



# WHISTLER

## REPORT | INFORMATION REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** August 18, 2020                      **REPORT:** 20-073  
**FROM:** Resort Experience                      **FILE:** 7728.03  
**SUBJECT:** WHISTLER CHILD CARE PLANNING PROJECT – FINAL REPORT

### COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION

**That** Council receive Information Report No. 20-073 regarding the final report for the Whistler Child Care Planning Project.

### REFERENCES

Appendix “A” – Whistler Child Care Planning Project, Final Report – August 2020

Information Report to Council No. 19-080 – Whistler Child Care Planning Project, dated June 25, 2019 (Not attached)

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Information Report is to present the final report for the Whistler Child Care Planning Project to Council. The final report is the outcome of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project that was conducted by municipal staff with the Whistler Centre for Sustainability (WCS) between June 2019 and March 2020. The WCS carried out background research and a policy context analysis, designed and conducted community and stakeholder engagement activities, generated the population growth scenarios and associated target modelling, and prepared a draft of the final report. The RMOW provided overall project oversight and finalized the project report.

### DISCUSSION

#### **Background**

On January 4, 2019, Council received a letter from the British Columbia (B.C.) Minister of Children and Family Development and the Minister of State for Child Care announcing a provincial partnership with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) to provide funding for the creation of child care space and for community child care planning. This funding is offered under two programs that are administered by UBCM: the Community Child Care Space Creation Program and the Community Child Care Planning Program.

On January 22, 2019, Council passed a resolution directing staff to make an application to the Community Child Care Planning Program. The RMOW was successful in obtaining the grant. On June 25, 2019, Council received Information Report No. 19-080, which informed Council of the UBCM grant

funding and provided an outline of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project and its work plan. The RMOW and WCS subsequently embarked on the project.

Staff will submit this final report to UBCM as part of the funding requirements. In addition, staff will submit the completed community child care space inventory (using the required Excel template) and a financial summary of the project to UBCM. UBCM shares the information gathered with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the information may be used in future provincial funding decisions such as the grants for funding for child care space creation.

After submitting the final requirements to UBCM, the RMOW will focus on next steps and work through opportunities with the local Child Care Working Group, as many initiatives would be implemented by key partners. The actions and targets in the final report will both inform and be further refined through other research and planning initiatives, including the RMOW Strategic Planning Committee, the Recreation Department's annual work plans and corporate budgeting. The RMOW also has agreement in principle from key partners to reconvene the Child Care Working Group annually to check-in on progress related to increasing access to child care in Whistler.

### **Report Content and Study Methodology**

The content of the final report for the Whistler Child Care Planning Project was developed from an inventory of Whistler child care providers, surveys of Whistler child care providers and parents, and three stakeholder workshops. The report content is also based on a policy context analysis as well as a 'high level' consideration of population growth scenarios and space creation modelling carried out by the WCS. The stakeholder engagement elements are discussed further below under the Community Engagement and Consultation section of this Information Report.

Using the information derived from the activities listed above, the final report presents information about Whistler's current child care space inventory and availability, and parents' needs and satisfaction with current child care availability in Whistler as expressed through the parent and provider surveys. It then includes an assessment of existing provincial and local RMOW policies and resources that influence the provision of child care in Whistler. Afterwards, the final report presents a range of population growth scenarios and space creation targets for the next five and 10 years. Finally, the report presents a preliminary action plan for further consideration and implementation for the delivery of child care in Whistler. These actions focus on addressing the key issues and needs identified through the planning process, as well as the projected child care needs of the community. The following "Key Findings and Project Deliverables" section of this Information Report highlights the main content of these aspects of the final report.

