

November 18, 2024

Re: 2025 - 2029 Financial Plan

Dear Mayor and Council,

Tourism Squamish appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the District's 2025-2029 Financial Plan. While the public documentation offers valuable insights into key areas, some details on the General Fund operating budget remain limited. With that in mind, please find our comments and suggestions below:

1. General Fund

The Financial Plan Summary indicates that \$8,786,741 will be allocated to Economic and Community Development in 2025. However, only \$499,000 in special projects are itemized, leaving \$8,287,741 unaccounted for in the public documentation. We would like to understand the District's Economic and Community Development plans for 2025 and to offer more thorough feedback. We ask for access to the full General Fund budget in order to provide meaningful feedback to the District.

2. Adventure Centre Renovations

We are pleased to see the planned updates to the Adventure Centre, including the HVAC system, roof replacement, and flooring improvements. Welcoming over 150,000 visitors and residents annually, the Adventure Centre plays a key role in supporting Council's Strategic Plan objective of fostering a connected and livable community by providing spaces for arts, culture, and events.

The Adventure Centre has secured significant funding through the Tourism Dependent Communities Fund, a provincial initiative aimed at supporting communities heavily reliant on tourism. This funding is allocated in two phases: Phase 1 focuses on developing the 'Squamish Story' exhibit within the building, while Phase 2 aims to enhance the exterior to enrich visitor experiences. These grants underscore the Centre's vital role as a tourism asset, attracting visitors and contributing to the local economy.

We would appreciate an update on the Adventure Centre Parking Lot study, as we believe enhancements to the parking lot, the addition of amenities, and inclusion of the proposed Forestry Interpretive Centre would greatly improve access and enrich the experience for locals and visitors alike.

3. Economic and Community Development Funding Reductions

The Financial Plan includes substantial cuts to Economic and Community Development funding, with the 2025 budget reduced by over \$2 million compared to the 2024 allocation and further cuts anticipated through 2029. Given that Squamish is one of the fastest-growing communities in British Columbia, we would appreciate greater clarity on how the District sees these reductions aligning with the increasing demands of a rapidly expanding population and a thriving tourism sector.

Economic and Community Development is a pivotal department that supports not only tourism but also the broader goals of community cohesion, business growth, and sustainable development. Tourism Squamish works closely with District staff on a range of initiatives to strengthen the economic and social fabric of the community. These reductions could severely impact our shared capacity to effectively manage Squamish's evolving needs. We would value insights into how the District plans to mitigate the negative impact of funding reductions on these critical areas of support and maintain momentum on key

initiatives for Squamish's long-term prosperity. Are there alternative strategies or funding sources the District envisions to using for Economic Development despite these cuts?

4. **Tourism Master Plan Completion**

In 2024, \$100,000 was allocated for the development of a Tourism Master Plan, a project that remains unfinished. We seek confirmation that this funding will carry forward into 2025, allowing us to bring this essential initiative to completion. A Tourism Master Plan is essential for Squamish to develop a sustainable, vibrant, and community-focused tourism strategy that aligns with local priorities and values. Tourism is well identified as a 'Core and Enabling Sector' in the District Economic Strategy. As a major economic engine for Squamish, tourism directly impacts our community's quality of life and our shared resources. A comprehensive Tourism Master Plan will help manage growth, preserve environmental assets, and enhance both resident and visitor experiences.

We see this plan as complementary to several other studies underway, including the Marine Action Strategy (MASt) and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. For instance, MASt aims to guide the sustainable use of Squamish's marine and waterfront assets, which are integral to the tourism experience. Similarly, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will address community access to green spaces, recreational areas, including marine areas, and natural resources—also core components of the visitor experience. By coordinating these efforts, the Tourism Master Plan can support and reinforce the goals outlined in these plans, ensuring that tourism development is thoughtful, sustainable, and well-integrated within Squamish's overall vision for the future.

Given ongoing budget constraints, we urge the District to ensure that sufficient resources and staffing are allocated to complete the Tourism Master Plan. Tourism Squamish is prepared to collaborate closely with the District, providing both industry insight and strategic input to bring this initiative to life.

5. **Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

To support Squamish's evolving needs and continued growth as a premier destination, it's essential to update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan in 2025 rather than delaying it until 2027. Since the last plan was developed in 2012, Squamish has seen rapid growth in both resident population and visitor numbers, leading to increased pressure on parks, trails, and recreation facilities. Squamish has evolved significantly, and visitors increasingly seek unique indoor/outdoor recreational experiences, making updated facilities and programming essential to attract and support tourism. An updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan would allow the District to proactively address current demands, ensuring that resource allocation, infrastructure investments, and community programming are aligned with Squamish's goals as a vibrant, sustainable, and culturally rich community.

