



# WHISTLER

## REPORT | INFORMATION REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** March 12, 2019

**REPORT:** 19-034

**FROM:** Resort Experience

**FILE:** 8331

**SUBJECT:** WHISTLER PARKS MASTER PLAN UPDATE

### **COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That** Council receive Information Report No. 19-034 regarding an update of the Whistler Parks Master Plan.

### **REFERENCES**

None

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an update on the Whistler Parks Master Plan. More specifically this Report summarizes Phase 1 process and findings and discusses Phase 2 next steps.

### **DISCUSSION**

With a population of almost 12,000 residents, Whistler has an incredible array of park facilities that are important amenities to the resort community and that provide a visitor experience that sets Whistler apart from other places and resorts in North America. While satisfaction levels are consistently in the high 90 per cent range, it is imperative that these assets are maintained, enhanced, developed and enriched for the long-term enjoyment of residents and visitors and to manage lifecycle costs.

Visitation at municipal parks in the summer season has grown significantly over the last number of years, particularly at water front parks. This has been placing pressure on park infrastructure and maintenance, as well as creating capacity and conflict issues. Park infrastructure is in some cases approaching the end of its useful lifespan, infrastructure technology and operational approaches have changed, and new park lands have been acquired. Additionally, the community's demographic and needs have evolved significantly since the parks were built over 30 years ago.

In response to these issues, and building off of the 2015 Recreation and Leisure Master Plan (RLMP), the Parks Master Plan seeks to create an inventory of current amenities in each of Whistler's parks, determine what improvements are desired for the future, and develop a series of designs and prioritized implementation strategy for those improvements.

### **Geographic Project Scope**

The park system in Whistler is comprised of three different types: Major Resort Parks, Neighbourhood Parks and Natural Area Parks. The primary focus of the Parks Master Plan are nine park areas that are either large in size, are Major Resort Parks, are located on popular waterfront, or represent significant value to the resort community. Still included in the project but with a secondary focus are the Neighbourhood Parks, Natural Area Parks, three school sport fields, and newly acquired park lands.

Village area parks, plazas and open spaces are excluded from this the project.

### **Project Phasing**

The RMOW launched the start of a three-phase Parks Master Planning process in 2018:



#### **What we've completed to date:**

- Park surveys + mapping
- Neighbourhood Parks and Natural Areas Inventory
- Major parks asset inventory and conditions assessment
- Staff workshops + RLAC review
- Community open house #1 + online survey

## **Phase 1 Summary and Findings**

Phase 1 focused on generating a better understanding of the existing state of municipal parks. Work included development of base mapping, a Major Resort Parks Asset Inventory, Conditions Assessment (AICA) and Valuation Study, a high-level Neighbourhood Parks and Natural Area Parks inventory, and municipal staff and committee workshops. These tasks occurred concurrently to help inform the concluding tasks of Phase 1 - a community open house and online survey.

Below is a brief overview of each task.

### **Major Parks Assets Inventory, Condition Assessment and Valuation Study**

An external consultant was retained to undertake an audit of nine existing municipal parks, as well as three sport field locations owned by School District #48 (SD48) with shared maintenance responsibilities between the RMOW and SD48. These locations were chosen as they are either large in size, are major resort parks, are located on popular waterfront, or represent significant recreational value to the resort community.

The Study's purpose was to create an inventory of assets in each site and determine the current physical condition and replacement value. Moving forward this information will help inform the prioritization and budgeting for park infrastructure re-investment. It will also align with and contribute to the larger municipal Asset Management Investment Plan initiated in 2018.

In terms of Study findings, overall the condition of the assets are generally high. However there were several higher cost elements that are in poor condition including drainage and irrigation systems (particularly at Rainbow Park and Meadow Park) and the water spray park at Meadow Park. The total value of park assets in the nine municipally owned Major Resort Parks is estimated at over \$15,000,000.

