



**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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## STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** March 19, 2024 **REPORT:** 24-026  
**FROM:** Planning Department – Policy **FILE:** 7729.04  
**SUBJECT:** VULNERABLE POPULATIONS HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT – FINAL REPORT

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning and Development Services be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Council receive Information Report No. 24-026 regarding the final report for the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment, attached as Appendix A to Information Report No. 24-026.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment Report (Final Report) to Council. The Final Report is the outcome of the project that was conducted from February 2023 to February 2024 by Jessie Abraham of Planning & Development, with support from municipal staff. The project's key purpose is to identify the existing supply of, and community need for emergency, transitional, supportive, and non-market rental housing. This report will be a key tool to contribute to the development of housing options across the housing continuum and to support municipal partners in pursuing grant opportunities. It will also inform the development of the Resort Municipality of Whistler's (RMOW) long-term housing strategy.

Information Report  Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

##### *RMOW Role: Facilitating Housing*

The RMOW collaborates with higher levels of government, local non-profit organizations and the private sector to facilitate housing options. Additionally, in partnership with its subsidiaries, the Whistler 2020 Development Corp (WDC) and the Whistler Housing Authority (WHA), the RMOW delivers new affordable housing. WDC is generally responsible for housing development and construction, while the WHA is typically the housing owner and operator. Since 2018, through this model 294 employee housing units have been built or are currently under construction. One apartment building under construction will be owned and operated by the Whistler Valley Housing Society (WVHS) and will

provide housing opportunities geared towards essential service employees and social service clients employed in Whistler.

Through the development of the 2023 RMOW Housing Action Plan, the RMOW identified six housing action categories where it can have the most impact facilitating housing. These action categories are:

- Monitor Supply and Identify Needs;
- Protect and Optimize Employee Housing;
- Leverage Municipal Lands;
- Utilize and Expand Finance Tools;
- Encourage the Private Sector; and
- Remove Red Tape Barriers.

These action categories show that the RMOW mainly facilitates housing options through regulations, policies and programs, and collaboration. Regulations, policies and programs are used to determine the location and type of housing that can be built and encourage the development of non-market housing.

### *2022 Whistler Housing Needs Report*

In May 2022, the RMOW completed Whistler’s Housing Needs Report. The Housing Needs Report identified the following key segments of current need:

- general need for increased supply of purpose built rentals;
- housing for low income and vulnerable persons;
- housing for families;
- accessible housing; and
- smaller dwelling units.

It was also concluded that the market alone cannot be relied upon to provide these affordable, suitable, and adequate housing units for Whistler’s workforce – as prices have reached a point where the average market property is unaffordable for more than 90 per cent of Whistler’s resident population, with diminishing availability of market rentals. Additionally, the report called for further assessment of housing needs for vulnerable populations. Supported by grant funding provided by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), in February 2023 the RMOW initiated the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment project.

### *Understanding Vulnerability*

There is no standard definition of “vulnerability”. People experience vulnerability in different ways and at different stages of their life. Life changes that may make people more vulnerable include sudden changes in employment, housing eviction, fleeing violence, change in family structure (divorce, separation or becoming widowed) or health. For the purposes of the Final Report, a vulnerable person is any person who is, or is perceived to be, in a disadvantaged position or marginalized and, as a result, experiences barriers to housing. The methodology used acknowledges that people do not typically self-identify as vulnerable, nor do they consider themselves as belonging to a vulnerable population; however, they are experiencing vulnerability.

### *Housing Continuum*

As noted above, the project’s key purpose is to identify the existing supply of and community need for emergency, transitional, supportive, and non-market rental housing which typically serve more vulnerable populations. These housing types are identified in black outline on the housing continuum shown in Figure 1 and are described in the key results section of this report. The housing continuum is

a concept that illustrates housing options in a community and helps us understand housing challenges and barriers. A balanced housing continuum means people have options to find appropriate housing at all stages of life, and as their needs change over time.



