
Squamish Tourism Investment Attraction Strategy

Final Report

Prepared for
District of Squamish



By



ECONOMIC GROWTH SOLUTIONS INC.

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1 – TOURISM VISION AND INVESTMENT ATTRACTION GOALS

The District of Squamish already has a significant tourism industry because of its strategic location on the Sea To Sky Highway halfway between Vancouver and Whistler. Many visitors to Whistler stop at least briefly in Squamish for fuel and other services, with a small percentage taking in other tourism attractions and features offered in the Squamish area. Squamish is also a popular day trip for outdoor recreation enthusiasts based in the Greater Vancouver Area.

To enhance the economic development of the community, the District of Squamish would like to strengthen its role as a tourism destination in and of itself, going beyond its role as a service centre and day trip destination. This will require significant investment in new attractions, infrastructure and facilities (particularly roofed accommodations) in order to attract and cater to overnight destination visitors.

VISION FOR SQUAMISH AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

The overall vision for tourism in Squamish should build on values the community deems important including the following:

- ◆ Outstanding natural environment
- ◆ Friendly and welcoming small-town atmosphere
- ◆ Central, connected and diverse
- ◆ Strong sense of community and creative energy

The overall vision for Squamish as a tourism destination should help to reinforce these values. Therefore, the vision is as follows:

- ◆ Squamish will develop as a unique oceanfront mountain community destination, capitalizing on the range of outdoor recreation activities available in the immediate area from “tidewater to mountain peaks”.
- ◆ The principal attractions base will be focused on the access to a broad range of land-based and water-based outdoor recreation activities, as well as an innovative and attractive mixed use oceanfront development which offers a combination of waterfront access, outdoor recreation features, retailing and accommodations, all linked to a revitalized downtown area.

- ◆ Trail systems, walkways, roadways and signage will link the various tourism precincts in the District of Squamish including the oceanfront, downtown area, other retail service areas, major accommodation establishments, and access to mid-country and back-country outdoor recreation activities.
- ◆ The District of Squamish will have a larger and more diversified accommodations base as well as a broader range of tourism and outdoor recreation-oriented retailing, tours/excursions and outdoor recreation outfitting facilities and services.
- ◆ Complementing the natural heritage of the area will be a number of cultural-oriented attractions including enhancements of existing major heritage attractions in the region such as West Coast Railway Heritage Park and the Britannia Beach B.C. Museum of Mining attraction, as well as development of enhanced First Nation attraction components.
- ◆ Squamish will also develop one or more major marquee attractions such as a sightseeing gondola (but not on the Chief) to draw visitors to the community.

KEY GAPS IN CURRENT PRODUCT BASE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

To fulfil its ambition as a major tourism destination Squamish will need to attract investment to fill in a range of gaps in the current infrastructure. These gaps relate to accommodations, attractions, outdoor recreation infrastructure, signage, and various aspects of community appearance.

Gaps in Accommodations Base

The primary gaps in the accommodations base include the following:

- ◆ Lack of high-end accommodation (four or five star), in spite of a sizeable high-end market attracted to nearby Vancouver and Whistler
- ◆ Lack of specialty accommodations such as a waterfront hotel/marine resort, high-end back-country lodges, and high-end B&B's
- ◆ Lack of Spa and wellness retreat accommodations
- ◆ Need for additional hostel accommodation for students and budget travellers
- ◆ Need for full-service campground/RV park, in addition to Provincial Park campgrounds in the area

Attractions

The major gaps in the attractions base include the following:

- ◆ Lack of waterfront/oceanfront oriented attractions in spite of location at the head of Howe Sound
- ◆ Limited tourist-oriented retailing
- ◆ Need for a convention/conference centre
- ◆ Inadequate marina facilities
- ◆ Need for additional arts and cultural attractions including an Arts Centre and entertainment venues (indoor and outdoor)
- ◆ Lack of boat tours, boat rentals and other marine-oriented attractions
- ◆ Lack of a major flagship (drawing card) attraction, other than The Chief which caters to a niche market.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure

While there are plenty of outdoor recreation activities available in the region, there is a lack of physical infrastructure and organized tours/excursions associated with some of these activities. Missing components include the following:

- ◆ Well-identified access points with adjacent parking areas for individual trails and trail networks
- ◆ Need for additional trail-oriented infrastructure including interpretive signage, restrooms or outhouses, lookouts, and trail improvements to cater to a wider range of skill sets
- ◆ Limited opportunities for outfitting for outdoor recreation activities including rentals of equipment and organized tours and excursions.

