

New owners open up about future of Smoke Tree Resort

Developers say community conversations, plans to be expected later this year

By Melissa Rosequist
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Collaboration appears to be the name of the game, as the newest owners of Smoke Tree resort are confident they can bring forward a winning development for the town of Paradise Valley.

Describing a welcoming, boutique and luxury resort — that will not include for-sale units — Scottsdale-based Walton Global Holdings plans to bring ideas forward later this fall.

“Our goal is for this reimagined resort to become comfortable and welcoming to the residents of Paradise Valley,” said Walton Global CEO Bill Doherty. “We want to become the ‘living room’ for the town — welcome to everyone.”

Walton Global Holding bought Smoke Tree Resort for \$14 million on June 29 from former owners Gentree LLC. The 1950s Smoke Tree Resort was first approached for revitalization in early 2018 when Gentree, originally known as Ge-

• See **Smoke Tree** on page 5



Smoke Tree

• From page 1

neva Holdings, took a hold of the property. Despite multiple attempts to bring a redevelopment plan to fruition, plans failed to pass town of Paradise Valley scrutiny.

Since news broke about the defunct resort being purchased, it's been a topic of interest within Paradise Valley as the community waits

to hear what Walton Global will propose. The property has been sitting, closed, for several years.

The Walton team say they will be open and willing to hear what the community wants.

“It is unfortunate that past ideas did not work for the previous owners and other interested parties,” said Doherty. “However, we have researched those groups and heard what the residents at-

large have stated. We believe we have listened to Paradise Valley residents and the town of Paradise Valley and will continue to listen as part of the planning process.”

Doherty says the group is



Bill Doherty

• See **Smoke Tree** on page 9

Smoke Tree

• From page 5

setting the bar high for themselves to provide a finished product that everyone, including the community and tourists, will be proud of.

“The location and land-use of this particular parcel is one of a kind in the town,” said Doherty. “We feel honored to be the owners of such a special property and we want to get our development right. We believe we can achieve this by working collaboratively with Paradise Valley residents and elected officials in the town.”

Paradise Valley Town Council member Mark Stanton says it will be exciting to see what the new owner proposes and how it may blend in with the world-class resorts in the community already. Stanton, who’s in his third term on council, was among those who saw what previous ideas were proposed.

“I am grateful for the investment into our town, which helps provide for important town services for our residents and will help offset the need for a property tax. I am hoping for an application design that has charm and character with low density and height,” Stanton said.

Stanton touched on what ideas had been attempted in the past by the former owners. He says, despite good intentions and initial design



Applications for redevelopment go through scrutiny and an approval process at Paradise Valley Town Hall, pictured above. [Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Graine]

concepts, the previous applicants aspired to height and density, which do not fit at the Smoke Tree location or match the low-density character of Paradise Valley.

“I would strongly encourage that the applicant carefully studies the previous challenges of earlier applications, pay close attention to the SUP guidelines and be thoughtful about how their proposal and design will enhance the property and not detract from the character of the town that is so cherished and protected,” Stanton said. “More specifically, I am hopeful that the applicant will be thoughtful about aesthetics, parking and low density.”

Withey Morris attorney Jason Morris, who is working with Walton Global Holdings, says he has the personal knowledge and experience to meet the desires of what the town wants out of Smoke Tree. Morris says he knew

the original Smoke Tree Resort owners since his high school days, knew the history of the property and has an understanding of land use within Paradise Valley.

“It seemed like the only people who would be able to have success with this property are the people who have the wherewithal to do it right,” Morris said.

“Someone who was willing to pay the price, willing to solicit the town’s input, the community’s input — I think that will be the two most important things in getting this property entitled.”

Morris points out that many things done in Paradise Valley are through a consensus, with all parties agreeing upon a solution.

“What’s gotten approved and what’s been supported, it’s land use that’s been agreed upon,” said Morris. “It’s not developer driven, not even town staff driven. It has to be a combination of what the community is looking for and what

makes sense for the developer. I think that’s what we’ll see in the coming months.”

Morris and Doherty both point to more information being available later this fall. Morris said there is not an identified timeline Walton Global is tied to.

“In the coming weeks, we will first engage the town of Paradise Valley and then the neighbors, followed by a charrette type process, which will take place at the existing Smoke Tree Resort,” Doherty said. “We hope that Paradise Valley residents are interested in our initial vision for the new hotel and encourage all to join us so we can continue to develop the vision further together.”

Doherty describes that the new hotel will be a “viable, usable, attractive looking property.”

“We will not have ‘for-sale’ residential units. This is going to be an exclusive, small

• See **Smoke Tree** on page 26



Jason Morris

FROM THE COVER

Smoke Tree

• From page 9

luxury boutique hotel that places an emphasis on an upscale lifestyle with a phenomenal food and beverage experience,” Doherty said, adding that their food and beverage partner is a Phoenix native and one of the top chefs in the state. “Growing up in Arizona he also has a great appreciation for the history of the Smoke Tree Resort and the surrounding area that will be incorporated in the dining experience. We are certain that many Paradise Valley residents have, and continue to frequent his restaurants.”

Walton Global Holding is also working with local, award-winning architect Al-

len-Philp, who is no stranger to the Paradise Valley and Scottsdale hospitality sector. The architectural firm’s portfolio includes The Sanctuary, The Boulders and Fairmont Princess.

Morris says Walton Global is an out-of-the-box thinker, and is treating Smoke Tree as a gateway piece to Paradise Valley.

“I think the only thing that everyone agrees upon, at this point, is that what’s there is not really acceptable for Paradise Valley,” said Morris. “We’re fortunate that we’ve got some flexibility, a property at the center of the town would be a little bit different. The most important thing we can do at this stage is to listen. It’s more important than talking about financial viability.”