Figure 1: Targeted Housing Needs within the Housing Continuum

### Using Core Housing Need as an Indicator

The concept of ‘core housing need’ was developed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). According to Census Canada and the CMHC, core housing need is defined across the following three dimensions:

- Affordability – the household spends less than 30 per cent of its gross income on shelter costs.
- Suitability – there are enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of the household according to the National Occupancy Standard.
- Adequacy – the housing is not in need of major repairs as reported by residents. Major repairs include defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings.

If a household would have to spend 30 per cent or more of its gross income to afford the rent for an alternative suitable and adequate unit in the local market, then the household is in “core housing need”. If the household is in core housing need and has a shelter-cost-to-income ratio of 50 per cent or more, then it is in “extreme core housing need”.

There is no single method to assess the number of existing Whistler households facing housing need. However, Census core housing need data can help identify a baseline estimate of existing need for key population and income groups; it does not tell us the required number of new non-market rental units. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the 2021 Census data reflects a snapshot in time and that many factors will influence how this number will ultimately be measured at the next Census, including the building of additional employee housing units or potential loss of market rental housing units since 2021.

## Analysis

### Report Structure

The Final Report is organized into the following sections:

- *Section 1: Introduction* reviews the project context and methodology;
- *Section 2: Community Overview* provides a summary of key demographic trends;
- *Section 3: Current Housing Supply and Supports* provides an overview of existing housing options and gaps in the housing system including populations that are underserved;
- *Section 4: Identifying Current and Emerging Housing Needs* estimates the current and future need for targeted housing types;

- *Section 5: Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation Engagement* provides a summary of housing barriers, challenges and opportunities that exist for Nation members in Whistler; and
- *Section 6: Next Steps* identifies lessons learned and considerations for moving forward.

In addition, the Final Report includes three appendices as follows:

- *Appendix A* provides definitions for key terms used throughout the Final Report;
- *Appendix B* provides supplementary data for *Section 2: Community Overview*; and
- *Appendix C* provides the Community Engagement What We Heard Summary.

The document also features:

- ‘What We Heard’ callout boxes, which include key engagement findings and are qualitative reflections of community perceptions; and
- ‘Experience Spotlights’, which are housing stories from community members with lived experience.

### Key Findings

The following subsections provide an overview of each housing type and the populations they serve. For each housing type, the subsections also identify Whistler’s current stock and programs, estimated current 2023 housing needs and anticipated 2033 housing needs. It is noted that without adequate data, it is difficult to gauge the demand for different housing types and the numbers below for current and future needs are best estimates based on information available at this point in time. For example, there is limited data collection in Whistler for those experiencing homelessness and a survey called a Point-in-Time count would be helpful in informing the demand for emergency housing.

In addition to categorizing needs by housing type, the Final Report identifies “key areas of need” which describes housing need by demographics that may span multiple types of housing. In particular, the Final Report identifies the following key areas of need: women and children; older adults; people with intellectual or physical disabilities; youth; Indigenous households; and recent immigrant households.

### Emergency Housing

Emergency housing provides immediate, short-stay housing for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, this include people who are living outside, precariously housed (e.g., day-to-day in a hostel, in a vehicle, couch surfing, or in some other temporary location), or in crisis. Emergency housing programs may be supplemented by drop-in services, meal programs, outreach services and other activities or services.

*Table 1: Emergency Housing*

Current Stock & Programs	Estimated Current 2023 Housing Needs	Anticipated 2033 Housing Needs
One extreme weather response shelter with 18 beds operated by Whistler Community Services Society (WCSS).  An emergency housing program operated by WCSS provides temporary shelter.	A year-round emergency housing site with six beds, with either supports on site or close to amenities and other services.	Minimum eight beds and year-round emergency housing site, contingent on annual data collection, such as a Point-in-Time Count, to fully assess demand.

### Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is a type of housing for residents between 30 days and three years, with the aim of transitioning individuals to long-term, permanent housing. These housing types typically support people who are in crisis and need an intermediate step between shelter and permanent housing and may target specific sub-populations such as women and children fleeing violence. Transitional housing types specific to serving people fleeing or at risk of violence include: transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing. Transition houses provide a safe, anonymous place to stay with food, staff, and support services. When a transition house is not available in a community, a safe home is an alternative option to provide short-term shelter, support services and referrals. Typically, after completing a stay in a transition house or safe home, second-stage housing provides a place for people to live independently typically for six to 18 months, while they work towards securing permanent housing.

Table 2: Transitional Housing

Current Stock & Programs	Estimated Current 2023 Housing Needs	Anticipated 2033 Housing Needs
One second-stage housing unit operated by PearlSpace (formerly Howe Sound Women’s Centre).  No transition house or safe home.  No transitional housing option for people who require immediate and temporary accommodation.	One long-term transition house or safe home for women and children fleeing violence or in crisis.	Increase second-stage housing from one to two units.  As emergency and supportive housing units are developed, seek opportunities for data collection regarding the need and demand for transitional housing.

### Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is a type of housing that provides on-site supports and services to residents who cannot live independently, including older adults, people with disabilities or youth aging out of foster care.

Table 3: Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing Type	Current Stock & Programs	Estimated Current 2023 Housing Needs	Anticipated 2033 Housing Needs
Youth	Zero Ceiling houses nine youth at two housing sites and provides on-site supports.	Increase youth supportive housing program to 22 beds (from nine beds).*	Increase youth supportive housing program to 28 beds.*
Adults, Older Adults, or People with Disabilities	None.	Minimum 20 supportive housing units.	Minimum 26 supportive housing units, contingent on establishing regular data collection methods, such as a supportive housing waitlist.

\*As this is the only youth supportive housing option provided in the Sea to Sky corridor, it is important to note that the estimated current and anticipated needs reflect regional need and demonstrates the success of the program.

### Non-Market Rental Housing

Non-market rental housing includes government subsidized housing, non-profit below-market housing, occupancy or employee-restricted units, and rent assistance options that are typically geared to low to moderate income individuals and families who experience barriers to finding and maintaining affordable

and suitable housing in the private market or who may suddenly experience vulnerability for a range of reasons including unsecure rental arrangements, or sudden changes in employment or family structure.

In the Final Report, non-market rental housing needs are estimated using core housing need data. The proportion of core housing need reflects 2021 Census data and the number of households are adjusted to reflect the projected 2023 population size and 2033 population size.

The estimated number of households shown in Table 4, represent households whose current homes are either not affordable, suitable or adequate and in order to be appropriately housed in an alternative adequate and suitable unit in the local market they would need to spend 30 per cent or more of their gross income on rent. This provides an indicator of need. It should be noted that economic impacts and migration could significantly alter estimated housing needs, especially in a resort community.

*Table 4: Non-Market Rental Housing*

Current Stock & Programs	Estimated Current 2023 Housing Needs*, **	Anticipated 2033 Housing Needs**
<p>Whistler has a variety of non-market rental units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 327 non-market rental units through the WHA.</li> <li>• 20 non-market rental units through the WVHS.</li> <li>• 1,038 unique community housing units (employee restricted rentals, employee occupancy restricted properties and employee suites).</li> <li>• An estimated 45 households in the private rental market across the Sea to Sky region receive rent supplements through BC Housing.</li> </ul>	<p>The following number of households require the identified shelter costs to secure affordable housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 114** very low-income households require shelter costs below \$495 to be affordable.</li> <li>• 548** low-income households require shelter costs below \$1,237 to be affordable.</li> <li>• 512** moderate-income households require shelter costs below \$1,980 to be affordable.</li> </ul>	<p>It is estimated that the following number of households by income category will require affordable housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 145** very low-income households.</li> <li>• 693** low-income households.</li> <li>• 647** moderate-income households.</li> </ul>

\* These shelter costs reflect the income groups provided in the 2021 Census.

