

From: [Shelley Owens](#)
To: [Ivy Spohnholz](#)
Cc: [Hank Lentfer](#); [Julia Nave](#); [Alison C. Cohan](#); [Crystal Nelson](#); [Amy Miller](#); [Caitlin Hedberg](#); [Kelsey Schober](#)
Subject: RE: Thank you!
Date: Monday, January 15, 2024 13:42:23
Attachments: [Letter To Ivy Spohnholz 1-15-24.pdf](#)

Ivy,

Thanks to you, Julia and Hank for talking with us at the Council Work Session. Attached is a letter I've written in response with input from and on behalf of the Gustavus community. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Shelley

Shelley K. Owens
Mayor, City of Gustavus
Office: [\(907\) 697-2451](tel:907.697.2451)
P.O. Box 1, Gustavus, AK 99826
shelley.owens@gustavus-ak.gov
<https://cms.gustavus-ak.gov/>

From: Ivy Spohnholz <ivy.spohnholz@TNC.ORG>
Sent: Friday, January 12, 2024 4:30 PM
To: Shelley Owens <shelley.owens@gustavus-ak.gov>
Cc: Hank Lentfer <hlentfer@gmail.com>; Julia Nave <julia.nave@TNC.ORG>; Alison C. Cohan <acohan@TNC.ORG>; Crystal Nelson <crystal.nelson@TNC.ORG>; Amy Miller <amy.l.miller@TNC.ORG>; Caitlin Hedberg <caitlin.hedberg@TNC.ORG>; Kelsey Schober <kelsey.schober@TNC.ORG>
Subject: Thank you!

Dear Mayor Owens,

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Gustavus City Council during your work session earlier this week, and for the neighborly reception. You were generous in providing ample time for our presentation and questions from Council members. Thank you for this generosity.

We've been in a previously scheduled team planning session for the past few days, and although it created a bit of a delay in following up, it also gave us some time to reflect. During that time, we've continued to receive feedback from Gustavus community members via email and through their outreach to our local preserve manager, Hank Lentfer.

Based on this feedback, **I've decided The Nature Conservancy will retain title to the Gustavus Forelands Preserve for the foreseeable future.** The passionate response of the Gustavus community over the last week make it clear that now is the not the time to explore possible transfers in ownership. I'm very sorry for the distress this has caused in the community.

I can commit to you that moving forward:

1. The community of Gustavus will be involved at the beginning of any discussions about the preserve's ownership.
2. **TNC remains steadfastly committed to ensuring the Gustavus Forelands Preserve remains open and accessible in perpetuity, in alignment with the original intent of the many donors including many from your community.**

Regarding your request to see the full memo we referenced during the work session on Monday. This memo is a confidential, internal document that would not be appropriate to share. Further, as a confidential, internal document, it hasn't been shared with *any* other external party either. I can assure you that the summary memo Southeast Alaska Program Director Julia Nave wrote contains all the relevant information and conclusions in this internal document. If you have specific questions we might be able to help answer, please don't hesitate to reach out.

I look forward to rebuilding our collective trust as neighbors and partners, and hope we can all break bread sometime soon. It is my hope to be down to Gustavus this spring to walk the preserve myself and hope that we can meet at that time.

Thank you,

Ivy

Ivy Spohnholz
Alaska State Director

Dena'inaq elnen'aaq' gheshtnu ch'q'u yeshdu. (Dena'ina)
I live and work on the land of the Dena'ina. (English)

facebook.com/natureconservancyalaska
twitter.com/nature_ak
nature.org/alaska
linkedin.com/showcase/the-nature-conservancy-alaska

With our partners we're creating a new kind of conservation, one that is anchored in local values and priorities.
Learn how in Alaska's [2023 Annual Report!](#)



City of Gustavus
P.O. Box 1
Gustavus, AK 99826
Phone: (907) 697-2451

January 15, 2024

Ivy Spohnholz
Alaska State Director
The Nature Conservancy
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Director ~~Spohnholz~~ ^{Ivy},

Thank you for your email Friday. I too am new to the lands issue, and while TNC has had 2 years to conduct a “deep dive” of the historical and legal complexities leading to the development of the Gustavus Forelands Preserve in preparation for conversations with HIA, my dive into the historical record in the past two weeks has been admittedly shallow. What I did find was that, beginning with an initiative in 1998 begun by Gustavus to conserve the Mental Health Trust lands, there followed a strong record of Gustavus stewardship of the lands and a 25-year partnership with Hank Lentfer and TNC for preservation of the lands in an intact and undeveloped state for future generations. There has been a recent rift in the relationship between the community and TNC because of the failure to include Gustavus in discussions regarding potential transfer of the Preserve, but we welcome the opportunity to resume our previously close collaboration. I need first to address concerns on behalf of community members who have submitted over 200 petition signatures, 100 letters, numerous texts, and phone calls.

