



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: September 10, 2024 **REPORT:** 24-082
FROM: Planning Department – Policy **FILE:** 1855-20-0503
SUBJECT: WHISTLER EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR OLDER ADULTS
ASSESSMENT AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGN – FINAL REPORT

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 receive Information Report No. 24-082 regarding the final report for the Whistler Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign project, attached as Appendix A to Information Report No. 24-082.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the final report for the Whistler Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign project (Final Report) to Council. The Final Report is the outcome of a project conducted by municipal staff with Cardea Health Consulting Inc. from February to August 2024. The project was supported by a BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) grant under the Age-Friendly Communities Program.

Information Report Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The project resulted from two recommended actions from the [2021 Resort Municipality of Whistler \(RMOW\) Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan](#). This action plan presented 30 strategies and 71 actions for the Whistler community. The two actions that were addressed by this project are:

1. Explore existing emergency preparedness plans and how they meet older adults' needs; and
2. Consider a campaign to bring awareness to older adults about current emergency preparedness plans.

On July 18, 2023, through [Administrative Report No. 23-079](#), Council endorsed the submission of a grant application to the BCHC program to specifically address the above two actions. The BCHC program is funded by the Ministry of Health and aimed at supporting communities to prepare for an

aging population that can age actively in place. In September 2023, BCHC awarded the RMOW \$15,000 in grant funding and staff initiated the project in February 2024.

Analysis

The Final Report (attached as Appendix A) summarizes the needs assessment of emergency preparedness supports for older adults in Whistler and proposes an awareness campaign strategy based on the assessment results in four main sections:

- section one outlines the project context;
- section two describes the project methodology;
- section three presents the needs assessment findings; and
- section four details the awareness campaign strategy.

The Final Report also includes an appendix that contains the ‘Community Engagement What We Heard Summary’. The needs assessment key findings and awareness campaign strategy are discussed below in more detail.

Needs Assessment Key Findings

The assessment was focused on enhancing the RMOW’s Whistler Emergency Program, which aims to prepare the RMOW and the Whistler community for significant emergencies and disasters. The overall purpose of the needs assessment was to identify whether existing RMOW emergency plans, resources and practices include the direction required to meet the unique needs of older adults in emergency situations and consider recommendations to improve the age-friendliness of the RMOW’s approaches to emergency preparedness.

The needs assessment recognizes that emergency planning is focused across three phases: preparation, response and recovery. In the Final Report, the needs assessment findings are organized along these phases. For each phase, the discussion is then organized according to the following subsections:

- **Understanding Older Adult Needs:** These subsections identify the key older adult needs during the particular phase of the emergency. These needs were derived from peer-reviewed literature and non-peer-reviewed “best practice” content. These needs were also identified from the output of the community engagement.
- **Understanding the RMOW’s Existing Plans, Resources and Practices:** These subsections identify aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program relevant to the particular phase of the emergency.
- **Assessing the RMOW’s Existing Plans, Resources and Practices:** These subsections assess the current age-friendliness of Whistler’s emergency plans, resources and practices in consideration of key older adult needs for the particular phase of the emergency. The subsections also propose considerations that could be integrated into the RMOW’s ongoing emergency planning.

Table 1 summarizes the Final Report findings for understanding older adult needs for the three phases.

Table 1: Key Findings for Understanding Older Adult Needs by Phase

Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and outreach aimed at an older population are essential • Efforts to assist older adults in making their own emergency plans are critical • Resources should not all be digital • Understanding influences on disaster preparedness can make outreach efforts more targeted • Responses are better when older adults are involved in planning
Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in need should be identified in advance of the event • Multiple methods of communication are necessary to reach older adults who are not digitally literate • Accessible and supportive shelter spaces are vital • Older adults may depend more on electricity than other groups • Older adults tend to be more impacted by environmental issues such as air quality • Older adults are more vulnerable to disasters because of higher rates of chronic illness • Coordinating with local organizations improves response outcomes
Recovery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults should be included in recovery planning • Making sure older adults with medical needs have access to continuity of care • Restoration of older residents' homes should be a priority

Table 2 below summarizes the Final Report findings for understanding the RMOW's existing plans, resources and practices for the three phases. Where relevant, valuable non-RMOW resources are also listed.

Table 2: Key Findings for Understanding the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices by Phase

Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency plans • Emergency Planning Committee • Training and exercises • Public education, including workshops • RMOW website • Relationships with Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation • FireSmart Whistler • Non-RMOW resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Government of BC's emergency preparedness website ○ Canadian Red Cross' emergency preparedness and recovery website ○ United Way of BC's "Emergency Preparedness Guide: What Seniors Need to Know" ○ BC Centre for Disease Control and University of British Columbia 'do-it-yourself' air filters

Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Operations Centre • Whistler Alert and other communications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RMOW website ○ Social media ○ Radio and news ○ Public address systems ○ Door-to-door notification ○ Public information call centre ○ Posted notices ○ Media briefings ○ Standardized messaging • Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and other emergency plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flood Hazard Specific Guide ○ Sea to Sky Multimodal Evacuation Plan ○ Operational Evacuation Plan ○ Hazard, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessment ○ Heat Emergency Response Plan ○ Air Quality Advisory Response Plan ○ Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan ○ Whistler Community Wildfire Defence Plan ○ Volunteer teams ○ Paratransit services
Recovery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEMP • Community Recovery Plan • Non-RMOW resource: Canadian Red Cross' Psychological First Aid

Table 3 summarizes the key outputs of the assessment of the RMOW's existing plans, resources and practices presented in the Final Report by identifying considerations that could be integrated into the RMOW's ongoing emergency planning by phase.

