



REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: March 16, 2021
FROM: Resort Experience
SUBJECT: SUMMER 2021 PARK PREPARATIONS

REPORT: 21-028
FILE: 6120-00

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendations of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopt the new proposed 2021 Summer Experience Plan, as outlined in this Report, including the introduction of seasonal fees to select park parking lots; and

That Council direct staff to report back with any budget amendments requirements to deliver the 2021 Summer Experience Plan.

REFERENCES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to:

- Inform Council of the proposed strategies to address the anticipated increase in Whistler's summer visits and the associated RMOW preparations to facilitate a safe and enjoyable resort experience for visitors and residents during ongoing COVID measures; and
- Introduce several initiatives intended to manage anticipated capacity issues at Whistler's municipal parks and trailhead parking; and
- Seek Council support for the introduction of seasonal pay parking at four high-demand lakefront park locations; and further
- Seek Council support for staff to work with local businesses to develop initiatives that support local businesses by encouraging and leveraging visitor dispersion outside the core Village area.

DISCUSSION

Background

One year ago on March 16th 2020, physical distancing measures were introduced in B.C. due to an alarming increase in the number of COVID cases in the province. On March 17th, the Provincial Health Officer declared a public health emergency, and on March 18th the province declared a State of Emergency that remains in place. Much has changed in a year, and Whistler's efforts to respond to an ever-evolving public health crisis continue. During the early months of the provincial state of emergency Whistler saw a rapid and severe decline in visitation. Non-essential businesses closed, international

tourism ceased, and British Columbians stayed home. On May 19th non-essential businesses re-opened across the province; on June 24th intra-provincial travel resumed.

British Columbians quickly sought out safe travel destinations that would enable them to be outdoors, connect with nature, reconnect with friends and family, and regain a sense of normalcy. Whistler was one such destination. Lower Mainland residents – anxious to escape their apartments and urban surroundings – arrived in Whistler en masse. July and August received significantly more regional visitors than expected.

The volume of regional visitors in summer 2020 combined with physical distancing presented considerable capacity challenges at municipal parks and several trailheads – including parking lots, washrooms, waste bins, open space – and provided an indication of what can be expected for the summer of 2021. If the plan proposed in this report is not implemented in some form, there is likelihood of a deterioration of the park system, impacts to the natural environment, a diminished visitor experience and negative impacts to local neighbourhoods.

In addition to managing Whistler's parks, the implementation of health and safety measures required an expanded role for RMOW staff in managing the visitor experience including additional sanitation stations, increased waste removal services, and redeployment of municipal staff as park hosts to provide information to visitors.

It is important to remember that COVID measures evolved over the course of the summer and into the fall and it was not until November 20th 2020 when masks were made mandatory in indoor public spaces in B.C.

Whistler Summer Experience 2021

The Plan is informed by baseline assumptions and considerations which resulted in six Objectives and five Focus Areas, all of which will be supported by a robust communications plan. These are discussed below.

Assumptions:

The following serve as baseline assumptions for RMOW planning:

- Demand for travel and access to the outdoors will be high:
 - Outdoor destinations that can be safely accessed and enjoyed will see visitation in line with or above busy 2020 levels;
 - The majority of Whistler's visitors will be from the Lower Mainland, other regions of BC, and some inter-provincial travelers;
 - The Canada - US border will remain closed.
- All British Columbians will have received their first COVID vaccination by July;
- BC will enter into a post-pandemic state including reduced travel restrictions within BC;
- Re-opening of all BC businesses;
- Safety measures including mask wearing and physical distancing will continue as national and global herd immunity will not have been reached;
- Major events and large gatherings will not be permitted.

Therefore, staff assumes that visitor volumes will meet or exceed 2020 levels and are in the process of developing a comprehensive summer experience plan that maintains COVID safety while addressing capacity challenges.

Considerations:

The plan will aim to provide improved visitor experiences, local business opportunities, and will test initiatives related to local transportation choices and climate action objectives intended to encourage

permanent behavioral changes.

