

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: February 21, 2023
FROM: Chief Administrative Officer
SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF 2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLANNING OUTCOMES

REPORT: 23-020
FILE: 0540

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Officer be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive Information Report No. 23-020 and the Resort Municipality of Whistler 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, attached as Appendix A.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's receipt of the overarching priorities and initiatives that will guide the work of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) over the current term of Council as outlined in this report.

☒ Information Report ☐ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background and Approach

This report presents a high-level strategic planning summary for the RMOW for this term of Council. The 2023-2026 RMOW Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) is informed by community input during the election, continuance of key multi-year municipal initiatives and discussions during the Council and Senior Management Team strategic planning retreat in December 2022.

During the intensive two-day facilitated retreat, discussions were guided by existing conditions as measured through the [Community Monitoring Program](#), which includes nearly 90 indicators of success, updated annually. In addition, outputs from the [Balance Model](#) informed the planning, which speaks to implications of population growth and community performance based on, observed historical trends.

Discussions were also guided by Whistler's imagined futures as outlined in the [Whistler Sessions](#) scenarios through a process convened by the RMOW and created by community members.

The consideration of probable and possible aspects of our future were discussed in the context of what they may mean as the organization and community moves toward [Whistler's Shared Community Vision](#) as articulated in the [Whistler Official Community Plan](#).

The Strategic Plan includes four priority areas: Housing, Climate Action, Community Engagement and Smart Tourism. A brief synopsis of why each priority was selected and key initiatives associated with each is outlined below.

Underpinning all four priorities are specific areas of improvement and focus as the organization provides service to the community. These include:

1. Continuing to strengthen relationships with the Lílwat Nation and the Squamish Nation and identify projects to work on together. This would continue to build on the success of the 2030 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Bid and the overarching [Framework Agreement](#) between the RMOW and Lílwat Nation, Squamish Nation, Province of British Columbia and Vail Resorts.
2. Allowing room for innovative problem solving. Where there is room and opportunity to employ new and improved approaches, to take them – this may mean developing a larger tolerance for failure and error.
3. Continuing to seek out non-tax revenue sources, including grant funding.
4. Articulating and communicating an understanding of Whistler's capacity limits and constraints. The Balance Model provides insights into future trajectories in the resort municipality. These need to be shared and discussed in the community.

Council Priorities for 2023-2026

Housing

The Housing priority has two primary components: 1) Expedite the delivery of employee housing; and 2) Develop a long-term plan for employee housing.

Housing continues to be at the forefront of challenges for Whistler's workforce and the continued prosperity of the local tourism economy. It was the number one concern that residents raised with Mayor and Council during the election period along with general affordability challenges. While the RMOW was successful in delivering housing during the last term of Council, with 100 new units delivered at Cheakamus Crossing Phase II in 2022, there exists the reality that new housing cannot be built fast enough to address the gap that currently exists for businesses looking to house staff. This means new and innovative solutions need to be employed and developed within the existing housing system.

During this next Council term, the RMOW will be driving forward on mobilizing resources to expedite the delivery of new housing through its work with the Whistler 2020 Development Corp (WDC) and the Whistler Housing Authority Ltd. (WHA) – both wholly-owned subsidiaries of the RMOW. Two new rental buildings are ready to get started in Cheakamus Crossing Phase II, which will be constructed over the next 18-24 months. In addition to these buildings, the RMOW continues to work closely with several private developers who have stepped up to provide an employee component to their development projects under the RMOW's Private Sector Employee Housing Initiative.

In addition to expediting delivery of known housing projects, the RMOW will be introducing a new Housing Action Plan which outlines a number of initiatives that will help improve housing availability

within our existing neighbourhoods. Development of a long-term housing strategy is one action identified under RMOW's Housing Action Plan and will involve working with select community partners and committees. This plan will be informed by the insights from the RMOW Balance Model project and tested against the Whistler Sessions scenarios which have imagined Whistler's housing evolution in four different outcomes.

Climate Action

The focus of the Climate Action priority considers both climate mitigation and climate adaptation measures.