Table 3: Considerations for Ongoing RMOW Emergency Planning by Phase

Preparation
<p>Emergency Preparedness Information and Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the awareness campaign to communicate key messages and promote existing resources • Create RMOW emergency webpage bookmarks on Whistler Public Library computer web browsers • Continue ongoing efforts to enhance awareness of wildfire risks, evacuation procedures and preparedness measures through workshops, campaigns and targeted messaging that is specific to older adults, newcomers and caregivers of those who have cognitive challenges • Promote emergency preparedness at community events

- Add more resources that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of older adults and encourage local organizations to promote information and resources

Workshops and Personalized Emergency Plans

- Encourage older adults specifically to create personalized emergency plans that outline their personal support networks, evacuation procedures, contact information and specific needs
- Increase awareness of workshop opportunities among older adults and local service providers who support older adults in the Sea-to-Sky corridor, by reaching out directly to local organizations, such as the Mature Action Community (MAC)
- Tailor workshop content to the needs of older adults and their caregivers
- Consider expanding workshop content (e.g., teaching older adults to create “do-it-yourself” low-cost air-purification systems to help manage poor air quality)

Emergency Planning Collaboration

- When RMOW staff capacity is available, and in consideration of other priorities, consider supporting the development of a neighbourhood resiliency program in which community members could learn how to effectively mobilize to support each other (and more vulnerable community members) during an emergency
- Further involve Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation in regional emergency planning efforts

Response

Whistler Alert and Other Communication Methods

- Reach out to older adult community to ensure this population is registered for Whistler Alert
- Consider increasing Whistler Alert registration by advertising through community organizations, including the Whistler Public Library and MAC
- Provide Whistler Alert registration information and notifications in multiple languages

Considering Older Adults Needs in Emergency Plans

- Ensure the plans reference the most recent demographic data and consider future additional support needs based on an aging population

Additional Emergency Support Needs *(to be considered by a local healthcare provider)*

- Implement and maintain a voluntary registry for older adults and their caregivers who may require additional assistance during emergencies
- Explore the ability to share the registry list with emergency responders as required during an emergency

Recovery

Recovery Plans

- Include older adult groups such as MAC as members of the community recovery committee to reflect the best practice of involving older adults in recovery planning
- Adjust the recovery resource questionnaire to include needs that are more specific to older adults

Supporting Mental Health

- Provide mental health first aid training to Emergency Support Services (ESS) Team members and/or to neighbourhood support groups
- Revise existing plans to include more robust information on mental health considerations in recovery efforts

Awareness Campaign Strategy

As noted above, one action in the 2021 Whistler Age-friendly Assessment and Action Plan is to launch an awareness campaign to increase emergency preparedness among older adults in Whistler. The need for an awareness campaign was further reiterated during the community consultation for this

project. In particular, the community consultation highlighted that older adult participants felt they lacked information about where to find further guidance on emergency preparedness, evacuation procedures and support during an emergency.

Based on the assessment results, the Final Report presents an awareness campaign strategy, that aims to reduce reliance on emergency services and promote a more resilient community overall. The awareness campaign strategy proposes targeted community information and events to empower the older adult population to take proactive steps toward their safety. The awareness campaign strategy has several components: objectives, target audience, key messages, slogan, best practice principles, proposed topics, marketing channels, indicators for evaluation, and approaches and actions to overcoming anticipated challenges. Details for these components are provided in section four of the Final Report, and the objectives, key messages and proposed slogan are highlighted below:

Objectives: By fostering a culture of preparedness and providing the tools and resources necessary for older adults to navigate emergencies, the campaign is aimed at reducing reliance on emergency services and promoting a more resilient community overall. In particular, the objectives of the awareness campaign are:

1. To increase the knowledge and awareness of older adults and their caregivers about the risks and possible complications of emergencies, including the use of clear and plain-language information about the resources that can help them prepare, respond and recover with a goal of self-reliance;
2. To encourage the participation of older adults and their caregivers in the planning and management process to create resources that are appropriate and sensitive to the needs of older adults; and
3. To encourage collaboration, coordination and leverage existing strengths and resources among the RMOW, community partners and community members in addressing the emergency preparedness needs of older adults.

