

Dear Whistler Mayor and Council, MP Patrick Weiler and MLA Jordan Sturdy, Pemberton Mayor Mike Richman, Squamish Mayor Armand Hurford

A new report in our local papers from BC Stats has estimated that “the province's population will rise to 7.9 million by 2046—an increase of 43% over today's 5.5 million. Most of that growth will come to B.C.'s Lower Mainland/Southwest region, encompassing the entire Sea to Sky Corridor.” (Link to article in Squamish Chief below.)

How is this growth sustainable?

In the Whistler OCP we have goal 4.1 which states “Land use and development are effectively managed to maintain Whistler’s unique sense of place, protect Whistler’s natural environment, provide a high quality of life for residents and provide exceptional experiences for our visitors.” Planned and managed growth can be beneficial for all concerned however what I see is unconstrained accommodation of imposed growth which is neither planned for nor is it sustainable.

Even today's infrastructure to support current public expectations are strained. Housing being the topic of the day but almost any other capacity of service or facility is in a similar state. Now within just 20 years we are told the population is supposed to be closer to 50% larger in Squamish and Whistler. Will the plans and priorities of current leaders catch up to current needs and also be prepared to service 50% more in such a short time?

Services and infrastructure in Vancouver that Sea to sky residents rely on will also be under the pressure of Vancouver's similar increase in population.

Reliance on fossil energy and products will move GHG emissions likely 50% higher and climate consequences will surely follow. Squamish is vulnerable to sea level rise and other climate change consequences. (as is Vancouver area) Other S2S communities will have climate challenges also. Wild fire risk haunts the whole corridor. I do not believe I have heard how future planning accommodates the predicted changes in our climate and environment within the planning time period let alone the longer term. We have GHG emission goals that are completely unachievable with the priorities our leaders display. The apparent denial of baked in climate change let alone the compounding impacts our continued emissions growth is shocking. Is there something that all of you know that I am not aware of?

Our wildlife must endure environmental changes also which will be compounded with 50% more human intrusion, pollution, outright destruction and fragmentation of their habitat. Can at least the current wild life habitats and agricultural lands be protected from development? If not when or where does urban sprawl stop?

“We protect the land – the forests, the lakes and the rivers, and all that they sustain.” Is this a realistic vision? Are we only fooling ourselves? Should we live up to this vision or remove it from our Whistler OCP?

Yet still economic and population growth is welcomed as Mayor Hurford states in the article “growth could be seen as an opportunity to increase amenities and services. “ This would be great if the growth in amenities and services could actually keep up with the growth in population. When will the theory that future growth will solve the problems created by past growth be abandoned? Has it ever worked?

Mayor Jack Crompton says RMOW is “working to prepare for growth” of 46 percent in just a couple of decades. Part of the plan might be the work that the Strategic Planning committee is still working on over five years later. The strategies and plans of this committee are still not due to be released until next November. At this pace it appears unlikely that RMOW will ever catch up to current needs let alone prepare for almost 50% more housing, traffic, parking, commercial services, medical and dental services, recreation facilities, schools etc. It will also be impossible to hold to our OCP vision to protect nature. Hoping for “a small town in the mountains” is not a realistic expectation Mayor Crompton unless there is a change in priorities. The qualities of Whistler, which it sounds like we agree on, need to be defined and planned for by Whistler. If an actual balanced model plan is ever revealed it will likely be too little too late to be effective. I would also agree with you to “embrace change” if the changes were locally motivated and sustainable. I do not see that they are. Changes that I would like to see towards a sustainable future are not being achieved and do not appear to be a high enough priority. I would ask that you embrace some of the changes I see as important but it seems my changes might conflict with those of the Chamber of Commerce “choir”. It seems the priority is to “ensure the RMOW doesn't get in the way of progress.” Despite a formal effort to engage the community the concerns of those “who believe Whistler is losing its appeal to locals or longtime visitors over time” you say that you “don't think that's helpful”. “Preaching to the choir” indeed. This reinforces the feeling of some in the community that our “nostalgic” voices will not be heard.

