

Westway speaks to council about plans for former Talisman lands

(by Isabel Buckmaster)

Members of the Beaver Valley Development Group (BVDG) invite the public to weigh in on their housing project in the upper and lower Talisman Resort Lands.

Despite “lots of starts and stops,” the development team believes this is the final speed bump before plans are drawn up.

While consultants spoke to several locals, they want to ensure that they “get a good mix of views and opinions as it all starts.”

“We need to make sure our feet are firmly planted on the ground,” said Paul Mondell, head of development and planning for the project, speaking to Grey Highlands council in late July.

“There’s been many comments like ‘who are these people’ and ‘what are they doing;’ we haven’t been hiding in the shadows, we’re very active and engaged in this process.”

BVDG is an affiliate of Westway Capital Inc. which purchased the land in June 2022.

The Grey Highlands took possession of Talisman in 2020 but still do not own the middle section, although the group is in talks with current owners and are confident the deal will finalise.

“I worked very hard to change some of the approaches in the development industry,” said

Paul Golini, senior advisor and Talisman project lead.

“The whole approach shouldn’t be that sustainability and energy efficiency is an upgrade but part of the planning process from the onset.”

Coun. Little asked for additional information about the proposal’s original vision, which highlighted health and wellness as both a form and function of the property.

Mondell clarified that while they’ve kept wellness, sustainability and tourism in mind, what that will look like is still up to the public. For those who want to know more, the website is almost finished.

“There are many people I’m sure who would like to keep (Grey Highlands) a secret but allowing more people to enjoy what is here is important as well,” said Mondell.

“We want to take the best of what’s here and allow people to engage and participate in what’s here.”

Co-founder and former vice-president of Empire Communities, which built hundreds of communities across Ontario and parts of the United States, Golini exited the company. He moved his family to Blue Mountain a number of years ago. However, Golini considers himself new to the community, and invites the public to tell him what he’s missed.

“We’d love to make this an example of how to do this the right way in 2022 moving forward, especially on the heels of the pandemic,” said Golini. “Yes, focusing on the environment but we need to also focus on the human occupants at the same time and how t h e y interact.”

When asked whether the BVDG aims to be “the next Collingwood” or Blue Mountains, both consultants assured members of council that that isn’t feasible in the area.

“First of all, the setting is completely different and the scale, it’s not even possible in my professional opinion,” said Mondell. “But there will be many elements that Collingwood and Blue Mountain will be jealous of what we achieve here.”

The group has been going through a technical analysis of the lands and reports and some on-site investigations, but the development plans are at an early stage.

There will be a minimum of three consultation sessions, starting this fall, with a “community stakeholder advisory group,” which will review and evaluate different options for buildings, green space and access, and o emerge with one that is preferred. Planning Partnership will lead the planning part of the project and Crozier will provide engineering.

Thanks

Paul + Gail