### **Key Findings and Project Deliverables**

#### *Current State of Child Care in Whistler*

The final report presents information on the current state of child care in Whistler and associated trends. In particular, it provides detailed information on the following topic areas related to child care in Whistler: space inventory; access and utilization; locations; staffing; facilities; diverse population and services; affordability; quality of care; and priorities if additional funding became available. A summary of the key information in this section of the report is as follows:

- Whistler has a variety of typical child care programs that include group care, occasional care and family home-based care as well as numerous activity-based care such as recreation, arts and other outdoor offerings that take advantage of Whistler's diverse amenities.
- Full-time licensed group child care services are provided by six active operators with a total capacity of 205 spaces. While their capacity is lower than the activity providers, these are

the only operators that offer consistent full<sup>1</sup> daytime care programs (8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) year-round.

- Part-time licensed occasional care programs offered in three locations by Whistler Blackcomb are somewhat limited in capacity and run for the winter season only. These occasional care programs are primarily targeted at visitors; however, they play an important role in aftercare for locally-based residents with children in winter activity programs.
- To date, the provision of licensed family home-based care programming is limited and could represent an underutilized opportunity.
- Activity-based camps captured in the inventory have the greatest variety of programming with several providers and capacity levels of approximately 450 plus; however, the offerings and capacities can fluctuate dramatically throughout the seasons in the year.

### *Policy Context Analysis*

The final report provides an overview of provincial regulations in order to identify the broader context of the B.C. regulatory framework. It then provides an in-depth analysis of RMOW policies, regulations and initiatives as well as a brief overview of regional initiatives. A summary of the key information in this section of the report is as follows:

- The biggest barriers to providing child care in Whistler relate to the ability to attract and retain qualified staff in existing facilities, as well as access to facilities (due to limited availability and cost of land and construction and lease rates).
- RMOW municipal policies and initiatives supporting child care in Whistler include the Official Community Plan (OCP), tax exemptions passed onto some of Whistler's key facility-based providers, a cost-recovery approach to programs delivered to children, and staff dedicated to delivering municipal child care programs.<sup>2</sup>
- RMOW residential zoning permits child care as a home occupation use, however providers would need to consider other relevant regulations.
- Whistler utilizes the zoning process to negotiate community amenities for new developments on a case by case basis to achieve community needs and address the impacts of proposed developments. OCP policies support consideration of child care facilities and space through new development.
- Provincial regulations relating to child care are in place to protect children and ensure a quality care and learning environment; they prescribe requirements related to space, caregiver training and more. Work is being done by the Province to address some of the key barriers affecting child care in Whistler and around the province, especially those related to increasing the supply of qualified Early Childhood Educator (ECEs).

### *Future Child Care Needs and Child Care Space Targets*

The Community Child Care Planning Program requires grant recipients to identify short-term (one to two years), medium-term (two to five years) and long-term (five to ten years) space creation targets that will meet the community's licensed child care space needs. These space creation targets are linked to a community's access rate, which is a measure of child care availability that equals the number of licensed child care spaces per 100 children from birth to 12 years of age. Whistler's current child care

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<sup>1</sup> Kids on the Go, operated by the RMOW, combines with school programming to offer full day programming for ages Kindergarten to Grade 7.

<sup>2</sup> There are 3.5 FTE staff dedicated to delivering municipal child care programs (i.e., Kids on the Go), plus another six to eight program leaders who provide after-school care or full-time care on non-school days and in the summer.

access rate is 14.3, meaning there are 14.3 child care spaces per 100 children who are from birth to 12 years of age.

As a first step, three high level population growth scenarios were developed for the purposes of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project based on historic trends. These scenarios are: 1) growth scenario, with a projected average annual growth rate of 2 per cent per year; 2) flat scenario, with a 0 per cent growth rate; and 3) decline scenario, representing a decrease in the current child care age population of 1 per cent per year. The projections provide for a range of potential outcomes and need to be carefully monitored and considered over time. Essentially, future growth scenarios must consider the extent to which the current child care age population will age out of this group over time, and the extent to which there will be new births and in-migration that will replace or grow the current number.

