

Dear Mayor & Council,

Re: 2019 RMOW Budget Feedback

We write to you as our communities elected officials to provide feedback on the draft 2019 Municipal Budget and some of the projects therein.

On Climate Change Action and Capacity -

Firstly, we would like to highlight our full support for the creation of a new role within municipal hall to work on progressing the recommendations of the Community Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP), as committed to in the 2019 budget. Incumbents on Council will likely recall that AWARE raised concerns about the lack of a dedicated staff person and advisory committee to support the CECAP at both the 2017 and 2018 Budget Open Houses and it is good to see this gap start to be addressed.

Following further discussions with RMOW staff we would like to highlight the following observations - as our understanding is that Mayor and Council are committed to pursuing a course of aggressive actions on climate change.

1. The CECAP includes 94 emissions 'mitigation' recommendations and 40 'adaptation' actions. In the years since CECAP was adopted in 2016 we have seen four action areas receiving significant investment: wildfire & FireSmart; housing; waste; and transportation. We believe further investments in any of these action areas would be strongly supported by the community. There are however, many short-term recommendations highlighted in the CECAP that we do not see project budget allocations for in the 2019 Budget. Significantly, we do not see sizable new investments in mitigation recommendations – which are fundamental if we wish to achieve our GHG reduction targets and which community performance indicators show we are currently trending negatively against - with an actual increase of 16% in total emissions from 2015 to 2017¹.
2. Discussions with staff highlighted that the new Climate Change Officer role will sit as a mid-level position in the Environmental Stewardship Department. We question whether the positioning of this role reflects Councils intention for this file - given that opportunities for climate actions will need to continually advocated for, identified and enacted with senior managers within municipal departments but also (and perhaps more importantly) outside of the RMOW. The lead on climate action will need allocation and control of a budget associated with this file, they need to be able to direct work and they need to be embedded in strategic decision making at the highest level – because we need to start designing climate goals into all aspects of our community. We question whether a mid-level role will be positioned to effectively drive climate action within and (again more significantly) external to the RMOW.

¹ RMOW emissions reports show total CO₂ emissions of 111,043 tCO₂ in 2015 and 129,080 tCO₂ in 2017 and increase of 18,037 tCO₂ in just two years.

3. Within the CECAP, actions were allocated across RMOW departments and external organizations either for leadership or as key partners in delivery. We encourage Mayor and Council to use the new CECAP quarterly updates to council as the opportunity to ensure the aggressive action you hope to see is being reflected and that updates highlight actions not just across municipal departments but also that have been triggered in external bodies (resort partners, targeted sectors, businesses, community members, etc). This will also provide clarity of responsibility for actions and will assist all those involved in supporting CECAP implementation as well as ensuring ongoing accountability for actions.
4. A recommendation of the CECAP that we have repeatedly supported and that to date we have been told will not proceed is the need to create a CECAP Advisory Committee of Council. We recognize that the formation and oversight of committees requires capacity and resources. However, we continue to believe this is a vital step to engaging key external organizations in continually pursuing CECAP recommendations, similar to the work we have seen come out of the Transportation Advisory Committee. We would also question what message we are sending about community priorities when people look at the list of council's advisory committees and climate change is not represented in that list.

On Alpine Trails -

5. The 2019-2023 budget forecasts an expenditure of \$430,000 on item X008 'Recreation Trail Program' and \$950,000 on item X055 'Alpine Trail Program'. Prior to construction of Lord of the Squirrels we were told we could expect around 1000 users on that trail over the course of a season. In reality we have seen exponentially greater use with over 5500 users in the 2018 season, which was 57 days long (giving an average of nearly 100 users per day). Our group continues to have ongoing concerns regarding the intensity of use of alpine trails and construction of new trails.
6. We commend the recognition of the need for a management strategy for trail networks. As we continue to encroach on and fragment habitat we should have plans in place to manage people as needed, in the interests of protecting other values. We recognize the conversations sparked by alpine trail closures for Grizzly Bears last fall but we believe this type of trail management action will continue to be necessary and should be supported into the future. There are a number of background contexts that support this:
 - a. Grizzly bears are an umbrella species and indicator species meaning the conditions needed by these bears (seasonal food sources, safe areas to raise cubs, connected habitats, etc) are also needed by many other species of wildlife. So by safeguarding their habitats we are supporting many other species;
 - b. Past Council passed a resolution to support actions to allow for recovery of the local population which is registered as threatened;
 - c. When we build trails into known grizzly bear habitat areas we have a responsibility to take on additional user management and public behavior education efforts (meaning ongoing costs over and above trail maintenance and signage);
 - d. As a bear smart community we made commitments to avoiding and wherever possible designing out human-bear conflict; and
 - e. Given investment in RMOW budgets of well over a million dollars over the lifetime of the Alpine Trails Program there may be risk and legal factors that emerge if we fail to keep people and bears safe.