Signage

Signage around Squamish from a tourism point of view is spotty and inconsistent. While there is some appropriate welcome signage to the community, this may need refinement particularly in light of the refinement of Squamish's overall branding. Specific gaps in the signage include the following:

- ◆ Inadequate directional signage to major attractions and facilities

- ◆ The need to further enhance the recently implemented themed tourism signage system directing people to various points of interest throughout the District of Squamish and highlighting major tourist attractions and features as well as the downtown area and waterfront
- ◆ Commercial signage at present is relatively uncontrolled with a fairly intense neon strip along the Highway. As time goes on a more refined look is required to enhance Squamish's tourism destination appeal and fit in better with the outstanding natural setting.

Community Appearance

Currently the community appearance along the Highway is relatively harsh compared to the outstanding natural setting. This rather suburban commercial strip look needs to be softened which can be achieved by requiring landscaping on the part of commercial enterprises, literally planting evergreen trees along the Highway, and better controlling signage and design of the built infrastructure. More coordinated architectural appearance would also be beneficial, particularly in the downtown area. In addition, major sections of the District are very industrial looking and a "greener" look needs to be achieved with perimeter landscaping and buffer zones.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES FOR TOURISM INVESTMENT ATTRACTION

The overall goals for tourism investment attraction are as follows:

1. To attract major developer interest in developing the waterfront lands, particularly for the commercial/retail and accommodation components
2. To develop a public/private partnership for revitalizing the downtown area
3. To secure public sector funding for important infrastructure investments including community appearance enhancement, signage, and outdoor recreation infrastructure.
4. To attract tourism small business entrepreneurs to establish specialty oriented retailing, tourist outfitting businesses and various tours and excursions.
5. To attract investors to develop one or more flagship attractions that will be drawing cards for visitors to the Squamish area.

2 – TYPES OF TOURISM/OUTDOOR RECREATION INVESTMENT TO BE ATTRACTED

The key gaps in the tourism product base identified in Chapter 1, along with the goals and objectives for tourism investment attraction provide the basis for identifying the specific tourism investment and outdoor recreation investment needs. This includes a range of facilities, infrastructure and programming.

OVERALL TOURISM INVESTMENT NEEDS BY CATEGORY

A primary tourism investment need is additional accommodation facilities if Squamish is to become a successful overnight tourism destination. Then, in order to encourage visitors to stay overnight in the area, there is a need to develop additional attractions, festivals and events, and themed tourist-oriented retailing, much of which ties-in with the proposed downtown and waterfront redevelopment.

Accommodation Investment Needs

A recent Accommodations Strategy study was completed for the District of Squamish, which recommends a number of new accommodation developments. What will be important with any such proposed developments is acquiring locations with a high amenity value. For example, we would not recommend additional accommodations along the commercial highway strip, which is already served by the largest accommodation properties in the area. Any new accommodations should be located in proximity to the downtown and waterfront or in scenic view locations, making the accommodations attractions in and of themselves. The scenic view locations could be in the urban area as well as natural settings in the rural areas where smaller lodge/resort type accommodation would be appropriate.

Specific accommodation investment needs we recommend and which are supported by the recent Accommodations Strategy include:

- ◆ **Waterfront marine resort small convention hotel.** This is recommended also in the waterfront development plan and could be up to 200 rooms in size and should feature adjacent convention facilities catering to meetings, conferences, conventions and banquets of up to 500 people, who would be accommodated in this hotel and other properties in the town. This property should be capable of achieving a Canada Select 4-star rating and CAA 3-diamond rating, and should be a

higher end brand such as Delta, Marriott Courtyard, Sheraton Four Points, Hilton Garden Inn or similar level brand. Spa and wellness facilities could also be part of the complex.

