

# Petition asks council to stop the sale of lands near Talisman

Council received a petition last Wednesday from a group of people who want to present the petition to stop the sale of Talisman public lands.

Stephanie Warner spoke to council. Despite online consultations, emails and presentations to council, she said that those who signed the petition question whether the public voice has been heard.

Grey Highlands has accepted a conditional offer from Westway Capital on two parcels that came into its hands because of unpaid

taxes. This does not include the resort property with the building. The terms of the offer have not been released.

A coalition involving the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy made a presentation to council about the same time as Westway.

Since the Westway offer was accepted, the coalition has put in its own offer for the lands.

But having those lands is a "once in a lifetime opportunity," Ms Warner said, to use public lands "to benefit all rather than a few."

Westway, one of whose spokesman has been associated with other resort developments, told council that much of the land would have to be left natural as it is not developable.

Grey Highlands council has adopted a visioning statement putting a priority on the environment in the Beaver Valley Corridor.

But Ms Warner said that people should know more about the details of the Westway offer, referring to the "mysterious and unnecessary secrecy."

Jane Pyper of Kimberley

spoke to the Advance last month about a Freedom of Information request that has been filed about the deal.

The municipality has said the sale is considered under negotiation because of the pending condition.

Ms Warner said that about 700 people who have signed the petition which says in part: "Right now, Council can still get out of the current sale. We demand that Council stop the sale they have started, and engage with the public they have ignored."

Coun. Dane Neilsen asked what success looked like for the residents who are opposing the sale - "is it no development, some development, no bricks and mortar?"

Ms Warner said there was a mix of positions among those involved, but that they were united in thinking the decision shouldn't be happening behind closed doors.

Coun. Paul Allen said that just as there are people who are against the deal, there are others who support it. Ms Warner responded that if the proposal for development was laid out then people could decide if they were for or against. Right now, "they don't know what that means," she said.

CAO Karen Govan

explained that most if not all negotiations of sales are kept in confidence so other potential buyers are not tipped off.

"It's not a back door deal,' she said. "It's solely 100 percent to protect the taxpayers... We don't want to put our cards on the table."

Ms Warner asked why an open RFP process was not used, as multiple offers can lead to a higher price. Ms Govan countered that the joint venture document to market the property along with the former Talisman resort and the strategic plan were public documents.

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