



**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

4325 Blackcomb Way TEL 604 932 5535  
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5 TF 1 866 932 5535  
whistler.ca FAX 604 935 8109

## STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** February 25, 2025 **REPORT:** 25-011  
**FROM:** Finance **FILE:** 3900-20-2472  
**SUBJECT:** FIVE-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN 2024 – 2028 AMENDMENT BYLAW (EV CHARGERS AND OPERATIONS) NO. 2472, 2025

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Corporate Services and Public Safety and the Chief Financial Officer be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Council consider giving first, second and third readings to the “Five-Year Financial Plan 2024 – 2028 Amendment Bylaw (EV Chargers and Operations) No. 2472, 2025”

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks consideration of the first three readings of the “Five-Year Financial Plan 2024-2028 Amendment Bylaw (EV Chargers and Operations) No. 2472, 2025” (Amendment Bylaw), a bylaw to amend the “Five-Year Financial Plan 2024-2028 Bylaw No. 2424, 2024” (Financial Plan) for the purposes discussed below.

Information Report  Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

The purpose of this Amendment Bylaw is to update the Resort Municipality of Whistler’s (RMOW) Financial Plan to include current expectations around both revenues and expenditures within the General Fund, and to resize the EV chargers project to properly reflect expectations around spending for the year. On Schedule B, changes related to EV chargers serve to increase expected spending by \$275,000. This change is matched by an increase in transfer from the General Capital Reserve of the same amount.

The total impact of changes to operating expectations on Schedule A of the Financial Plan is an increase in operating expenditures of \$2.5Mm, increases to non-tax revenues of \$0.9Mm and a decrease to the General Capital Reserve contribution of \$1.6Mm. This reduction in planned reserve contribution is being made while interest income (income earned by the reserve itself) is meaningfully higher than expected. This helps to dull the effect of the lower budgeted contribution, by approximately

\$0.5Mm. These two effects, taken together, mean that the net impact of the reserve from changes to operations budget is **\$1.1Mm**.

The RMOW budget is large and complex. Dozens of domain experts within the organization are engaged in developing the budget; they are in effect translating the work they are asked to do for the community into dollars and cents. This process generally takes place in the period late summer through early fall. After consulting with the community and Council, the budget is finalized early in the fiscal year.

From that point onward, many things can change, and look different than what the budget assumed, both in the operating environment (things like inflation, economic circumstances including those in the local economy) and within the organization itself. Delivering the work has long been the top priority of the organization; this looks like the goal of maintaining service levels and keeping up with care and maintenance activities. In addition to this, the RMOW has undertaken a multi-year effort to remove conservative assumptions from the budget, while keeping operations relatively stable. The net result of this approach is that individual line items within the budget are now free from contingency amounts, or allocations for expected inflation and budgets are very tightly matched with previous year spending. This approach reduces the size of the required tax requisition (a top priority for Council, while still targeting stable service levels) but also creates a situation where delivering the services within the confines of the budgeted amounts becomes more difficult and changes in the operating environment become more consequential to outcomes.

### **Analysis**

Although the financial records for RMOW 2024 operations are not yet finalized, evidence of a net operating deficit for the year has come to light. A reasonable level of confidence exists today around the likely size of this deficit. It is unlikely that any changes yet to come to the financial information will meaningfully change the deficit size from what is currently understood. Because of this and based on the RMOW's commitment to surface important financial information promptly (this includes deviations from the budget), an amendment to the Financial Plan is being proposed.

Three specific expenditures areas are noted below, where the operating variance is most impactful and where changes are proposed to be made to the Financial Plan. These are not the only areas in which RMOW operations have been affected by current operating conditions. There is, in fact, evidence of cost pressures across the entire organization. A greater level of service is being achieved than in prior years, or even relative to the Financial Plan. Staffing has become easier, for the RMOW and for RMOW contractors including the RCMP and BC Transit. This return to full staffing is a new condition and one that improves output (whether that's bus service or municipal service) but also costs more money than a partial-staffing model does.

### **Proposed Amendments to Schedule A**

Proposed amendments to be reflected in Schedule A of the Financial Plan are described and outlined below.