- ◆ **Additional downtown/waterfront hotel.** Over the next five years the market would support an additional similar quality full-service hotel located in the downtown/waterfront area. Ideally it should be within walking distance to the downtown to provide support for its rejuvenation, while at the same time being only a short distance from the waterfront, to take advantage of that setting. While offering a full range of food and beverage services and some meeting and conference rooms, this property would not be as elaborate in terms of resort type amenities as the waterfront marine resort property.
- ◆ **Nature-based lodges/resorts and spas.** Squamish is an ideal location for all types of nature-based tourism and recreation, ranging from hiking, rock climbing and mountain climbing to windsurfing, kayaking and white water river rafting. In spite of these assets, there is relatively little high-end soft adventure type accommodation infrastructure developed in the region. These are primarily limited to B&B's and a few small cabin operations. Over the next five years there is potential to develop at least one or two higher end backcountry lodge/resort type operations which would offer a range of outdoor adventure and ecotourism activities and have the following facilities:
 - 15 - 20 lodge rooms or cabin units which would have private baths, decks or patios and scenic views
 - Main lodge area with small restaurant and cocktail lounge that could accommodate overnight guests and some additional day visitors
 - Some small meeting rooms
 - On site recreational amenities such as a sauna, whirlpool, exercise room
 - Additional spa and wellness facilities, if appropriate
 - Direct access to water and land-based activities such as hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, river rafting, bird watching etc.
- ◆ **Development of additional campgrounds.** Currently there are several campgrounds in the District of Squamish including the Squamish Municipal Campground next to the Brennan Park Leisure Centre as well as campgrounds in the following provincial parks:
 - Alice Lake
 - Brackendale Eagles
 - Brandywine Falls

- Garibaldi
- Murrin
- Porteau Cove
- Shannon Falls
- Tantalus

There are also campsites at the Brohm Lake and Cat Lake forestry recreation sites. In total, however, there are less than 300 campsites available for the region, which is quite limited for an area popular for camping and with a potential longer camping season than some other parts of the province because of the mild coastal climate. Also, there is a lack of full-service RV parks with all of the water, sewer and electrical hook-ups currently in demand by this market segment. Therefore, we recommend the following additions to the campground infrastructure:

- One or two additional full-service campground/RV parks in attractive settings with a full range of campground and on-site recreational amenities. These facilities should be capable of achieving a 3 or 4 W rating in the Woodalls Camping Guide.
- Work with BC Provincial Parks to determine the potential of adding campsites, including more serviced campsites, at the existing provincial parks in the region to help satisfy growing demand.

Attraction Developments

In spite of the vast array of outdoor recreation amenities, there are relatively few developed tourist attractions in the Squamish area beyond any of the infrastructure associated with the provincial parks. A major tourist attraction proposal for a gondola on The Chief has been put forward by a development group, although this particular location was rejected by the community.

The idea of a sightseeing gondola, similar to the highly successful Sulphur Mountain Gondola in Banff National Park (which has operated for more than 50 years) clearly has merit, although needs to be developed in a different location and one which would possibly provide more panoramic views of the region than the initial proposal. A limited amount of tourist oriented food and beverage and retail development could be located at both the base and summit of such a development and add to its appeal.

- ◆ **Enhancement of existing built attractions.** These include West Coast Railway Heritage Park and the B.C. Museum of Mining at Britannia Beach. Both are full scale operating tourist attractions, and there is currently a development plan being undertaken for the Mining Museum, which will likely be implemented over the next several years. Similarly,

proposals for enhancing the Railway Heritage Park have also been put forth and investment in the upgrading of this attraction would also be appropriate.

- ◆ **Revival of the *Royal Hudson* steam train excursion.** This popular attraction was discontinued with the termination of BC Rail's passenger service. Funds have recently been made available for complete restoration of the engine, so it will be important to negotiate the return of the excursion with CN and the Province.
- ◆ **Development of an arts and cultural facility.** In spite of considerable local interest and talent relative to the performing arts and the visual arts, an appropriate facility has not been developed. While the recent referendum was not supportive of increasing taxes to fund such a development, it would be appropriate to examine a range of private sector and public/private sector partnerships that would be used to fund this development, tying-in with cultural legacies for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.
- ◆ **The Squamish Nation Cultural/Interpretive Centre.** This is currently proposed as part of the Downtown Waterfront Concept Plan. This would further showcase the unique Aboriginal culture of the Squamish Nation for visitors and local residents alike.

