



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: January 24, 2023 **REPORT:** 23-007
FROM: Parks Planning **FILE:** 6130-00
SUBJECT: RAINBOW PARK REJUVENATION PROJECT OVERVIEW

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive Information Report 23-007 that provides an overview of the Rainbow Park Rejuvenation Project.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council and the community regarding the Rainbow Park Rejuvenation Project.

Information Report Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

Rainbow Park (Rainbow Park or park) is a popular destination park located on a site with a long history of outdoor recreation pre-dating Whistler Village itself. Constructed and opened to the public during 1988, the early plan for Rainbow Park remains the backbone of the park as we enjoy it today. Over the decades Rainbow Park has only had minor changes to the layout, scale and location of most amenities.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) staff identified that Rainbow Park needed upgrades to keep pace with increased visitor use and changing user needs, as well as operational requirements caused by the effects of climate change.

During 2018 and 2019, hundreds of Whistlerites shared feedback on the community's vision for the future of Whistler's parks during the "Outside Voice" community engagement process. Feedback received helped inform the initial park rejuvenation ideas and the RMOW's Parks Master Plan.

In 2020 and 2021, visitor use at Rainbow Park increased 57 per cent above pre-pandemic levels. Upgrades became urgent to protect Rainbow Park and maintain a positive park user experience. Pilot programs and initiatives implemented during the pandemic through the Summer Experience Plan (2021) helped to further inform the rejuvenation design with the goal to upgrade the park in order to

meet the vision of the municipality and align with provincial Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) principles for funding.

Rejuvenation

The redesign of Rainbow Park has been driven by a need to align the park with the pressures of increasing visitation so that it will be robust, resilient and engaging for years to come. As demands and visitation have changed, so too must the structure and function of the park.

The design is informed by feedback received from the Outside Voice community engagement process, ongoing staff observations and experiences at the park as well as the guiding documents as listed in the “Policy Considerations” section of this report.

Two distinct phases encompass this project:

- Phase 1 is located between the railway tracks and Alta Lake Road; and
- Phase 2 represents the main park area between the railway tracks and Alta Lake.

The intent of Phase 1 is to improve and enhance sustainable transportation access, emphasize safe routes for pedestrian and cycling users, improve the arrival experience, reduce irrigation demands on the potable water supply, and connect the park washroom - currently operated via a septic tank system - to the newly installed sanitary sewer system on Alta Lake Road.

Portions of this work were piloted in 2021 and permanently installed in 2022. Work completed includes a new segment of Valley Trail, a reconfigured shuttle turn around area with increased accessible parking and short term drop off and pick up options, and the first portion of the sanitary sewer line. The remaining elements are to be completed in 2023 and be coordinated with Phase 2 works.

Phase 2 focusses on several critical objectives including; long term park resilience, climate change adaptation, accessibility and inclusivity, strengthening the role of the Valley Trail as a recreational amenity and gateway to Rainbow Park, increasing the number and variety of gathering places and user experiences, and improvements to park operational infrastructure.

To meet these objectives a number of physical changes are proposed including:

- Improving access to the beach with a paved path for accessibility;
- Expanding the beach, adding natural elements for seating;
- Installing a new dock with a built-in cargo net hammock and upgrading the existing docks;
- Planting clusters of trees around the edge of the lawn for respite on hot summer days;
- Realigning and widening the Valley Trail while framing the beach volleyball area;
- Addition of a food truck plaza, as well as more seating, picnic and relaxing space overall; and
- Seasonal shade sails and a hammock grove.

Subtleties in the design are intended to discourage geese activity, re-wild underutilized areas for enhanced ecological connectivity and resilience, improve lawn drainage and protect the park from typical flood events while at the same time absorbing extreme events.

From a park maintenance and operations perspective, service access is improved and streamlined through reduced fragmentation of task ‘zones’, reduced user conflict points, updated site power provision and conversion of the irrigation system to a non potable water source.

