



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: May 16, 2023 **REPORT:** 23-059
FROM: Planning Department – Policy **FILE:** 7729-04
SUBJECT: RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER HOUSING ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning and Development Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council endorse the Resort Municipality of Whistler Housing Action Plan attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report No. 23-059; and

That Council direct staff to provide an annual housing action plan, beginning in 2024.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present and seek Council's endorsement of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) Housing Action Plan (the Plan), attached as Appendix A to this report, and seek Council's direction for staff to provide an annual housing action plan, beginning in 2024. The Plan identifies actions to be undertaken by the RMOW in 2023 and provides a framework to guide future initiatives beyond 2023. For context, it also identifies the RMOW's recently completed and ongoing actions related to housing. Housing actions are proposed to continue to be initiated in parallel to developing the RMOW's Long-Term Housing Strategy, which is included as an action within the Plan.

Information Report

Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

Historically, housing affordability, home ownership and quality rental accommodations have been the greatest housing challenges in Whistler, and these challenges persist today. Among other things, challenges related to housing have direct impacts on Whistler's sense of community, livability and available workforce.

The [RMOW's 2022 Housing Needs Report](#) (Housing Needs Report) indicated that affordability is the leading challenge contributing to core and extreme core housing need, where nearly 30 per cent of all Whistler Census households spent more than 30 per cent of their gross income on shelter costs. It was

further concluded that the market alone cannot be relied upon to provide affordable, suitable, and adequate housing units for Whistler's workforce – as prices have reached a point where the average market property is unaffordable for more than 90 per cent of Whistler's resident population, with diminishing availability of market rentals. To date, the [Balance Model Initiative](#) has identified that without further interventions or change in conditions, 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. As emphasized in Whistler's Official Community Plan (OCP) and reinforced by the findings of the Housing Needs Report and Balance Model Initiative, policies and actions to meet housing needs must focus primarily on supporting Whistler's workforce.

In the 2023-2026 RMOW Strategic Plan, housing is identified as a top priority. The Strategic Plan particularly identifies the implementation of a housing action plan, completion of Cheakamus Crossing Phase II (Lots 2, 3, 5), advancement of private sector employee housing applications and development of a Long-Term Housing Strategy as key initiatives.

In the past five years, substantial progress has been made in delivering new employee housing. Through RMOW, Whistler Housing Authority Ltd. (WHA) and Whistler 2020 Development Corp (WDC) initiatives, a total of 596 new employee bed units have been created in the last five years across six projects. Moving forward, the anticipated completion of Cheakamus Crossing Phase II (Lots 2, 3, 5) by 2026, will result in approximately 554 additional employee bed units. Further, the current advancement of the private sector employee housing initiative is facilitating the development of 537 new employee housing bed units. While this headway is significant, there are additional actions the RMOW can take in parallel to the development of a Long-Term Housing Strategy.

Analysis

The following section presents the Plan and provides supporting context. To reflect the areas where the RMOW can respond to challenges and contribute to employee housing initiatives, the Plan is organized using the following six housing action categories:

1. Monitor Supply and Identify Needs;
2. Protect and Optimize Employee Housing;
3. Leverage Municipal Lands;
4. Utilize and Expand Financing Tools;
5. Encourage the Private Sector; and
6. Remove Red Tape Barriers.

Within each housing action category, the Plan identifies recently completed and ongoing actions. Actions that are currently in-progress and actions that are recommended to be initiated in 2023 are listed as "2023 actions". The timeframe for completion varies between actions; some actions of greater complexity will extend into 2024 and beyond. The progress of 2023 actions will be monitored and reported on in 2024. In 2024, Council may choose to select new actions to be initiated from the "buckets" of potential actions included in the Plan. The Plan will be updated in 2024 to reflect progress and new actions. New actions will be recommended based on evaluation of impact and complexity.

The support of the WHA and WDC are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the Plan. The Plan was developed to support and build off current WDC and WHA initiatives and projects as

presented to [Council on January 24, 2023](#) and the [Committee of the Whole on February 7, 2023](#), respectively.

The following subsections describe the completed actions, ongoing actions, 2023 actions, and future potential actions, as applicable, for each housing action category.

1. Monitor Supply and Identify Needs

As mandated by the Province, the RMOW is required to monitor housing supply and identify housing needs. Having accurate and up-to-date information informs housing action and is essential to secure grant funding.

