

12 February 2023

Honourable Mayor and Council,

I respectfully ask you to pause the planned redesign of Rainbow Park to allow for a full community engagement; specifically, a Public Hearing. The current redesign is not in keeping with four of RMOW's own strategic plans (Recreation and leisure master plan 2015; Official Community Plan 2018; Climate Action Big Moves Strategy 2020, Whistler Summer Experience Plan 2021).

Cost – The \$4.7M is covered by funds of the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI), but the true cost to the Whistler community is 4-6 months of park closure at the height of visitation pressure which will disrupt all other community parks. Additionally, the chosen approach to focus on infrastructure plus pavement, means someone pays for any cost overruns and the long-term maintenance, both of which could be avoided by leaving the park natural. How was the contract awarded? Who pays for the cost overruns?

- Why not choose an evidence-based solution to the key issue that Ralph Forsyth identified¹ as “loving the park to death”¹, by using RMI funds to quantify the level of use that can be sustained by the natural assets of the Park and then set visitor use below that level through user fees which are shown to instill respect for the asset, and provide funds for maintenance and restoration where necessary. Then repeat this for all of Whistler's parks. Ensure there is an exemption of user fees for residents who already support maintenance of the parks through their taxes and many through volunteer hours.
- Both RMI and MRDT (aka hotel tax) comprise 13.6% of the RMOW revenue; the remaining 86.4% comes from property taxes, non-tax revenues, user fees, license and application fees & grants. User fees, properly allocated to RMOW Parks, Trails maintenance & enforcement budgets, will reduce the amount needed from property taxes.
- Ralph Forsyth as the RMOW representative, stated that “upgrades are needed to deal with increased user numbers as the community is “loving the park to death” ”¹. How does the current focus on increased access, deal with increased user numbers? Is it the community who are loving the park to death, or visitors? Ralph would not entertain input, stating “we're NOT going back to the drawing board ... that's wasteful” ... “any considerable redrawing of the design would result in significant delays & cost increases”¹. Why is the timeline more important than a thoughtful design? This is a community park & therefore requires community input. Perhaps no construction is more cost effective.

Purpose – what was the expressed need, by whom & is this best approach? We need to defer the project until these questions are answered to the community.

- The objective of the RMI is to support & grow tourism in Whistler with the intension to “incorporate sustainable tourism practices & products”. The RMOW stated vision & goals for RMI are to “diversify the municipal tax base & revenue, increase visitor activity, and increase employment in the community”. What are RMOW's measures of sustainable tourism – are we achieving this? What does this project do for employment in the community?
- The RMOW Phase 1 objective was to “improve & enhance sustainable transportation access, emphasize safe routes for pedestrian & cycling users, improve arrival experience to a major

¹ Robert Wisla News Whistler “Petition launched against planned Rainbow Park upgrades”, 8-Feb 2023

park, reduce irrigation demands on potable water supply, and connect the park washroom to the sanitary sewer system & railway crossing improvements.”

- The Rainbow Park construction is to improve access to the waterfront for people who use wheelchairs to solve the challenge of “often-waterlogged grass”¹ Yet, the proposed solution of installing an impermeable surface (asphalt) will impede drainage, and therefore, not solve the challenge. Given the RMOW rationale for the RMI funding is to fix the drainage, irrigation, and sewer system – won’t water-logged grass be a thing of the past? The goal Ralph clarifies¹ is to provide wheelchair access to the dock – How are wheelchair users reaching Rainbow? Wouldn’t a direct path from that access point be better? Who in the wheelchair community has commented on this plan?

RMOW’s mandate - The approach is not consistent with the RMOW commitment to mitigate climate change, provide for community well-being or sustain our natural assets:

- Despite the above guiding documents, RMOW has prioritized “expansion of paved parking areas” for shuttle buses & to reduce conflict with pedestrians/cyclists ... Why not prioritize non-GHG emitting uses? How about bike-locking at all community park docks (e.g. nudie dock at Lost Lake so people aren’t inadvertently damaging tree roots in attempts to lock their bike). Why not pre-warn visitors on websites + source points (airport, Hwy 99) that they will need to park & walk or use local small business bike rental, instead of offering a GHG-emitting shuttle?
- The alteration as planned will:
 - Expand the natural beach into a larger sandy beach; provide a new dock & hammock space – How are those attributes improving wheelchair access? Who has asked for these changes?
 - Add a paved food truck plaza – How is this inline with RMOW Climate Change commitments to reduce GHG emissions, increase local business opportunities (village restaurants & takeout outlets) & reduce waste (already a stated problem & paid for by taxpayers).
 - Add a paved promenade between the grass & lakefront – How will this address expected increases in severe weather (flooding, heat) when asphalt impedes drainage and reflects heat?
 - The “beach will expand to reduce erosion and debris accumulation” - A better way to reduce erosion is by protecting natural ground cover, retaining permeable surfaces & managing access to a measured threshold for sustainability. Reduce debris accumulation with a waste management program that educates users and requires reusable/compostable containers?

The problem of silos - It is time to recognize that the objective to increase the number of people visiting Rainbow Park is out of step with evidence of the need to limit tourism, with concrete action to manage it; see Brandon Barrett’s article showing visitation to our 4 destination parks has increased 35% from 2021 & >77% from 2019².

- We can achieve all three goals of community well-being, protection of natural assets and climate change mitigation by dedicating RMI funds to:

² Brandon Barrett (Pique 29 Nov 22)

- Sustaining our parks for future visitation, with user fees and visitation limited to the measured and monitored threshold for sustainability.
- Focusing on restoration of natural habitat – the reason people come to Whistler.
- Limiting disturbance (noise, lighting, and harassment of wildlife) for community well-being
- Addressing the issue that's annoying visitors, and keeping residents from enjoying their own natural assets on weekends and holidays (Parks and Whistler-Blackcomb); the vehicle congestion on Highway 99 (see GD Maxwell's article 12 January 2023)³.

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³ G.D. Maxwell "Whistler's Big Moves on climate miss the mark" Pique 12 January 2023.