

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

4325 Blackcomb Way
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5
whistler.ca

TEL 604 932 5535
TF 1 866 932 5535
FAX 604 935 8109

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: July 8, 2025
FROM: Infrastructure Services
SUBJECT: WHISTLER MUNICIPAL HELIPORT BYLAW NO. 2490, 2025

REPORT: 25-056
FILE: 3900-20-2490

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Infrastructure Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council consider giving first, second and third readings to “Whistler Municipal Heliport Bylaw No. 2490, 2025”.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the “Whistler Municipal Heliport Bylaw No. 2490, 2025” (Bylaw) for Council’s consideration of first three readings. The Bylaw proposes to enable a stronger cost-recovery and streamlined management of the Whistler Municipal Heliport (Heliport) operations. The report also serves to inform Council and the public about recent developments at the Heliport, summarizing its history and noting that, after 30 years under Whistler Heliport Society (WHS) oversight, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) has resumed management of the facility.

☐ Information Report ☒ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The current Heliport arose from a rapid increase in helicopter traffic in the mid-1980s. Several informal landing spots emerged throughout Whistler, with some close to the Village and residential neighbourhoods. The resulting noise and safety complaints prompted the RMOW to pursue a single, purpose-built heliport where helicopter operations could be concentrated and properly regulated.

In 1992, the RMOW finalized a 30-year lease from the provincial government for land just north of Green Lake. Local operators created the WHS, a non-profit society made up of representatives from the helicopter companies leasing space at the Heliport, which took on responsibility for day-to-day management. Under the arrangement, the RMOW holds the head lease with the province and then signed a lease with the WHS for overall management of the site, and WHS in turn sub-leased individual lease areas to approved companies that provided helicopter services.

Construction of the Heliport concluded in 1991. The finished facility consisted of a public central touchdown pad surrounded by five lease areas, each assigned to one of the five principal helicopter services companies then active in Whistler. Approximately \$3Mm in federal and provincial funding covered most of the capital cost, securing the Heliport's status as a community asset.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the Heliport supported tourism flights, heli-ski operations, industrial lifts and medical evacuations. In 2009 a sixth lease area was added so the Canadian Armed Forces could stage security flights during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games; that area later became available for lease.

By 2023 the volunteer-run WHS determined it could no longer manage the facility effectively. It requested that the RMOW resume direct oversight and the WHS no longer participates in daily operations. The RMOW has been concurrently seeking a renewal of the head lease from the province (application submitted in spring 2022) which is now operating on a month-to-month basis until the province grants a new arrangement.

The Heliport currently has three long-term leaseholders and maintains a large itinerant pad for visiting and emergency aircraft. Following a public request for proposal, the RMOW entered into a Management Services Agreement in February 2025 with an external Heliport Management Services Contractor (Contractor) to oversee day-to-day operations. The Contractor is responsible for collecting and remitting itinerant landing fees, performing routine maintenance, ensuring ongoing conformity with *Transport Canada Standard 325*, preparing cost estimates for capital upgrades, liaising with federal regulators and submitting detailed monthly and annual reports to the RMOW.

Analysis

As a result of the RMOW resuming direct management of the Heliport, the itinerant landing fees paid by visiting (non-tenant) helicopters using the public-use pad will become municipal revenue, rather than being retained by the WHS, as was previously the case. Under the *Community Charter*, a municipality may only collect and retain fees if they are authorized by bylaw. As such, staff are bringing forward the Bylaw to formally enable the collection of these fees by the RMOW.

The itinerant fees will be collected on site by the Contractor and remitted to the RMOW, creating a new revenue stream that is separate from, and in addition to, the ground-lease rent already paid by the three resident operators.

To ensure the fee structure is fair and supports cost recovery, staff reviewed itinerant landing fees at other municipal heliports and small regional airports across British Columbia. The proposed rates are set out in Schedule A of the Bylaw. The Bylaw fees are approximately double the previous fees charged by the WHS. Staff note that these fees had not been increased in many years. The proposed fees reflect both the true cost of maintaining the Heliport and the need to align with market norms. Adoption of the Bylaw is expected to generate approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000 in annual gross revenue, supporting the Heliport's long-term financial sustainability and operation.

The Bylaw also sets out operational regulations pertaining to safety requirements, helicopter parking, night operations and regulatory compliance.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Council decisions in the early 1990s established the Heliport and approved its long-term management by the WHS. Aside from a 2020 report to Council January 21, 2020: [Administrative Report No. 20-008](#) “Amending Survey Plan of the Heliport Lease”, supporting a survey plan amendment to facilitate infrastructure upgrades by one of the leaseholders, there have been few formal updates to Council, as the Heliport was managed independently by the WHS for over 30 years.

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.

This report supports the objectives of the OCP by reinforcing the RMOW’s continued role in overseeing the Heliport operations and ensuring helicopter activity remains centralized. Specifically, it aligns with:

11.6.1.4 Policy: Maintain ownership/leasehold of the Municipal Heliport and continue to work with the Whistler Heliport Society to concentrate helicopter activity at this location, as a means of protecting the community from noise and other helicopter traffic impacts.

11.7.1.2 Policy: Discourage further commercial and private helicopter or aircraft facilities within the developed areas of Whistler, particularly Whistler Village and Whistler Creek.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW’s goal is for revenue generated through Heliport operations, including itinerant landing fees and leaseholder agreements, to offset the costs of managing and maintaining the facility.

LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍłwat 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 planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☒ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

The Heliport is an existing municipal asset with no proposed change in use, zoning, or service level, so the appropriate level of engagement is to inform the public about its management and funding. A webpage on whistler.ca/heliport is being created to provide information to the public about the Heliport and the itinerant fees.

REFERENCES

"Whistler Municipal Heliport Bylaw No. 2490, 2025" (included in the Council package)

SUMMARY

This report brings forward "Whistler Municipal Heliport Bylaw No. 2490, 2025" for Council's consideration. The Bylaw formalizes the RMOW's authority to collect itinerant landing fees at the Heliport, now that the RMOW has resumed direct oversight of the facility. The report also provides background on the Heliport's establishment, its function as a community asset and the transition to a municipally managed model after more than 30 years of operation under a non-profit society. With the lease from the province under renewal and a new Management Services Agreement in place, the RMOW is working to ensure the Heliport remains available for tourism, emergency services, and essential transportation needs, while ensuring cost recovery.

SIGN-OFFS

Written by:

Erin Marriner,
Legislative Services Special Projects

Reviewed by:

Pauline Lysaght
Manager of Legislative Services/ Corporate
Officer

James Hallisey,
General Manager of Infrastructure Services

Virginia Cullen,
Chief Administrative Officer