Completed Actions:

- *Housing Survey*
The RMOW completed a market residential housing survey in 2021 to understand the current and future availability of housing for the resort's workforce and the frequency of use by second homeowners.
- *RMOW Housing Needs Report*
The Housing Needs Report was completed in May 2022, as required by the Province, to assess the RMOW's current housing needs and anticipated needs over the next five years.

Ongoing Actions:

- *Community Life Survey*
The [Community Life Survey](#) has been completed on an annual basis since 2006 to determine the overall satisfaction with quality of life in Whistler. It also provides insights into housing, affordability, employment and income.
- *Balance Model Initiative*
The Balance Model Initiative seeks to understand the changing trends in Whistler's population and study the capacity of services and amenities to support that population, including housing needs.

2023 Actions:

- *Update Whistler Housing Needs Report*
The Housing Needs Report is actively being updated to reflect Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data. The Province requires the Housing Needs Report to be updated every five years.
- *Complete Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment*
The Housing Needs Report identified the necessity for an additional assessment of housing needs specifically for vulnerable populations as a very high priority. This assessment is currently underway. The purpose of the assessment is to identify the existing supply of, and community need for, housing for vulnerable populations. The assessment is anticipated to be completed by fall 2023.

- *Develop Long-Term Housing Strategy*

Working with community partners on a Long-Term Housing Strategy is a key initiative identified in the [2023-2026 RMOW Strategic Plan](#) to support housing. Generally, the strategy will expand and improve links between the Housing Needs Report, the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment and the Balance Model Initiative data. The strategy will entail a quantitative analysis and projection of future employee housing needs over the medium and long term. Further, the strategy will provide an estimate of the current employee shortfall and housing needs by population segments and will identify steps to meet identified needs. This will include investigating the feasibility for new employee housing projects on municipal lands and developing a funding and financing strategy. Furthermore, if determined necessary to meet future housing needs, the strategy may result in the contemplation of future OCP amendments.

2. Protect and Optimize Employee Housing

Whistler has an extensive stock of existing employee housing that can continue to be protected and fully optimized. This stock is inventoried and tracked by the WHA and this information is publicly available. Currently, Whistler has 7,000 beds of employee rental and ownership housing.

Completed Actions:

- *Council Policy No. K-01: Employee Rental Housing Policy*
This policy provides direction for the management and administration of RMOW/WHA rental properties. The policy was updated in 2022 to reflect a Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) approach for rents and to replace the net asset limit with a market housing ownership asset limit. This policy is continually reviewed and updated as required.
- *Home-Run Program*
The program was established and is administered by the WHA and is managed by a licenced property manager. It is a matching program for residential property owners to rent their properties to businesses. The program provides homeowners with a streamlined process and offers local businesses stable accommodations for their employees.

Ongoing Actions:

- *Tourist accommodation licence review and enforcement*
New RMOW zoning and business licence regulations were introduced in 2017. Among other things, these regulations help to ensure residential properties are not used for tourist accommodation. RMOW staff actively enforce these bylaws to ensure tourist accommodation and residential properties are used in accordance with applicable regulations.

2023 Actions:

- *Continue to strengthen employee housing education and enforcement*
In 2022, the WHA prioritized housing covenant education, compliance, and enforcement, including completing occupancy audits at various employee ownership housing complexes, resulting in the turnover and sale of six homes. Employee housing education and enforcement continues to be a priority for the WHA in 2023. RMOW staff will continue to explore how the

RMOW can support the WHA to strengthen both the education related to and the enforcement of employee housing restrictions.

Future Potential Actions:

- *Update Council Policy No. G-14: Whistler Seniors Housing*
As identified in Whistler's Age Friendly Needs Assessment and Action Plan, and Accessibility Action Plan, this policy requires updating to address aging-in-place features for seniors housing units and explore models to facilitate independent living and supportive housing.
- *Incentivize rentals in employee restricted units*
There is opportunity to optimize housing through encouraging rentals of available rooms in employee owner-occupied dwellings and employee-restricted suites. Some rental rates are restricted by covenants registered on title. Providing an easy reference for property owners to know what the rental rates are under existing agreements would provide clarity and remove barriers. Existing rental rates could be evaluated to incentivize increased utilization.
- *Review owner-restricted inventory utilization*
There is opportunity to further identify differences in unit values and understand potential impacts for retirees looking to downsize. This action would also explore the consideration of maintenance and renovation costs in relation to price appreciation restrictions.

