

STAFF REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

PRESENTED: February 24, 2026
FROM: Parks Planning Department
SUBJECT: VILLAGE STROLL TREE STRATEGY

REPORT: W26-003
FILE: 6120

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee of the Whole (COTW) recommend to Council that the Village Stroll Tree Strategy (Strategy), attached as Appendix A to COTW Report No. W26-003, be endorsed as a guiding framework to protect, enhance and adapt Whistler's Village Urban Forest; and

That the COTW recommend to Council that staff reflect the Strategy's principles and recommendations in future updates to relevant guidelines, policies, and standards, including the Whistler Village Design Guidelines, where appropriate; and further

That the COTW recommend to Council that the Strategy be used as a reference document when reviewing development permits, tree removal and replacement proposals, and public realm projects along Whistler's Village Stroll.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the Village Stroll Tree Strategy (Strategy) to the Committee of the Whole (COTW) for information and recommendation of Council endorsement. The proposed Strategy, attached as Appendix A, is intended to guide the protection, enhancement and long-term management of trees along the Village Stroll.

DISCUSSION

Background

Whistler Village was developed in the late 1970s as a pedestrian-oriented resort centre closely integrated with its mountain setting. Guided by Landscape Architect Eldon Beck's vision of a "Village in the Forest," the Village Stroll was designed as the primary pedestrian way, with trees playing a central role in shaping public spaces, softening buildings and reinforcing Whistler's identity as a nature-immersed resort community.

As construction continued through the 1980s and 1990s, trees were extensively planted along the Village Stroll, within plazas, and adjacent to buildings using the landscape standards and construction practices of the time. Many trees were installed in raised planters or on-slab soils above underground parkades with limited rooting volumes. While effective for early establishment, these conditions have constrained long-term tree health.

Over the subsequent decades redevelopment, infrastructure upgrades, snow loading, storefront and visibility concerns, began to impact these trees. More recently, climate change, wildfire risk, water conservation objectives, and shared management responsibilities across public and private lands have further increased pressure on Whistler's Urban Forest.

An inventory and assessment of 354 trees along the Village Stroll was completed in July 2024 by Diamond Head Consulting. The collected data was used to evaluate species and diversity, replacement value, and ecosystem services such as carbon and air pollution sequestration. Further analysis was undertaken by RMOW staff.

Analysis

Trees along the Village Stroll are a defining element of Whistler's identity, public realm, and economic vitality, yet they are increasingly vulnerable.

The 2024 tree inventory and assessment confirmed that while many trees remain in fair to good condition, most are growing in highly constrained conditions with soil volumes well below best practices and are heavily reliant on irrigation to survive. Without a coordinated and proactive approach, there is a high risk of continued incremental tree loss and missed opportunities to integrate trees more effectively into future development, capital projects, and public-realm improvements.

The Strategy responds to these challenges by providing a clear framework to guide how Whistler's Urban Forest is planned, protected, and enhanced over time. The Strategy consolidates existing policy direction, technical findings, and operational experience into consistent guidance that can be applied across planning, development review, capital works, and ongoing maintenance. By establishing shared objectives, recommended practices, and a long-term vision, the Strategy enables more informed decision-making, improves coordination between municipal departments and private property owners, and supports climate adaptation, FireSmart™ and water-use objectives. Importantly, the Strategy is intended to guide, not regulate, future actions, allowing flexibility while improving consistency and long-term outcomes.

Supporting the Strategy provides Council with a proactive tool to protect an essential resort community asset before further decline occurs. Improved growing conditions, diversified species selection, and more deliberate replacement practices can extend tree lifespan, preserve canopy cover, enhance shade and pedestrian comfort, while reducing long-term maintenance and replacement costs. Inaction, by contrast, would likely result in continued reactive decision-making, increased tree mortality, and higher long-term costs associated with loss of mature trees and diminished ecosystem services with compromised public experiences.

Potential drawbacks include increased expectations for coordination, incremental capital investment to improve growing conditions, and the need to balance competing interests such as storefront visibility, wildfire safety, snow management and water conservation. Some recommendations may also require additional staff time or future budget considerations as opportunities arise through redevelopment or capital projects. However, these impacts are largely incremental, can be phased over time, and are

outweighed by the benefits of improved tree performance, reduced risk and clearer direction for all parties involved.