The second step was to determine the targeted future access rates for Whistler. As Whistler's current access rate of 14.3 is below most other neighbouring communities in the Sea to Sky region (with Pemberton being a notable exception knowing that some Pemberton residents use Whistler facilities) as well as some comparable rural communities outside the region, it was important to give consideration to taking incremental steps to increase this rate over the ten-year planning horizon.

In light of the COVID-19 situation, it will be most important in the short-term to maintain the *status quo*; in the short-term, work should focus on maintaining existing spaces in the community and supporting existing child care providers to remain in operation. In the longer-term, maintaining the *status quo* access rate of 14.3 would likely continue to challenge Whistler families and businesses. After considering the current COVID-19 situation, the provincial average of 18, regional benchmarks, neighbouring community targets and the unique challenges and opportunities in Whistler and the suite of actions available, the Whistler Child Care Planning Project established overall access rate targets of 17 in 2025 and 24 in 2030, along with age-specific access rate targets. These targets are highlighted in green in the table below. The table also shows the range in number of spaces required based on the different population growth scenarios and access rate targets.

Total Spaces												
	2020 Existing				2025				2030			
Access Rate	14	11	41	7	17	20	42	8	24	30	45	14
	Spaces				Spaces				Spaces			
Population Growth*:	All	0-2	3-5	5-12	All	0-2	3-5	5-12	All	0-2	3-5	5-12
1. Decline	205	36	110	59	226	61	104	61	294	87	106	101
2. Flat	205	36	110	59	244	66	113	66	335	99	121	115
3. Growth	205	36	110	59	286	78	132	77	433	128	156	149
Range of Extra Spaces Required												
	2020				2025				2030			
Access Rate	14.3				17				24			
	+ Spaces				+ Spaces				+ Spaces			
Population Growth*	All	0-2	3-5	5-12	All	0-2	3-5	5-12	All	0-2	3-5	5-12
Decline	-	-	-	-	21	25	-6	2	89	51	-4	42
Flat	-	-	-	-	39	30	3	7	130	63	11	56
Growth	-	-	-	-	81	42	22	18	228	92	46	90

\*The population scenarios are: 1) growth scenario, with a projected 2% average annual growth rate; 2) flat scenario, with a 0% annual average growth rate; and 3) decline scenario, with a -1% average annual rate of decrease.

The results of the projections and targets selected for 2025 and 2030 bracket a range of potential space requirements.

For 2025, to achieve an increase in the access rate from 14.3 to 17 spaces per 100 children would require somewhere in the range of 21 to 81 additional new spaces: 21 additional spaces under the population decline scenario, 39 spaces if the child care age population remained the same as the current population, and 81 spaces if population growth continued at two per cent per year, beyond the current child care age population.

For 2030, and an access rate target of 24 spaces, the number of new spaces required increases significantly, ranging from 89 spaces for the population decline scenario to 130 spaces for the flat scenario and 228 spaces for the growth scenario. In percentage terms over the next 10 years, these additions represent significant increases of 43 per cent, 63 per cent, and 111 per cent beyond the current licensed capacity of 205 spaces.

The creation and buildout of the existing Cheakamus Crossing and Rainbow employee housing neighbourhoods provided housing for local families and contributed to the current populations of children and associated child care needs. Potential future population growth, and growth in the number of children in the child care age categories, significantly affects future child care space needs. The extent to which further expansion of the Cheakamus Crossing neighbourhood, and additional employee housing throughout the community, or further in-migration of permanent residents and families, will create additional needs, or simply replace the existing child age group population, needs to be carefully monitored and considered over time. The sensitivity of child care need relative to population growth and age shifts, speaks to ongoing monitoring and demographic forecasts, and addressing need to the greatest extent possible within existing operations and facilities, as compared to construction of new facilities and commitments to significant capital requirements and ongoing operating costs. It is also important to consider the current COVID-19 situation where economic trends and their associated impacts on population may be uncertain.