### **Neighbourhood Parks and Natural Area Parks Inventory and Assessment**

A less detailed examination of Whistler's 13 municipal Neighbourhood Parks and 13 Natural Area Parks was completed by an external consultant. The scope of work included an existing conditions inventory, a park asset count, a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis, and ideas for improvements.

High level findings include maintenance opportunities, updated park signage, protection of natural spaces, and improved park furnishings (i.e. seating, bike racks and play structures).

### **Staff Feedback**

A series of workshops were held with municipal staff responsible for the day to day maintenance and operation of Whistler's Parks system to determine what works well, what needs attention, what could be improved upon, and what opportunities they see. To a degree, staff's feedback helped inform the Major Parks Assets Inventory, Condition Assessment and Valuation Study.

## **Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee**

Focussing on the twelve subject sites, a workshop similar to the staff workshop was held with the Recreation and Leisure Advisory Committee (RLAC).

## **Community Engagement Feedback**

A community open house and corresponding online survey was held in December 2018. Branded as “OUTSIDE VOICE”, the open house was attended by almost 100 individuals while the online survey received over 200 responses. Findings from the staff and the RLAC workshop sessions, as well as information from the 2015 RLMP pre-populated the engagement pieces. This enabled participants to “hit the ground running” when providing comments, ideas and opinions.

Overall, the vast majority of submissions were shared by permanent residents, with a few from part-time residents and Sea to Sky residents, seasonal residents, and visitors. Regardless of their relationship with the place, their knowledge of parks for which feedback was shared was likely high as the vast majority of respondents indicated that they visited the area often. Over half of feedback shared related to the major parks.

Dogs, enforcement, capacity and parking were all top of mind topics in our Major Resort Parks. This is not substantially different from feedback received while preparing the Recreation and Leisure Master Plan. Park by park detailed feedback will be considered and integrated where possible in Phase 2.

Other items frequently appearing in community feedback include:

- More public docks
- Acquire waterfront whenever possible
- Connect all parks with local transit service
- More dog friendly areas
- Signage at major parks to direct people to close proximity neighbourhood parks
- Perception of over-irrigation at all parks

## **Visitor Engagement**

For this phase of the project visitors were not directly engaged. However, information and feedback from Tourism Whistler and their intercept survey program has contributed to the Phase 1 findings. Visitors will be engaged in Phase 2.

## **Phase 1 Summary**

The above tasks generated considerable information and will be combined with other work, such as a pre-existing park accessibility audit to form the backbone for Phase 2 moving forward.

**Phase 2**

Phase 2 of this project will build upon previous work and consider other factors including:

- Alignment with higher-level plans such as the Official Community Plan, Recreation and Leisure Plan, and the Corporate Plan;
- Community values related to parks;
- Site-specific opportunities and challenges;
- Asset risk if not renewed (financial, environmental, safety, reputational);
- Demand for the feature or improvement;
- Ability to support high use;
- Currently lacking in Whistler;
- Brand consistency;
- Park and recreation trends;
- Accessibility and inclusivity improvement;
- Increase access to physical activity;
- Environmental considerations; and
- Relative cost

Focussing on the twelve sites identified in the Major Parks Assets Inventory, Condition Assessment and Valuation Study, but keeping in mind other municipal park sites, Phase 2 will undertake a critical evaluation of existing park programming and develop alternate park programming options. This task will explore the potential and feasibility to reallocate, relocate, add or delete park elements. This will be completed on a park-by-park basis but in the context of the entire system, including underutilized and new spaces, and will include community and stakeholder engagement. Conceptual designs for high priority park areas, a high level prioritization and timeline matrix with order of magnitude cost estimates will be part of the deliverable package. This work is targeting completion in the summer of 2019.

Phase 3 will provide detailed design and costing for prioritized Phase 2 elements in the form of a long term park reinvestment and development strategy. The strategy will be used to inform future projects and work plans which will be considered in the municipal budgeting process in the autumn of 2019. Some funding has already been included in the 2019 draft budget / Five-Year Financial Plan to accommodate anticipated improvements.