Key Messages: Key messages are valuable to impart the awareness campaign strategy's overall objectives. The strategy's key messages focus on four themes:

1. Emergencies can happen anytime and anywhere and affect anyone, especially older adults with specific needs or health challenges;
2. Older adults and their caregivers can take proactive steps to prepare for emergencies, such as making an emergency plan, building an emergency kit, staying informed and getting involved;
3. Older adults and their caregivers are not alone in facing emergencies and can access various resources and supports from the municipality, its partners and the community; and
4. Older adults and their caregivers have valuable skills and experiences that can contribute to the community's emergency preparedness and response, and they can also share their knowledge and feedback with others.

Slogan: It was felt that it was valuable to develop a slogan for the awareness campaign strategy. After considering feedback from consultation participants, the Final Report proposes the following message as one option for the campaign's slogan: "Ready Today, Safe Tomorrow: Helping Prepare Older Adults for Emergencies".

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

[July 18, 2023: Administrative Report No. 23-079](#), Grant Application for 2023 Age-Friendly Communities Program and Application for BC Age-Friendly Community Recognition

[December 7, 2021: Information Report No. 21-134](#), Whistler Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan Project – Final Report

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.

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 Official Community Plan (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.

The OCP provides policy direction to support the project. Specifically, Policy 8.7.4.3 and Policy 8.10.2.1 in 'Chapter 8: Health, Safety and Community Wellbeing' respectively state that Whistler will:

- Provide public education opportunities that ensure citizens are prepared for, and can respond to, climate-related emergencies; and
- Encourage services, programs and facilities that support the health and social needs of seniors, with a focus on cultural and recreational opportunities and social programs tailored to the needs of Whistler's seniors.

Other relevant vision characteristics as well as goals, objectives and policies are identified in [Administrative Report No. 23-079](#).

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The consulting services for this project were 100 per cent covered by the BCHC grant. The existing Planning Department budget provided for the engagement and staff resources associated with the project.

The Final Report presents emergency planning considerations for older adults and an awareness campaign strategy that may be integrated into the RMOW's ongoing emergency planning initiatives and associated budget.

LÍŁWAT 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 unceded land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

The Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre (SLCC) is a member of the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee (AIC). Unfortunately, there was no SLCC representation at the June 5, 2024 AIC meeting where this project was discussed.

In understanding the RMOW's existing plans, resources and practices in the preparedness phase, the Final Report notes that the RMOW has existing relationships with Squamish People and Lílwat People that are important in emergency preparedness. When discussing future emergency planning collaboration opportunities that may be considered, the Final Report also cites further involving Lílwat People and Squamish People in regional emergency planning efforts.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

A key project objective was to consult the community in a meaningful and inclusive manner. The engagement process consisted of focus groups and interviews with older adults and service providers and a meeting with the AIC. These consultation activities are discussed further below. In addition, the Final Report will be shared directly with engagement participants and posted on the RMOW's website so that it may be shared broadly with the Whistler community.

Information gleaned from the community engagement process was used to inform the Final Report. Key community engagement findings are presented through-out the Final Report in the purple text boxes labeled "What We Heard". A complete summary of the community engagement is included as Appendix A in the Final Report.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Two focus groups were held in Whistler on May 30, 2024. The first focus group was targeted towards older adults and their caregivers, while the second was for service providers. Organizations and interested older adults who could not attend the focus group were offered an alternative interview at a day and time of their convenience. In total, 14 community members attended the Older Adult Focus

Group and one participated in an interview. The following five organizations participated in either the Service Providers Focus Group or an interview: Vancouver Coastal Health (Community Services and Older Adult Mental Health and Addiction departments), Sea to Sky Better at Home, Whistler Community Services Society and the RMOW Protective Services department.

Questions in the consultation were designed to understand the current state of preparedness in the community. These consultations also focused on understanding the information sources and resources participants relied on for emergency preparedness and what additional information could help Whistler's older adults prepare for and respond safely to an emergency. Data was collected using questions based on the Closing the Gaps document produced by the Canadian Red Cross and National Institute on Ageing.

The major themes that emerged from the engagement with older adults/caregivers included wildfires, communication and information, transportation, community and preparedness, logistics, plans and preparations, and other concerns and comments. The major themes that emerged from the engagement with service providers included planning for weather events versus wildfire evacuation, communication and dissemination of information, emergency preparedness and education, collaboration and community involvement, cultural and diversity considerations, psychological and mental health support, vulnerability and clients, resource sharing and confidentiality issues, self-sustainability and resilience, and specific needs during emergencies. These themes are discussed further in Appendix A to the Final Report.

AIC Meeting

The AIC was engaged at the meeting on June 5, 2024. At the meeting, the AIC was presented with an overview of the project purpose, context and initial engagement findings from the focus groups and interviews. AIC members then provided feedback on the presented information. The AIC's comments are presented in Appendix A to the Final Report.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults in Whistler: Assessment and Awareness Campaign Strategy

SUMMARY

The purpose of this Information Report is to present the Final Report to Council. The Final Report is the outcome of the project conducted by Cardea Health Consulting Inc. with support from municipal staff from February to August 2024. It identifies the results of the needs assessment and provides general recommendations for future RMOW emergency planning work. It also presents an awareness campaign strategy. The Final Report will be submitted to BCHC by RMOW staff.

SIGN-OFFS

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