



**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

4325 Blackcomb Way TEL 604 932 5535  
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5 TF 1 866 932 5535  
whistler.ca FAX 604 935 8109

## STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** July 19, 2022 **REPORT:** 22-106  
**FROM:** Economic Development & Tourism Recovery **FILE:** 0540  
**SUBJECT:** Long Term Strategic Planning Initiative – Interim Summary Report

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Officer be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Council receive this Interim Summary Report of the Long Term Strategic Planning process including the Balance Model Initiative, attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report to Council No. 22-106; and

**That** Council direct staff to continue working with the Strategic Planning Committee and other stakeholders to refine the emerging principles and develop a coordinated set of priorities that could be recommended for further consideration by the community; and further

**That** Council direct staff to organize community engagement in the fall of 2022 to support finalizing a full comprehensive set of recommendations for a new Council to consider for adoption in 2023.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key insights, implications and emerging principles from the Balance Model Initiative that supports long term strategic planning for the Whistler community, and to seek Council direction for staff to continue working towards refining a priority set of recommendations through collaboration with key stakeholder groups and community engagement in fall 2022.

Information Report

Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

With the development of Whistler into a major ski resort, and progressively a year round four season destination, the community has continued to become a highly desirable place to live and a leading world class resort. With this success, Whistler has faced a number of ongoing challenges over time, and as described in the Official Community Plan (OCP) adopted in June 2020, include:

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- escalating living, housing and business costs,
- pressures on Whistler's physical size,
- climate change impacts on weather, snowfall and forest fire risk, and declining quality and functioning of natural systems
- uncertain global economic conditions,
- increasingly costly limited natural resources
- growing competition among tourism destinations and changing tourism patterns and
- changing demographics and population.

Similar to many communities in British Columbia, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) has seen strong population growth in recent years. As a community that values our deep connection to the natural environment, the wellbeing and prosperity of community members, and the sustainability of the resort economy, the increased pace of growth in recent years (prior to COVID-19, and then the subsequent resurgence in recent months as restrictions have been reduced or eliminated) has caused growing pains and with those, conversations about community balance grew. The disjoint of high visitor satisfaction with declining resident satisfaction levels illustrates the complexities in balancing a vibrant resort economy that has flourished in recent years, while residents are feeling the pressures this brings.

In response to growth stressors, the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was initiated, with the members appointed and then the first meeting in Q4 2019, to support Council decision making related to community, land use planning and growth management. While this work was interrupted during COVID-19 in order to pivot to pandemic needs, this report is a culmination of work over many months and includes the benefit of hindsight in dealing with the pandemic. It should be noted that experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted and in some cases exacerbated the challenges already being felt in the community prior to the pandemic. These experiences have also been considered in this long term strategic planning work.

It is also acknowledged that while there are macro-economic and geopolitical factors, traveler trends, consumer preferences and other external factors that may change over time, and that can have significant effects on the resort community and economy, this report is intended to focus on the longer term strategic planning such that the resort can be more resilient over time, while at the same time being able to pivot and adapt through changing times.

So, while the OCP sets out a vision and goals for the community, this strategic planning process focusses on strategies and actions required to deliver on those high level future oriented goals, both in the near term and longer term.

## Analysis

The Balance Model Initiative, in collaboration with the SPC, uses quantitative data to investigate Whistler's historical growth trends and community impacts, to project out into a 20-year horizon where future implications may lie under various scenarios of population growth and development. While the concept of forecasting is not new, the Balance Model Initiative provides a unique vantage point by linking all aspects of a resort community, showing the interrelationships between visitation to workforce to resident population, and how these together impact the community's goals across social, environmental, and economic measures.

While there is much known about the community needs, opportunities and challenges, the Balance Model Initiative work has defined the scale of need in various areas, and with these now being quantified, key decision makers can focus energy and effort on prioritizing step changes, or significant interventions that may be needed in order to meet community goals.

Detailed Balance Model findings were presented at two Committee of the Whole meetings:

1. A current state assessment was presented on [Dec 21, 2021: Committee of the Whole presentation](#)
2. A future insights and scenarios presentation was delivered on [June 7, 2022: Committee of the Whole presentation](#)

This work has identified three foundational implications that are considered critical to resolve in order to achieve balance in any future scenario, being housing, transportation, and demand management, and are like building blocks that will support or benefit the additional implications further described in the report.

In specific, the Balance Model Initiative found that, *without further interventions or change in conditions...*

1. **The current housing challenges will continue to worsen**, as demand for employees continues to outpace additional supply of employee restricted housing, leading to inevitable further workforce shortages. It is estimated that ~5,000 workers could still be reliant on market housing even as the additional employee restricted beds are built out over time. The demand for workforce is heavily influenced by visitation levels.
2. **Transportation congestion and related Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions have worsened during COVID-19, and will continue to challenge the community** – exceeding the capacity of the highway and village roads resulting in longer congestion and travel times, while also neglecting to meet GHG emission targets, and impacting both resident and visitor experiences.
3. **Demand Management** is needed as visitation growth will continue to increase from external forces outside of RMOW control to fill the existing built capacity, until current 'peak' visitation levels become the average with daytrippers able to exponentially increase, and higher visitation levels significantly driving up the need for workforce – subsequently further exacerbating the current housing and transportation related challenges as described in 1 and 2 above.

Each of these challenges has implications across Community, Economy, and Environment, and are thus considered high impact priorities.