#### **Increased Expenditures**

##### **1. RCMP Expenses: \$700k**

The planned RCMP budget for 2024 was premised on several assumptions provided by Provincial 'E' Division inputs to contract communities and a commitment by staff to avoid overbudgeting RMOW contract costs. While the RCMP fiscal year is not aligned with the RMOW fiscal, recent

RCMP Q3 invoicing provides sufficient insights to require an amendment to the RMOW 2024 budgets. Key changes in the 2024 RCMP net costs are as follows:

- a) Changes to the provincial Traffic Fine Grant calculation method will result in a \$132k reduction in grant revenues.
- b) Announced changes to the cost share methodology for Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) access will result in an increase of approximately \$50k annually.
- c) A higher than anticipated labour settlement between the Federal Treasury Board and the National Police Federation has increased collective 'per resource' costs for 2024 by approximately \$300k.
- d) Internal accounting of the 2023/2024 year-end RCMP reconciliation was posted in 2024 (rather than 2023) resulting in increased 2024 costs of \$160k (with a consequent reduction in 2023 expenses).
- e) Other increases in computer system costs and upgrades as well as access to DNA analysis services increased RCMP costs in 2024 by approximately \$50k versus planned budgets.

For these reasons, this amendment proposes a net change in the 2024 RCMP operating budget of + \$700k.

## **2. Transit & Transportation Planning Expenses: \$500k**

The cost of the BC Transit contract in the final four months of the year exceeded amounts that were expected at the time of the September 2024 budget amendment by approximately \$350k. The expenses were tracking on target through the June invoicing period for BC Transit, but overages were identified in the second half of the year. These second-half invoices were received following the September budget amendment. The most significant reasons for the increases in expenditure over budget were as follows:

- a) BC Transit was successful in hiring nearly 100 per cent of drivers after several years (post-Covid) of reduced driver numbers and therefore reduced service.
- b) Since the Spring service change in April 2024, transit has delivered an average of 100 per cent of the budgeted service hours. This includes an approved service hour increase of 10 per cent over the 2023 levels as well as some reallocation of winter weekend service hours to late night Route 10 buses.
- c) In the last quarter, BC Transit finalized pay negotiations with their operators and operator rates increased.

The RMOW's existing approach to budgeting BC Transit expenditures can be made more robust. Information from the Annual Operating Agreement can be incorporated before invoices arrive, and a cost inflator estimate applied in addition to consideration for system expansion (the +10 per cent noted above, that was captured in the September budget amendment). A collaborative approach and a learning mindset have already had positive effects on revenue forecasting. Revenue variance is down meaningfully comparing 2024 to 2023 and prior years. Applying the same change to practices on the expense side is expected to yield similarly helpful results (smaller expenditure variances going forward).

The expectation is that this will improve outcomes in future years. For 2024 however, the BC Transit portion of transit system costs requires ~\$350k more funding than was expected. In addition, another \$150k in added expenditure for Transit and Transportation Planning more broadly is required, bringing the total to \$500k.

### 3. Improved Staff Recruitment, Retention and Utilization: \$1.3Mm

In a typical year, turnover in RMOW staffing results in salary costs that are below what would be required if the organization was fully staffed for all twelve months of the year. This happens because when a role is vacated, it typically takes time to identify and hire a new person into that role. During this window, the wages associated with the role are not paid. The payroll budget for the organization is in most years, well below what the full-staffing, full-12-months approach would suggest would be the case. These are in essence vacancy savings.

When the budget is set, and the tax requisition calculated, the salary costs reflective of a less-than-full staff team forms part of the calculation. Said differently, there is less money collected from the community in any given year than would be necessary if full staffing were achieved.

In 2024, to deliver on planned projects and initiatives even when faced with a team vacancy, managers were, looking for ways to deploy salary funds into casual, contract, or temporary staff when possible. This practice meant that more municipal work was being done than would otherwise have been the case and reflects an improvement in overall work completion. This approach was key to achieving some deliverables that otherwise would have taken shape more slowly. Examples include:

- a) Improved HR throughput (via added administrative support to the recruiting team in HR),
- b) More community-funded FireSmart work,
- c) Committees of Council restructure work and Code of Conduct,
- d) Additional training and support for Building Department staff.

