

# Friends of the Beaver Valley begin fundraising campaign

GREG COWAN

A GoFundMe page set up to raise \$15,000 for the Friends of the Beaver Valley and the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy had collected \$3,650 from 20 donors as of midday Monday.

The Friends of the Beaver Valley and EBC seek to conserve most of the 200-plus acre property that's home to the former Talisman Resort in the Beaver Valley.

The former resort lands are owned by a private company and the Municipality of Grey Highlands. The two parties recently signed a joint venture agreement to sell the land as a package deal in the hopes of recruiting a serious buyer.

So far, a Greater Toronto Area-based development company called Westway Capital has proposed to build a "world-class resort" promoting health and wellness. Meanwhile, the Friends of the Beaver Valley - a coalition of local landowners and conservationists - have teamed up with one of the country's largest land-conservation organizations to make a formal pitch for the property.

Last week, the EBC submitted a formal Letter of Intent (LOI) to officially express its interest in purchasing the property.

"We have a long way to go but with community support from residents, local businesses and others, we hope to begin to raise funds to cover start-up costs and eventually the purchase of the former Talisman site in partnership with the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC)," said Friends of the Beaver Valley organizer Dr. Mary Ferguson in a media release.

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The joint venture agreement between the municipality and the resort's private owners shows Grey Highlands owns the 59-acre parcel known as Upper Talisman and the 74.8-acre parcel known as Lower Talisman. A 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 agreement.

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

"We know there is a lot of nostalgia for the 'old Talisman' and while it cannot be brought back to its former state, we intend to create new community experiences. Working with experts like those found at EBC and locally we are focusing on family activities that honour the natural and cultural heritage of the Beaver Valley," Ferguson said.

In their GoFundMe campaign, the Friends of the Beaver Valley said the community is at a crossroads and needs to decide whether the sprawling former resort will be purchased and designed by a developer or to support their option - a coalition of conservation bodies, community-based entrepreneurs, educators, organizations and individuals.

Thanks  
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