3. Leverage Municipal Lands

The RMOW collaborates with its wholly owned subsidiaries, WHA and WDC, to develop new employee-restricted homes on municipal lands. In addition to Cheakamus Crossing, there are other municipal lands that could be suitable for additional employee-restricted housing.

Completed Actions:

- *Development of new employee housing*
In collaboration with the WHA and the WDC, in the last five years the following six employee housing projects have been developed, representing 596 new employee bed units:
 - Cloudburst Court (2018);
 - Legacy Passive House (2020);
 - Lumina Seniors Housing (2020);
 - Granite Ridge (2021);
 - 1340 Mount Fee Road (2022); and
 - 1360 Mount Fee Road (2023).

Ongoing Actions:

- *Secure new municipal lands*
Strategic opportunities can be utilized where feasible to secure new municipal lands to facilitate new employee housing developments.

2023 Actions:

- *Expedite the completion of Cheakamus Crossing Phase II (Lots 2, 3, 5)*
The RMOW will continue to dedicate staff resources to expedite the completion of Cheakamus Crossing Phase II by 2026, resulting in approximately 554 new employee bed units.
- *Investigate feasibility for new employee housing projects on municipal lands*
As part of the Long-Term Housing Strategy, staff will conduct a preliminary assessment of the feasibility for new employee housing projects on municipal lands across Whistler to meet current and projected needs. More in-depth technical studies will then be initiated on municipal lands that have the potential for employee housing uses.
- *Explore public-private partnerships*
Public private partnerships may provide opportunities to secure financing for employee housing on municipal lands and for local businesses to contribute to secure housing for their employees. This approach could be considered on a project-by-project basis with a policy in place.

Future Potential Actions:

New future potential actions will be identified through the action to investigate feasibility for new employee housing projects on municipal lands.

4. Utilize and Expand Financing Tools

To facilitate the development of new employee housing projects there are opportunities to utilize and expand employee housing financing tools.

Completed Actions:

- *“Employee Housing Service Charge Bylaw No. 1507, 2000”*
This Bylaw was initially adopted in 1990 to require new commercial and industrial development to contribute towards the provision of employee housing. The associated charge was last updated in 2001.

Ongoing Finance Tools:

- *Community amenity contributions*
Community amenity contributions, received through rezoning applications, may contribute to employee housing initiatives.
- *Selling market housing components*
Selling market housing components of land associated with employee housing developments contributes to financing for construction of new employee housing.
- *Online Accommodation Provider (OAP) funding*
OAP funding is used to support the development of Cheakamus Crossing Phase 2.
- *Apply for government grants and partnerships (i.e., Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), BC Housing)*

RMOW and WHA staff actively pursue grant opportunities as they arise and are offered by senior levels of government.

- *Explore opportunities for First Nations partnerships*
Schedule B of the OCP includes a table and map identifying the existing and potential fee simple lands and partnership interests of Squamish Nation and Lilwat Nation.

2023 Actions:

- *Explore updating and expanding the applicability of the “Employee Service Charge Bylaw No. 1507, 2000” (ESC Bylaw)*
With few remaining opportunities for new commercial and industrial developments in Whistler, the current applicability of the ESC Bylaw to generate new employee housing funds is significantly limited. Additionally, to receive the necessary Provincial Ministerial approval to update the ESC Bylaw, there is extensive supporting documentation required. Several Resort Municipalities, including the RMOW, have initiated a project to collaborate with the Province to clarify the applicability and approach to employee service charge bylaws. This initiative may provide the opportunity to update the charge and consider expanding the ESC Bylaw’s applicability to include residential development.
- *Apply to CMHC Housing Accelerator Fund*
The Housing Accelerator Fund provides incentive funding to boost housing supply across Canada and is launching in summer 2023. The application requires a “Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan” outlining supply growth targets and specific initiatives to grow housing supply and speed up housing approvals. Staff are actively preparing a Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan in alignment with the grant requirements for Council’s future consideration.
- *Develop a funding and financing strategy*
As a component of the Long-Term Housing Strategy, staff recommend developing a funding and financing strategy that relates to the development of new employee housing projects to meet identified current and projected needs.

Future Potential Actions:

- *Consider employee mandatory suite buy-out program*
Staff have been directed by Council to complete a review of the current cash-in-lieu procedure and to establish a policy for future discharges of mandatory employee restricted suite covenants. There is opportunity for this action to provide financing to develop new employee housing units, increasing utilization and reducing enforcement challenges.
- *Consider allocating a portion of general MRDT funds to support affordable housing*
Designated recipients of the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) have the option to fund affordable housing initiatives that they deem appropriate to meet local needs. If local stakeholders are supportive (and subject to Provincial approval), a portion of general MRDT funds could be allocated to affordable housing initiatives.