**WHISTLER 2020 ANALYSIS**

W2020 Strategy	TOWARD Descriptions of success that resolution moves us toward	Comments
<p><b>Recreation &amp; Leisure</b></p>	<p>The resort community is globally recognized as a leader in innovative recreation products and services</p>	<p>The PMP will assess/look at updating aging parks and park amenities to better ensure Whistler’s park system is refreshed, exciting, and remains at the leading edge for recreational experiences</p>
	<p>Recreational experiences reflect an appropriate balance between adventure, challenge and safety, and exist within the</p>	<p>The PMP will revisit Whistler’s park system and ensure there is a diverse range of programming experiences for all as well as assess the</p>

	comfortable carrying capacity of the amenity	carrying capacity of individual park amenities and recommend potential improvements
<b>Visitor Experience</b>	The resort community's authentic sense of place and engaging, innovative and renewed offerings attract visitors time and time again	The PMP is an important plan for refreshing and updating Whistler's park system for residents and visitors enjoyment
	A comfortable carrying capacity of the resort, its amenities, and the surrounding natural environment is respected	The PMP will propose recommendations to over-subscribed park features and will look at maintaining the balance between natural environment and recreational experience
<b>Natural Areas</b>	Developed and recreation areas are designed and managed to protect as much of the natural environment within and around them as possible	The PMP will protect and attempt to restore ecosystem integrity within Whistler's park network

The Parks Master Plan does not move our community away from any of the adopted Whistler2020 Descriptions of Success.

**OTHER POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

The Parks Master Plan is consistent with the RLMP which was endorsed by Council in 2015, and includes 90 recommendations with over 300 supporting actions for each of Whistler's parks, trails, recreation programs, and amenities.

The Parks Master Plan project builds off of the RLMP's recommendations and has been designed to align with the Community Vision and Recreation and Leisure chapter of the draft Official Community Plan.

**BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

This project was initiated in 2018. Funds are included in the draft Five-Year Financial Plan 2019-2023 to complete Phases 2 and 3. Specific funding needs will be determined to deliver on the Phase 3 recommendations which will be confirmed through the municipal budget process.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

Phase 1 of the Parks Master Plan included the launch of "OUTSIDE VOICE" which included partner outreach, media announcements, and Council endorsement. Through targeted invitations to key stakeholders, including local sports clubs, tourism partners, and AWARE, as well promotion through social media and print advertising, the RMOW generated significant engagement. Through both the open house and online survey, over 250 individuals submitted feedback.

Public engagement for Phase 2 anticipates an open house and online survey through the "OUTSIDE VOICE" engagement platform to present the programming document and conceptual options. A second round of feedback on refined options will be completed through an online survey.

Phase 3 will include further community engagement. Details on this will be generated as the Phase is initiated.

## **SUMMARY**

Visitation at municipal parks in the summer season has grown significantly over the last number of years, particularly at water front parks. This has been placing pressure on park infrastructure and maintenance, as well as creating capacity and conflict issues. Park infrastructure is in some cases approaching the end of its useful lifespan, infrastructure technology and operational approaches have changed, and new park lands have been acquired. Additionally, the community's demographic and needs have evolved significantly since the parks were built over 30 years ago - park uses that made sense 30 years ago may not make sense today.

In response to these issues, and building off of the 2015 RLMP, the Parks Master Plan seeks to create an inventory of current amenities in each of Whistler's parks, determine what improvements are desired for the future, develop a series of designs for those improvements, and provide a prioritized implementation plan with order of magnitude costs.

This Report provides an overview of the current progress to date and planned next steps of Phase 2 of the Whistler Parks Master Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Annie Oja  
PARKS PLANNER

for  
Jan Jansen  
GENERAL MANAGER OF RESORT EXPERIENCE