Endorsing the Strategy provides Council with a practical, forward-looking framework that supports long-term resilience, aligns with adopted policies, and helps ensure the Village Stroll continues to function as a welcoming, climate-adapted, and nature-immersed public space consistent with Whistler's founding vision.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

There are two main policy and four bylaw documents relevant to this Strategy:

- **Official Community Plan (OCP)**

Whistler's OCP includes numerous Development Permit Areas (DPA), which are designated areas with specific guidelines for development.

The Strategy aligns with the OCP by applying DPA guidelines that govern environmental protection, form and character, and hazard mitigation, ensuring that tree planning and management along the Village Stroll meet regulatory expectations and support the long-term vision for Whistler Village.

- **Big Moves Climate Action Implementation Plan (Big Moves Plan)**

The Strategy directly supports the [Big Moves Plan](#) by enhancing wildfire resilience, improving extreme weather adaptability, and strengthening local biodiversity through coordinated, climate adaptive urban forest management.

Adaptation Goal 1: Minimize Treats from Wildfires

- Incorporate FireSmart™ guidance into the RMOW's community planning and policy frameworks.
- Seek collaboration with organizations and interested parties on wildfire risk reduction and resiliency tasks.

Adaptation Goal 2: Increase Resilience to Extreme Weather Events

- Develop strategies to improve public safety for extreme rain, snow, heat and wildfire and wildfire smoke.
- Develop strategies to make recreation trails and outdoor recreation assets more resilient to extreme rain and snow.
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Adaptation Goal 3: Protect Local Ecosystems and Biodiversity

- Develop policy, plans and legislation to protect and restore local ecosystems and support natural infrastructure services.

- **“Tree Protection Bylaw No. 2435, 2025” (Tree Bylaw)**
The Strategy supports the Tree Bylaw by providing a coordinated framework for maintaining required tree densities, guiding species selection and replacement, and strengthening long term stewardship to ensure the environmental, climate resilience, and community character outcomes the bylaw is designed to protect.
- **“Environmental Protection Bylaw No. 2426, 2025” (Protection Bylaw)**
The Strategy aligns with the Protection Bylaw by strengthening protection of natural systems through coordinated tree management, species selection, and maintenance practices that preserve ecological health and prevent environmental degradation.
- **“Water User Fee Regulation Bylaw No. 1826, 2007” (Water Bylaw)**
The Strategy supports the Water Bylaw by reducing long term irrigation demand through drought-tolerant species selection, improved soil conditions, and more efficient irrigation systems, helping to manage water use under tiered consumption based fees.
- **“Outdoor Potable Water Usage Bylaw No. 2179, 2018” (OPWU Bylaw)**
The Strategy supports the OPWU Bylaw by reducing reliance on potable water through drought-tolerant species selection, improved soil conditions, and the use of low-flow or non-potable irrigation systems.

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.

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 OCP is the RMOW's primary guiding document setting out the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

Schedule T: “Whistler Village Design Guidelines” of the OCP is the most relevant policy document informing this Strategy. It establishes objectives for Whistler Village that emphasize maintaining the unique character and sense of place while guiding development that supports its evolution as a successful pedestrian-oriented commercial centre integrated within its mountain setting.

The Whistler Village Design Guidelines focus on landscape and design at the human scale and carry forward the original planning principles for Whistler Village, including guidance related to site planning, landscaping, solar access, viewscape protection, and the consideration of trees as a fundamental element of the public realm and urban forest.

Other OCP Schedules are also included in the Strategy with varied levels of applicability:

- K: Protection of Sensitive Ecosystems DPA
- L: Aquifer Protection DPA
- M: Whistler Village DPA
- S: Wildfire Protection DPA

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Funding for the Strategy was provided by the provincial Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) Program, which is intended to support small, tourism-based municipalities to build and diversify their tourism infrastructure, deliver exceptional visitor experiences and incorporate sustainable tourism practices and products. The RMI does not rely on local taxpayers.

There are no immediate budget considerations. Moving forward, there may be need for resources to achieve the desired outcomes outlined in the Strategy. These will be presented to Council, when necessary, through the annual budgeting process.

LÍL'WAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Líl'wat 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 planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☐ Inform ☒ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

An online survey was offered to over 100 businesses fronting the Village Stroll, including retailers, hotels, restaurants, and property owners. A similar survey targeted landscape contractors maintaining trees and landscape in the study area. Findings from both surveys were integrated into the Strategy.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Draft Village Stroll Tree Strategy.

SUMMARY

This report introduces the Village Stroll Tree Strategy for the COTW's information and to request endorsement to bring to a future Regular Council Meeting for Council's consideration.

SIGN-OFFS

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