Festivals and Events

Squamish already has a successful year-round program of festivals and events, some of which are nationally and internationally significant. However, many of these are not well-known beyond Squamish and the event participants. There is an opportunity to invest more in the marketing and promotion and programming associated with some of these events by attracting additional corporate sponsors and investors. Events that Squamish could build on to enhance its tourism profile and increase visitation include the following:

- ◆ Brackendale Winter Eagle Festival in January
- ◆ The Songbird Festival held in April and May
- ◆ Test of Metal Mountainbike Race in June
- ◆ Squamish Days Loggers Sports during the August Long Weekend
- ◆ Return of the Salmon Festival in October.

Each of these festivals and events has a range of programming associated with it, although there are opportunities for enhancement and drawing a wider

audience from the Lower Mainland and the Greater Vancouver Area visitor base.

Themed and Tourist Oriented Retailing

This investment needs to be encouraged for the downtown area and in the new waterfront development. The concept would be to develop a significant tourist oriented retail precinct that would be similar to such developments as Granville Island, Steveston, the Village of Fort Langley and the waterfront town of Ganges on Salt Spring Island. Each of these destinations has distinct elements that would be well-suited to the Squamish downtown and/or waterfront.

- ◆ For example, the historic look of the Village of Fort Langley, which has many restored heritage buildings as well as new infill buildings designed in a traditional style, could be suited to portions of the downtown area.
- ◆ Ganges on Salt Spring Island has some heritage buildings, but a significant number of new buildings that have been designed in an appealing west coast style.
- ◆ The Steveston waterfront ambience is something that should be created as part of the Squamish waterfront development and which should include waterfront promenades adjacent to any marina developments and oceanfront park areas.

Specific types of retailing that should be attracted include the following:

- ◆ Additional craft shops, gift shops and galleries, as well as further enhancements/expansions of those already existing
- ◆ Waterfront and downtown restaurants and cafes (including sidewalk cafes) that would appeal to local residents and visitors alike
- ◆ Men's and women's fashion boutiques
- ◆ Marine supply stores
- ◆ Windsurfing supply stores
- ◆ Diving shops
- ◆ Outdoor outfitting depots and shops
- ◆ Expanded farmer's market and artisan/craft fairs in the downtown and waterfront area
- ◆ Antiques and curio shops.

Enhanced Streetscaping and Landscaping

This is essentially infrastructure. Tourist oriented communities typically pay considerable attention to streetscaping and landscaping and there is a need to invest in upgraded appearance in the downtown area and along the highway corridor. Specific investment needs include the following:

- ◆ **Landscaping along the Highway 99 route within the urban area.** Some of the newer developments do feature landscaping along the Highway, but this needs to be consistent all the way through the urbanized areas within the District. Additional trees and shrubs and other landscaping features along the route would soften the harsh suburban and industrial appearance.
- ◆ **Landscaping/streetscaping in the downtown area.** In addition to a more consistent architectural look, the main street downtown would benefit from updated planters, street furniture and paving stones to create a more attractive pedestrian ambience. The Heart of Sea to Sky banners are a colourful addition that should be retained. More awnings on shops would be beneficial on rainy days.
- ◆ **Additional tourist oriented signage.** Recently a new system of tourism signage has been implemented. These signs are very helpful and point to various tourist oriented attractions and features in Squamish. It is important to continue the implementation of this system and provide additional way-finding signage in between these main signs and the points of interest to which travellers are directed. In some cases, it is unclear how to proceed once you have travelled a few blocks from the directional signs.

OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM INVESTMENT NEEDS

In spite of Squamish having the ideal natural setting for outdoor recreation and promoting a wide range of outdoor recreation activities in its travel literature and on web sites, when travelling through Squamish it is unclear where many of these activities take place. In order to encourage greater visitation based on these activities, it is necessary to invest in the following:

- ◆ **Development of enhanced trailhead sites.** This would be relevant for the main access points to individual trails and trail networks, which are significant. The trailhead should provide adequate parking, perhaps outhouses, and both directional and interpretive signage.
- ◆ **Trails infrastructure development.** This would include trails upgrading, additional restrooms/outhouses enroute, defined lookout areas,

interpretive signage, and possibly backcountry cabins for hikers in the case of long distance trails.