#### *Action Plan and Implementation*

The final report identifies short-term (one to two years), medium-term (two to five years), and long-term (five to 10 years) actions that community partners and the RMOW will take to meet licensed space creation targets and improve access to child care services within the community. In particular, the Whistler Child Care Project Action Plan presents 29 prioritized actions and a few non-prioritized actions. The actions focus on two key areas of greatest need and the largest service gaps in Whistler: after-school care for school-age children; and full-time, facility-based group care for children 0 to 3 years of age. There was also general agreement among the stakeholder participants that the assets, partnerships, programs, policies and facilities enabling the current provision of child care need to be maintained and built on, leveraging existing opportunities to the greatest extent possible.

The actions were developed with input from child care stakeholders during a February 2020 workshop and then refined by the RMOW and WCS with additional stakeholder input as needed. The actions focus on a number of topics including meeting the needs of underserved populations, leveraging public assets, engaging further with community stakeholders and seeking support from external agencies. They also consider other factors like helping to increase the number of ECEs serving the community in coming years, through provincial engagement, and trends related to the affordability of child care in Whistler.

The action plan section also addresses implementation and related considerations. The actions will be considered for implementation by key partners such as MLA Jordan Sturdy's Office, the RMOW, Whistler Chamber, child care providers, School District No. 48 and Sea to Sky Community Services. Actions that require significant resources will need to be weighed against other priorities and then

pursued if resources are available and opportunities arise. The balancing of priorities is especially important in light of the COVID-19 situation.

Regarding the RMOW's role in implementation, the actions and targets will be used to inform and will in turn be refined through other research and planning initiatives, including the RMOW Strategic Planning Committee, the Recreation Department's annual work plans and corporate budgeting. Beyond integration into existing initiatives, the RMOW has agreement in principle from key partners that they will collaborate to reconvene the Child Care Working Group annually to provide the space and time for a check-in on progress related increasing access to child care in Whistler.

It is important to note that Whistler has a strong foundation of quality child care providers and a considerable diversity of offerings – with much to build on moving forward. Additionally, a number of providers have recently increased their offering to meet the current child care needs of our community. The Whistler Waldorf School opened its new program in Spring Creek in December 2019 and added 16 new spaces for children 30 months to school-age. In September 2019, the Whistler Racket Club (in collaboration with the RMOW) started an after-school program for up to 24 children three days per week. Whistler Sport Legacies began offering after-school care for Kindergarten and Grade 1 children at Spring Creek Community School on Mondays and Wednesdays for the 2019-2020 school year; the program filled on the Wednesdays, but not Mondays. Further, Whistler Sport Legacies recent rezoning of its parcel of land in Cheakamus Crossing provided for use of existing housing as a priority for essential workers with child care workers among them. These recent achievements provide a strong basis for support for ongoing collaborative efforts and some of these achievements have come about as a result of a focus on child care and the process of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **OCP Policy Considerations**

The OCP's Health, Safety and Community Well-Being chapter (Chapter 8) is supportive of the implementation of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project through its action plan. In particular, this chapter includes an objective and corresponding set of policies focused on improving access to preschool and child care facilities and services.

The OCP's Growth Management chapter (Chapter 4) is also supportive of the direction in the Whistler Child Care Planning Project as it provides a policy that enables facilities like daycares to be located anywhere in the community, provided other requirements are met. This policy is excerpted as follows:

4.1.4.3. Policy: Community facilities, utilities, parks, schools, daycare facilities, places of worship, home occupation and live-work uses may be located anywhere within the municipality subject to municipal zoning requirements and any additional regulatory approvals and permitting criteria, giving consideration to the policies contained in this OCP.

