

## Summary

**Dear Mayor and Council: The current zoning bylaw ("ZONING AND PARKING BYLAW NO. 303, 2015") provides significant financial and quality of life benefits to car owners by exempting car garages from the gross floor area calculation of their "principal building". This is directly in conflict with the first goal of Whistler's "Climate Action Big Moves Strategy" which is "Move Beyond the Car". Storage areas suitable only for bicycles and e-bicycles do not benefit from the same exemption. Our ask is for council to extend the exemption to storage areas for bicycles, e-bikes, and other items including recreational equipment, storage, tools, etc.**

Dear Mayor and Council,

Firstly, we want to be 100% transparent in our personal goal for this letter: we are trying to put a roof over our deck. However, our building permit is in limbo because the previous owners of our relatively modest cabin/house in Alpine Meadows built a storage area without obtaining a permit. The storage area has a bare concrete floor and no plumbing. It is primarily used to store bicycles, e-bikes, and other recreational equipment. The unpermitted space puts our cabin over our gross floor area (GFA) allotment for our current zoning. We want to legitimize the storage area so we can build our roof and remove any barriers to obtaining building permits in the future if we choose to pursue one. The only option that has been presented to us by the municipality is to demolish the storage area. This is not a reasonable option for us and our tenants.

## Why the Roof

- 1) Currently, snow and ice dump from our roof onto the deck. We want to eliminate the winter risk of injury or even death to persons. Because of the volume, the snow and ice dumped on the deck currently must be removed by hand increasing the risk of an accident. We do not think snow guards are an option, nor would they satisfy our other goals of our project outlined below.
- 2) We wish to increase the summer shade available to use. We do not have air conditioning.
- 3) It will likely increase our property's tolerance to wildfire.
- 4) And, of course, it will increase the usability of the space.

## The Storage Space

In the process of trying to get our roof built and then the need to have our storage area legitimized, we became aware that garages do not count against a building's GFA calculation. We then wondered why our storage area would not be considered a garage. After discussion with our builder, it seems only *car garages* do not count against your GFA.

Our storage area has a bare concrete floor and is not plumbed. However, the door is not big enough to drive a car through. It is also not likely practical to create “highway access” *for a car* to the storage area. However, the space is maybe big enough to fit a single small car.

We share the space with our tenants. They have a one-bedroom suite in our cabin. Use of the storage area has been a key selling point to tenants over the years.

The storage area ***is used like any car garage in Whistler***, except that you can’t get a car in there. ***There are two e-bikes and four regular bikes permanently stored in it. When we and/or our tenants have guests, there can easily be a total of ten bikes in there.*** Of course, there are also cabinets, shelves, a workbench, random recreational gear, tools, etc. in it. But, again, none of this is unlike a typical car garage in Whistler.

In the summer, we estimate that our tenants use their e-bikes for 70 or 80% of their trips in Whistler. We typically run, ride or hike straight from our cabin in the summer without ever getting in our car once we are here.

#### Whistler's Climate Action Strategy

We are sure you know what this is, however, we kindly remind you that the first goal is "Move Beyond the Car".

#### The Bylaw

The current Zoning and Parking bylaw clearly excludes *garages* from the GFA calculation. However, garages are not well defined. It also appears that the interpretation currently assumed by the RMOW is that a garage is uniquely for a motor vehicles and an e-bike is not one. If we bought a motorcycle and put that in there, would it be a garage? Unclear at the time of sending this email.

It has also come to our attention that there is an exclusion (up to 8 m<sup>2</sup>) for bike storage for multi-family dwellings, but not duplexes. For the record, 8 m<sup>2</sup> is a very small area. Could we fit 10 bikes in 8 m<sup>2</sup>? Maybe if you stacked them like pancakes or didn’t need to use half of them. Any provision that is made should provide significantly more space.

Separately, a garage for bicycles and e-bikes does not require a slab as thick as one required to support a 7,500 lb SUV. Similarly, the “highway access” requirements can be significantly relaxed for a bicycle and/or e-bike storage area. Changes to the bylaws should recognize these relaxed needs.

#### Our Options

A) If we were to spend an extra million or even more on our project, we could completely redesign our cabin to maintain the living area for us and our tenants, but also have a new two or even three-car garage. Then we could store our e-bikes and bicycles, etc., and our Porsches in our new, huge garage! (For the record, we drive a 15-year-old Suzuki and a nearly 20-year-old Audi... We were just joking about the Porsches!)

B) Pursue a zoning change. Because we are in a land strata this would be extremely challenging.

C) Demolish the storage area. This would have a significant quality of life impact on us and our tenants, and on the value of our home.

D) Sue the previous owners and move. The existence of the unpermitted space built by the previous owners is now documented on our file with the municipality. This is arguably already affecting the value of our property.

E) Pursue a change to the unfair and, frankly, hypocritical bylaw. This option not only helps us, but other owners in a similar situation. It also makes the bylaw considerably more consistent with Whistler's climate action strategy.

Since you have received this letter, we are obviously pursuing option E at this time.

### Conclusions

I) The current bylaw provides a huge financial benefit to homeowners who have a garage by effectively giving them extra GFA which has and will likely continue to increase the value of their property.

II) The current provides significant space/quality of life benefits to homeowners who have a garage.

III) There are no such benefits to homeowners that have effectively a garage that is only for bicycles and e-bikes.

IV) The current bylaw encourages the construction of large garages for two or even more cars.

V) There is no such incentive for even small spaces (for single family homes) for "just" bicycles and e-bikes.

VI) For the reasons above, the current bylaw is at best inconsistent with Whistler's stated Climate Action Strategy, but probably closer to hypocritical.

### Other Considerations

Our project has already been significantly delayed because the municipality erroneously wiped off the books the zoning under which our strata was initially developed. This issue has been addressed by council (many thanks!!!), but only very recently and this has only allowed us to find out that we are definitively blocked by the GFA issue described above.

### Our Ask

***Our ask is to extend the exemption for car garages from the GFA calculation for principal buildings to include storage areas suitable for bicycles and e-bicycles. And, of course, we***

**would like to see this change happen in a timely way. E.g. in the first half of 2025, so we can move forward with our project in time for winter 2025/26.**

Note that a change to the bylaw here might paint council members as being serious about encouraging transportation by bike and e-bike!

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Thank you for your time on this subject. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or require any clarification to the above.

Finally, we have copied David Girard at Whistler Builder/Peak Ventures and Adam Pocock in the planning department at the RMOW on this message.

Regards,

Bill Gordon and Christina Poon

Whistler and Vancouver, BC