- ◆ **Windsurfing infrastructure development.** The prime windsurfing access is on the estuary, which will continue to be popular. There is a need for enhanced infrastructure including change rooms/showers, snack bar facilities and on-site windsurfing depot featuring windsurfer sales and repairs, related accessories and equipment, rentals, instruction and packages. This would be difficult at the present location, but the Downtown Waterfront Concept Plan proposes that it be relocated to a new site.
- ◆ **Squamish estuary trail and viewpoint enhancement.** This unique ecosystem with all of its bird species and other wildlife and marine life would benefit from investment in additional trail infrastructure and interpretive signage, as well as strategic viewpoints and lookouts.
- ◆ **Eagle viewing infrastructure enhancement.** There is an excellent series of viewpoints along the Dike in the Brackendale Eagles Provincial Park. The interpretive panels are excellent, but there is a lack of nearby parking and inadequate directional signage to this interesting site.

3 – TOURISM PACKAGING NEEDS

The District of Squamish has many tourism attributes, points of interest, attractions and facilities. There are also a number of individual tourist operators offering a range of outdoor adventure and other nature-based activities and excursions. However, there is potential to further develop packaged tourism products making use of the various attributes and product elements already in place.

LOCALLY BASED PACKAGING REQUIREMENTS

Currently there are a number of package excursion operators that are based in the Squamish area. Some, such as the Sunwolf Outdoor Centre offer a full range of packages featuring different activities and including accommodation and meal facilities. Most of the locally based package operators, however, do not offer accommodations and are primarily focused on half-day and full-day excursion operations. Some of the local B&B's and hotels do offer some packages as well. Overall, however, comprehensive experienced-based packages including accommodations are in relatively short supply.

A range of innovative local vacation packages should be developed that include the following components:

- ◆ High quality accommodations
- ◆ Included tours and excursions, which may be based on one or more activities such as hiking, cycling, sea kayaking, birding, etc.
- ◆ Some or all meals
- ◆ Local transfers and transportation
- ◆ Transfers to and from Vancouver Airport, where appropriate.

This type of packaging could be done effectively by a locally-based inbound tour operator or ground operator specializing in unique experiences within the District of Squamish.

This operator would position itself as offering the “Squamish Experience” with an appropriate operating name along the lines of “Squamish Tours and Adventures Inc.”, which would communicate the types of services being offered. At this stage of development, there is probably room for one good operator to be successful, but as Squamish evolves into a more

comprehensive tourism destination, there may be potential for additional similar operators to be successful, as has occurred in Whistler.

The range of packages to be offered by this inbound operator would include:

- ◆ Eagle viewing and other bird watching packages
- ◆ Windsurfing and kite boarding
- ◆ Cycling tours and mountain biking
- ◆ Hiking and walking tours
- ◆ Kayaking and rafting expeditions
- ◆ Mountaineering, rock climbing and ice climbing packages
- ◆ Nature appreciation tours and orienteering
- ◆ Salt water and fresh water fishing packages
- ◆ Back-country snowmobiling, snowshoeing and ski touring packages
- ◆ Mining and railway heritage packages
- ◆ Golf packages featuring Furry Creek Golf and Country Club, Garibaldi Springs Golf Course and Squamish Valley Golf and Country Club
- ◆ Theatrical productions at the Eagle Eye Theatre.

The same operator could also be involved in developing events-oriented packages for spectators and participants in major festivals and events, such as the Test of Metal Mountainbike Race and the Windsurfing Championships.

TOUR OPERATOR BASED PACKAGING NEEDS

Adventure Tour Operators

There are a significant number of adventure tour operators based throughout North America that package premier adventure vacations across the continent and around the world. In examining the programming of several of the better known operators such as Toronto-based Butterfield and Robinson and California-based OARS, it is clear that Squamish is not even “on the radar screen”, despite billing itself as the Outdoor Recreation Capital of Canada.