Whistler is known for outstanding parks. This rejuvenation project will ensure Rainbow Park as a top recreation destination for the community and visitors for decades to come.

Graphic drawings and a detailed design narrative document further communicate the rejuvenation project. These are located in Appendix A and B respectively.

Development Permit (Delegated) Application

A Development Permit (Delegated) application was submitted in September 2022 as project implementation will alter land in the Development Permit Areas identified for:

- Protection of Riparian Ecosystems
- Protection of Sensitive Ecosystems
- Aquifer Protection
- Wildfire

This process is anticipated to successfully conclude in Q1 2023.

Construction Timeline and Impacts

Portions of Phase 1 were constructed in 2022, and remaining elements will be sequenced around the larger Phase 2 works.

Construction tender documents for all Phase 2 elements are anticipated to be publically available in February 2023. With suitable tender results and award of a construction contract via a future regular Council meeting, Phase 2 is anticipated to begin construction in 2023 and be fully complete by late spring of 2024.

Phase 2 construction will significantly impact public access to the park, the Valley Trail and Alta Lake. The scope, extent and duration of closures will be confirmed following award of the construction contract. Temporary relocation of some popular park and lake access elements is being considered, and a broadly reaching communications plan is being developed.

At this time members of the public should “know before they go” and anticipate access to Rainbow Park, the Valley Trail and Alta Lake will be fully closed to the public and businesses during the construction period. This is necessary in order to complete construction as efficiently as possible and limit the risk of construction impacts extending into multiple seasons or years.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Rainbow Park Rejuvenation Project aligns with the goals and objectives of several municipal guiding documents:

- [Recreation and Leisure Master Plan \(2015\)](#)
- [Official Community Plan \(2018\)](#)
- [Climate Action “Big Moves” Strategy \(2020\)](#)
- [Whistler Summer Experience Plan \(2021\)](#)

- [Whistler Resort Development Strategies \(2019-2021, 2022-2024\)](#) for the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (RMI related)

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

Corporate Goals

- Community character and mountain culture is reflected in municipal initiatives
- Municipal decision-making supports the effective stewardship of natural assets and ecological function
- Corporate policies and operations ensure continuous excellence in infrastructure, facility and program management
- A high level of accountability, transparency and community engagement is maintained
- Corporate financial health is optimized to ensure long-term community success
- A vibrant local economy and safe, resilient resort community is effectively reinforced by organizational activities

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The Official Community Plan (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 2 – Community Vision

'Sense of Place' - As a major destination park within Whistler's park network, strong consideration for the park's ability to contribute to the overall Community Vision has been given throughout the design

process. Particular focus has been on sense of place through invigoration of the Whistler experience and inclusion of new, identifiable characteristics including particular points of interest, enhancement of well-known and well-loved existing characteristics and protection and centring of iconic views.

‘Environment’ - Environmental considerations have been central to design decisions throughout the process with focus on consolidation and connection of fragmented sensitive ecosystems, balance and provision of habitat and protection of riparian areas innate to the site’s specific location, character and ecological value. Additional consideration has been given to protection and efficient use of natural resources including efficient water use and forward-thinking design to support resiliency and site micro-climate management in response to Climate Change.

‘Community’ - Focus on Community has centred on inclusivity, access and the important relationships between diverse site users, both from the local community and national and international visitors.

‘Tourism-based Economy’ - The design has evolved with the goal to enhance and maximise the experiential qualities that the park offers and to provide new and unique identifying features that provide a diversity and equity of experience that supports Whistler’s tourism-based economy’.

Chapter 4 – Growth Management

The park’s rejuvenation supports Chapter 4 Objectives through focus on specific Policies which reflect the need for considered development that supports increasing user demand while enabling and reinforcing positive resident and visitor relationships, protecting, restoring and enhancing the natural environment and promoting ongoing site management efficiencies.

Chapter 6 – Economic Viability

As an increasingly popular summer attraction, Rainbow Park plays a key role in Whistler’s tourism economy and through the design process it has been identified that the park could play a greater role in supporting year-round local and visitor interest. Although expected to be gradual, infrastructure has been included that will support future growth of facilities and amenities at the park.

