

February 16, 2023

DELIVERED BY EMAIL (vcullen@whistler.ca, jcrompton@whistler.ca, jgresley-jones@whistler.ca)

Resort Municipality of Whistler
4325 Blackcomb Way
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5

Attention: Mayor Jack Crompton
Chief Administrative Officer Virginia Cullen
General Manager of Resort Experience Jessie Gresley Jones

Copy to: Members of RMOW Council

Dear Mayor and Council, CAO Cullen and GM Gresley-Jones,

RE: Rainbow Park Rejuvenation (Phase 2) – Objection to Shoreline Path

We are writing to urge the Municipality to reconsider the design that has been proposed for Phase 2 of the Rainbow Park Rejuvenation. As detailed below, we love Rainbow Park and are supportive of most aspects of the redesign. However, **we are strongly opposed to proposed paved path that will run parallel to the shore between the main lawn and the beach (the “Shoreline Path”) for the seven reasons set out below.**

But first, a bit of background. We are a family of four (including two teenage boys) who are full time residents of Whistler. We live in Tapleys, which provides us with amazing access to all the best that Whistler has to offer. Of course, that includes Rainbow Park which we use frequently, particularly during the summer when we are there almost every day. We swim, lounge on the docks, play volleyball, paddleboard, meet with other local friends, grab ice cream and crepes, and generally enjoy the views and the sunshine. Sometimes going to the beach is its own activity; other times it is a great finale to a challenging ride on the westside trails. We arrive on foot or by bike, almost always by way of the Valley Trail. As with many other locals, we also host out-of-town guests frequently and always make a point of taking them to Rainbow Park. Like us, those visitors are awestruck that such a gorgeous, functional and natural-feeling park is just a short stroll or pedal from our house. All of which is to say that Rainbow Park is a key local amenity that we value deeply.

And we are clearly not the only people who feel that way. Even in the relatively short period we have lived in Whistler, we have noticed the significant increase in use of Rainbow Park. On a sunny day in the summer, the Park is full of people, who spread from the edge of the Valley Trail right to the waterfront.

We therefore appreciate that the RMOW is investing in the future of Rainbow Park. The Phase 1 improvements were a welcome change and were well-executed. While the Phase 2 changes will certainly be disruptive, the final result should be amazing.

But only if the proposed Shoreline Path is eliminated from the redesign.

The Shoreline Path must be eliminated from the design for the reasons set out below, in which we refer to the Staff Report of January 24, 2023, including Appendix A (design concept) and B (design narrative).

1. **The Shoreline Path would be an aesthetic disaster.** The beauty of Rainbow is that it is integrated with its surroundings and provides users with a seamless panoramic view of the best of Whistler: grass gives way to beach which gives way to crystal clear water, with the iconic peaks of Wedge, Blackcomb and Whistler rising above the trees on the far shore. Sitting on the main lawn, your entire field of vision

is filled with this natural beauty. That entire aesthetic would be scarred by a paved Shoreline Path, which would draw an unnatural dividing line through and otherwise coherent natural vista. That outcome would starkly contradict the focus on “protection and centring of iconic views”, as asserted in the Staff Report, the stated objective of “retain[ing] and enhance[ing] the views of Alta Lake,” as set out in the design narrative in Appendix B. Put simply: the Shoreline Path would be an unacceptably ugly change to the Park.

