

The Daily Courier

Thursday, January 31, 2013

Granite Dells Partnership takes resort acquisition proposal to Prescott council

[Cindy Barks](#)

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PRESCOTT - Advocates of preserving the historic Granite Dells Resort have come up with an acquisition plan that would take the [City of Prescott](#) out of the equation for management of the resort's remaining buildings.

When the Granite Dells Preservation Foundation initially proposed that the City of Prescott buy the 83-acre resort site as open space, one of the city's concerns centered on the management of the resort's remaining 1920s- and 1930s-era buildings.

The parcel - complete with an original dance hall, boat house, and remains of a 3-million-gallon swimming lake - would come with challenges that would go beyond the city's usual parks and recreation responsibilities, officials said.

Foundation members have since honed their plans, and are now proposing - as the Granite Dells Partnership - that the city buy about 80 acres of the granite-studded land that surrounds the old resort, while the three-acre resort site itself would be the responsibility of the non-profit organization.

A presentation on the details of the plan is scheduled to go to the [Prescott City Council](#) next week.

The Granite Dells Partnership, a consortium of community groups, will present its plan during the council's workshop at 3 p.m. Tuesday, at Prescott City Hall, 201 S. Cortez St.

The organization's concept paper on the project states: "With the City of Prescott acquisition (of the 80 acres), the Granite Dells Preservation Foundation is committed to the separate acquisition and management of the historic Granite Dells Resort buildings and surrounding three acres."

Dan Campbell, a member of the foundation board, was hopeful this week that the parcel's owner would, in turn, "gift" the crucial three-acre parcel to the foundation.

Mark Wirth, the owner of the entire 83-acre parcel, said Thursday that he is contemplating such a donation. "I would definitely entertain that, and I have signed a letter to that effect," he said.

Along with acquiring the three-acre resort tract, the partnership also would agree to conduct a master-planning process for the entire 83 acres, and would raise the money for the old resort's operation and maintenance, according to the concept paper.

Although the exact sum of money for the master plan and maintenance is yet to be determined, Campbell said the partnership is committed to raising it.

And, he said, the idea has generated encouraging feedback from area philanthropic organizations. "We've been getting blinking green lights" from area foundations, he said, adding that those groups are closely watching the level of interest by the city.

Along with discussions with possible donors, Campbell said Granite Dells advocates have had a series of meetings with council members and other city officials.

"We had four sessions that looked very promising," Campbell said. On Tuesday, the partnership plans to ask the council to take the next step: Meeting with Wirth to talk about the possibility of updating the property's appraisal.

(Wirth earlier reported that the most recent appraisal, which took place at the peak of the real estate market, valued the land at about \$7 million. Today, experts estimate the value at about \$4.3 million, although that number is not based on a recent appraisal).

Councilman Jim Lamerson said Wednesday that he has a number of questions for the partnership about the property's value, as well as the city's responsibility for preserving it.

"My opinion is, the value should be based on tax records - what it's on the tax rolls for," Lamerson said.

He also questioned whether it should be up to the city to preserve land that is located outside city limits.

The partnership answers a number of the frequently asked questions about the project in a "questions and answers" section in its concept paper. The entire proposal is available online on the city's website at www.cityofprescott.net, under the "city meetings" section.

The foundation has suggested that the city pay for the purchase with revenue from the streets/open space sales tax initiative that voters approved in 2000.

While the city indicated at the time that it would spend as much as \$40.7 million of the revenue on open space acquisitions over the coming 15 years, it has so far spent about \$16 million. The sales tax expires in 2015.

Over the years, the city has opted to devote the bulk of the 1-percent sales tax revenue to street improvements.

But advocates say a number of factors have converged to bring urgency to the Granite Dells purchase.

"The opportunity to purchase this property, at a time when land values are at an historic low and the current owner wishes to see it preserved for recreational use, is unprecedented and urgent," states the partnership's proposal.

The Granite Dells Resort was a popular recreational gathering spot for area residents for decades in the 1900s. Wirth currently uses the property as a summer and vacation retreat for his family.

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