

Efforts by the Gustavus Conservation Lands Advisory Committee to secure endowment grant funds last December to jumpstart protection of the De Boer beachfront properties caused considerable controversy. That was not our intent! Many questions were raised before and after the City Council meeting when the grants were approved. We've heard those concerns.

We would like to take this opportunity to provide some background, address those concerns and look ahead.

The City Council established the Conservation Lands Committee last May in response to the proposed Nature Conservancy/Hoonah Indian Association land transfer. That event startled many of us, and led to the realization that as a community/city we do not have a clear grasp of the many public lands within and surrounding Gustavus, nor an avenue for active participation in their management or disposition. Our goal is to gain that understanding and stand as a sentinel for actions that may affect our future. We are collecting maps (thank you John Barry), and learning about ownership, management and future plans for these lands

Conservation of the DeBoer Beach Lands was an express part of our mission from the city. At its first meeting in September, the Committee learned that the DeBoer family had been in discussions with Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) to negotiate a potential conservation easement. We followed up with SEALT, which urged quick action because the grants available for purchase of wetlands such as these may soon become scarce. Spring 2025 is our best, possibly only, chance. SEALT suggested that we secure funds to temporarily lease the property while they seek grant funding and negotiate easement terms with the family. The endowment grant was the perfect place to turn

The importance of protecting this land and the realization that endowment grant applications were due by October 31 gave us a compressed time frame and created a sense of urgency to get things done. In hindsight we would have done some things differently, but that timeframe and that sense was why things moved forward quickly, why we pushed to increase our recommended endowment grant allotment. Council woman and committee member Susan Warner held a community forums at the GCC on December to update and get feedback from Gustavus residents.

It is not essential that the Committee be involved in this process. It was our judgement, based upon conversations with Ben DeBoer and SEALT, that our involvement could help it along. Intermediate funding through the endowment grant could help with necessary steps such as the aforementioned leases to the DeBoers, as well as demonstrate the depth of community support for the project to the funding agencies. (The Committee has also received over \$9000.00 to date in private donations from community members wishing to support this effort.) The Committee is a pass through only. Neither we nor the city will purchase or hold any ownership rights in these lands. The intent is that these lands remain undeveloped and held in trust for the people of and visitors to Gustavus forever!

Other issues:

- Endowment grant criteria were satisfied because the funds are for the preservation of Gustavus' lands from and for the benefit of Gustavus residents. Endowment grants have been historically and legally used to purchase services or products not available locally.
- City code states that up to two Council members can be on any advisory committee. We couldn't get enough people to join when our committee was first formed, so interested council members stepped forward to get it going. However, we understand this is not ideal and support discussions the city is beginning to examine potential revisions to these and related rules.

We will move forward with full openness and transparency. Lands Committee meetings are always appropriately posted, and the public is encouraged to attend and participate. The committee presents quarterly reports to City Council general meetings, and all relevant documents, minutes and regular updates posted to our website, <https://www.gustavus-ak.gov/bc/page/conservation-lands-advisory-committee-clac>

One thing shone through the discord of the December Council meeting--pretty much all of us agree that these lands should be protected! We love that beach, treasure the scale of our community, and don't want to see Gustavus overwhelmed by the big money and industrial tourism swallowing up other towns all over Southeast.

That's the vision guiding us.