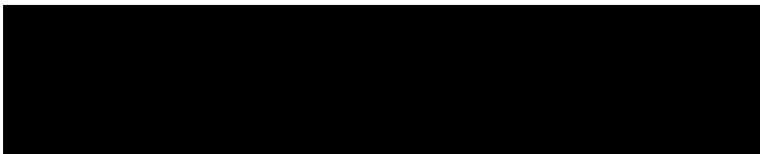
2. **The Shoreline Path is a design element that flows from several flawed premises.** The design narrative in Appendix B asserts (without support) that “[c]irculation routes are the main spatial organizational element in park design, and are the basis for a visitor’s first impressions.” This statement reveals a traffic-planning bias that seems to have corrupted the design process. It entirely misses the “main spatial organizational element” of Rainbow Park is the smooth transition from hardscape to grass to sand to water as one moves away from the Valley Trail, and that the jaw-dropping scenery makes the strongest first impression. The notion in Appendix B that more hard surface pathways are necessary to “encourage exploration” is ridiculous. Nobody needs the Shoreline Path to lead them to a shoreline that is visible from every square centimeter of the Park. The Valley Trail is a way to (and through) the Park; it is not the defining amenity of the Park. The notion in Appendix A that the Park needs “more edges” to entice people onto the main lawn is also ridiculous to anyone who has spent any time trying to find open space to sit on a busy summer day. It feels like whoever is articulating these flawed premises has never set foot in Rainbow Park and is pushing theories that may be appropriate for a big-city greenspace like Stanley Park but that are not relevant to a compact, community park in Tiny Town. We don’t need a Seawall bike path – we need a place to enjoy the views and access the water.
3. **The Shoreline Path would waste extremely valuable greenspace.** As you well know, Rainbow Park is full many days. Groups establish their laydown areas on the main lawn, right up to the edge of the beach. Based on the drawings included in the Appendix A, the Shoreline Path will be about 4 meters wide and will run for about 80 meters from dock to dock. That strip of land could likely accommodate 15-20 groups of people in the summer. That is precious real estate that is best reserved for lounging and enjoying the view. That greenspace will be at a greater premium once the rest of the Valley Trail through the Park is widened by 33% and lengthened to achieve the “sinuous vs straight alignment”. Paving even more of the Park to create the Shoreline Path therefore contradicts both the goal of “support[ing] increasing user demand”, as set out in the Staff Report, and the corresponding redesign objective of “increase[ing] the Park’s ability to accommodate increasing visitation”, as set out in the design narrative in Appendix B
4. **The Shoreline Path would be a safety hazard.** The narrative in Appendix B identifies one of the key design objectives as “improv[ing] safety with respect to the Valley Trail for all Park users.” In the current layout of Rainbow Park, people who are on the move at the front of the lawn travel perpendicularly to the shoreline: they are either heading to the water or back from it. The Shoreline Path introduces a lot of movement parallel to the shoreline, including higher-speed bike traffic. This new crisscrossing flow of traffic will greatly increase the risk of collisions. That risk is particularly problematic when you consider that the shoreline is prime territory for the youngest and most meandering of visitors. Is the expectation that parents will now have to help their toddlers cross the street to get from the grass to the sand?
5. **The Shoreline Path will increase problematic bike traffic.** Our entire family rides bikes all summer, including to Rainbow Park. We therefore know that distracted bikers and distracted pedestrians do not mix. In the current layout, bikers like us tend to stick the Valley Trail and either lock our bikes at one of the racks (or the valet) or roll cautiously to a spot on the main lawn and then lay the bikes down. The Shoreline Path will make it much easier to keep cruising right into the busiest area of the Park. When something is easy, more people will use it. Instead of being a “chill” bike-free zone, the edge of the beach will become a busy thoroughfare, which exacerbates the aesthetic and safety issues identified above.

6. **Accessibility is not a sufficient justification for the Shoreline Path.** We fully support improving access to the beach, docks and waterfront for people who have mobility challenges. However, the Shoreline Path is not necessary to achieve that goal. The plan for the Park already includes the “hard surface pathway to the beach and docks” at both the north and south ends of the beach, as called for in Appendix A. Those paths make perfect sense to improve access - but they do not have to be bridged by the Shoreline Path to work. Also, we suspect that many people with mobility challenges would be capable of traversing the flat, level, well-drained grassy lawn that is otherwise contemplated. For example, my mother is in her mid-70s and is anything but sure-footed after two hip-replacements (with knee replacements to come). She is perfectly content to walk across the existing lawn from the existing Valley Trail to the waterfront. Of course, we do not presume to speak for all of those who experience mobility challenges, so encourage you to seek their perspectives.
7. **Operational and winter grooming efficiencies are not sufficient justifications.** The design narrative in Appendix B states that the Shoreline Path would help “provide a structurally sound loop for summer park servicing and winter Nordic snow grooming efficiencies”. With all due respect to the hardworking staff of the municipality, paving the Park to make it easier to maintain is an example of the tail wagging the dog. No amount of operational efficiency warrants the negative impacts identified above. In the winter it might be nice if there was a track-set path that curled lazily by the shoreline. However, the needs of a relatively small number of skiers should not trump the needs of the huge number of summer users. Also I do not know of any cross-country skiers who are asking for this or who find themselves incapable of breaking their own trail for those last 80 meters (which is exactly what many do today). In any event, we are confident the grassy strip along the beach could be engineered to support occasional maintenance vehicle traffic in the summer and groomer traffic in the winter without resorting to paving.

For these reasons, we implore you to eliminate the Shoreline Path from the redesign of Rainbow Park. Based on reports in the Pique and from our discussions with our neighbours and friends, we know that many other locals strongly share our views. We hope that they too are taking their time to share their perspectives. Considering the weight of public opinion, we trust that the Municipality will ensure that Phase 2 of the rejuvenation preserves the uniquely stunning character of Rainbow Park.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these submissions.

Yours truly,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the names of the signatories.

Andrew Lord

 Jennifer Lord