Discussions with staff have highlighted that other than completion of the trail to Beverly there will be no further development of alpine trails this year until work is completed on a bear hazard assessment of existing and proposed trails and subsequently a bear management plan relating to the trails. We would recommend the hold on alpine trail development be extended beyond the 2019 year so that there is significant time to implement recommendations of these two human-bear conflict avoidance plans and to monitor for effectiveness. We would suggest a period of at least 3 years to allow for changes in annual food availability (e.g. changes in berry crops), weather patterns (e.g. early / late thaw and now) and pregnancy cycles for females (links to defensive behavior and food sourcing) as well as the time it can take to change human behaviors.

7. In the 2019 budget there is \$85,000 allocated to item P073 ' Recreation Trails Access and Management Strategy'. We understand from staff that the scope and parameters of this strategy is yet to be confirmed. AWARE holds a seat on the Forest Wildlands Advisory Committee and we have seen the conversation around access evolve in that group for over a decade. FWAC has previously submitted a set of guiding principles to Council that could be used as a basis for a comprehensive access planning process. We are providing these as an annex to this letter for reference and to convey the scale and scope of work that is needed if we are to effectively balance the diverse mix of values we currently see on the landscape (recreation, biodiversity, commercial, industrial, etc).

We recognize that to create a comprehensive plan around managing all types of access – i.e. determining how we are going to distribute increasing numbers of people, where access infrastructure should and should not go, what types of access are appropriate in which areas, where are there values (ecological/cultural/etc) that we want to safeguard for the future and how access controls can support that, management of jurisdiction and enforcement – represents a huge amount of work and would require significant investment. While item P073 is undoubtedly a good start at tackling existing trail access gaps the funds allocated are specific to recreation trails and would not therefore enable the steps mentioned above in terms of budget or scope (based on our understanding following questions to staff). We would recommend that project P073 be recognized as an initial step and not interpreted as completion of actions still needed to develop a comprehensive access management strategy for Whistler.

We hope you will find this feedback useful in your review and consideration of the 2019 Budget.

Sincerely,



Claire Ruddy
Executive Director,
Association of Whistler Area Residents for the Environment (AWARE)

Annex 1 –

FWAC Recommended Whistler Access Management Planning Principles

June 3, 2016

Over the past many years, FWAC has noticed that issues around providing and managing access are a recurrent and continuing theme in and around Whistler's forests, wildlands, and backcountry areas. The Sea-to-Sky LRMP, the very basic Sea-to-Sky Coordinated Access Management Plan (which was intended to be updated and added to), and other planning documents provide but some access direction but, in FWAC's experience, not enough to deal with enough of the complex access issues in and around Whistler.

It is important that a range of values are presented at all access-related conversations and initiatives and seldom can one committee bridge all those interests. It is also important that with limited resources to construct, deconstruct, maintain, and sign access, that adequate access planning and management occur to optimize resources and avoid duplication.

Goal & Principles

The Goal and Principles are intended to guide and inform the RMOW, businesses, project proponents, organizations, and other governments and agencies with respect to access and access management within the boundaries of the RMOW, the Cheakamus Community Forest, and, upon occasion and depending on importance to the community, the broader area of interest in the Whistler Landscape Unit and potentially beyond.

It is recognized that in order for much of the access management planning that meets the RMOW's vision to be implemented, the RMOW and CCF will need to work in conjunction with other provincial government agencies (e.g. FLNRO District Manager and BC Parks) Whistler Blackcomb, and First Nations.

