

# EBC formally expresses interest in former Talisman property

GREG COWAN

The Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy has submitted a formal Letter of Intent (LOI) to purchase the 200-plus acre property that's home to the former Talisman Resort in the Beaver Valley.

The LOI outlines the conditions of purchase and development.

EBC executive director Robert Barnett said the organization of the local community group Friends of the Beaver Valley played a large part in the land conservation organization's decision to formally submit the LOI.

"Strategically the proposal focuses on our core principles of conservation and sustainable development," Barnett said in a media release distributed Wednesday.

In an interview, Barnett said the essence of the proposal is to have the EBC protect the natural areas and species on the property while the Friends of the Beaver Valley works with its partners to create a sustainable development that could support the property's hefty taxes and utility fees.

"They're out looking for people who would want to use, let me call it the development potential, on

the site. We would like to have a light ecological footprint, but I don't think the municipality would be very happy if there's nobody paying taxes and there's nobody paying for the water and sewer," Barnett said.

The LOI was submitted to Grey Highlands CAO Karen Govan and ThinkCOMPASS - the consulting firm that is handling the sale of the Beaver Valley Development Project Lands for Grey Highlands and the owners of the former Talisman Resort property, Brian Ellis and Phil Calvanos.

SEE PROPERTY ON A3

The resort's private owners and the municipality signed a joint venture agreement to collectively market and promote the property in its entirety to prospective buyers and investors.

The sprawling former Talisman Resort property has been divided into three parcels. The municipality took over the entire property in 2013 after it developed more than \$2 million in tax arrears under previous owners and sat abandoned and deteriorating. The municipality severed the top of the property, nearly 60 acres, and sold the rest to Ellis and Calvanos' numbered company.

The joint venture agreement shows Grey Highlands now owns the 59-acre parcel known as Upper Talisman and the 74.8-acre parcel known as Lower Talisman. The numbered company remains the owner of a 139.7-acre parcel of land known as the Talisman Springs Inn and includes the resort buildings. Both parties are equal shareholders in the joint venture.

Approximately \$450,000 in taxes and fees are owed to the municipality on the parcel still owned by 2420124 Ontario Limited, taxes and utility fees for the property in question, at one time, ran to more than \$270,000 annually.

According to the terms of the joint venture agreement, ThinkCOMPASS will present offers to the appointed management committee. Once that process has taken place, the LOI is presented to Grey Highlands council in a closed session

The Friends of Beaver Valley is a coalition of local advocates and landowners who seek to conserve the land while also evaluating options for sustainable development.

Some of the individuals and groups involved are Joyce Hall, chair of the Grey Highlands Climate Action Group; Jeanette Walters, a local landowner; Stacie Howe, proprietor of the Kimberley General Store; Dr. Mary Ferguson, a senior partner at EkoNomos; and Linda Reader from the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC).

A Greater Toronto Area capital management and development firm has also expressed interest and proposed another resort for the Talisman land at a special council meeting in May.

Westway Capital proposes to "develop a world-class resort that will promote health, wellness and follow the principles of sustainable development, that will integrate the beauty of the area and the natural heritage of the Beaver Valley" according to presentation slides submitted to the municipality and included in that meeting's agenda.

Paul Mondell, who has worked as a vice-president with Skyline Investments, the resort company with Blue Mountain Village in its portfolio, presented to Grey Highlands council at the meeting and is acting as a senior planning consultant for the firm, according to the presentation slides and a delegation request form submitted to the municipality.

Westway Capital says it works to acquire lands for development with the goal of managing the full process from acquisition to engagement, planning, sales and building.

Barnett said that while there have been no talks with Westway Capital to work together, the EBC has worked with developers.

The EBC said its next steps are to gather a group of professionals in the building trades to tour the resort buildings with the Friends of the Beaver Valley with the resort's current owner.

"I've heard anecdotally that all the buildings need to come down because they all have mold and damaged structural members, etcetera. I'm an architect and I'll be looking at that with other members of our team," Barnett said.

A professional appraiser is working with EBC to help establish the property's value.

A website and fundraising campaign, as well as an appeal for coalition supporters and volunteers, are currently in the works, Barnett said.

The EBC is one of Ontario's largest land trusts with 186 nature reserves and over 17,000 acres of land held for conservation.

"I can tell you we just finished a project west of Killarney where we were able to protect a 2,140-acre property . . . to do that we had to pretty well mobilize the community and raise \$1.7 million," Barnett said.

Fri  
6/18/21  
The  
Owen  
Sound  
Sun  
Times

Thanks  
Fred  
&  
Gail