

Plans for land above and below Talisman revealed

(by Kate Russell)

Local residents had an early peek into what the Beaver Valley Development Group may propose for lands around the former Talisman resort.

"We're giving people an opportunity to voice their opinions - we always welcome them," said Antonio Piazza. He's the vice president of real estate for Beaver Valley Development Group (BVDG).

"It's important to listen - that's part of everything I do."

Indeed, Piazza had lots to hear from those residents who attended the public consultation, which the company held in-person at Kimberley Hall last week as well as online.

The company presented its ideas to the public ahead of entering into the formal process with the municipality.

"A lot of people have a wide range of opinions," he offered, suggesting overall what he has heard has been very positive.

The development group has been preparing maps, outlining potential development models and engaging experts to complete reports for the planning process moving forward. "It was a process to get where we are now."

There are likely to be a couple more years when changes may be made before building starts. And the same group could still acquire the main Talisman property and tie in to development there, the Advance was told.

TALKS WITH COMMUNITY

During earlier discussions since Westway Capital purchased the land at the top and bottom of the valley next to the former Talisman lodge property, a community reference group was formed to "get feedback from certain members of the community."

Not all of the community reference group were happy with what they saw at the recent public meeting.

"It's a bit of a mixed bag,"

said Jeanette Walter of Protect Talisman and Friends of the Beaver Valley, who sat on the community reference group.

"You feel you're being listened to in the moment, but I'm not sure what is shown here is a culmination of what has been heard. There's a lot of difference."

Walters explained she is concerned about the density of homes possible for the property.

Though no unit numbers were specified in the many maps and panels on display, she thought the idea of about 250 units on each portion of the property was excessive. She felt they were planning for more like 40. "In the reference group, that's what they said they were aiming for."

She suggests the BVDG is looking at mixed use of housing, from single family dwellings, townhouses, condos and rental units.

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As part of the reference group, which informed the BVDG process, she worried people think this may help the local housing crisis. She does not believe it will.

"It is irritating when people conflate the need for housing with this development. We need to have it somewhere but we don't want it here," she said, of the Beaver Valley, part of the Niagara Escarpment UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

"This development is not for people who need housing. This is nice for a special demonstration, but it is not solving any housing issues for anyone."

MUCH REVIEW TO COME

The maps and charts at the public meeting showed "high level" concepts of what might be possible on the property. They included housing developments, open space with viewing platforms and connections to existing Bruce Trail and other local recreational amenities.

The panels, set up on easels for the public to review, reflected community input as well as BVDG's necessary due diligence and studies required to develop the land.

"We are expecting to work within the constraints shown here," explained Piazza, referring to maps showing open land and trail access, as well as appropriate setbacks and infrastructure needs.

He noted they have no unit counts yet as there are lots of constraints. They are in discussions with the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The group hopes to feature the Bruce Trail prominently in the development of the space. "We actually want to expand on those amenities. We aren't into the minutiae yet, it's very contextual right now."

Kimberley resident Stephanie Needham wondered about how green the development will be, noting the evening's presentation was "too high level to say whether they will be green buildings."

According to the BVDG website, Project Lead and Senior Advisor Paul Golini, has a background in sustainable building practices through his past

participation with Canada's Green Building Council.

Piazza added that the environmental focus will include the land use as well. The group is working with the Bruce Trail Conservancy on connecting trails and building amenities that "fit with the area."

Almost 70 per cent of the lower land portion is a "no-go area" to "become an amenity for all of this. We will use it to activate those areas for the public."

The presentation panels were explained by landscape architects from The Planning Partnership, engineers from Crozier Consulting Engineers and BVDG VP of Planning and Development Paul Mondell, who brings 40 years of land development, resort and community building to the table.

"We're still at a very high concept here," Mondell explained, confirming the "significant constraints on this land" and suggesting there's a lot of old infrastructure.

He added an archeological study has been completed, as the BVDG is "about to engage with First Nations (Saugeen Ojibway Nation), we're going to be engaging in a process with them."

MAIN TALISMAN LAND MAY STILL BE ADDED

Mondell has a lot of expertise in building communities as well as resorts. He was instrumental in developing Deerhurst and Horseshoe and is currently moving to a home in a development he was involved in at Blue Mountain. He suggested the public meeting was showing what could be done, not what will happen.

"I bring my resort hat here too," he said, suggesting the BVDG does not own the hill nor the existing hotel, but the hospitality element will be huge in the overall concept.

He offered their group is in discussions about the main Talisman property. "We're working with that owner and we're going to come up with something that makes sense. We'll figure it out."

"If this was easy, everyone would be doing it. You're never going to get 100 per cent buy-in, but common sense goes a long way."

He suggested a combination of seasonal and permanent residents will encourage a variety of home

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buyers and investors.

He added the idea is to have hospitality "baked in" to the project and suggested there may be a broader mix of housing to attract younger families as well as smaller units for rentals.

"There's a whole plethora of things that could evolve here," he said, offering the development may attract a spa operator or boutique hotel, as well as places for rental opportunities.

"We want to enhance recreational opportunities in an environmentally sustainable way. I'm not building a subdivision, I'm building enduring places for people to live."

New Grey Highlands municipal councillor Joel Loughhead was on hand for the public meeting. He was impressed with the amount of information presented. He thought it was more than he anticipated.

"It's interesting to see some actual designs on paper. It's nice. It beats the alternative of no public consultation whatsoever," he said. "We'll see how much is taken into account when the rubber hits the road."

The Planning Partnership, which worked with the municipality on a review of the future of downtown Markdale and in the creation of a Beaver Valley Corridor Visioning report, was on hand at the meeting as well to hear further from the local community.

"We wanted to have a focussed conversation on our work in progress," said Donna Hinde, a landscape architect who is a principal in communications with The Planning Partnership.

She commended the community reference group's 26 members from a broad range of interests.

"We have terrific conversations. They're not easy conversations. We are hopeful it contributes to us doing the best plan we can. We believe in this process."

The BVDG will be seeking pre-consultations with Grey Highlands municipal staff in the new year.

There are still many steps to the process, including official public meetings as part of the municipal planning approvals requirements.

It may still be a few years before a shovel hits the ground. The Advance will be following the journey ahead.



TALKING ABOUT BEAVER VALLEY'S FUTURE – The Beaver Valley Development Group (BVDG) held public meetings - both in-person and online - last week to hear from the community on concepts for the properties at the bottom and top of the former Talisman resort lands. Top left: Municipal councillor Joel Loughead was interested in what Project Lead and experienced resort developer Paul Mondell had to say about infrastructure. Middle: A “high concept” plan. Right: BVDG VP of Real Estate Antonio Piazza heard from local people Jeanette Walker, of Protect Talisman and Friends of the Beaver Valley and Kimberley resident Stephanie Needham who expressed concerns about density and green development. Many people attended the events, which included maps and charts covering the areas proposed for development to include housing and enhancements to environmental and recreational amenities. (Photos by Kate Russell)

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