

Grey Highlands Council betrays public trust in closing deal to sell Talisman lands: Beaver Valley's Niagara Escarpment is under grave development risk

Statement by Robert Leverty, President, Niagara Escarpment Foundation

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At a meeting today of the Council of the Municipality of Grey Highlands, Council decided that it will close the deal to sell its two land parcels at the former Talisman Resort by May 25. Council has capitulated to the request of Westway Capital Inc., the developer-purchaser, to advance the closing date, originally to be 180 days after the waiving of all conditions, which would have been in mid-July 2022.

As the Niagara Escarpment Foundation has stated several times over the past year during Grey Highlands' Talisman debacle, to sell off a precious natural asset to private development interests, when all governments should be retaining their natural heritage lands as a legacy for the future, is breathtakingly short-sighted.

The sale of the public lands at Talisman to maximize development and profits constitutes an unprecedented rupture of the historic tradition of private-public partnerships faithfully supporting the Niagara Escarpment Plan in the Beaver Valley. There has been a half-century legacy of environmental protection for the Escarpment in the Beaver Valley. Public ownership of these lands would have helped meet the enormous public demand for publicly accessible rural protected areas for low-impact outdoor recreation. Such recreation can mean significant economic opportunities.

Grey Highlands Council could have done the right thing, for the Beaver Valley, for the climate crisis, for the natural environment and the economy. Council had a historic opportunity to better protect the Niagara Escarpment – a UNESCO Biosphere and part of Ontario's Greenbelt. Council has betrayed the public trust.

Today's decision is an outrage. The Niagara Escarpment Foundation will continue to work with community groups in the Beaver Valley to do everything possible to protect the valley's natural environment.

The NEF is a not-for-profit corporation and registered charity founded in 2001 to encourage public awareness of the natural and cultural significance of the Niagara Escarpment and to conduct research related to protection of the Niagara Escarpment.