There are probably a number of reasons for this including being dramatically overshadowed as a tourist destination by both Whistler and Vancouver, as well as the commercial/industrial look and feel of the Town itself which does not present the right image to adventure travellers. However, making use of the right accommodations, such as some of the District’s high-end B&B’s, the

Howe Sound Inn and Brewing Company, and Sunwolf Outdoor Centre, we believe there is potential to ultimately be included in itineraries offered by some of these major operators. Many of the operators are probably simply unfamiliar with Squamish and its plethora of outdoor adventure and recreation possibilities. An appealing aspect of Squamish for some of these operators would be the easy access from Vancouver International Airport, which in turn has a direct access from most major North American and international markets.

Motorcoach Tour Operators

In addition to adventure tour operators, Squamish offers a range of features and attractions that are appealing to the motorcoach tour business, which brings significant numbers of travellers to British Columbia. Specific attractions that would appeal to these tour groups include:

- ◆ West Coast Railway Heritage Park
- ◆ B.C. Museum of Mining at Britannia Beach
- ◆ Eagle viewing
- ◆ Guided nature walks (e.g. Squamish Estuary and Shannon Falls)
- ◆ Visits to other cultural sites such as Brackendale Art Gallery and the Squamish Nation's Totem Hall.

Cruise Lines (Shore Excursions)

A third type of package that would be suited to the Squamish area could tie-in with the cruise lines making ports of call in Vancouver. Squamish is a perfect day excursion and packages could range from soft adventure activities such as river rafting (float trips rather than whitewater trips), visits to such sites as the West Coast Railway Heritage Park, B.C. Mining Museum, and Brackendale Art Gallery, and guided sea kayaking tours of the Squamish estuary. The Squamish Nation should be encouraged to offer performances, feasts and other interesting tours of Totem Hall.

These packages would need to be carefully planned and developed, and then marketed directly to the cruise lines that stop in the Vancouver area. The packages would need to include all transportation to and from the ship, as well the guided tours offered and any meals or refreshments required during the course of the excursion.

We understand that the new *Whistler Mountaineer* railtour will not be stopping in Squamish. Therefore, the District must lobby government and do its utmost to ensure that the *Royal Hudson* is refurbished (money has been put

aside for this) and that the tours that it used to offer such as the “Rail and Ale Tour”, visits to West Coast Railway Heritage Park and Shannon Falls be continued – these were extremely popular with cruise ship passengers and tourists staying at hotels in downtown Vancouver and looking for interesting day excursions.

4 – TOURISM INVESTMENT ATTRACTION TARGETS AND STRATEGIES

The preceding chapters have highlighted a range of investment needs to enhance the Squamish area's tourism industry. These needs are primarily related to accommodations, attractions, infrastructure, community appearance enhancement, and tours/excursions/packages.

TOURISM INVESTMENT ATTRACTION TARGETS

A combination of private and public sector investment will be required to transform Squamish into a successful and sustainable tourism destination.

Private Sector Targets

The primary private sector investment attraction targets include the following:

- ◆ Retail/commercial developers
- ◆ Marina developers
- ◆ Hotel and resort developers
- ◆ International brand hotel chains such as Delta Hotels & Resorts, Marriott Courtyard Inns, Hilton Garden Inns and Sheraton Four Points
- ◆ Specialized waterfront developers
- ◆ Tour operators – primarily adventure tour operators, motorcoach tour operators and cruise lines
- ◆ Small business entrepreneurs who will operate retail oriented businesses, food and beverage outlets, and new tourism excursions in the region.

As consumer marketing will clearly contribute to the attraction of investment for tourism projects, a range of consumer tourism marketing partnerships should be pursued with Vancouver Coast & Mountains, Tourism BC and the Canadian Tourism Commission.