Goal

“All forms of access are planned and managed in a coordinated manner to meet overall community interests so that a range of community values - environmental, First Nations cultural and spiritual, wildfire management, public safety, historic, and neighbourhood - are maintained while allowing appropriate levels of public and commercial recreation, and industrial use.”

Principles

1. A range of community values are maintained and/or enhanced through access planning and management.

Desired outcomes:

- Appropriate access is designated/zoned, planned, constructed, maintained and monitored to the degree that the RMOW has jurisdiction and/or influence.
- Access planning respects sensitive areas and the intent of existing land designations including Wildlife Habitat Areas, Ungulate Winter Ranges, rare and endangered ecosystems, drinking water sources, ecosystem management areas, and First Nations cultural and spiritual areas.
- Develop a strategic plan to identify which existing and new roads and trails are maintained and managed into the future to serve the public, commercial recreation and industrial uses.
- Unnecessary roads and trails are decommissioned to avoid safety, aesthetic, and environmental concerns.
- Habitat fragmentation, loss of greenspace and impacts on visual quality through the construction

of wider linear corridors (eg. roads, powerlines, etc) are minimized.

- Unintended access consequences are avoided. (eg. access being provided too close to areas where some or all forms of access are not desired – such as community water sources - are avoided)
- Unless part of an acknowledged access plan, new resource, commercial or infrastructure roads are temporary and suitable rehabilitation or decommissioning measures are employed.
- Best management practices are utilized during construction and maintenance, and resources such as terrain stability and ecosystem mapping are employed. (e.g. to avoid erosion and sedimentation and impacts to water quality and aquatic habitat)
- Management planning efforts should, to the extent possible, be designed to be able to capture, new, nascent and yet to be developed forms of access.

2. Consistency of access planning and management direction by the RMOW in keeping with Whistler 2020.

Desired outcomes:

- As Whistler 2020 is the community's highest level policy document, access planning and management reflects it.
- Where there are multiple RMOW initiatives, departments, committees, etc that intersect with issues of access planning and management, these should be coordinated and integrated with common purpose.

3. Access planning and management direction is consistent with providing visitors quality nature-based tourism experiences.

Desired outcomes:

- Visitor surveys consistently indicate the strong interest Whistler visitors have in nature-based tourism experiences. The quality and number of nature-based experiences available to visitors to Whistler can be improved with appropriate access measures.

4. Coordination for access planning and management with other levels of government and existing plans.

Desired outcomes:

- Planning for access management is compatible and consistent with other and higher level plans including the Sea to Sky LRMP, the amendable Sea to Sky Coordinated Access Management Plan, First Nations land use plans, and "backcountry recreation sharing accords".
- Synergies are maximized and conflicts are minimized.
- Whistler continues to provide input on access-related issues within and beyond its boundary.

5. Public access is safe and enjoyable.

Desired outcomes:

- As public access to Whistler's forests and wildlands is an important component of the resident and visitor nature-based experience, and as the spectrum of recreational opportunities potentially conflict among themselves or with commercial recreation and industrial activities, access planning should allow multiple forms of access where safe, desirable and compatible, but must also recognize that not all activities and modes of transportation are appropriate or compatible at all times.

- To protect the natural environment, the recreation resource, and/or the resident and visitor nature-based experience, there may be situations where limits to the amount access may be desirable and/or required. This could include a range of tools including limits to the amount of access infrastructure, the number of users, the cumulative effect of multiple activities, new forms of access, etc.

6. Access planning and management are incorporated in the corporate plan.

Desired outcomes:

- Budget(s) are developed to plan, provide, maintain, decommission and monitor access infrastructure.
- Partnerships and contributions are sought to share access management costs.

7. Access-related information is widely available.

Desired outcomes:

- A GIS information system that inventories roads, trails and other forms of access and linear infrastructure is maintained and available to other governments, agencies, project proponents, and the public.
- Information on what access is permitted where and when - including the state of that access - is disseminated through a variety of means including online and signage and, where appropriate, be reflected in the OCP and bylaws.