

WHISTLER

REPORT INFORMATION REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: September 15, 2020

REPORT: 20-083

FROM: Chief Administrator's Office

FILE: 0519

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS INSIGHTS AND COVID RECOVERY UPDATE

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Officer be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive Information Report No. 20-083 regarding Community Conversations Insights and COVID Recovery Update.

REFERENCES

Appendix "A" – Recovery Work Diagram

Appendix "B" – Community Conversation Participant Comment Themes

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to provide an update and overview for several aspects of the Resort Municipality of Whistler's (RMOW) work to engage and facilitate community-wide discussions and initiatives toward strategic response and recovery planning associated with COVID-19. Collaborative planning and action will be one of the ways the community works together to move through this unprecedented time in our community's history.

DISCUSSION

Background

COVID-19 response

In mid-March 2020 a variety of national and provincial measures were taken in Canada in reaction to the COVID-19 international pandemic. On March 16, the Prime Minister recommended all Canadians stay home as much as possible, the next day Provincial Medical Health Officer (PHO) declared a public health emergency and on March 18 the Province declared a state of emergency that is still in place making it the longest in British Columbia's history.

The RMOW Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated on March 15, 2020 to coordinate the organization's response to COVID-19 and the closure of all non-essential buildings and facilities was announced on March 16, followed by parks and playgrounds March 22. The RMOW made other changes to its operating structure to maintain most municipal services to support the community in those early stages and to eventually move toward the step-wise re-introduction of services starting in

May. Organizations and businesses across the community have adjusted their activities to respond to the pandemic and put into place recovery and reopening plans that meet provincial safety protocols.

The Premier of British Columbia launched the 4-phased [BC Re-Start Plan](#) on May 6. At a high level the phases are as follows:

Phase 1 – Essential services operating during COVID-19

Phase 2 – Under enhanced protocols, the restoration of sectors such as retail, salon, restaurants, offices galleries, libraries, parks, beaches.

Phase 3 – Under enhanced protocols, the restoration sectors such as hotels and resorts, more parks, film industry, select entertainment and education.

Phase 4 – Conditional on at least one of wide vaccination, community immunity or broad successful treatments the restoration of sectors including conventions, live audience professional sports and concerts.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted most aspects of everyday life across the whole community and across the globe. Extensive disruptions to the regular operations of the municipality and huge impacts to the business community have resulted in unprecedented economic times and associated social impacts. While tourism has recovered to a certain level, it is far from business as usual and this is not expected to change in the near future. The planning context that existed earlier this year has changed considerably, and plans at the municipality and across the community are adapting to adjust to consider the realities of this new environment and uncertain future.

Recovery Work

Whistler is managing through unprecedented times with no pre-existing road map to guide the way and the RMOW has taken a leadership role in facilitating important discussions and connections amongst the community and community leaders.

From June through August 2020 several activities have taken place including four Community Conversations virtual town hall meetings and associated online engagement, as well as the formation of two working groups, the Whistler Recovery Working Group and the Social Services Working Group.

See Appendix A for a graphic overview of several of the areas of work underway toward recovery.

Community Conversations

Throughout July 2020, Whistler community members were invited to join in a series of Community Conversations July 14, 16, 20 and 23 on Zoom in a new type of engagement format designed to help understand individual and shared experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic and look forward to steps toward recovery.

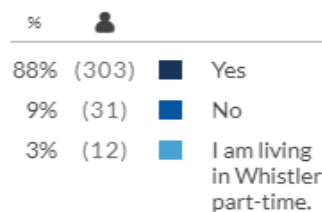
The four events focussed on the four characteristics of Whistler's shared Vision: Sense of Place, Environment, Tourism-based Economy and Community. Mayor Jack Crompton and CAO Ginny Cullen hosted the conversations along with a guest community member for each characteristic including Heather Paul, Mike Douglas, Danielle Kristmanson and Chris Wrightson.