Public Sector Targets

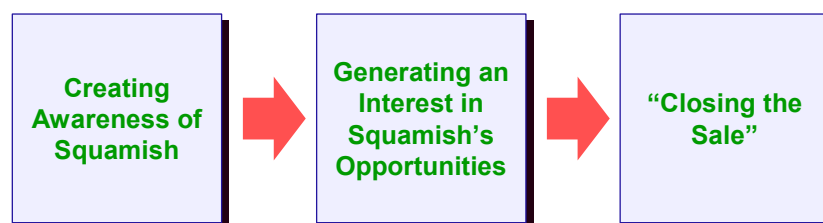
The public sector investment attraction targets are primarily sources of funding for the various signage, streetscaping, landscaping and infrastructure requirements recommended. These targets include the following:

- ◆ District of Squamish
- ◆ Province of British Columbia
 - Economic development funding
 - Ministry of Highways funding for enhancement of Highway 99 Route through the District
- ◆ Federal funding sources
 - Western Economic Diversification
 - Community Futures
 - Industry Canada – CISP Program

STRATEGIES FOR REACHING THE INVESTMENT ATTRACTION TARGETS

Strategies that create an awareness of Squamish as a tourism destination area within the key target groups, along with strategies for generating a specific interest in Squamish’s opportunities and then “closing the sale” will need to be pursued, as shown below in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Tourism Investment Attraction Process



Source: Economic Growth Solutions Inc.

Creating Awareness

The overall awareness strategies tie-in with the overall trade and investment initiative, including the new branding proposed for Squamish. These awareness strategies include the following:

- ◆ Development and implementation of a distinctive new tourism branding for Squamish, which is currently underway
- ◆ Further researching the best target companies within any of the above-noted private sector investment target categories, as well as determining the most appropriate public sector funding programs to tap into (these are constantly changing).
- ◆ Initiating a program of direct contact with target companies via direct mail, e-mails and a telephone campaign
- ◆ Participating in appropriate trade shows and marketplaces where the following types of investment attraction targets congregate:
 - Retail/commercial developers
 - Waterfront development forums
 - Resort development forums
 - Hotel Association events
 - Marina developer forums

Examples of specific trade shows, conferences, forums and marketplaces include:

- Hotel Association of Canada
- British Columbia & Yukon Hotels' Association
- Canadian Franchise Association
- Annual Canadian Hotel Investment Conference
- The Real Estate Forum (Real Property Association of Canada)
- BC Real Estate Association
- Canadian Real Estate Association
- Real Estate Institute of Canada
- Building Owners & Managers Association of BC
- ◆ Specific marketplaces for meeting with key tourism operators including the following:
 - National Tour Association (NTA)
 - American Bus Association (ABA)
 - Ontario Motorcoach Association (OMCA)

- Rendez-vous Canada (to market to overseas tour operators)
- SeaTrade (to market to cruise lines).

Networking in these various types of conferences, forums and marketplaces is an opportunity to meet directly with prospective developers, investors and tour packagers, to interact with them to create an interest in Squamish's specific opportunities.

Generating Interest and “Closing the Sale”

Essentially the preceding awareness strategies will help to generate leads and the following strategies are designed to convert leads into actual business investment attraction. These strategies include the following:

- ◆ Undertake a customer relationship management process with appropriate investment attraction leads.
 - The initial step involves providing more detail information about the prospects and opportunities in Squamish
 - Then a site visit to the area should be encouraged
 - Implementation of the site visit itself should ensure that the investors are thoroughly briefed on the potential opportunities, taken on appropriate site tours, and familiarized with the development and planning process in Squamish, B.C., and Canada.
 - There may be need to undertake some supplemental research on behalf of the client to respond to specific questions, issues and concerns they may have.
- ◆ “Close the sale” by helping to facilitate the approvals process and/or partnership arrangements for prospective investors.
 - Economic development officials can help provide access to information and act as intermediaries in the various approval processes, if required, to facilitate the investment and development.
 - An ongoing client relationship from lead to completion of the investment and development is important for successful investment attraction.