In addition, the opportunity exists to introduce regional visitors – especially day visitors with little or no awareness of the essence or ethos of Whistler – to one or more of Whistler’s many transformative experiences and, through that introduction, anticipate they will be inspired to explore more of what Whistler has to offer.

The summer experience plan may not solve all challenges; doing so would be an unrealistic expectation given the pandemic context as well as limits to available public space, time and budget.

However, the plan will focus on challenges specific to increased regional visitation along with the COVID safety limitations and reduce unnecessarily reactive operational and staffing responses that may have occurred in select areas.

The plan anticipates the added complexity of three construction projects taking place during the summer of 2021:

- Alta Lake Road sanitary sewer installation (RMOW), affecting access to and from Alta Lake Road and Rainbow Park; and
- Alta Vista services replacement (RMOW), affecting access to and from the Alta Vista neighbourhood, Lakeside Park, Blueberry Park south and the Carleton Way boat launch; and
- Highway 99 repaving (MOTI), affecting highway transportation between the River of Golden Dream Bridge and Emerald Estates.

The plan will be tested, monitored and adjusted as necessary in response to the dynamic nature of Public Health Orders and other variables. Additionally, new initiatives will be evaluated for long term operational effectiveness and serve as pilots for future initiatives.

Objectives:

The summer experience plan has the following objectives:

- 1) Maintain COVID public safety.
- 2) Educate visitors about Whistler.
- 3) Respond to capacity challenges.
- 4) Provide enhanced and diversified experiences.
- 5) Provide opportunities for local business.
- 6) Test local transit initiatives related to climate action objectives.

Focus Areas:

The summer experience plan is based upon five integrated and overlapping focus areas:

- 1) Increased parking management.
- 2) Increase local transit and sustainable transportation offerings.
- 3) Visitor dispersion and programming.
- 4) Enhanced park experiences.
- 5) Opportunities for local businesses.

1. Increased Parking Management

Introduction of seasonal user-pay parking at lots located within Rainbow, Lakeside, Alpha and

Wayside Parks, as well as on a portion of Alta Lake Road on either side of the Rainbow Park access driveway, and improvement of neighbourhood on-street parking signs at high demand and problematic areas to better communicate parking regulations.

These changes seek to:

- Manage demand for parking at parks and trailheads.
- Reduce reliance on private vehicles; encourage use of preferred transportation modes.
- Encourage dispersion to parks and open spaces throughout Whistler.
- Encourage turnover at busy parks.
- Reduce traffic on Alta Lake Rd. and the Rainbow Park area.
- Generate revenue to offset costs of preferred transportation modes and build reserves to manage, maintain and build new amenities in existing parks in the future.

Potential measures may include:

- Return and expansion of seasonal traffic control speed bumps on Alta Lake Road from Alpine Meadows to ~200 meters south of Rainbow Park;
- Consideration of contracted on-site traffic control where and when required;
- Modest organizational improvements to certain recreational parking areas to improve safety, flow, and capacity while reducing conflict and daily operational staffing needs.
 - The extent of improvements will be guided by available resources and limitations of seasonal preparation.
 - Parking areas identified for potential improvements include Rainbow Park, Rainbow Lake Trailhead, Train Wreck / Sea to Sky Trailhead, and Whistler Interpretive Forest.

Further details on the implementation of pay-parking can be found in the subsequent section: Seasonal Pay-parking.

2. Increase Local Transit and Sustainable Transportation Offerings

Creation of a seasonal multi-modal local transportation hub in the Village offering shuttle service between the Village, Rainbow Park, and Rainbow Lake Trailhead, as well as privately operated bike rentals. These changes will:

- Decrease reliance on private vehicles for travel to destinations within Whistler.
- Facilitate convenient access to and use of alternate methods of transportation.
- Support the Big Moves stated in Whistler's Climate Action Strategy.
- Decrease traffic congestion and GHG emissions.
- Support local businesses.