Chapter 7 – Natural Environment

As noted under ‘Chapter 2’ above, the park site is located within a network of valuable and sensitive ecosystems and habitats. The design has given due consideration to effective ways to enhance and sustain these ecosystems and reinforce them for the future to improve biodiversity and resilience in respect of Climate Change, and facilitate their effective and efficient management going forward.

Chapter 8 –Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Particular focus has been provided in respect of accessibility and inclusivity in the redesign, to support 8.8 Goal to ‘Ensure Whistler is an inclusive and accessible resort community’. Key improvements have been to provide accessible beach, waterfront and access to swimming opportunities which were

previously absent. Widening of pathways and routes is more accommodating and equity in the provision of experiences and opportunities for recreation have been central to the design process.

Chapter 9 – Learning, Culture and Recreation

The recreation portion of Chapter 9 sets out several goals of particular relevance to this project:

- 9.3 Continually reaffirm our sense of place as the foundation to Whistler’s recreation and leisure experience.
- 9.4. Achieve a balance between user needs, the natural environment and user experiences in providing recreational opportunities.
- 9.5. Continue to maintain, improve and provide a diverse variety of high quality and affordable recreation and leisure amenities and experiences.

Various aspects of the design touch on these goals and their supporting policies. Whistler’s parks are key to reaffirming our sense of place where high quality spaces are accessible and suitable to a range of ages, abilities, functional needs and income levels, all balanced with the natural environment.

The planning, design and programming of major parks such as Rainbow Park reflect the broad needs and opportunities of the resort community and are informed by high level municipal documents, initiatives and public engagement.

Chapter 10 – Climate Action and Energy

The rejuvenation design of the park builds on key principles and pilot projects explored as part of the Summer Experience Plan (2021). Permanent and tailored spatial provision for the successful bike valet service has been included with power supply options to continue encouragement of the use active and sustainable modes of transport, alongside improved circulation to minimise drive time for maintenance crews at the park. Additional efficiencies in water use include a move to a non potable water primary source for irrigation across all phases of the park’s construction.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The Rainbow Park Rejuvenation Project is Provincially funded through several cycles of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport’s approved Resort Development Strategy (RDS). This funding, commonly referred to as RMI, supports tourism facing assets and will support the improvements of the critical asset.

There are no general capital budget implications, as the funding is provided by the Province.

The annual operational costs to maintain the park are funded from local taxpayer contributions and segments of RMI. While the rejuvenation design represent a modest increase to park operational costs, operational savings realized elsewhere in the park system will be reassigned to Rainbow Park, resulting in no net new operational costs.

LÍLWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lílwat 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):

Feedback was received during the 2018/19 'Outside Voice' Parks Master Plan community engagement process. The engagement involved a total of more than 800 responses to two online surveys, more than 100 people attending one open house and more than 50 attending a second open house. A total of more than 950 points of engagement with the community was achieved. Elements of this process specific to Rainbow Park have been considered in the redesign of the park.

The park's redesign plans were presented to the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee at their March 10, July 14, September 8, 2022 Regular Meetings. With regard to Phase 2, discussion focussed on the need to slow Valley Trail users down when entering Rainbow Park from the Lorimer Road end, and the park's ability to accommodate additional visitors.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Rainbow Park Rejuvenation – Design Drawings and Images
Appendix B – Rainbow Park Rejuvenation – Design Narrative

SUMMARY

The report provides an overview of the Rainbow Park Rejuvenation Project, highlighting key park improvements, a likely construction schedule and significant impacts to public access.

Costs to redesign and construct the park are 100% funded by the Province of BC's Resort Development Strategy as administered by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport.

SIGN-OFFS

Written by:

Martin Pardoe,
Manager Parks Planning

Reviewed by:

Jessie Gresley-Jones,
General Manager of Resort Experience

Virginia Cullen,
Chief Administrative Officer