Pemberton is likely to grow by almost double according to the report. Will agricultural lands be preserved and will needed wetland environments survive the sprawl that will be created to support over six thousand residents and all the housing, expanded roads, parking lots, commercial, recreational and social service facilities needed? Unless preparations for this have begun already it seems unlikely. With the likelihood of status quo urban sprawl housing that continues to rely on personal vehicles it is unclear how all this traffic will manage on a two lane highway 99. (SLRD adding more traffic and sprawl at WedgeWoods?) If transit for example was going to be ready to serve the larger communities wouldn't it need to be in the plans today? What right of ways will transit vehicles use or will they sit as they do now in the grid lock. Are they in the planning today? With no apparent plan to manage future population how will continued growth be accommodated? The village of Pemberton claims that it aims to “meet a goal of a 50-per-cent reduction in territorial greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions below 2007 levels by 2030, and a 100-per-cent reduction below 2007 levels by 2050”. Is this realistic Mayor Richmond? Is it really fair to make such unachievable goals without realistic plans to accomplish them? Is wildlife habitat for local and migrating species set aside? If not what will prevent its disruption or destruction by development? What will the valley climate be like in 20

years or 50 years which is well within the life time of the described planning period and the life time of our children? Is the status quo assumed or will plans to address the changes science seem sure are coming?

What is often missing is the question.. Then what? Even if there is space in some communities to expand boundaries, to mow down forests and fill in wetlands for development the question should be "then what"? Unless we can figure out how to manage growth rather than subserviently accommodating growth there will be a reckoning one day that our children will have to deal with. Not some far in the future generation but likely the one we send off to school today. Why we adults and seniors of this generation can not see this, why young and middle aged adults today can not see this is beyond me. The space and resources that humanity can consume has limits. This is just physics. We test these limits at our peril and at our children's peril. We say we understand but our children will judge us not on what we said but what we did. Are we doing enough? Do you really think so?

I ask that realistic discussion of the future we are creating for our children be included in setting sustainable priorities of our governments instead of the endless mantra of growth. In general I feel that our population continues to be allowed to live in a state of denial and with unrealistic expectations. Our school core curriculums for example still do not educate our youth with a clear understanding of the history, the causes and the solutions and consequences of climate change. A major change in our society is going to be needed and there is still no leadership to prepare us for the creation of a sustainable future. What does a sustainable future even look like? This should have been defined decades ago yet we blindly carry on like space and resources are infinite. We carry on like our status quo first world human comfort, privilege and economy are all that matters. Our assumptions of life going on as it is for just a few more decades is probably optimistic. It is great to have a positive attitude and hope that everything will be all right forever but I grow doubtful that this is realistic or responsible. Is it not denial dressed up to be more politically correct?

I am sorry that I do not have the solutions and it appears neither do you our leaders at any level of government. This really frightens me. I would suggest that a discussion to at least acknowledge this and let this be the first step to urgently getting solutions decided on and moving forward sustainably. This issue should be the highest priority here in the sea to sky, in our province, our country and globally.

It appears, given the predicted growth, we need to get going in a meaningful way and stop the illusion that current programs and accommodating the status quo are anywhere close to what is and will be needed. Most all levels of government seem destined to try and solve unmanaged growth problems with yet more growth. Perhaps it will take some of the devastating environmental consequences that climate science is warning about to make an impression and create the needed motivation. I am afraid that by then it will be too late and I think you should be too. I am afraid we will just normalize these changes and not be motivated at all.

Again I think that planned purposeful growth can be beneficial to all concerned when it is done with respect for the long term. I believe this is what has created the wonderful communities of our corridor. Growth seems now to be more like a cancer that is out of control. We are treating only the symptoms and the disease is out of control.

There are many challenges in front of you at this time. All are important. But... little else is going to matter if we cannot learn to manage how our species lives sustainably in our communities and indeed on this planet.

I ask our sea to sky corridor leaders to set realistic and sustainable policy.

Yours truly,

John Wood

Whistler BC



Population stats point to steady growth for Whistler over next two decades - Pique Newsmagazine

Squamish mayor sees growth as opportunity for renewal - Squamish Chief

Whistler has a long way to go on climate targets: Staff - Pique Newsmagazine

Whistler not losing its soul: Mayor - Pique Newsmagazine