obligated to address my first point: that funding individual compensation for two other grantees but not the Rookery position is blatantly unfair and a violation of its own rules. On this subject, I expect a timely response.

Respectfully,

Laura Marcus
Board Member, Gustavus Children’s Enhancement Program