Several formats and tools were used to gather input to help inform decision-making going forward. Participants were guided into breakout rooms within Zoom to discuss specific questions and feedback was captured on a virtual white board software Mural. During the breakout groups, participants were made to have conversations with people they may not have otherwise helping to surface different ideas and themes. Participants also had the opportunity to verbally report out with "a-ha" moments. In

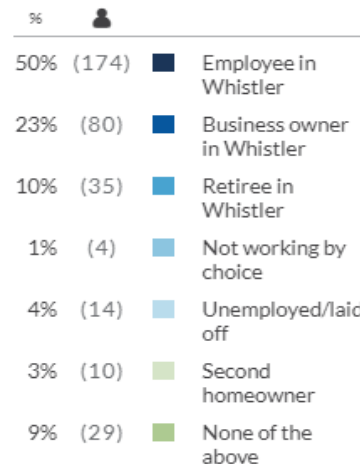
addition, a digital tool called Thoughtexchange was used to gather input in advance, during and following the events. Through Thoughtexchange, participants were asked to share their thoughts about “What are some of the things that have been top of your heart and mind during Whistler’s COVID-19 experience?” After entering thoughts, participants were asked to rate thoughts shared by others. This input helped to inform the discussions during the Community Conversations events.

THOUGHTTEXCHANGE PARTICIPANT PROFILE INFORMATION

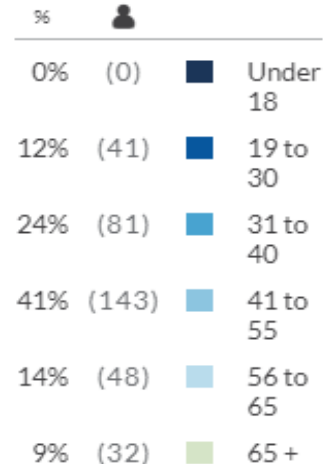
Whistler



Employment



Age



Two hundred and fifty people participated in the Community Conversations events while 385 people participated in Thoughtexchange and shared 436 thoughts.

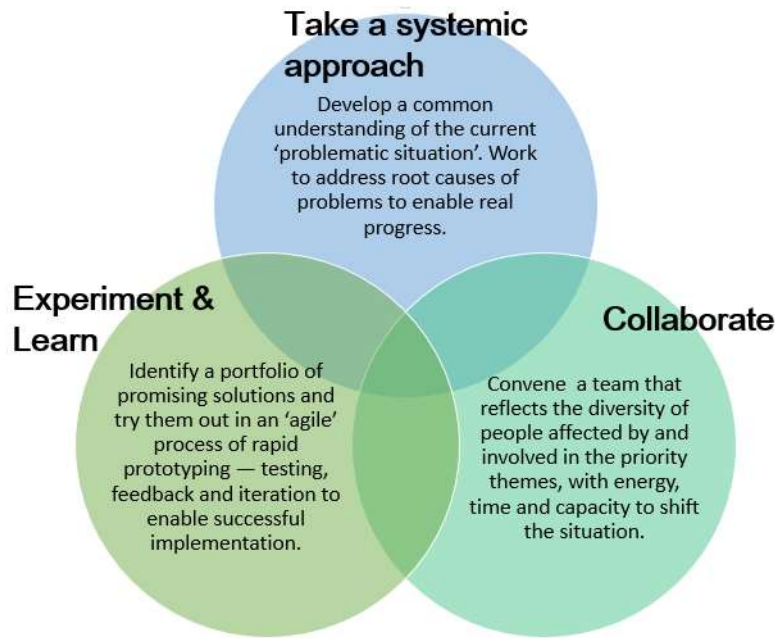
The input gathered in the Community Conversations serves as input into the recovery working groups.

The feedback received regarding the format, content and tone of the discussions has been very positive and will help inform future community meetings and discussions moving forward during and post COVID. While more and more of the municipality’s communications and engagement tools were digital before the pandemic, the safety protocols of COVID-19 forced us to try and accelerate the introduction of new tools and systems.

Approach

Through this process municipal staff and its consultant Reos are striving to take a systems approach to recovery, looking at our community as a connected system rather than silos of interests and groups. One of the goals is to create a process and platform that can enable the organization and community to think about things as a whole and ultimately to more quickly assess opportunities and mitigate unintended consequences.

This diagram shows the collaborative, systemic, and experimental way that recovery work is being approached.



