

Community group not giving up fight for Talisman lands

Friends of the Beaver Valley and the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy will still be putting in an offer on the lands, which have been sold conditionally by the municipality to Westway
about 24 hours ago By: [Jennifer Golletz](#)



The Talisman lands are a 200-acre property located in the Beaver Valley in Kimberley in the municipality of Grey Highlands. Two-thirds of the land are municipally owned, while the remaining one-third is owned by a private number company. Contributed photo.

A volunteer group of concerned Grey Highlands' citizens is working to mobilize their neighbours to demand a "transparent, respectful and measured approach" for the management of the Talisman lands.

At the end of July, the municipality of Grey Highlands [announced it had moved into a conditional agreement for the sale](#) of the municipally-owned lands at the former Talisman Resort site with Westway Capital, a private investment firm from Toronto.

Since that time, [several groups and residents have voiced their concerns](#) about the sale as well as the process the municipality has taken to bring the sale about.

In a recent newsletter, the Friends of the Beaver Valley in partnership with the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC), stated that they have hired an appraiser to evaluate the former Talisman resort land and the two municipal parcels, despite the current conditional agreement.

The group has also retained a lawyer and will be proceeding with its own offer to purchase.

“The offer to purchase the two municipal lands should be going into the municipality any day now,” stated Jeanette Parry on behalf of Friends of the Beaver Valley.

“There will also be an initial meeting between Brian Ellis, the current owner of Talisman Mountain Springs and members of the group that have been developing the business concept of a nature-based arts and wellness hub,” she added.

Parry also confirmed that representatives from the group and EBC will be meeting with the Grey Highlands mayor and staff on Aug. 19.

When the municipality announced the conditional sale agreement, it also made a point of noting it would be “encouraging opportunities for collaborative undertakings between the developers and the community groups who have expressed interest in the future of the identified lands.”

The collaborations and ensuring they happen are slated to be part of the discussions on Aug. 19.

Karen Govan, CAO for Grey Highlands said the plan is that council representatives and Grey Highlands staff will be meeting regularly with the team from Westway Capital.

“They will be encouraging conversations, following up on outcomes, and ensuring that key parties and groups have an opportunity to discuss ways to work together to support collective objectives,” Govan said.

A [new website has also been launched](#) that specifically focused on “engaging citizens to look at the municipal processes at play in this deal.”

“The website is a one-stop-shop for how to participate in achieving these goals,” Parry said, adding the main goals of the group are to stop the sale of the former Talisman lands; reveal the details of the Westway proposal; demand a process that involves and respects constituents; and challenge the municipality's “caving-in” rather than bargaining with a vision for long-term, best land use.

A GoFundMe page and a new [petition](#) have also been created in an effort to gain community support and fund the fees required for due diligence.

“Through this petition, council will hear a community voice, stronger than ever, concerned with the municipal processes leading to the conditional sale: the lack of public deliberation, the unpublished results of the visioning sessions, and the general secrecy around the sale of the public lands,” Parry stated.

The group has also published community signs, which read: Listen to us! Protect Talisman! Public lands matter!

Parry said the signs have been shared widely with concerned residents and are available to others at several local Grey Highlands' businesses.



***About the Author:* Jennifer Golletz**

Jennifer Golletz covers civic matters under the Local Journalism Initiative, which is funded by the Government of Canada