Potential measures may include:

- Expanded shuttle van service between the Village and Rainbow Park with stops at Meadow Park and Rainbow Lake Trailhead;
- Expanded bike valet and gear storage services in the Village and high demand lakefront

parks;

- Return of the free daily BC Transit service between the Village and Lost Lake;
- Return of free resort-wide BC Transit service on weekends and holidays; and
- Coordination and collaboration with resort partners to ensure efforts are aligned and complementary.

3. Visitor Dispersion and Programming

Expand the frequency and locations of the *Explore and Experience* summer animation program to:

- Increase the likelihood of visitors having an authentic Whistler experience;
- Decrease operational challenges at high-demand locations;
- Increase awareness of Whistler's lesser known open space amenities and offerings;
- Support local artists, performers, programmers and service providers.

Potential measures may include:

- Continue to program animation in unique and off-the-beaten-track locations throughout the Valley;
- Promotion and content development for current and revamped new self-guided tours; and
- Development of themed mini Adventure Itineraries that showcase different business areas, parks and areas of interest throughout the Valley.

4. Enhanced Park Experiences

Provide additional capacity for public facilities and amenities at high demand locations including:

- Portable washrooms;
- Food service;
- Park Hosts;
- Educational booths; e.g. Discover Nature;
- Increased maintenance service levels.

5. Opportunities for Local Businesses

Staff will work with local businesses to find ways to explore business opportunities outside the core Village area.

Potential opportunities may include:

- Services related to shuttle van, bike rental and bike valet;
- Dispersion animation;
- Food service in parks;
- Equipment rentals (excluding watercraft) at parks currently without concession services; e.g. umbrellas, toys, etc.

Communications

Effective communication is essential to ensure the success of the plan. The RMOW

Communications department will:

- Collaborate with resort partners and their initiatives;
- Develop a campaign to encourage planning ahead of the visit;
- Communicate impacts related to construction, parking management so public/visitors can plan ahead, and manage expectations;
- Communicate Whistler's values and expectations of appropriate conduct in-resort including messaging about Climate Action Big Moves; and
- Respond to Provincial Health Orders as well as visitor needs and travel patterns.

This will be achieved through significant local, regional and provincial outreach across a variety of media platforms in collaboration with resort partners.

Collectively the initiatives outlined above will address the objectives of the plan.

Seasonal Pay Parking and Alternate Transportation Initiatives

To help manage visitor demand for vehicle parking at Rainbow, Lakeside, Alpha and Wayside Parks the municipality intends to introduce improved parking signage and seasonal pay parking this spring as a strategy to reduce traffic and the impacts of increased park visitation. These changes will be supplemented by the introduction of a shuttle service, bike valet, and other initiatives that focus on sustainable modes of travel and park use. Parking will continue to be a limited option at our parks. The focus this summer, and in future years must be on safe and effective parking management and opportunities to access the parks by alternate modes. Similar pay parking measures at parks and trailheads are being introduced in the lower mainland including the District of North Vancouver and in similar tourist destinations such as Tofino.

The implementation of seasonal pay parking will align with the seasonal structure of the existing day lot parking. Revenues will support the seasonal park shuttle service, as well as other park operations. Through monitoring and data collection, the municipality will gain an understanding of parking lot usage at the targeted destinations as well as demands and impacts at adjacent on-street parking locations. This information will be used to inform future decisions about parking and transportation demand management. Most importantly, the introduction of seasonal pay parking at parks and trailheads is a vital step towards incentivizing sustainable transportation options.

During the past several years Whistler's parks have experienced increasingly high-volume traffic leading to congestion and overflow parking concerns impacting adjacent neighbourhoods. As a transportation demand management measure in support of the municipality's Climate Action Big Moves Strategy, seasonal pay parking promotes preferred modes of transportation including walking, carpooling (post pandemic), cycling, transit and shuttles. Seasonal pay parking has been shown to decrease average length of stay thereby increasing turnover, enabling more visitors to enjoy the destinations. Additionally, pay parking reduces cruising for an available parking space which, in turn, reduces vehicle congestion, fuel consumption and emissions.