\*\* The number of new units actually required to address needs may not be the same as the estimated number of households shown here. Some households may be served through other actions including rent supplements and additional units may become available as existing households move or migrate out of Whistler.

### Moving Forward

With vulnerable populations especially, it is difficult to quantify changing needs or capture data of those in crisis. Therefore, it is necessary to create opportunities for continued and more detailed data collection to further inform the estimated current and future needs identified in the Final Report. Additionally, it is recommended that this assessment is revisited in a maximum of five years.

The Final Report identifies that housing options for people experiencing vulnerability are needed now. Moving forward, the RMOW can consider actions to address and plan for current and future housing needs for vulnerable populations by using a balanced mix of the following methods:

- **Partner:** develop and maintain partnerships with community organizations that serve the needs of vulnerable populations to address the housing needs of these populations.

- **Engage:** collect data regarding housing needs and solutions, and share information with the public regarding housing plans, policies, and decisions.
- **Plan:** develop policies, plans, and strategies that consider the housing needs identified in this report.
- **Incentivize:** consider land use incentives (e.g., density bonusing), property tax incentives or fee waivers, or priority permitting to encourage the development of new housing.
- **Regulate:** regulate land uses through zoning and other bylaws.

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## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

[May 16, 2023: Administrative Report No. 23-059](#), (2023) RMOW Housing Action Plan

The Housing Action Plan outlines actions to address Whistler’s affordable housing needs and challenges; it identifies priority actions to be undertaken in 2023 and 2024 and provides a framework to guide future initiatives. Completing the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment is identified as a 2023 action under the housing action category ‘Monitor Supply and Identify Needs’.

[May 10, 2022: Administrative Report No. 22-062](#), (2022) Whistler Housing Needs Report

The Whistler Housing Needs Report assesses current and anticipated housing needs over the next five years and is legislatively required to be updated every five years. The Whistler Housing Needs Report called for further assessment of housing needs for vulnerable populations, identifying the work as “a very high priority”.

### 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.

Housing and Community Engagement are priority areas within the Strategic Plan. The completion of the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment Report supports the key initiative of implementing a Housing Action Plan. Additionally, the project’s community engagement process (described below in the Community Engagement section of this Information Report) contributed to connecting local organizations to each other and the RMOW.

### **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.

The Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment directly supports Policy 5.3.1.4 to:

*Collaborate with appropriate agencies and organizations to investigate requirements and provide, on an as-needed basis, affordable housing and special needs housing including emergency shelter, transitional housing or special care facilities.*

The information gathered from the Final Report will further support Policy 5.3.1.3:

*Encourage a diversity of housing types and tenures (rental and ownership) responsive to the needs of all age groups and family types, including singles, couples, young adults and families, seasonal residents, people with disabilities and seniors, and to support their transition through different housing types as their needs change.*

The RMOW mainly facilitates housing options through regulations, policies and programs, and collaboration. These policies support collaboration between the RMOW and appropriate agencies and organizations with the objective to encourage flexibility and adaptability in residential land uses. They also support the goal to promote a diversity of housing forms, tenures, residential uses and densities to support the resort community's needs.

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## **BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

Funding for the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment Report was provided through VCH grant funding. Project costs were covered by the grant.

To address housing needs for people experiencing vulnerability, consideration may be given to possible senior levels of government grant opportunities that may arise. Additionally, ongoing collaboration among local social services providers, housing providers and the public and private sector will be important moving forward.