5. Encourage the Private Sector

The RMOW can encourage the private sector to contribute to housing initiatives either financially or directly by developing new employee housing on private lands.

Completed Actions:

- *Creation of the Residential Infill One (RI1) Zone*
Adopted in 2011, the RI1 zone allows for lot splits, duplexes and multiple auxiliary residential dwelling units across a large portion of the Alpine South Neighbourhood.
- *Launch of Private Sector Employee Housing Initiative*
In 2019, Council endorsed refined guidelines to evaluate private sector rezoning proposals for employee housing.

2023 Actions:

- *Complete processing of private sector employee housing applications*
Staff will continue to process private sector employee housing applications and process new applications as they are received. Through this initiative, a total of 537 new employee housing bed units are planned to be developed across the following seven projects:
 - Whistler Sports Legacies;
 - Vail Glacier 8;
 - 2077 Garibaldi Way;
 - 5298 Alta Lake Road;
 - Whistler Mountain Ski Club;
 - 7104 Nancy Green Drive; and
 - Garibaldi Professional Building.
- *Advance 4500 Northlands Boulevard rezoning application (RZ00173)*
The rezoning application for 4500 Northlands Boulevard is a significant opportunity to secure new built employee-restricted housing. Planning staff time is allocated to processing this application and negotiating community amenity contributions.
- *Develop new Infill Housing Program*
By finding a balance between increasing the employee housing rental supply and providing a return on investment to property owners, updating and expanding infill housing opportunities is intended to increase options and remove barriers for property owners. Staff will develop a revised infill project scope and engagement plan for Council's consideration this year. Infill opportunities that may be considered include:
 - Review and update the RI1 and RS1 Zones;
 - Remove or update auxiliary residential dwelling unit size restrictions;

- Expand areas where duplexes are permitted;
- Allow up to two suites for detached dwellings;
- Allow auxiliary residential dwelling units in duplex and multi-family buildings;
- Permit the stratification of detached and attached auxiliary residential dwelling units;
- Provide pre-approved detached auxiliary residential dwelling unit plans; and
- Facilitate lot splits for large, detached dwelling lots.

Future Potential Actions:

- *Develop OCP neighbourhood plans*
There is opportunity to consider developing neighbourhood plans where appropriate to incentivize the development of employee housing based on proximity to services, amenities, and public or active transportation.
- *Incentivize employee housing through bonus density*
Incentivizing the development of employee housing by providing bonus density through zoning can provide certainty and reduce application processing costs and timelines for developers. This may be an opportunity to revitalize and densify parcels with older buildings and create new employee housing in locations in close proximity to services, amenities, and public or active transportation.

6. Remove Red Tape Barriers

Finally, the RMOW can identify, influence and remove red tape barriers in regulations and processes that are seen to hinder the development of employee housing.

Completed Actions:

- *Updated “Land Use Procedures and Fees Bylaw No. 2205, 2022”*
The bylaw was updated in 2022 and contributes to efficiencies in processing planning applications.

Ongoing Actions:

- *Dedicated Planning Department staff time*
In addition to day-to-day responsibilities and other projects, the Planning Department provides dedicated staff time across planning groups (policy, projects and development) to expedite employee housing applications and initiatives.
- *Consider reduced parking minimums*
The reduction of parking minimums to facilitate employee housing developments is considered by Council on a case-by-case basis.
- *Consider appropriate level of community engagement*
Determining the appropriate level of community engagement required for planning applications facilitating employee housing is balanced with streamlining application processes. This is considered on a case-by-case basis and in view of statutory requirements.

2023 Actions:

- *Prioritize employee housing building permits*
Prioritizing employee housing building permits reflects the priority need for employee housing in the resort community and aims to contribute to expediting the delivery of new employee housing units. A process for prioritizing building permits facilitating employee housing can be developed and implemented this year.
- *Advocate to the Province to re-introduce employee restricted properties in the Provincial Property Tax Deferment Program*
The tax deferment program is a B.C. government low interest loan program that helps qualified B.C. homeowners access Provincial funding to pay the property tax on their principal residence. Staff have received Council direction to collaborate with the WHA to advocate to the B.C. Ministry of Finance to re-include employee-restricted properties, including leasehold properties, as eligible participants in the Provincial Property Tax Deferment Program.