To ensure clarity of where visitors can and cannot park on a neighbourhood street, existing on-street parking signs are being reviewed and upgraded in documented hot spots. These upgrades are a continuation of similar upgrades in the Benchlands and Alpine Meadows, both of which were successful.

At this time seasonal pay parking is not being considered along neighbourhood streets other than a short section of Alta Lake Road on either side of the Rainbow Park access driveway. Staff is aware that the introduction of pay parking within select parks may displace some visitors to no-cost parking on adjacent neighbourhood streets. However, there will be little or no impact to neighbourhoods because these spaces become occupied relatively quickly on a typical peak day.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Official Community Plan

Community Vision

Whistler's vision is to be a place where the community thrives, nature is protected, and guests are inspired. The efforts outlined in this report seek to support the vision through proactive initiatives.

Vision Characteristics

3. **BALANCE:** Community life and resort visitation are balanced, both occurring within the carrying capacity of our developed and natural environments.
4. **VIBRANT:** Vibrant community spaces are full of energy and frequent celebration, while not interfering with natural places of solitude and rejuvenation.
5. **RESPECT:** We understand, respect and steward natural areas as the foundation of our community, our tourism-based economy and overall human health.
17. **EXPERIENCE:** Whistler offers diverse, year-round and authentic experiences that offer exceptional value and sustain visitation.
18. **DEPENDENCE:** Economic activity depends on and respects the natural environment, our unique mountain culture and the people of our community.
19. **LOCAL:** Locally owned businesses are essential and thrive.
20. **RENEWAL:** Innovation, renewal and reinvestment in Whistler's infrastructure and offerings support livelihoods, quality of life and the visitor experience.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

CHAPTER 4 GROWTH MANAGEMENT

4.1. **Goal:** Land use and development are effectively managed to maintain Whistler's unique sense of place, protect Whistler's natural environment, provide a high quality of life for residents and provide exceptional experiences for our visitors.

CHAPTER 6 ECONOMIC VIABILITY

6.5. **Goal** Support sustainable diversification compatible with the tourism economy.

6.5.1.1. **Policy** Support increased cultural, education and learning, arts, entertainment, events, sport tourism, and health and wellness opportunities that diversify our tourism-based economy using existing infrastructure.

6.6.2.1. **Policy** Support and encourage community-based businesses that enhance Whistler's character and authenticity.

CHAPTER 9 LEARNING, CULTURE AND RECREATION

9.3.3. **Objective** Residents and visitors are knowledgeable about and engaged with our unique natural environment, cultural history and way of life.

9.3.3.1. **Policy** regularly communicate responsible ways of interacting with our natural environment and each other.

9.4. **Goal** Achieve a balance between user needs, the natural environment and user experiences in providing recreational opportunities.

9.4.1.3. **Policy** Promote use of preferred modes of transportation to access recreation and leisure amenities to reduce public vehicle parking requirements with consideration given to maintaining site-by-site accessible parking.

9.4.1.4. **Policy** Recognize that public vehicular access to and parking at recreation and leisure amenities may be targeted, restricted, discouraged or managed due to environmental concerns, neighbourhood disruption, demand management, feasibility and cost.

9.7.3. **Objective** Investigate and test new initiatives where appropriate.

9.7.3.1. **Policy** When required, undertake planning and feasibility studies when considering new amenities or reinvestment in existing amenities.

9.7.3.2. **Policy** Use pilot programs to test the feasibility of new initiatives, where appropriate.

TRANSPORTATION

11.4. **Goal** Support the increased use of preferred modes of transportation for all travel purposes to reduce dependence on private motor vehicles.

Other Relevant Policies

Climate Action Big Moves Strategy

- Big Move #1: Move beyond the car
 - Increase transit options and usage
 - Enable more active transportation
- Big Move # 3: Reduce visitor travel emissions

Recreation and Leisure Master Plan Key Strategies

- 1.1 Continue to provide efficient delivery of municipal services to maintain high resident and visitor satisfaction levels
- 2.1 Respond to proven negatives and areas of user conflict
- 2.2 Address capacity and crowding areas
- 2.3 Support initiatives that enhance existing experiences

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed Summer Experience Plan has a total cost estimate of \$922,000 and is summarized in the table below. The RMOW has submitted a grant application to the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative that could potentially offset \$250,000 of this spending.