Climate change is the largest existential crisis of our time. The effects of climate change are no longer a theoretical outcome and can be observed and felt in every corner of the globe. In Whistler, the implications of these effects are far beyond having less snow in the Valley. Our responsibility and opportunity to provide leadership in development and sustaining a climate conscious resort is immense. As a community we are still not doing enough and our progress towards our 2030 goals is not yet tracking at a rate that will see us achieving them. However, we have done the diligence to understand what needs to be done and we now are tasked with the hard work of making it happen. Development and adoption of our Green Building Policy during the previous Council term is one example of a framework now in place to guide actions in the community toward reducing carbon consumption.

Under climate mitigation the RMOW will continue to mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan with an added focus on Big Move #1 – *Move Beyond the Car*. While reliable local transit has been a challenge over the past year, RMOW Council and staff are committed to investing in and further optimization of our current transit system. The return to transit incentives implemented following the transit strike led to record ridership numbers during the period of free transit. This is a positive indicator that if we continue to find ways to make transit as accessible, reliable and easy as possible, the ridership and uptake will be there. In addition to transit, the RMOW will continue to find ways to support active transportation with added focus given to how to encourage more visitors to use bikes and e-bikes. EV charging infrastructure continues to grow, and RMOW staff will continue to identify grants and opportunities for installing additional infrastructure to encourage further low carbon travel options within and outside of the community.

RMOW's climate adaptation actions focus on wildfire mitigation and emergency planning. Wildfire is the primary climate risk to the community with varied levels of Wildland Urban Interface Risk Classes throughout the community including 103 hectares at extreme, 163 at high and 476 at moderate risk. Concerted efforts will be unfolded over the Council term to strengthen Whistler's wildfire posture and mitigate risk. These actions include additional strategic fuel thinning measures, improved mobilization of resources to respond to wildfires and enhanced and updated evacuation planning and wildfire awareness education. In 2022, the RMOW was the recipient of a \$10-million federal government grant, which will be used to fund fuel thinning measures at the development area boundaries that interface with undeveloped Crown land.

Community Engagement

When the Whistler Sessions scenario planning team looked 15 to 20 years into the future, the social issues connected to affordability challenges came into focus. There exists a real potential that as housing and affordability challenges increase, so does division and fracturing within the community fabric. If this community fabric begins to come apart, the rich Whistler culture that locals contribute to and visitors seek out will start to dissolve. Community engagement is one of the best ways to build and strengthen connections between the RMOW and residents as well as between residents themselves.

For these reasons, RMOW Council and staff have identified Community Engagement as an important priority to evolve and improve during the four years of the Council term.

Initiatives identified to support this priority include expanded communication channels, development of content aimed at younger demographics, improved real time information sharing, website updates and review of existing Council process and procedures to find opportunities for reducing barriers for input. One important project that falls under this Council priority is an in-depth review of existing committees of Council. The committees are being reviewed for their relevance, effectiveness and experience for committee members. The goal is to ensure that every time the RMOW convenes a group of residents and stakeholders for input, there is clarity around the purpose of the discussion, the participants feel valued for their contribution and are able to clearly see where their feedback has been captured and considered in the municipality's work.

Along with the numerous initiatives and changes identified for community engagement, the internal organization at the RMOW has been restructured and reflects this greater focus on connection to community. A new general manager role has been created to oversee a new division titled Community Engagement and Cultural Services. The intent is to bring key community facing facilities and teams alongside departments tasked with visitor facing programming and tourism development work. This change compliments Council's new priority area and will elevate community considerations in the design and implementation of projects supporting tourism.

Smart Tourism

The term build-back-better was used constantly throughout the pandemic due to the disruption caused by COVID and the realization that within a disruption lies an opportunity to change trajectories to affect better outcomes. Pre-COVID visitation levels had reached a level where the need to understand the capacity levels of the resort had become a conversation. Over tourism was placing pressure points on many community systems and appeared to be negatively impacting the experience of residents which eventually impacts the experience of visitors. The concept of tourism delivering economic benefits alongside positive impacts to people and place has been a focus of discussion amongst many different tourism destinations. The draw of Whistler as a world class four season resort destination means that visitation will continue to grow and our thinking and planning needs to evolve like these other destinations seeing similar challenges. Visitor volumes ultimately impact the need for employees and for infrastructure to support local and visiting populations and an appropriate balance of these systems must be considered.