Trust

Thank you for the many assurances you’ve made that no decision has been made on land transfer; that TNC will retain title to the Gustavus Forelands Preserve for the foreseeable future; and the City will be involved in discussions about Preserve ownership. The assurances are welcome but unfortunately ambiguous. It has been difficult to tell what the decision-making process of TNC is. You stated a land transfer decision would be made at the Alaska chapter, and in your email said that it was your decision that TNC will retain title for the foreseeable future. Trust in TNC transparency will need to be rebuilt. The website for TNC Alaska does not contain notice of meetings, agendas, minutes, or resulting decisions, and I’m told the meeting minutes are not publicly available.

Also of concern is, while the Memorandum describes an assessment of HIA’s proposal to assume ownership of the Preserve, when asked if you had discussed how HIA planned to manage the lands, you said no because there was no intent to transfer the property, and when asked about the effect of land transfer on State development rights, you said you hadn’t gotten into that level of legal analysis. You described the timing of the conversations with HIA, the Hoonah Borough petition, and the Global Nature Conservancy trip to Gustavus in June as unrelated, but given that TNC Global procedures and policies outline conditions for transfer of TNC-owning land, the community’s concern has been that the timing of the June trip was for a ribbon-cutting announcement of a land transfer to HIA.

Change in Mission & Commitments


Gustavus feels that commitments TNC made during 25 years of collaborative partnership have been discarded by a change in TNC's mission. The Memorandum discusses the option of a land transfer to HIA (pps 2 & 4) and references the *TNC Board of Governors Real Estate Project Abstract* but makes no mention that a land transfer to Gustavus is expressly considered throughout the *Project Abstract* (pps 3,5,6). The Gustavus Community Association is described as a key partner and, following incorporation, the City of Gustavus "...is expected to become a major partner in long-term monitoring and management of the site, including possible transfer of title subject to a conservation easement held by the Conservancy or a local land trust." A cooperative land management agreement, management plan, and potential transfer of some or all of the lands to the City, subject to a conservation easement are envisioned, and a draft 2001 Management Agreement confirms the intent and efforts of TNC and Gustavus to partner in joint management of the Preserve, including the establishment of a joint management oversight committee.

In talking with the City you said times have changed, that the original documents represent "that moment in time" and that the situation is a little bit different as TNC's understanding and commitment to indigenous communities has evolved under the new Choice and Action Framework. The TNC Mission and Value statement – Integrity Beyond Reproach describes that you "Earn trust by building relationships, being competent, and following through on all of our commitments." We commend you for this vision and wish to help you live up to it and restore public trust and confidence in TNC through the renewal of our written commitments. A well-intentioned decision based on a national model which doesn't take into consideration the unique characteristics of Alaskan communities risks causing irreparable harm to those communities as well as TNC. Disclosure that TNC and HIA have been engaged in conversations for 2 years without communication with the affected community has created an alarming division between Gustavus and Hoonah, impacting long-established friendships. Let's see if we can repair the damage.

Going Forward

You spoke of your hope to visit Gustavus this spring. We would very much welcome the opportunity to walk the lands we value with you, and for you to meet the impassioned and committed community who initiated the conservation of Preserve lands, and have served as its dedicated stewards for a quarter of a century. Ours is a community with many writers, natural and social scientists, who have worked to communicate the region's natural and cultural history. We see the Preserve as a priceless legacy to be conveyed intact for the stewardship of future generations for whom these lands will be ever more exceptional in a challenged world. As the local, immediately-affected community, we stand ready to work with the Conservancy to develop an updated natural area management and monitoring plan for the Forelands Preserve and to take further responsibilities for implementing measures agreed in the plan. We look forward to hearing from you and renewing our partnership.

Sincerely,


Shelley K. Owens
Mayor