Through the consideration of the above implications and the insights that have been generated through the balance model analysis, which are detailed out in the attached report, there are some core Principles emerging that are important to consider in how future strategies and actions may be prioritized.

The core 'Principles' that are emerging from the Balance Model insights and implications, and engagement with stakeholders are as follows (with further explanation and opportunities that arise from these being documented in the Interim Summary attached):

**Balance** considers the interconnectedness of the number of visitors with workers needed and how both economic and community needs can be sustained

**Availability** of and access to employee housing requires a sustained increase in supply

**Labour** efficiencies are needed with a coordinated approach

**Active** participation of all resort stakeholders and citizens to enable step change

**No** single initiative on its own can deliver balance

**Climate** goals will not be achieved without radical intervention

**Evaluating** performance requires new metrics

This report is intended as an Interim Summary, sharing an update with the community as major milestones have been completed. Therefore, this report focuses on sharing the Balance Model Insights and the core principles that have emerged. Additionally, some illustrative 'example' strategies and actions are shared and considered in the context of the emerging principles, to demonstrate how these can be used moving forward.

Staff anticipate continuing to work on the Balance Model Initiative with guidance from the SPC. In particular, next steps identified are:

1. Continue to engage with the SPC to refine the emerging principles, and further develop ideas generated from workshops into coordinated sets of actions that can be implemented by a range of actors and prioritized with short term and longer term focus
2. Continue to collaborate with Economic Partnerships Initiative (EPI) to progress on principles and potential actions relating to demand management and the resort economy.
3. Engage with Lil'wat Nation and Squamish Nation on the insights and implications arising in this report, through the Economic Development Committee (EDC).
4. Prepare for broader community engagement to inform a final report, as it will be important to hear from the community as part of the process to incorporate feedback on:
  - a. the Balance Model Initiative as well as the foundational and additional implications that have emerged from the various insights
  - b. the draft principles that have emerged
  - c. development of new emerging ideas or improvements to existing ideas such that prioritized action plans can be refined

- d. Any areas that may not have been considered so far, for example intangibles such as sense of belonging, community diversity and wellbeing.
5. After community engagement, proceed to share findings with the Council, and return with final recommendations regarding implementation and rollout of sets of coordinated strategy and action plans.

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## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### **Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions**

Council has previously been presented the Balance Model Future State Scenarios and Insights on [June 7, 2022](#): [Committee of the Whole presentation](#)

Council has previously received the Housing Needs Report in a report to Council on [May 10, 2022](#): [Information Report No. 22-062](#)

Council has previously been presented the Balance Model Current State Assessment on [Dec 21, 2021](#): [Committee of the Whole presentation](#)

Council has previously been presented the Balance Model Work Plan on [March 2, 2021](#): [Committee of the Whole presentation](#)

Council has previously received the SPC's 2020 Update and Work Plan at the [March 3, 2020 Regular Council Meeting](#)

Council has previously endorsed the Terms of Reference for the SPC in a report to Council on [May 28, 2019](#): [Administrative Report No. 19-074](#)

### **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

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*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.

The insights, implications and ideas generated from the balance model work have aligned with the goals as set out within the OCP, and will inform future recommendations to Council on priority strategies to support collective progress towards Whistler's vision to be "a place where our community thrives, nature is protected, and guests are inspired".

### **BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no budget considerations at this time.

### **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.

Moving forward, the Framework Agreement, together with the EDC will provide guidance for how the RMOW will involve Lil'wat Nation and Squamish Nation in this work. This Interim Summary document and related materials will be referenced and used as a basis for developing points of focus in the EDC.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform     Consult     Involve     Collaborate     Empower

Comment(s):

**Inform** – To date, the community has been kept apprised of the progress and findings of the Balance Model Initiative through the municipal website which contains information and presentations on the Balance Model Initiative including objectives, work plans, progress, and quantitative insights from the technical modelling tool.

**Collaborate** – Several 'ideation' workshops were conducted with a range of stakeholders including Council Committees - the SPC, Transportation Advisory Group (TAG), and EPI - and additional

community members. These stakeholders directly created and contributed to potential strategies and priorities for housing, transportation, and visitation/demand management.

Additional broader community collaboration will be conducted in fall 2022 to gather feedback on the implications identified, emerging principles, ideas and priority actions, and any areas that have not yet been considered. This will provide further considerations for finalizing recommendations to a new Council in early 2023.

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## REFERENCES

Appendix A – Long Term Strategic Planning Initiative – Interim Summary Report – July 2022

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## SUMMARY

The Balance Model Initiative has been progressed in conjunction with support from the SPC, and uses quantitative data to investigate future possible trajectories of population growth and community performance based on observed historical trends. The first version of the Balance Model excel tool is now complete, and provides a vantage point to understand the interrelationships unique to a resort economy, including visitor and resident dynamics.

This report intends to share Balance Model Initiative insights and implications for the resort community in progressing towards its stated vision. Emerging principles have been drafted which can be used to guide future strategies and actions, and their prioritization for both short and longer term implementation.

This report asks council to direct staff to further refine the emerging principles, develop priority recommendations in conjunction with key stakeholders, and collaborate further with the broader community in order to finalize a set of recommendations that could be brought before the new Council in early 2023.

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## SIGN-OFFS

### Written by:

Becca Zalmanowitz,  
Strategy Analyst

### Reviewed by:

Toni Metcalf,  
Manager, Economic Development and Tourism  
Recovery

Virginia Cullen,  
Chief Administrative Officer