Other Opportunities for Council Advocacy:

The Province has expressed significant interest in streamlining housing approvals. With limited ability for staff to impact Provincial decisions, there are other potential opportunities for advocacy to be undertaken by Council.

- *Advocate to the Province regarding property transfer tax requirements on employee housing.*
There may be opportunity to advocate to the Province to either waive or re-direct property transfer taxes on employee housing units to support affordable housing initiatives.
- *Advocate to the Province to streamline Provincial approvals and regulations.*
Streamlining Provincial approvals and regulations, specifically regarding Provincial covenants on municipal lands that require updating to efficiently modify and update existing housing agreements, would remove red tape barriers to facilitating employee housing developments.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decision

The Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing developed seven recommendations to address Whistler's employee housing challenges. The Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing – Final Report is as follows and was used to inform the development of the Plan:

[December 19, 2017: Administrative Report No. 17-137](#), Final Report from the Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas with various associated initiatives that support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan.

Housing is a priority area and is supported by the key initiative to implement a housing action plan. The proposed action also incorporates the key initiatives for completing Cheakamus Crossing phase II (Lots 2,3,5) by 2026; advancing Private Sector Employee Housing Initiative projects, and working with community partners on a long-term housing strategy. Further development and implementation of the specific actions within the plan will also take into consideration and work to address the Climate Action and Community Engagement priorities.

Strategic Priorities

- Housing
 - Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing*
- Climate Action
 - Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan*
- Community Engagement
 - Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW*
- Smart Tourism
 - Preserve and protect Whistler's unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure*
- Not Applicable
 - Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs*

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.

Chapter Four (Growth Management) supports the effective management of land use and development to reinforce sense of place, protect the natural environment, provide a high quality of life and provide exceptional experiences for visitors.

The Residential Accommodation section in Chapter Five (Land Use and Development), includes the key Objective 5.1.2. to house at least 75 per cent of Whistler's workforce within the resort community in livable, appropriate and affordable housing. The Plan strives to balance growth management goals, objectives and policies while supporting the delivery of housing to meet employee housing needs. The actions that are proposed and underway all support and are consistent with the policies of the OCP. A list of the most relevant OCP goals, objectives and policy statements as they relate to the housing action categories are listed in Appendix B.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The cost to produce the Plan, including staff time and internal administration costs, is included within the Planning Department's annual operating budget. The 2023 housing action plan items represent the largest commitment of the department's resources commensurate with this strategic priority.

Budgets associated with advancing initiatives within the 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. Staff are actively pursuing grant opportunities offered by senior levels of government as they arise.

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. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

In Chapter 3 of the OCP, Policy 3.8.1.1. speaks to working with Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation to provide employee housing opportunities for both Nations' members to live in Whistler and to support participation by both Nations in the development of employee housing in Cheakamus Crossing. In Chapter 5 of the OCP, Policy 5.2.1.3. supports collaborating where applicable with Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation to source funding for employee housing projects. Additionally, Schedule B of the OCP includes a table and map identifying the existing and potential fee simple lands and partnership interests of Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation.

While not anticipated at this time, if OCP amendments are required to facilitate future housing initiatives, Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nations are required to be consulted. The RMOW is party to the [Framework Agreement](#) dated June 15, 2020 that outlines land use considerations associated with Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation. Specifically, article seven of the Framework Agreement provides the RMOW with direction in regard to amendments to the OCP including completing early engagement with the First Nations, providing First Nations an invitation to review proposed amendments and providing First Nations a reasonable time to undertake this review.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Comment(s):

New and future potential actions were developed and refined through multiple internal staff workshops and in consultation with other stakeholders, including the WHA, WDC and Tourism Whistler. Staff are currently looking at opportunities prior to summer to share with the community the details of the actions completed and underway within the Housing Action Plan. Opportunities for future community engagement will be identified as new housing actions are undertaken, including an engagement process to support the development of the Long-Term Housing Strategy.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Resort Municipality of Whistler Housing Action Plan
Appendix B – Relevant OCP Goals, Objectives and Policies

SUMMARY

This report seeks Council's endorsement of the Plan that directs the RMOW's work on housing and Council's direction for staff to provide an annual housing action update, beginning in 2024. The Plan identifies actions to be undertaken by the RMOW over the next year and provides a framework to guide

future initiatives. Housing actions are proposed to continue to be initiated in parallel to developing a Long-Term Housing Strategy.

SIGN-OFFS

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