During the Community Conversations, a lot of input was collected and organized into theme areas called “design principles” and broken down into needs and opportunities. These are listed below. Further to the systems approach, one of the goals of the approach is to look at the consistency across all of the conversations and establish emerging common themes and insights.

Sense of Place

- Design principles
 - ✓ Coordinate as a community about the “what” and “how”
 - ✓ Reset and pivot
 - ✓ Be guided by our connection to nature
- Needs
 - ✓ Recreation infrastructure
 - ✓ Labour market
 - ✓ Mental health support
 - ✓ Affordable housing
 - ✓ Opportunities
 - ✓ Economic diversification
 - ✓ Support of local business
 - ✓ Deepened sense of belonging
 - ✓ Type of tourism we attract

Environment

- Design principles
 - ✓ Focus on urgent environmental issues, not low hanging fruit
- Needs
 - ✓ Type of tourism we attract
 - ✓ Define Whistler's carrying capacity
 - ✓ Transportation infrastructure
 - ✓ Reduce waste

- Opportunities
 - ✓ Outdoor space
 - ✓ Responsible tourism
 - ✓ Support of local business
 - ✓ Educational tourism

Tourism-based economy

- Design principles
 - ✓ Equity
 - ✓ Human rights
 - ✓ Manage economy and environment
 - ✓ Dialogue approaches
 - ✓ Use this pause to re-think the path we've been on
 - ✓ Be global leaders as we "build back better"
- Needs
 - ✓ Transportation infrastructure
 - ✓ Recreation infrastructure
 - ✓ Labour market
 - ✓ Economic diversification
 - ✓ Support local business

Community

- Design principles
 - ✓ Inclusion and Belonging
 - ✓ Shifting from a consumer society to a more sustainable one
- Needs
 - ✓ Improved relationship with First Nations
 - ✓ Affordable housing
 - ✓ Address digital divide
- Opportunities
 - ✓ Deepen sense of belonging
 - ✓ Individual and community mental health
 - ✓ Encourage emerging leaders
 - ✓ Outdoor space
 - ✓ Framework to guide the way forward
 - ✓ Social programs
 - ✓ Partnerships and collaboration
 - ✓ Educational tourism
 - ✓ Ecotourism
 - ✓ Partnerships and collaboration
 - ✓ Implementing and enforcing health/ safety requirements
 - ✓ Attracting regional tourists
 - ✓ Social programs
 - ✓ Affordable housing

See Appendix B for the Mural graphic representation of the design principles, and theme areas that flowed out of each of the Community Conversation events.

Key insights

Some examples of key insights that have flowed out of the input and analysis across all areas of discussion are as follows. These insights and all other input is a critical input to the recovery working groups.

COVID has allowed us to see more clearly what needs to be improved and preserved.

- The library and other community spaces are important points of connection.
- Not all demographics are represented in community discussions.
- Access to child care and mental health services needs to be made easier.
- Need to understand how better to support immigrant families and the aging population.

How can technology help us?

- Booking systems and heat maps to allow visitors to avoid busy areas.
- Online platform that connects local businesses to protect local offerings.
- Contact tracing and at home testing when available.

Supporting local

- Are there systems (housing and beyond) that can help us support local, help rebuild employee base, and support existing staff?
- Whistler is full of doers but even more people have stepped up during this time, how do we continue to foster that, doesn't always need to be "leaders" who lead.
- Continued emphasis on the importance of how to better connect with and involve Lil'wat and Squamish Nation people.

COVID will likely accelerate diversification of Tourism Economy

- There is a need to rebuild our connection with Vancouver, our Province, and Canada with the loss of international and group business.
- Whistler can be a model for living sustainably and responsibly, guests can learn what that means when they visit, and take new ideas and ways home. Whistler can be a leader in attracting conscious global citizens.
- Need to find big spaces and fewer faces will spread visitors out across the resort – this highlights infrastructure and transportation considerations.

Working Groups

The RMOW is helping to facilitate two recovery working groups with community-wide representation.

Whistler Recovery Working Group

This group is a roundtable of participants from across all sectors with the intention of full "system" representation. Its activities include sharing sector stats, trends, needs and information; identify opportunities for collaboration; and forming task groups for actions identified. The group will identify high-impact action areas to advance to support COVID-19 recovery efforts while making progress towards community targets that already exist.

