

# Talisman property secure,

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The Municipality of Grey Highlands has done its best to secure the Talisman Mountain Resort property to protect against more vandalism, but many of the buildings there are so badly damaged they will need to be torn down.

Grey Highlands Fire Chief Rod Leeson provided a report about the situation at the Talisman property at a special council meeting held in Flesherton on Wednesday, September 25. Many of the questions from the public at the meeting pertained to the condition of the property and the security issues at the site.

Leeson explained that since an attempted arson at the site a few weeks ago steps have been taken to secure the property to prevent any future problems. However, many of the buildings have been so badly damaged that they are now unsalvageable.

"The main lodge is in very poor condition. It's unsafe to enter," Leeson said, describing a mould problem and

## but damaged beyond repair

massive water infiltration. "I would not want anyone in there without respiratory protection," he said. "The

centre building is damaged beyond repair. There will be a point in time when they need to be removed," said

the Fire Chief.

The only building that could be preserved is the day lodge where the Talisman

cafeteria and ski rentals were located said Leeson.

The Fire Chief explained that because Talisman is still

private property it was very difficult for the municipality and the fire department to do much about security on the property. As a result there has been a lot of vandalism and people entering the property.

However, Leeson said the situation changed when there was an attempted arson at the property a few weeks ago. That incident is still being investigated by the OPP and Fire Department.

"The attempted arson gave me the legal authority to do a variety of things," Leeson explained. "We have secured the property to prevent any unauthorized entry," he said.

The property is inspected on a weekly basis and a report is produced for each inspection. Any time a breach in the security of the property is found it is immediately repaired.

"There has been one breach in the past two weeks," said Leeson. "I think you're going to see lower activity. Anybody caught in the building will be charged with trespassing," he said.

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# Fall of Talisman tough for resort's former owner

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It has been a painful few years for Talisman Mountain Resort's founder and former owner Jake Hammer.

For several years Hammer as had to watch on the sidelines as his once thriving ski and golf resort fell into bankruptcy and disrepair.

Hammer attended a special Grey Highlands council meeting about Talisman on Wednesday, September 25. It was the first time he has spoken publicly about what has happened to the former ski resort.

"It's terrible. It's sad to see it happening like this. It was my lifetime work. It's very sad," Hammer told reporters after the meeting.

At the meeting Grey Highlands council accepted a staff recommendation to take full ownership of the property - now that the tax sale process has not succeeded in finding a buyer.

Hammer offered his assistance to the municipality in whatever it decides to do with the property. He would not comment about whether or not he has interest in purchasing the property to re-develop the land.

Hammer said he agrees with Grey Highlands taking ownership of Talisman.

"If they don't own the property they can't really negotiate or show the property," said Hammer.

The former Talisman owner said it's highly unlikely Talisman will ever be a functioning ski club again.

"A ski resort is probably not viable. It would likely only be open weekends - Blue Mountain has taken



The inside of the resort resembled an abandoned ghost ship earlier in the spring, when it was revealed the resort was wide open to the elements and vandals.

CHRIS FELL PHOTO

over everything mid-week," Hammer said. "It's very difficult to make enough money three days a week and on Christmas and March Break," he said.

Hammer said it was disappointing to hear Grey Highlands Fire Chief Rod Leeson say that the majority of the buildings on the property need to be torn down.

"It's such beautiful land. It's absolutely marvelous," he said.

During the meeting Hammer said Talisman employed approximately 200 people during its boom time.

"It was a great business," he said, noting that the Municipality of Grey Highlands faces a serious question. "Is the municipality interested in creating employment there? Or is it interested in getting it's money out?" he said.

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# Grey Highlands takes ownership of Talisman

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The Municipality of Grey Highlands is going to move forward with the vesting process to take full ownership of the Talisman Mountain Resort property in Kimberley.

Grey Highlands council held a special council meeting in Flesherton on Wednesday, September 25 to discuss the Talisman situation. At the meeting CAO Dan Best recommended that the municipality vest the Talisman property, form a special public advisory committee to help assist council in determining the future course of the property and hire a consultant at some point to help guide the process. At the conclusion of the meeting Grey Highlands council endorsed that recommendation.

The public meeting was

attended by a large crowd of local residents concerned about the situation at Talisman. The bankrupt ski resort has fallen into severe disrepair over the past few years and owes Grey Highlands approximately \$2.4 million in back taxes.

The meeting included a lengthy public comment and question period for local residents to ask about the property and quiz municipal officials about what happens next. Included in the audience was former Talisman owner and founder Jake Hammer, who spoke publicly about the situation for the first time at the meeting.

CAO Best did most of the speaking at the meeting and explained what has happened on the Talisman file to this point. Attempts to find a buyer for the property to this point have failed. The

attempts include: an ill-fated receivership process and two tax sales. When the second tax sale did not produce a bid - it essentially forced the hand of the Municipality of Grey Highlands.

"This is one of the biggest decisions council has to make since amalgamation. It's a point in time where we're at a crossroads. The decisions we make today will have an impact on future generations," Best said at the start of the meeting. "This is not just a Kimberley and Beaver Valley issue - it's a Grey Highlands issue and we're going to need a made in Grey Highlands solution," the CAO said.

With a failed tax sale process, Grey Highlands now has two years to vest the property. Vesting would mean that Grey Highlands would assume full owner-

ship of the property. All mortgages and amounts owing on the Talisman property would disappear (with the exception of any liens put on the property by the federal government, of which there are none at this time). Once the municipality assumed ownership it would be able to dispose of the property as it saw fit.

Best explained that once Grey Highlands owns the property the sky could be the limit for what it wants to do. He urged everybody at the meeting to stop thinking of Talisman as a ski and golf resort and to look at the possibilities for the future.

"On this property there is a blank slate. This is an opportunity to look at it as a four-season recreation attraction, to look at mixed multi-residential homes and

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## Moving forward with Talisman

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homes," he said, explaining that current urban centres in Grey Highlands like Markdale and Flesherton were formed based on being the "urban nodes" for the local farming community. He said the Talisman property represents a chance at something brand new. "There is an opportunity here for the community of Grey Highlands to redefine what Grey Highlands looks like. We could have a new neighbourhood node at this location," he said.

With council's approval of his recommendation Best said Grey Highlands staff would immediately begin the process to vest the Talis-



Above: Looking through a broken window into a room. Right: Dust collects on glasses in the dining room. CHRIS FELL PHOTO

man property. Staff also plan to bring Terms of Reference for the new Talisman Public Advisory Committee to council on October 7.

"This is a watershed moment for the community. It's a very exciting opportunity the community has before it," Best said.

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