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## **LÍLWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS**

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lílwat 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 Crown land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation were invited to participate in the project engagement through an interview or an alternative format, so that the project team could learn about the housing barriers, challenges, and opportunities that exist for Lílwat and Squamish Nation members in Whistler. An



interview was conducted with the Lílwat Nation Housing Coordinator and Director of Infrastructure. Squamish Nation provided written comments through the Squamish Nation engagement portal Squamish Connect. The insights shared on behalf of Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation are included in Section 5 of the Final Report. A copy of the Final Report will be shared with each Nation as a follow-up. Moving forward, to address housing needs for Nation members in Whistler continued collaboration with Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation is recommended.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform     Consult     Involve     Collaborate     Empower

Community engagement and consultation was an important element of the Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment project. To better understand the targeted housing needs, the RMOW engaged with interested organizations through two focus groups and engaged community members through five experience interviews. These consultation activities and the role of VCH are discussed further below. In addition, the Final Report will be shared directly with all engagement participants and posted to the RMOW's website so that it may be shared broadly with the Whistler community. A complete summary of the community engagement is included as Appendix C in the Final Report.

### *Vancouver Coastal Health*

The project team met with VCH staff twice to provide updates and receive feedback on the project approach and the initial findings of the needs assessment.

### *Focus Groups*

On May 24, 2023, two in-person focus groups were conducted. One focus group included social service and housing providers, and a second focus group included public sector organizations. The focus groups provided the opportunity for participants to come together to provide information and feedback on Whistler housing needs, gaps, challenges and opportunities. The focus groups included a brief presentation on the project purpose and timeline, as well as preliminary housing data collected to date. This was followed by a series of open-ended questions. Participants discussed and documented responses in small groups.

The first focus group was with 20 participants representing the following 13 social service and housing provider organizations:

- PearlSpace (formerly Howe Sound Women's Centre Society);
- Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre;
- Whistler & Pemberton Newcomer Services;
- Whistler Blackcomb Foundation;
- Whistler Community Foundation;
- Whistler Community Services Society;
- WHA;
- Whistler Mature Action Community;
- Whistler Multi-Cultural Society;
- WVHS;
- WISH Society; and

- Zero Ceiling.

The second focus group was with 12 participants representing the following nine Public Sector organizations and departments:

- Ministry of Children & Family Development;
- RCMP;
- RMOW Bylaw Department;
- RMOW Emergency Social Services;
- RMOW Fire Department;
- Sea to Sky School District No. 48;
- Vancouver Coastal Health; and
- Whistler Public Library.

In an effort to involve all key interest groups, organizations who could not attend the focus groups were offered an alternative interview. Sea to Sky Community Services Society was unable to attend the first focus group and instead participated in an interview.

#### *Experience Interviews*

Five lived housing experiences were collected through interviews and are shared as ‘experience spotlights’ throughout the Final Report. The purpose of the interviews was to engage with community members and to capture snapshots and housing stories of vulnerable populations with lived experience. Participants were referred by non-profit housing and social service providers and the interviews were completed via phone or in-person. All personal identifying information was removed or changed.

#### *Future Collaboration*

Ongoing engagement and collaboration with residents and local service providers is needed to understand how housing opportunities and challenges are evolving over time, and to make informed policy decisions. In order to take meaningful actions, partnerships are needed with the community, non-profit organizations, the private sector, and higher levels of government.

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## **REFERENCES**

Appendix A – Vulnerable Populations Housing Needs Assessment – Final Report

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## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this Information Report is to present the Final Report to Council. The Final Report is the outcome of the project that was conducted by Jessie Abraham of Planning & Development with support from municipal staff from February 2023 to February 2024. As an outcome of the project, the Final Report identifies the existing supply of and community need for emergency, transitional, supportive, and non-market rental housing. The Final Report also provides recommendations for moving forward including ongoing engagement and collaboration with the community, non-profit organizations, the private sector, higher levels of government, and Lílwat Nation and Squamish Nation. Furthermore, it is necessary to seek opportunities for continued and more detailed data collection and it is recommended that this assessment is revisited in a maximum of five years.

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**SIGN-OFFS**

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