The outputs of this group will help to inform municipal and other agency decision-making. It has met twice (July and September) and will meet monthly through end of 2020. The initial focus is on 2020 including lessons learned from summer; transition to winter; and consideration of what do we need to keep doing vs. what we can do without?

In its September meeting the group established four sub teams:

- Local business survival
- Labour market
- Tourism diversification
- Community wellbeing (mental health, safety, belonging and housing)

During the month of September, each of the groups will establish an action plan for presentation in early October. The work is intended to be agile and may result in very short or medium term recommendations.

A subsequent report will be brought to Council to share updates and activities of this group.

Social Services Working Group

This group is focused on psycho-social recovery of the community. Its activities include assessing needs of individuals and community organizations; identifying and compiling resources; matching needs with resources; identifying and addressing gaps; and looking out for opportunities for advocacy. The outputs of the group will help inform municipal and other agency decision-making. The group has held four meetings to date.

As part of its work the group organized and executed an impact survey to 31 local community and non-profit organizations to understand COVID-19 impacts. The two leading themes/issues in the survey included:

- 1) Adverse effects to funding sources. Funding sources have been negatively impacted in several ways including decreased fundraising ability, fee-for-service, registration income and grant availability; and,
- 2) The inability or challenge to continue to provide services. The ability to provide services has been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions including access to physical space and staffing challenges noting that not all organizations can offer services virtually.

Priorities for the next month include compiling a comprehensive list of local community and non-profit organizations and the service they provide, and identify and address gaps and opportunities for advocacy.

While the challenges that this group faces are serious, a positive aspect to the work is the collaborative work to match needs and seek out resources.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Official Community Plan

The Community Conversations and recovery work is collaborative in nature and is consistent with characteristics established in our Community Vision. The foundation for the engagement work uses the Vision as a starting point for discussion.

Whilst the work toward recovery from COVID-19 touches all areas of moving toward our shared community vision, as all aspects of our community are part of the discussions and potential recommended actions, the characteristics of the vision most pertinent to the engagement work are the following:

CONDUCT: Everyone is treated with fairness, respect and care, and as a result we enjoy high levels of mutual trust and safety.

PARTICIPATION: We are able to meaningfully participate in community decisions, collaborating to achieve our Community Vision.

PARTNERSHIPS: We have established strong partnerships with the Squamish Nation, Lil'wat Nation, other levels of government and community stakeholders based on open dialogue, honesty, respect and collaboration, resulting in the achievement of mutual goals and shared benefits.

Other Relevant Policies

There are no other policies of particular linkage to this work.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The budget for the recovery engagement and facilitation work has been accounted for in the 2020 Five-Year Financial Plan. Recommendations flowing out of the two working groups that require additional resources will be brought forward as needed or accounted for in existing or modified 2020 and subsequent budgets.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

The very nature of this work is community engagement and consultation oriented. Progress and updates toward recovery efforts will continue to be shared with Council and the community and ongoing engagement opportunities will continue to be part of all work.

SUMMARY

This Report provides an update and overview for several aspects of the Resort Municipality of Whistler's (RMOW) work to engage and facilitate community-wide discussions and initiatives toward strategic response and recovery planning associated with COVID-19. Collaborative planning and action will be one of the ways the community works together to move through this unprecedented time in our community's history. The Community Conversations virtual community meetings, as well as the Thoughtexchange virtual engagement tool, provided an effective platform for the RMOW to gather input and offer a place for community discussion. The extensive input has been organized and shared as a critical input for the Whistler Recovery Working Group and the Social Services Working Group in their work to identify key short term actions for the municipality and other organizations toward pandemic recovery. A systems approach is being taken in this work to look at our community as a connected system rather than silos or special interest groups. One of the goals is to create a process and platform that can enable the organization and community to think about things as a whole and ultimately to more

quickly assess opportunities and mitigate unintended consequences. Subsequent updates will be brought to Council as work continues.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Comeau
MANAGER, CORPORATE PROJECTS
For

Ginny Cullen
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER