

**Beaver Valley Development Group – Community Reference Group (upper and lower Talisman lands)  
to be facilitated by The Planning Partnership**

**Position Statement of the Niagara Escarpment Foundation  
September 8, 2022**

The Niagara Escarpment Foundation (NEF) respectfully declines the invitation from The Planning Partnership to join the Community Reference Group (CRG) for the Beaver Valley Development Group's proposed development of its currently undeveloped Niagara Escarpment lands at the former Talisman resort in the Beaver Valley.

The NEF places a high value on the role of public engagement in land use planning. In fact, the NEF Board of Directors has almost 150 years of combined experience in public engagement on the Niagara Escarpment. Regrettably, The Planning Partnership's participation exercise, as outlined in the CRG's Terms of Reference, is not in keeping with either historical priorities or our vision for Niagara Escarpment protection.

In the 1960s, there was tremendous public engagement and pressure to protect the natural environment of the Niagara Escarpment, culminating in the adoption of the *Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (NEPDA)* in 1973 by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The *NEPDA* recognizes that the Niagara Escarpment is a very special place in Ontario and that the protection of its continuous natural corridors is of provincial significance.

From 1973 until the early 1980s, the Proposed Plan for the Niagara Escarpment underwent one of the most comprehensive public engagement processes in the history of Ontario. The provincial public hearings on the Proposed Plan, including the Beaver Valley, took place from 1979 to 1982 and were among the longest public hearings in Ontario's history.

As a result of this arduous, expensive and unprecedented public engagement, in June 1985, the Ontario Cabinet approved the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP), Canada's first large-scale environmentally based land use plan. Both the Cabinet and all three parties in the Legislature agreed that the continuous natural corridors on the slopes of the Beaver Valley must be protected to safeguard water quality and natural habitats including the Beaver River and its watershed, and that future development should be directed away from these sensitive and ecologically invaluable lands.

Since 1985, based on extensive environmental monitoring and research, the Niagara Escarpment Plan has undergone three provincial reviews which included extensive public engagement. Based on further research, the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area was designated a World Biosphere by UNESCO and later, was included in the Greenbelt by the Ontario government.

The foundation of public engagement for planning the future of lands in the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area is prior comprehensive environmental science research and studies on such issues as wildlife habitat, species at risk, forest conservation, visual impact analysis, landform conservation and hydrological assessment. This research foundation is a fundamental principle which must be honoured and respected and in the NEF's view, is evidently lacking in The Planning Partnership's proposed CRG process.

In the Beaver Valley, the foundation for public engagement over the past 50 years has been the partnership of public agencies and private landowners, including not-for-profit organizations, enhancing and securing lands to maintain the continuous natural corridors and the integrity of the watershed. Such initiatives and activities undertaken in the public interest have included: setting aside agriculturally marginal lands for wildlife preserves; natural reforestation and water resource enhancement; tree-planting for windbreaks and soil conservation; donating private lands or portions thereof to secure the continuous natural corridors; improving fish habitat; signing long-term conservation agreements with the Ontario government and conservation charities; adopting sustainable and organic farming practices; developing Environmental Farm Plans; family estates gifting permanent access to the Bruce Trail Conservancy; undertaking legal action, including judicial reviews, to halt inappropriate development that would undermine the *NEPDA* ; initiating Niagara Escarpment Plan amendments to re-designate their own farms as Escarpment Natural Area and Escarpment Protection Area in the NEP; and many more.

The NEF's position on the future of the Talisman lands remains unchanged since our May 2021 conservation-first [Alternative Vision for the Talisman Lands](#). "If the public lands currently owned by the Municipality of Grey Highlands at Talisman are sold to maximize development and profits, this would constitute an unprecedented rupture of the historic tradition of private-public partnership faithfully supporting the NEP in the Beaver Valley. It would also undermine the legacy of generations of valley landowners who worked so hard to advocate for the soul of the valley – its natural corridors and watersheds."

Unfortunately, in May of this year, the Municipality sold the undeveloped public lands at Talisman – the upper parcel and lower parcel – to the Beaver Valley Development Group without any meaningful public engagement.

In our vision, the formerly public Talisman lands now owned by the BVDG should, as we stated in May 2021, be added to the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS) for the public's benefit, for the health and wellbeing of the natural environment, and for future generations. Since the NEF understands that the BVDG is envisioning a considerable scale of building development on its currently undeveloped Talisman lands, we prefer not to contribute to a process that will or may assist in that development coming to fruition, given our position that the lands should be added to NEPOSS. In the midst of the global climate crisis, NEF takes the position that every opportunity to maintain and enhance carbon sinks, such as the Niagara Escarpment's forests, wetlands and natural corridors, and to protect the Escarpment's precious water resources, should be seized and promoted.

Therefore, we urge the BVDG to transfer all the lands that it now owns to the Government of Ontario or a suitable not-for-profit charitable organization for a charitable tax receipt. There are clear precedents in this regard including on the western slopes of the Beaver Valley and in the public interest, the NEF would be willing to publicly engage with the BVDG in this process.

The NEF thanks The Planning Partnership for the invitation to participate in the Community Reference Group and would like to be kept informed, if possible, of the BVDG's future initiatives regarding the Talisman lands.

*Respectfully submitted by the Board of Directors, Niagara Escarpment Foundation*  
<https://nefoundation.ca/>