

## Letter to Mayor and Council

### August 11 2020

Dear Mayor and Councillors

#### **Ensuring the “Best” Environmental process and outcome for our Community.....Rezoning 5298 Alta Lake Road.**

As we move through these strange and challenging times, it has provided a chance for many of us to reflect about what is important to us and our community. Some people have called for a “Reset”...take a step back and challenge what we are doing and why. For Whistler, this means many things but importantly it means how we balance sustainability and environmental standards with managing growth and development.

#### **What does the Environmental report say and recommend?**

I am very concerned that the proposed rezoning and 43 home development at 5298 Alta Lake road, on the west side of Nita Lake, has got this balance wrong. I have read the environmental report (not easy to read and not easy to get hold of!) which along with the attached Cascade Environmental report have both identified several concerns and recommendations. **These lands are described as having many mature trees (some 250-300 years old), are potentially the habitat for some endangered species and are likely to have many rare plants. It also outlines that there are severe constraints to development and suggests some key recommendations and mitigation strategies.** One of these is to ensure a detailed study of rare and endangered plants and wildlife before development proceeds. According to the report, there are 40 animal species at risk potentially occurring onsite, in addition to 13 at risk plant species and 11 at risk ecosystems. Another recommendation is the preservation of as many of the mature trees as possible with guidance from an arborist. The current report clearly states that it is an “Initial” report: have any of these further reports and studies been completed, and if so, what are the results? What if we find out that there are many rare plants and wildlife on these lands? Surely, this is a material piece of information that the Council need to know. And yet this project has already been in front of Council three times and is soon to have a public hearing. Discussion of the environmental issues for this development have been far from detailed and have lacked transparency and rigour.

**To be clear, the environmental report does not provide an opinion on the project’s viability. Also, some important progress has been made to provide for green spaces and to provide for a Riparian setbacks and buffers next to the Lake and Gebbert Creek. However, key and demanding questions are still not being debated and the recommended additional reports do not appear forthcoming.** Clearly, these are special and sensitive lands on the shores of one of our precious lakes. How many times will Whistler have this opportunity to develop or protect such unique lands. In an age when environmental issues are so important, surely the council and the community should demand a comprehensive discussion of the environmental impact and ensure the concerns and recommendations of the environmental report are addressed.

#### **What does this mean...?**

**This does not mean no development at 5298 Alta Lake Road, but it means a development that is held to the highest environmental standards and one where the environmental impact is transparent and**

**keenly debated.** I am asking council to commit to the Whistler community that these additional environmental reports are completed, made available to the public and that there is a full and transparent debate about the environmental impact of this development.

**The Long term impact....having a long term plan.**

Taking time to get the environmental approach right is emphasised **in the letter sent to you September 2019 from Clare Ruddy, Executive Director of AWARE**, where she calls for a more holistic strategy and says....“The piecemeal nature of rezoning applications mean it can be hard to see the cumulative impacts of our continuing to develop the valley. We believe this is particularly true when it comes to Whistler’s lakefronts and remaining wetland areas, where natural values can be entirely lost to development or fundamentally impacted by changes of use in an area. **This perspective is particularly relevant to Nita Lake, where in addition to 5298 Alta Lake Road there are 2 other large parcels of land to be potentially developed around the Lake.**

**Key Questions to ask and address.**

I would ask that the Council to carefully ask themselves 2 key questions:

- 1) Is there anything else we can do as Council to ensure a better environmental outcome for 5298 Alta Lake Road. Have we done all we can?**
- 2) Should there be a little less density on this site to ensure a better environmental outcome?**  
Although I do not have access to the Financial Pro Forma, I suspect that less density is not incompatible with allowing the developer a reasonable rate of return on Capital and not incompatible with the council getting plenty of employee housing, but it would lead to a much better environmental outcome for the community on these “severely constrained lands”. This perspective is supported by numerous letters from Garry Watson to the Council.

Whistler’s wonderful environment is why people want to live here and why Tourists come and drive our economy. If we compromise our environment, the very reason for people wanting to be in Whistler disappears.

Ensuring the right Environmental outcome may cost a little more money for the developer and may take some extra time, but in 5 years time, when we ride our bikes and walk around Nita Lake we will all be very thankful that a rigorous process has been followed.

Thank you to Mayor and Council for your consideration of my letter

Respectfully

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