

Wed 11/22/23

## Citizens' groups hire firm to consult on Talisman lands

(by M.T. Fernandes, Local Journalism Initiative)

In the past few years, it seems there has been vision after vision of the Beaver Valley future.

Now, the Escarpment Corridor Alliance has partnered with Protecting Talisman Lands Association to hire a firm to do a "Talisman Visioning Project" that would include all the privately-owned properties.

That delegation to council last Wednesday prompted Paul Mondell of Beaver Valley Development Group to make a virtual appearance at Open Forum.

He said that the BVDG is working on its application, and would be addressing many of the areas named in the Talisman Visioning Project – official plan, water resources and regulations.

David Scoon of the Escarpment Corridor Alliance for his part said the goal given to the firm, Public City architects is to review available information and consult widely to determine a consensus vision.

How the actual owners of the properties would fit into the consensus vision was a question posed by some members of council.

"What is your relation to the landowners today – did you have a discussion with them before coming to council?" asked Deputy Mayor Dane Neilsen.

Mr. Scoon said that they had not.

The Deputy Mayor then asked if those working on the project would be willing to sit down with developers and parties interested in economic development for the Valley, to which the answer was yes.

The timeframe submitted with the proposal sets January for the detailed consultant talks with landowners, with November as the time for informing them.

In the recently adopted Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy, there were 23 stakeholder groups mentioned, the Deputy Mayor said.

"Are you open to opposing ideas?", he asked, saying he was concerned that there would be one specific vision brought to the table. The answer was that the group was open to collaboration.

Grey Highlands hired a consultant to do a Beaver Valley Corridor visioning exercise (2021), which was quoted in the Escarpment Corridor Alliance presentation.

"The reality is there's a lot of different visions, a lot of different opinions of what should or shouldn't happen in the Valley," the Deputy Mayor said.

Mr. Scoon said the group was open to collaboration, and planned

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to hold its first public consultation on Dec. 10. "It's not all or nothing there will be some compromise."

The BVDG, which owns the lands adjoining the former Talisman Inn land did its own consultation, Mr. Mondell said in Open Forum. There were some 25 members of the public, several meetings and an open house.

He said there was "a sincere attempt on our part" to engage the community on things that were important to them.

He said that the last session "degraded into name-calling and a real uncivilized display that I've really never witnessed through my professional career."

"So they're back - maybe in a different name, but I believe it's a lot of the same group that's going to be presenting to you, and try to re-start a process that we tried to initiate going back into last year, and the early part of this year."

During the later council discussion, Coun. Tom Allwood said that he had been at the BVDG process which "unfortunately seemed to fall apart."

He said in response to Mr. Scoon's proposal that council welcomes input, while adding he was pretty clear on the group's position.

"There's been a consistent, well-funded

campaign to promote your position to council," he said.

Coun. Allwood remarked that the municipality is looking forward to the BVDG application coming forward, acknowledging concern about how the economy may affect it. "We want something to happen with that piece of property."

Mr. Scoon's starting point in his delegation had been that the situation around the development of the Talisman lands is "very uncertain."

In addition to the economy and high interest rates, there are two different owners involved, he said. The former Inn property is in different hands than BVDG.

"The future is uncertain with two developers working independently... there is no overall vision," he said.

Mr. Scoon asked for council and staff to attend meetings and participate in the process, and to be able to present to council the Talisman Vision, which is expected to be ready in March 2024.

Mayor Paul McQueen said that staff are busy, and will come back to council for authorization if requests for time go beyond what might be expected.

Public City architects is described as a firm with experience in civic, commercial, institutional and residential areas.