



The Virginian Lodge and RV Park was listed for sale for \$60 million in January 2020.

Town lubricates way for sale of Virginian

Buyers say no major changes to be made yet.

By Mark Huffman

When the historic Virginian Lodge changes hands next month there will be no break in your ability to buy a beer in the bar or grab a bottle in the liquor store.

The Town Council made sure of that Monday night when it voted 5-0 to OK the transfer of the Virg's liquor license from the Napierskie family to the people who will buy the lodge, convention center, the Virginian Liquor Store, the Virginian Saloon and the RV park.

No big changes are immediately expected at the Virginian, in spite of rumors that have gone around Jackson since the 13-acre property went on the market earlier this year.

Along with plans to refurbish the operation, the idea in the immediate future is to "keep it what it is ... and effectively update the things we love about the Virginian," said J. Justin Martin, a vice president of Orion Companies.

The new owner will be Virginian Lodge LLC, a group that includes Orion, a real estate and construction firm that's become busy in Jackson in recent years, and Waterton, a Chicago firm that specializes in hotel management. Until the official filing for transfer of the liquor license, there had been no acknowledgement that a deal had been reached for the property.

Documents in the filing set the closing for Aug. 4, but noted it might be delayed a few days.

The sellers are the Napierskie family. The property was listed at \$60 million.

Even the RV park at the back of the property won't immediately be redeveloped, Martin said, though the mostly open 5 acres was seen when the property was listed as a prime attraction. Under town zoning it could accommodate hundreds of units, and was seen by employee housing advocates as a prime mid-town location for that use.

"The goal is to again add some amenities, but for the current time is to maintain the RV park as an RV park," Martin said.

After saying there would be no changes "for the foreseeable future," Martin was questioned by Councilor Jonathan Schechter, who found the reassurance vague. Martin replied that "there is a possibility it would get redeveloped in the future." He added,

"The foreseeable is as far as we can see."

Martin added that Orion is a local company led by Robert Huggins that began with New West Building and in its growth has taken on several old Jackson firms, such as Delcon and JB Plumbing, and kept them healthy. He said that at the Virginian "we expect to have the same Virginian with

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ORION COMPANIES VICE PRESIDENT

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Schechter said he asked because he is worried about the "tremendous amount of gentrification that is happening very actively" in town.

Councilor Arne Jorgensen agreed that there was "no illusion there won't be changes on this property" but looked forward to what would happen there.

But at that point Mayor Pete Muldoon ended the line of questioning, saying that Monday's hearing was about the transfer of the liquor license, not about the new owners'.

See **VIRGINIAN** on 18A



REBECCA NOBLE / NEWS&GUIDE FILE

Classic cars line the front lawn of the Virginian Lodge during the 43rd Jackson Rod Run in 2019. The event typically takes place in June, but this year it has been postponed until Aug. 21-23.

VIRGINIAN

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plans.

In the weeks after the Virginian went on the market, about 20 “really interested parties” looked into the offer and mentioned a variety of plans, said Greg Prugh, the agent who had the listing. He said inquiries came from around the United States and overseas.

The Virginian was created in 1965 by Glenn and Virginia Napierskie, when the location was considered to be on the western edge of town. Glenn died in 2006 and Virginia in May 2019.

The hotel has 95,000 square feet and 170 rooms along 442 feet of West Broadway frontage. The place is seen as a bit of old-time Jackson, a roadside hotel built long before the lodging business in Jackson turned fancy; it's the sort of place with a parking space

in front of the door of every unit, and people are likely to be miffed if someone else takes the space they think is theirs. It's a place where community events are held, gatherings like this week's crafts show and the annual So-roptimist Christmas tree sale.

Zoning would allow up to about 130,000 square feet for a redeveloper on the 8 acres that accommodate the lodge.

The 5 acres in the rear accommodate 103 RVs. Though it's a going business, that parcel is used only in the summer and brings in \$110 a night for each rented space.

In a letter to town officials, Glenn Napierskie II said he had sold after being assured that the new owners intended “to conserve our family's legacy by maintaining the property much as it's always been.”

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