

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: 10 May 2022
FROM: Economic Development
SUBJECT: WHISTLER HOUSING NEEDS REPORT

REPORT: 22-062
FILE: 7724

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Officer be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive the Whistler Housing Needs Report, attached as Appendix A to this Information Report to Council No. 22-062.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to meet the requirements set out by the Province of British Columbia for all municipalities to complete a housing needs report by April 2022, that is then received by Council at a meeting that is open to the public.

☒ Information Report ☐ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

Municipalities and regional districts in B.C. are required to complete housing needs reports by April 2022 and every five years thereafter, per Division 22 of the *Local Government Act*. These reports will help local governments and the B.C. government better understand and respond to housing needs in communities throughout B.C.

Together, legislation and regulations specify requirements for local government related to housing needs reports. These requirements include:

- Collecting information to identify current and projected housing needs,
- Using that information to prepare and publish an online housing needs report which shows current and projected housing needs for at least the next five years, and
- Considering the most recently collected information and housing needs report when amending official community plans and regional growth strategies

When a housing needs report is complete, a local government is required to:

- Receive the report at a council or board meeting that is open to the public, and
- Publish the report on an internet site that is publicly and freely accessible

With reference to Whistler's Housing Needs Report (Appendix A), this report is intended to provide insight into Whistler's current and future housing needs, and identify potential solutions to respond to these needs. This report focuses on challenges and gaps in the housing supply by analyzing quantitative and qualitative information about local demographics, economics, housing inventory, and other factors, and builds upon many years of ongoing work that has been undertaken relating to Whistler's housing needs. Though Whistler has already developed a housing strategy with specific actions as a result of the 2016 [Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing](#) this housing needs report will update the current perspective on specific segments of the population, and may inform additional actions within the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW).

This report is based on several sources of robust data and analysis, and includes recent insights from community organizations and experiences over the past two years through the COVID-19 pandemic, recent sales of new employee housing with reference to applicant waitlists for purchase and rental of employee homes, and a survey of market residential properties in Whistler conducted in December 2021. The most recent census is 2016 with regard to depth of households, incomes and housing data, with the 2021 Census housing data release due later in 2022.

Although not a requirement under the *Local Government Act*, RMOW staff plan to review 2021 Census data, when it becomes available later in 2022, and update the housing needs assessment such that the most relevant data is being used to guide decisions on housing policy and projects.

Analysis

This report takes a deep dive into available socioeconomic data to understand the root causes of rising core and extreme core housing need in Whistler, and identifying key demographic segments of those experiencing need. This enables the RMOW and other stakeholders to tailor potential solutions that can most effectively alleviate housing needs, particularly for those most vulnerable. The number of households experiencing core and extreme housing need more than doubled between 2011 and 2016.¹

This report clearly shows that affordability is the leading challenge contributing to core and extreme core housing need,² where 1340 census households (nearly 30% of all Whistler census households) spent more than 30% of their gross income on shelter costs. This report identified the groups that had the highest levels of representation in core housing need, and in particular those households below affordability threshold. To be specific, the following spent more than 30% of their gross income on shelter costs in the last census:

- 40% of renter households,
- 49% of lone-parent family households, and
- 42% of single-person households

Based on recent collaborative work by the RMOW with a range of local community organizations, including Whistler Community Services Society, the COVID-19 pandemic experience has shown that the challenges of affordability and access to suitable housing has been exacerbated. Rising use of food bank, mental health supports and counselling services attest to the increasing vulnerability of key groups in the community.

¹ While we await 2021 Census results due later in 2022, 2016 data is used as the most recently available proxy of current core and extreme housing need.

² Core and Extreme Core Housing Need assesses whether a household is in affordable, suitable, and adequate housing based on their income and needs

Whistler's primary method to address affordability challenges for the local workforce is through the provision of employee-restricted dwellings, over 70% of which are owned, and the remaining are purpose-built rentals.

This Housing Needs Report defines the key segments of the population with greatest need, and how the municipal policy of linking rental rates to income levels provides a viable opportunity to support affordability in Whistler. The following are the key segments of current need:

1. General need for increased supply of purpose built rentals
2. Housing for low income and vulnerable persons
3. Housing for Families
4. Accessible housing
5. Smaller dwelling units

Reference is also made to the success of recent new supply of employee restricted housing for purchase, however with rising costs of ownership due to labour and material costs, and rising interest rates, this points to the need for purpose-built rentals to alleviate affordability challenges for much of Whistler's renter households.

Further, the analysis discovered that many of Whistler's larger market homes (three and four bedroom +) are owned and occupied by one and two person households, implying that the current stock of resident-occupied dwellings could be further optimized. This may be a result of the limited density in Whistler, resulting in few downsizing options for senior households. This supports the need for a greater supply of smaller dwelling units (e.g., bachelor, one-bedroom) to enable aging in place and encourage movement through the housing continuum – both units for ownership and rental.

It was also concluded that the market alone cannot be relied upon to provide these affordable, suitable, and adequate housing units for Whistler's workforce – as prices have reached a point where the average market property is unaffordable for more than 90% of Whistler's resident population, with diminishing availability of market rentals. Therefore, expanding the supply of rent restricted properties continues to be recommended as a necessary solution (in congruence with the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Residential Housing).

CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

While this Housing Needs Report is not intended to serve as a housing action plan in itself, its findings will help inform the recommendations of several other ongoing projects, including:

- **Vulnerable Populations:** In early 2022 the RMOW received a grant from Vancouver Coastal Health to be allocated to a project that addresses social determinants of health and community resiliency, in alignment with the Healthy Communities initiative. A comprehensive assessment of housing needs for vulnerable populations in our community has been identified as a very high priority, to help guide delivery of housing projects and to further grant opportunities to secure supportive housing. This further housing needs assessment will identify the existing supply of, and community need for:
 - Below market rental
 - Social housing
 - Transitional / supportive housing

- Short term shelter
- Other underserved housing target groups
- **Mayor's Task Force Actions:** This analysis will support the ongoing implementation of recommended actions that resulted from the 2016 [Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing](#), to address challenges with housing availability and affordability for the resort's workforce
- **The Balance Model initiative:** This analysis will also supplement the work of the [Balance Model Initiative](#), which looks at housing in the broader context of community planning, including implications for environmental, social and economic indicators. This will enable strategies and actions to be considered that may be implemented to support achievement of the community's goals in Whistler's Official Community Plan (OCP) and progress towards the vision of 'A place where our community thrives, nature is protected and guests are inspired'.

Further, these findings will be updated and validated upon availability of detailed 2021 Census data.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

[October 06, 2020: Administrative Report No. 20-095](#), Application for UBCM Municipal Housing Needs Assessment Funding Program

This report requested Council authorization to apply for a grant through the UBCM Housing Needs Report Program, such that an updated analysis of Whistler's housing needs may be conducted to include a current and projected need for at least the next five years, and further provide additional input to policy planning and development considerations.

Corporate Plan

The RMOW Corporate Plan is updated annually and articulates strategic direction for the organization. This section identifies how this report links to the plan.

Council Focus Areas

☒ Community Balance

*Effectively **balance resort and community needs** through deliberate planning, partnerships and investment*

☐ Climate Action

*Provide leadership to **accelerate climate action and environmental performance** across the community*

☒ Housing

*Advance strategic and innovative initiatives to enable and **deliver additional employee housing***

☐ Pandemic Recovery

*Leadership and support for **community and tourism recovery and sustainability** – priority focuses are where recovery needs intersect with other Council focus areas*

☐ Not Applicable

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The OCP is the RMOW's most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

Chapter 5 of the OCP outlines Whistler's vision for residential accommodation, where Whistler's residents have access to a continuum of affordable housing types, including market housing, and a secure supply of affordable and livable employee housing that includes a range of housing types, prices, and tenures. This report indicates how Whistler's supply of both market and employee-restricted residential properties are currently meeting the affordability and suitability needs of Whistler's residents, specifically for the workforce. The information delivered from this report will indicate where current gaps are in the supply of housing, to inform future housing policy decisions that will drive Whistler closer to its vision for residential housing.

This report will also inform the [Balance Model Initiative](#), which looks to recommend strategies and actions for resident housing in the broader context of maintaining balance across the OCP's four vision characteristic: Sense of Place, Environment, Community, and Tourism-Based Economy.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Following the RMOW's application for the UBCM Municipal Housing Needs Assessment Funding Program, a grant of \$20,000 was secured to complete the Housing Needs Report. The total cost of the Housing Needs Report, including the Housing Survey was \$21,857.00, which along with internal staff hours have been reflected in the RMOW's 2021 work plan and budget.

LIL'WAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lil'wat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for Crown land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☒ Inform ☒ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

Comment(s):

A Housing Survey of Whistler's market residential properties was conducted in December 2021, which provided updated data on the utilization of Whistler's market homes, and their availability to residents. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback or commentary explaining the current and expected use of their property. The Housing Survey was sent to nearly 8000 addresses, and garnered over 1200 responses in 4 weeks.

Whistler's Community Life Survey (CLS) is an annual survey that has been conducted since 2006. The CLS targets a random sample of 300 permanent residents and 200 second homeowners with the permanent resident sample size having a margin of error of +/- 5.66% at the 95% confidence level. The CLS seeks to determine overall satisfaction with quality of life in Whistler and provides insight into housing, affordability, employment and income.

Reliance was also placed on the public engagement that is ongoing for initiatives arising from the [Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing](#) such as rezoning for private developments, and the developments in Cheakamus Crossing Phase 2.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Whistler Housing Needs Report

SUMMARY

The Province of British Columbia recently introduced a requirement that all municipalities complete a Housing Needs Report by April 2022 (and every 5 years thereafter) that is received by council and publicly and freely available to access. These housing needs reports must identify key areas of need including: affordable housing, rental housing, seniors housing, housing for families, special needs housing, and shelters/housing for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This housing needs report also notes how current progress on the Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing makes inroads into the needs of the community.

The analysis and findings of this report are for information purposes only, and are not intended to serve as an action plan. Therefore, these findings will supplement the ongoing work of implementing the [Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing](#), and the [Balance Model Initiative](#) which looks to identify strategies and actions that Balance community, the environment, and the economy. Further, more targeted studies are in-progress, including the VCH Vulnerable populations study, and the Whistler Accessibility Action Plan.

SIGN-OFFS

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