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Plans for big new Talisman development submitted to Grey County

SCOTT DUNN

Up to 370 homes in a "mountain resort village" are proposed for the former Talisman Mountain Resort property.

Grey County planner Scott Taylor noted in his staff report about the application Thursday that the draft plan of subdivision application must go through agency assessment and public consultation processes before his department will weigh in with recommendations.

Grey County council received the report for information and without comment.

The project, in the Beaver Valley and within the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area, has attracted some community and broader concern over putting this much development in this natural, provincially protected setting.

The report says no individual residential or commercial lots would be created at this point. "Instead, blocks are being created which will be developed at a later date through future development applications," such as by plan of condominium or site plan applications.

One block is for recreation and mixed uses, three blocks are designated residential, one block is for future development, there's a block for stormwater management, two for "natural heritage" and one for natural heritage and open space.

A map showing where the homes could go is just a "concept plan" to show how individual blocks could be developed via separate development applications, the staff report said.

Up to 370 residential units (townhouses and multiple attached units), commercial, community and recreational uses are anticipated in the development, north of Kimberley. They would be below the ski hill, on former resort lands which included a golf course.

"The former ski resort buildings are in separate ownership, and not a part of the current plan of subdivision application," the report said. There are residential, recreational and natural land uses in the area.

The lands involved are designated as Escarpment Recreation Area and Escarpment Natural Area, but Niagara Escarpment development control has been lifted for portions of the subject lands, "including the majority of those contemplated for development." The areas proposed for development are within the Escarpment Recreation Area, which allows residential, commercial and recreational uses.

Access would be off Talisman Mountain Drive, which connects to Grey Road 7 in Grey Highlands. The development, referred to as the Beaver Valley Development Group subdivision, would be serviced by proposed municipal water and sewers.

County spokesman Rob Hatton said it will be months before staff present another report about the development to council. "A public process will need to be completed including a public meeting and staff will need time to summarize and consider all the comments heard. Other agencies will also need time to review the plan of subdivision application and comment," he said.

On Monday, Grey County published a notice of a completed development application, including maps and details which are also in the planning report. It says a public meeting date isn't set and it provides other ways to provide comment.

Grey has a dedicated webpage for the development, which contains numerous technical reports provided by the developer to support its application. One of them, the 89-page Planning & Urban Design Rationale Report, concludes the project is "appropriate and desirable" for the property and community.

SEE TALISMAN ON A2

Pg
1
of
2



Beaver Valley Development Group's concept plan for lands below the ski hill at the former Talisman Mountain Resort. GREY COUNTY PLANNING REPORT SCREEN SHOT

Proposal draws opposition from some quarters

TALISMAN FROM A1

It will provide a "range of housing options while promoting well-being, economic resiliency, and significant environmental conservation." It will be good for tourism and for locals, "designed as a pedestrian-oriented mountain resort village..."

The development could include a farmers' market, gathering area, interpretation centre, wellness centre and outdoor recreation outfitter, it says. The development fits the intent of the Niagara Escarpment Recreation Area and, hazard lands, natural features and functions will be protected, the developer's report said.

But the future of the Talisman property has generated community concern. Erica Ferguson, an area resident who has a masters in rural planning, responded to a Sun Times request for comment by calling the proposal "the worst

example of rural planning I have ever seen."

She said "it is my firm opinion that this epitomizes poor planning for our rural communities in every regard. It will cost the municipality way more than it will ever recoup, will irreversibly damage tourism and ecosystems, and pays no attention at all to the climate and health-care crises we face locally and globally. It is an abomination through and through."

Ferguson is also a practising local medical doctor who has warned that local health-care services are struggling to meet the needs of an already burgeoning population without more new development being approved.

She's called for "a sober second look at the development potential of our municipality."

Stephen Griggs, chair of the Escarpment Corridor Alliance, said his group will urge Grey County

council to turn down the application and will ask the province to "prohibit this high-density development in the Greenbelt."

"It's a completely outrageous attempt to pave over a large, very visible part of the Greenbelt and should be prohibited by the province."

Talisman is one of a few "hotspot developments" within the southern Georgian Bay escarpment area, Griggs said. His registered charity is trying to ensure a corridor which includes the Talisman area "that is enhancing the protection of the Niagara Escarpment."

Griggs said developers are trying to "exploit a potential loophole" grandfathered into the Niagara Escarpment Plan in 1985 which let a small number of recreational properties, including Talisman, build ancillary residential development to support their ski businesses.

Thanks, Reel & Gatt.

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2
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2