

Grey Highlands to take ownership of Talisman

By [Don Crosby](#), For The Sun Times

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A former owner of Talisman agrees with a decision by Grey Highlands council to take ownership of the former resort.

Jake Hammer, who owned and operated Talisman Mountain Resort for 23 years, told a public meeting Wednesday that only after the municipality has ownership of the property will it be able to exercise control over its disposal and development.

"If they take control of the property they are able to sell it to a developer because they will have access to show the property and negotiate with some individual," said Hammer, who sold the resort about seven years ago to a consortium that had plans to develop the property.

Three attempted tax sales by the municipality resulted in no suitable offers. Council at the end of a daylong meeting Wednesday accepted a recommendation in a report by CAO Dan Best to take control of the property with a view to eventually disposing of it.

Mayor Wayne Fitzgerald said after the vote that council approval to take possession of the property gives Best time to secure assurances from the federal government that the Talisman property is clear of any federal liens. That would clear the way for the sale of the property.

Council also accepted Best's recommendation to set up an advisory committee to help council decide on the future of the property. The terms of reference for the committee will be prepared in time for the Oct. 7 council meeting.

Hammer ruled out Talisman becoming a ski resort again because of the start-up costs.

"It likely would only be open on the weekends because there isn't much business in the ski industry. Blue Mountain has taken over all the mid-week business . . . it would be very difficult to make your money three days a week and Christmas and March break. I can't see it happening unless the government steps in to create employment and help to start to get it up again."

He also because of Niagara Escarpment Commission and Ministry of the Environment restrictions, the amount of land available for development is at most 30 acres.

"The development is limited by the capacity of sewer and water, which is good capacity there. But it's also limited by the amount of land available, which is basically from the toe of the escarpment down to where the tennis courts are now," said Hammer, who didn't rule out possible future involvement in developing the resort.

Fire chief Rod Leeson, who reported on the conditions of the buildings at Talisman, said two of them have suffered severe water damage and mould infestation which make them unsafe. In the event a building caught fire, the response by firefighters would be to protect surrounding buildings. He said he wouldn't take firefighters into the buildings in their condition.

Leeson said since an attempted arson a few months ago, the buildings have been boarded up. Each week he inspects the buildings and any breaches in security are repaired. This approach is gradually discouraging vandalism. Police have also stepped up patrols of the property.

Earlier in the meeting several of the 30 residents asked questions and made suggestions about the future of the resort.

Mary Ferguson of Kimberley suggested Grey Highlands take ownership and offered examples of three municipalities in Ontario and 10 in Quebec that operate municipally owned ski resorts.

Fitzgerald said he agrees with the recommendation the municipality, which is owed about \$2.4 million in back taxes, other charges and penalties, take ownership of the property, but that it be done with proper community consultation, which was the purpose of Wednesday's meeting in Flesherton. He hinted there may be other public meetings as council mulls over the options.

Fitzgerald said until the municipality owns the property, it will have little or no control over its future and will have to endure endless inquiries by people who are not serious about buying it. "It's people kicking the tires and a cycle of rehashing, but until you are the owner you are not going to see any genuine offers," he said.