## **BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

Funding for the Whistler Child Care Planning project was provided through the provincial/UBCM grant program noted above. The existing Planning Department budget also provided for completion of this stage of work. Further implementation is to be considered through the 2020/21 five year financial plan update and with consideration to possible senior levels of government grant opportunities that may arise.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

Community engagement and consultation was an important element of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project. The project included surveys of Whistler parents and child care providers, and three stakeholder workshops. The stakeholder workshops included organizations that were members of the previous Child Care Working Group. These consultation activities are discussed further below. In addition, the final report will be posted to the RMOW's website so that it may be shared broadly with parents, child care providers and the Whistler community.

### **Parent Survey**

An online voluntary survey of parents was developed and then promoted from September 25 to October 20, 2019. It was aimed at parents and guardians with children under 13 years of age, with the intent being to better understand the types of child care Whistler families use, their needs and access to child care, child care challenges, and their preferred child care scenario moving forward.

In total, 241 people responded to the survey. Estimating that there are approximately 850 families in Whistler with children under 13, this means that the survey results could represent approximately 27 per cent of these families. While this represents a very good response rate for this target stakeholder group, the survey was voluntary (participants were not randomly selected). Therefore, the results cannot be considered a statistically valid/accurate representation of all Whistler parents with children under 13, as parents facing child care challenges would probably have been more likely to take the survey.

Regardless, the survey was designed to shed light on child care needs and challenges, and therefore the results from the 241 people that opted to take the survey provide valuable information that supplements the child care inventory data from other sources.

Most (87 per cent) of the 241 respondents live in Whistler, and 90 per cent work in Whistler. Ninety per cent of respondents live in two-parent households. Nearly 20 per cent work in the accommodation and food/beverage sector, followed by the arts, entertainment and recreation sector.

Summary results are included throughout the final report and the complete survey results are attached to the final report as Appendix "A".

### **Provider Survey**

An online voluntary survey of child care providers was promoted between September 25 and October 20, 2019. It was aimed at current child care providers or those considering offering child care. The intent was to better understand the types of child care offered (or being considered), child care capacity, staffing and facility type considerations as well as operational dates and times.

In total, 31 participants responded to the survey, however some represented the same organization multiple times and others were incomplete after the first question (likely due to starting then stopping, etc.). Once the list was filtered, a total of 17 mostly complete surveys remained. Survey participants included those providers currently offering child care (14 respondents) and those considering providing child care (three respondents).

Of the 14 providing child care, eight were activity-based child care providers, six were licensed child care providers and one was a licence-not-required child care provider. All except one of the major licensed child care providers took part in the survey. This missing provider was contacted individually and directly provided feedback pertinent to the inventory and child care offering types. All but two of the known child care activity providers participated in the survey. These organizations were contacted individually to provide feedback pertinent to the inventory and child care offering types.

Summary results are included throughout the final report as relevant and the complete results are attached to the final report as Appendix "B".

### **Stakeholder Workshops**

A meeting with a group of Whistler child care providers was held in September 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to present an overview of the Whistler Child Care Planning Project and gather feedback on the parent and provider survey objectives and some of the draft survey questions.

In February 2020, two stakeholder workshops with child care providers and key Whistler organizations and representatives were held to inform the target setting and action planning aspects of this project. Stakeholders were subsequently offered the opportunity to review and comment on the draft action plan electronically.

### **Future Collaboration**

Ongoing collaboration amongst stakeholders will be important moving forward. The targets and actions presented in this report provide a sense of direction for Whistler moving forward – and implementation will require the efforts and contributions of all child care stakeholders in the community. The RMOW also has agreement in principle from key partners to reconvene the Child Care Working Group annually to check-in on progress related increasing access to child care in Whistler.

## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this Information Report is to present the final report for the Whistler Child Care Planning Project to Council. The final report, along with other required documentation, will be submitted to UBCM by RMOW staff. The report also provides a basis for ongoing collaborative efforts and consideration of RMOW related action items in future capital and operating budgets and municipal initiatives and opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Courtney Beaubien  
SENIOR PLANNER – POLICY

For  
Mike Kirkegaard  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

For  
Toni Metcalf  
INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER OF RESORT EXPERIENCE