Tourism in Squamish heavily relies on high-quality, well-maintained parks and recreational assets. Trails, green spaces, and community facilities attract thousands of visitors each year for activities like hiking, climbing, and cycling, which form the backbone of Squamish's appeal as an outdoor recreation hub. By prioritizing the Master Plan update in 2025, Squamish can ensure its recreational offerings continue to support tourism sustainably, fostering positive visitor experiences while maintaining the quality of life for residents. This timely update would also help the District anticipate future trends and effectively plan for continued growth, allowing Squamish to remain competitive as an attractive destination.

The Master Plan process would also provide many opportunities for planning integration and partnerships within our community. Integrating arts, culture, and heritage elements into the new Master Plan presents an opportunity to enhance the visitor experience while strengthening the sense of community identity. Public art installations, interpretive signage, and heritage exhibits can be thoughtfully incorporated into parks and recreation spaces, connecting visitors with Squamish's history and cultural landscape.

Additionally, partnering with organizations such as Capilano University, local schools, and churches provides a network of non-District-owned facilities across neighborhoods that could be used to expand recreational, cultural, and educational offerings. These collaborations would create more flexible, accessible spaces that meet the needs of a growing population, distributing event and programming opportunities across the community and alleviating pressure on District-managed assets.

6. Outdoor Recreation and Green Impact Studies

The Outdoor Recreation and Green Impact studies were initially funded in the 2024-2028 Financial Plan. Tourism Squamish maintains there remains value in conducting both Outdoor Recreation and Green Economy sector impact assessments. Both sectors are complementary to Squamish's tourism industry and understanding and supporting growth in these sectors would drive economic development through green infrastructure, eco-accommodations, sustainable transportation, collaborations with outdoor brands, development of interactive experiences, and greater media exposure, all of which highlight Squamish's landscapes and adventure culture in a sustainable manner. Additionally, it would drive job creation and economic resilience by diversifying the local economy and aligning growth with Squamish's natural assets. Does the District plan to complete these previously funded studies and if so, when?

7. Marine Impact and Community Boat-Launch Feasibility Studies

Within the documentation that has been made public, we cannot find any information on the Marine Impact and Community Boat-Launch Feasibility Studies. Both were funded for 2024 but remain pending. These studies are critical to achieving the goals outlined in the Squamish Marine Action Strategy (MASt), endorsed by the District of Squamish in July 2018.

MASt emphasizes the importance of waterfront and marine resources as community assets that contribute ecological, social, cultural, and economic benefits. In particular, the Marine Gateway focus area highlights the need for safe, accessible, and well-maintained water-based recreation infrastructure to serve residents and attract visitors. A community boat launch directly addresses identified infrastructure gaps, creating a managed entry point to our waterways that not only supports recreational tourism but also provides a tangible connection to Squamish's waterfront. Additionally, there is a clear need for basic marine infrastructure, such as a fuel station and essential services, to support the growing demands of water-based tourism and ensure a positive visitor experience. MASt also outlines immediate actions to promote shared leadership in managing Squamish's marine areas and expanding access to the waterfront. That topic will be further examined in detail by the pending Marine Impact Study.

By prioritizing the completion of these studies in 2025, Squamish can make data-informed decisions about infrastructure investments that will drive tourism growth, bolster our local economy, and bring us closer to achieving our goal of becoming a premier waterfront destination. We urge Council to ensure these studies

receive the necessary resources for timely completion to support this vision.

8. Squamish Airport Process and Procedure Manual

Tourism Squamish supports the development of a Long-Term Strategic Plan including land use and long-term lease negotiations with existing tenants, as it is a key asset for tourism. Tourism Squamish currently has four members operating out of the Squamish Airport (Glacier Air, Sea to Sky Air, Blackcomb Helicopters and Black Tusk Helicopters), who currently have short term leases with the District of Squamish. Offering long-term tenancy agreements fosters certainty and confidence among businesses operating at the Squamish Airport, supporting stability and growth within the tourism and aviation communities. Furthermore, exploring ways to expand airport services would benefit the community and nearby regions. Does the District plan to further the work completed in 2022/2023 interim recommendations and complete a Long-Term Strategic Plan?

9. Official Community Plan (OCP) Review and Zoning Adjustments

Finally, as the OCP will require updating, in light of new provincial housing legislation, we hope to see focused discussions on hotel zoning. Providing clear guidelines for tourism accommodations in designated zones would offer developers the clarity needed for planning. Given that many new hotels are integrated into multi-use buildings, accommodating these types of developments could also help address the hotel shortage in Squamish.

Thank you for considering our feedback on the 2025-2029 Financial Plan. We look forward to working together to ensure that Squamish continues to be a vibrant, sustainable destination for both residents and visitors.

Warmly,



Lesley Weeks
Executive Director, Tourism Squamish