Focus Area	Potential Opportunities	Budget Estimate
Increased Parking Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neighbourhood on-street parking sign improvements - Seasonal traffic control speed bumps on Alta Lake Road - Contracted on-site traffic control along Alta Lake Rd - Organizational improvements to select park and trailhead parking areas 	\$240,000
Increase Local Transposition Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanded shuttle van service between the Village and Rainbow Park - Expanded bike valet and gear storage services in the Village and high demand lakefront parks 	\$190,000
Visitor Dispersion and Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Animation in unique and off-the-beaten-track locations - Promotion and content development for current and revamped new self-guided tours - Development of themed mini Adventure Itineraries that showcase different business areas, parks and areas of interest throughout the Valley 	\$87,000
Improved Park Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional capacity oriented public facilities and amenities at high demand locations including toilets - Increased opportunities for food service - Return of a modified Park Host program - Increased park maintenance service levels 	\$345,000
Local Business Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Services related to shuttle van, bike rental and bike valet - Dispersion animation - Park food service opportunities - Park and beach equipment rental concessions 	Embedded in above elements
Communications and Marketing		\$60,000
Summer 2021 Park Preparations Total		\$922,000

If Council supports the recommendations in this report, following notification of the grant outcome staff will provide Council with a budget amendment bylaw for consideration.

The existing Five-Year Financial Plan contains several projects and operating allocations consistent with the objectives of the Summer Experience Plan. These are already authorized for spending and are in development for summer readiness. Included are: one bicycle valet location; provision of park compost bins; upgrading park washroom faucets, dryers and exterior doors to touchless; FE&A programming and more for total value of \$681,000.

For those pieces of the proposed strategy that are not already authorized, funding would be made available through the following means:

- 1) Reallocation of funds already identified in the Five-Year Financial Plan for Festival, Events & Animation (FE&A) Operational spending; and

2) Adjusting the anticipated delivery year for several projects already identified in the Five-Year Financial Plan.

The net impact on the budget as a result of this approach is anticipated to be \$0 if the grant application is successful. The recommended budget amendment to make the reallocations will be presented to Council at a future date.

All proposed expenditures are in response to demonstrated needs. Capital initiatives are permanent installations providing long term resort community benefits; associated annual maintenance expense and an allocation for eventual replacement of their components is implied.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

The RMOW successfully pivoted operations in 2020 to facilitate a safe experience for residents and guests. With summer 2021 approaching, staff must ensure that a safe experience can be achieved and that opportunities for local businesses through regional visitation can be optimized. The proposed initiatives contained in this report have been informed by ongoing cross-divisional staff engagement and represent innovative pilot programs. Staff are in the initial stages of engagement with resort partners, prospective service providers, Vancouver Coastal Health and relevant Provincial ministries including the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The RMOW's Communications department is developing a communications brief that will guide communications to achieve the plan's objectives.

SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the proposed Whistler Summer Experience 2021 Plan. To facilitate a safe and successful summer we must make changes to Whistler's parks experience.

If changes are not made we will see a deterioration of the park system, impacts to the natural environment, a diminished visitor experience and spill-over impacts on our local neighbourhoods.

The proposed initiatives address anticipated increased regional summer visitation resulting from ongoing COVID related travel restrictions. Several of these initiatives are intended to better manage anticipated capacity issues at Whistler's municipal parks and trailheads and effectively manage parking.

Staff will also work with local businesses to develop ways to leverage regional visitation and support business success by exploring dispersion opportunities outside the core Village area. Combined, staff hope that these measures represent a comprehensive and proactive approach to manage crowds and create a positive summer experience for visitors and residents.

Respectfully submitted,

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and
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