The net effect in this shift in focus to improved project and task completion, was that the entire payroll budget, the entire allocation of planned working hours, was put to work during the year. Better outcomes for the community resulted, but the cost of this additional work had not been matched with incoming revenue sources (taxes, etc.) at the time the budget was set. Additionally, the cost of some municipal benefits increased more than expected, select parity framework benchmark adjustments, and severance effects contributed to higher-than-expected staffing costs. The value of this payroll mismatch for the full year is \$1.3Mm.

### Summary of Increased Expenditures

In total, expenditures for the RMOW in 2024 were \$2.5Mm higher than what was budgeted. \$700k for RCMP, \$500k for Transit, and \$1.3Mm in direct staffing expense.

### Offsetting Revenues and Contributions

As Council is aware, the operating budget of the municipality must always be in balance. This is true when the budget is first established for a given operating year (typically in January) and is true every time the budget is amended as the year goes on. Any time expenditures are increased (as is the case here) there must be a combination of new offsetting revenue and/or reductions in other expenditures/contributions that equal the added expenditure amount. The \$2.5Mm in expenditures identified above must be matched with new revenues and/or reduced expenditures elsewhere.

Increases to budgeted revenues and decreases to expenditures that are proposed to accompany the expenditure increases are listed below.

### **1. Contributions to Transit from Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) and Community Transportation Initiative Fund (CTIF): \$0.6Mm**

At the same time that staff has worked to better understand our transit budget overage, additional sources of funding for transit have been identified, including an additional \$150k from RMI funding, which has already been approved by the Province, and ~\$470k from the CTIF. In 2023, funding from the CTIF to Transit was reduced by this amount, on the basis that 2023 transit fare revenue was significantly higher than budgeted. This means that across the two years 2023 - 2024 CTIF funding remains as expected.

### **2. Meadow Park Sports Centre (MPSC) Revenues: \$0.3Mm**

MPSC revenue was up 12 per cent in 2024 compared to 2023. Visitation continues to rise, and the changes to fees implemented for 2024 also helped to increase revenues. Revenues are proposed to increase by \$250k.

### **3. General Capital Reserve contribution: \$1.6Mm**

Where higher than budgeted revenues and reductions to other operating expenditures are insufficient to offset a deficit, capital reserve contributions generally serve as a last-resort type of funding to balance the budget. In practice, this is the area where cuts occur, to make room for operating spending added in-year. While it can feel like an easy decision to cut these contributions, there are real costs associated with doing so, and this approach often leads to tax increases in future years.

In this case, the reduction in planned reserve contribution is being made at the same time that interest income (income earned by the reserve itself) is meaningfully higher than expected. This helps to dull the effect of the lower budgeted contribution, by approximately \$0.5Mm. These two effects, taken together, mean that the net impact of the reserve from changes to operations budget is \$1.1Mm.

Staff are mindful of finding ways to minimize this unplanned reduction to reserve balances (see learnings and changes section below) and are actively working on increasing the sophistication with in-year budget tracking and revenue forecasting. Improving skills and tools will enable adjustments to be made to operations and projects more quickly to minimize end of year surprises.

In total, operating expenditures were \$2.5Mm larger than the current Financial Plan suggests, and revenues \$0.9Mm higher. These two changes (larger allocation to expenditures and revenues) are being proposed, alongside a \$1.6mm reduction to the General Capital Reserve contribution. As noted, higher than planned interest income (\$0.5M) reduces the impact to the General Capital Reserve to \$1.1M. This outcome is the result of both changes in the operating environment (inflation) and decisions actively taken by the RMOW to improve work output and project completions (as noted above), relative to the recent past. Learnings related to this outcome, and changes planned for the organization, are detailed under the subheading Learning and Adjustments below.

### **Proposed Amendment to Schedule B**

One proposed amendment to be reflected in Schedule B of the Financial Plan is outlined below.

#### **EV Chargers Project**

The purpose of this project is to install EV chargers in day skier lot 4, other RMOW-owned parking areas, and street-side parking. 73.3 per cent of the value of the work is to be grant funded. The

grant funding for this project comes from the Province and is for the benefit of all Sea to Sky Communities (Squamish, Pemberton, Lil'wat First Nation, and Whistler). Total maximum value of the grant is \$2.2Mm with up to \$1.4Mm being for chargers installed in Whistler specifically.

At the time the 2024 budget was developed, it was expected that for the 2024 fiscal year, there would be more grant revenue flowing into the organization in support of this work, than spending that would be incurred.

Reimbursement amounts for fiscal year 2024 have been similar to annual spending amounts, and due to some dislocation between when work was completed and when the grant funding was received, the RMOW's expenditure for the work for the year is now expected to be \$90k, rather than the -\$180k rebate originally budgeted. As such, the budget for this project needs to be increased by \$270k. Funding for the work comes from the General Capital Fund. Changes to both expenditures and contribution from reserve can be seen in Schedule B.

For the life of this project total spending (in Whistler) is expected to be \$1.9Mm with total grant revenues of \$1.4Mm, for a net municipal cost over the four-year project of \$0.5Mm.

### **Learning and Adjustments**

Something important to note about the 2024 operating deficit is that the entire amount of it only became visible in the fourth quarter. Through to September 30, 2024 there was a small operating surplus. The question of how these operating outcomes could become visible only in the last three months of the year, is one that staff continue to work to understand. Already, some changes have been identified that may help reduce the quarter-to-quarter variability in outcomes and drive better/more dynamic decision-making as the year progresses. These already include:

- a) Changes already discussed to how large cost items like RCMP and BC Transit, are budgeted
- b) Changes to how payroll is budgeted in the future to account for lower vacancy rate now apparent in the organization.
- c) Proactive identification of work that can be removed from workplans. This will become important as managers will increasingly be asked to absorb unexpected costs into their existing budget, by cutting some things to keep costs within budgeted amounts. This will be implemented through delivering improved tools and processes to monitor actual costs against budgeted amounts more frequently (monthly), so that adjustments to spending can be made in year wherever possible.
- d) Documentation of vulnerabilities in the 2025 budget assumptions and review and implementation of mitigation measures where available.

It must also be noted that the reduced reserve contribution in 2024 must ultimately be replaced. As such, in addition to the already-planned increases to contributions that have been built into the five-year tax increase outlook of 8 – 9 per cent, shifts to an 8.5 - 9.5 per cent window, or some other adjustments may be required. For now, these proposed changes to the financial plan bring the RMOW budget back into balance and satisfy the organization's obligations under the *Community Charter*.



## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Financial Plan was adopted on [January 23, 2024](#).

### 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.

Chapter 6 of the OCP addresses Economic Viability and includes the statement: "The municipality is committed to being fiscally responsible and at the same time must continue to invest in infrastructure, amenities and services, which are integral to the authentic Whistler Mountain experience."

The above proposed changes to the Financial Plan aim to deliver three specific investments in a fiscally responsible fashion and consider changing circumstances. Amendments to the Financial Plan are a key mechanism by which the RMOW ensures that the community remains current on the state of financial affairs, in a transparent fashion.

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## BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The preparation of the Financial Plan and any amendments thereto are entirely funded from within existing Finance Department operating budgets, and other budget considerations are outlined in the sections above.

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## LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍłwat People, known in their language as *L'íl'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform     Consult     Involve     Collaborate     Empower

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## REFERENCES

"Five-Year Financial Plan 2025-2029 Amendment Bylaw (EV Chargers and Operations) No. 2465, 2025" (Included in Council Package)

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## SUMMARY

The Financial Plan sets out the proposed revenues, expenditures and transfers for the years 2024 through 2028. It must be balanced. Proposed are some changes to the 2024 – 2028 Financial Plan that consider actual outcomes for the year (revenues and expenditures) and propose a path by which these can again be brought into balance (reduced reserve contributions). In every year, the operating environment inevitably looks different than what was expected at the time the budget was set. The RMOW's job in these cases is to be responsive to changes and make the best decisions for the community given the new context. This environmental shift and the administrative response is at the heart of these changes, and the reason for the late Financial Plan adjustment. The RMOW commits to continue to build responsiveness and dynamic decision-making into the organization and has outlined some immediate planned changes above.

The proposed changes also include an adjustment to planned 2024 spending for an ongoing EV chargers project.

Consistent with the *Community Charter*, the Financial Plan guides all municipal operating and capital spending across the organization. This Amendment Bylaw is being presented to Council for consideration of the first three readings.

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**SIGN-OFFS**

**Written by:**

Carlee Price,  
Chief Financial Officer

**Reviewed by:**

Ted Battiston,  
General Manager of Corporate Services and  
Public Safety

Virginia Cullen,  
Chief Administrative Officer