



Heated council debate ends with Talisman sale

Chris Fell

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It's official - Grey Highlands council has voted to sell the Talisman Mountain Resort property.

The sale's approval came at council's regular meeting on Friday, May 23 in a 5-2 recorded vote.

Grey Highlands will receive \$1.8 million for the Talisman land and will retain some parts of the property including land on top of the hill and land near the Kimberley sewage treatment facility. A total of \$1 million will be paid up front and Grey Highlands will hold a mortgage of \$800,000 on the rest - with it being repaid \$100,000 per year for eight years.

The sale was not approved without controversy as Deputy Mayor Paul McQueen and councillor Stewart Halliday raised several objections to the deal.

At one point the meeting nearly descended into procedural chaos as Mayor Wayne Fitzgerald called for an immediate vote after councillors had all been given a chance to speak. Halliday demanded a second five minutes to speak, but the Mayor denied that request and asked for a resolution to formally call for a vote.

"The rush to vote is a suppression of my rights as a councillor," said Halliday. "This council doesn't want to hear the truth," he said.

Halliday was the first to speak on the matter and raised several ethical questions about the deal to sell Talisman. He said council had not followed proper process to declare Talisman a surplus property. Halliday said more discussion about the sale of the property was needed and wanted a process put in place to invite other bids for Talisman.

Deputy Mayor McQueen had concerns about the property being sold to numbered companies. The formal transaction is with two numbered companies, but Brian Ellis is the head of the group purchasing the property.

McQueen also had concerns about the municipality holding a mortgage on the property and its right of first refusal to buy the property back in the event the new owners try to sell Talisman.

CAO Dan Best said that McQueen's objections were covered in a memo he had prepared about the sale for council.

"This is a simple real estate transaction. Don't make it bigger than it is," he said.

There was a clear sense of impatience in the council chambers and the delay tactics of McQueen and Halliday did not impress the majority of council.

"Why do we need to go around for another half hour on this? We all have our minds made up. We all know how we're going to vote," commented councillor Paul Allen.

Councillor Lynn Silverton said the sale is a good deal for Grey Highlands.

"We're going to have some jobs. This is going to happen - it's not going to be put off," she said.

In a news release that announced the original deal Ellis said his group plans to restore Talisman to a hotel/spa resort and convention centre.

"This use will make the new Talisman a destination property that will add amenities to serve the local communities and bring clientele into the region to say and enjoy the amenities that the resort and surrounding community offers," he said.



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