With this in mind, RMOW Council and staff have identified the Smart Tourism priority to help us look at our parks, trails, tourism programming and transportation options to encourage dispersion throughout the resort. We also need improved approaches to educating and engaging visitors that help them see and appreciate the richness of Whistler's cultural history and the critical need to neutralize environmental impacts in the area. The initiatives under this new priority area are less defined compared to Housing, Climate Action and Community Engagement. The Smart Tourism priority includes research and convened explorations into key questions such as:

- What does a Smart Tourism economy look like in Whistler?
- What is working/not working at other tourism destinations to manage visitor volumes?
- How to involve and invite visitors to contribute to our climate action initiatives?
- How to encourage visitors to expand their experience when they arrive to include learning and interacting with, and potentially giving back to, the local community?

- What additional metrics do we need to be looking at to track our progress towards a regenerative destination?

It is expected that specific community engagement will be developed to understand how businesses, non-profit organizations, schools and residents relate to this priority. Additionally, existing committees such as the Economic Partnership Initiative Committee will be engaged on this topic to develop a deeper picture of what Whistler's next evolution needs to look like.

Next Steps

This summary is a high level synopsis of the key priorities and initiatives for the organization. It does not detail the complex day-to-day operations and ongoing projects in place at the RMOW. Appendix A presents a graphic that summarizes the four priorities and the relevant key projects and initiatives.

The Strategic Plan provides the overarching framework for the more detailed [RMOW Corporate Plan/Annual Report](#) published in June annually. It will continue to be guided by and tracked against the Community Monitoring Program, publicly available through the [online dashboard](#), and through committees, the Community Life Survey and other ongoing engagement and analysis activities.

Following Council receipt of the Strategic Plan, Council report templates will be updated to reflect the priorities for the new term and to communicate alignment of staff reports with the strategy.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Strategic Plan is a high level document that guides the work of the RMOW and therefore has linkages to many Council Policies, Bylaws, legislation and strategies.

Corporate Plan

As noted, upon receipt of this Strategic Plan, an updated annual Corporate Plan/ Annual Report document will be produced. As well, this report template will be updated to reflect the new organizational priorities.

While the priorities have been updated in the Strategic Plan, the below still serves to move forward the priorities and goals outlined.

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*

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.

The 2022-2026 Strategic Plan identifies key priorities and initiatives that ultimately work toward the Vision and a variety of goals outlined in the OCP with a focus on goals in the following chapters:

Chapter 3 – Reconciliation with the Líl'wat Nation and Squamish Nation

Chapter 4 – Growth Management

Chapter 5 – Land Use and Development

Chapter 6 – Economic Viability

Chapter 8 – Health Safety and Wellbeing

Chapter 10 – Climate Action and Energy

Chapter 11 – Transportation

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The cost to produce the Strategic Plan, including the staff time and internal administration costs, is included within the annual operating budget of the municipality.

Budgets associated with advancing initiatives within the Strategic Plan are included within the annual operating and project budgets of the municipality or will be identified for budget amendment or inclusion in future budgets as necessary.

LÍL'WAT 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.

The Strategic Plan identifies an overarching focus area for the organization's work of continuing to strengthen our relationship with the Lílwat Nation and the Squamish Nation and identify projects that we can work on together building on the success of the 2030 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Bid and other collaborative work.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☐ Inform ☒ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

Comment(s):

The Strategic Plan is created considering many aspects of engagement with the community ranging from discussions during the 2022 Municipal Election, to committee work, the Community Life Survey and other ongoing feedback and engagement activities.

The Strategic Plan itself incorporates a priority area of Community Engagement underlining this ongoing importance of this area of municipal work toward the success of the resort municipality.

While there are no specific *Community Charter* requirements regarding the Strategic Plan itself, the work identified in the Plan is expected to result in myriad future Council decisions, bylaws and policies, each with its own decision making process.

REFERENCES

Appendix A - Resort Municipality of Whistler 2023-2026 Strategic Plan

SUMMARY

This report presents the overarching priorities and initiatives that will guide the work of the organization over the current term of Council as outlined in this report and in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan summary document attached.

It was developed considering community input through the election and other ongoing channels, continuance of key multi-year municipal initiatives and discussions during an intensive Council and Senior Management Team strategic planning retreat in December 2022.

The Strategic Plan work will be informed by ongoing community dialogue, the Community Monitoring Program as well as ongoing work of the organization and decisions of Council.

SIGN-OFFS

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