

Council approves Talisman advisory committee

By Don Crosby, For the Sun Times
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Grey Highlands council has approved the membership of a committee that will make recommendations on the future of the former Talisman Resort, now owned by the municipality.

Grey Highlands took ownership of the property earlier this year after two attempts to sell it through tax sales failed.

Council on Monday also approved a recommendation by a three-member interview panel to expand the size of task force to seven members. They are Peter Zinkan, Philip Allanson, Jim Halliday, Russell Severnuk, Gary Gingras, Erica Ferguson and Grant McLaughlin.

"We recommended . . . seven members to provide for more input in terms of the process and based on the diversity and quality of interviewees, we were quite impressed. It made it definitely difficult to narrow it down to five," said Randy Scherzer, head of planning for Grey County and a member of the interview panel.

"There was everyone from real estate lawyers and real estate agents to planners, we were quite impressed with the diversity."

The panel interviewed 20 applicants.

Council also accepted the recommendation by the interview committee to appoint a four-member resource group the task force could turn to for advice.

They include Jake Hammer, a former long-time owner of Talisman, Ray Robertson of the Grey County Agricultural Services, Rhonda Iadardini, a former Talisman employee, and businessman Kerry Baskey.

"We recommended them as a sounding board in some cases or to provide background and knowledge of the history of Talisman to understand why it ended up the way it has and to look for opportunities for the future," Scherzer said.

Scherzer said the experience and background of the task force members and the advisory panel are a reflection of the interest in the community for a plan to develop the Talisman property.

"They want to make sure something is done that is sustainable and will provide future economic opportunity in the municipality," he said.

Some members of council want to know how open the meetings and deliberations of task force will be, given the public interest in the Talisman property.

Deputy-mayor Paul McQueen argued since it's a committee of council it should operate under the council's procedural bylaw, which stipulates meetings can only be closed for a few very specific reasons as described in the Ontario Municipal Act.

That's still to be worked out between the task force and council.

The task force has 90 days to come up with suggestions on the future of the property.

Now that Talisman is owned by the municipality the \$2.5 million back taxes and penalties will be written off and steps will be taken to recover that portion of the money that was paid to the County of Grey and the school boards over the past seven years, said Best.