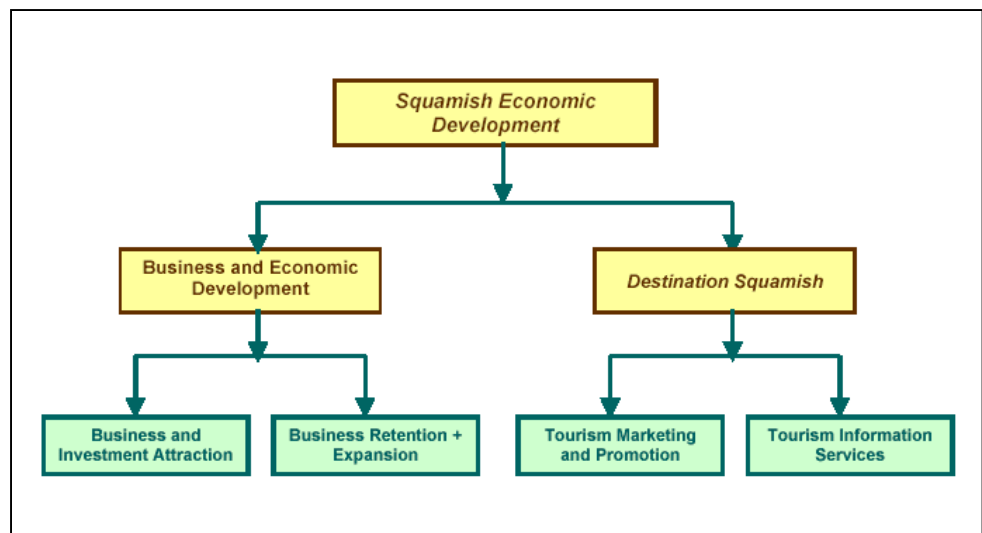
5 – RECOMMENDED DESTINATION MARKETING APPROACH

In order to help attract tourism investment to the Squamish area, it is critical that Squamish is being marketed effectively as a tourism destination. Therefore, an enhanced and coordinated tourism destination marketing initiative is essential.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

To be most effective in Squamish's situation, it will be helpful for the tourism destination marketing organization to be tied-in with the overall Squamish Economic Development effort. We have shown this conceptually in the organization chart below in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Organizational Structure for DMO



Source: Economic Growth Solutions Inc.

This suggests two distinct divisions of the Squamish Economic Development organization – the Business and Economic Development division and *Destination Squamish*. As shown, the Economic Development division breaks out into Business and Investment Attraction and Business Retention & Expansion, whereas

the *Destination Squamish* division breaks out into Tourism Marketing and Promotion and Tourism Information Services.

The primary functions of the Tourism Marketing and Promotion Division of *Destination Squamish* include:

- ◆ Development and implementation of an annual marketing and promotional plan
- ◆ Partnership marketing and promotional activities working with the Squamish area's tourism industry
- ◆ Selective advertising in regional and provincial travel guides
- ◆ Enhancement and maintenance of the Squamish area's comprehensive tourism destination website
- ◆ Working with local and regional operators to develop new products and packages
- ◆ Attendance at travel trade and consumer shows, where appropriate
- ◆ Development and coordination of a program of familiarization tours for travel writers, tour operators and tourism investors
- ◆ Ongoing public relations activities in support of tourism.

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DMO

To be effective the Squamish Destination Marketing Organization must ensure the following:

- ◆ Local and regional tourism industry buy-in to the overall Marketing Plan and specific marketing and promotional programs within it.
- ◆ Clearly defined and realistic target markets.
- ◆ An effective strategic approach oriented around the concept of product-market matching, ensuring that the products and packages on offer are suited to appropriate target markets, and that new products and packages are developed to serve currently untapped markets.
- ◆ An effective website marketing strategy is key, hot-linked to individual product and package offerings and tied into the major search engines.
- ◆ Sufficient financial resources to underwrite marketing and promotional activities, as well as adequate staff to do the job.

- ◆ A close tie-in with tourism investment attraction and development initiatives to ensure that products being developed are in sync with marketplace requirements.
- ◆ Effective partnerships with Vancouver Coast & Mountains, Tourism BC and the CTC, where appropriate.
- ◆ Use of effective sales techniques and customer relationship management to lure major tour operators and specific market niches (e.g. hikers, bikers, kayakers, windsurfers, railway buffs etc.).

OVERALL MARKETING AND PROMOTIONAL APPROACH

The new Squamish Destination Marketing Organization should focus its efforts as follows:

- ◆ Featuring the new Adventure Centre as a local icon and catalyst for the area's tourism industry.
- ◆ Enhancement of the tourism website under Squamish's new branding and the *Destination Squamish* identity.
- ◆ Production and distribution of a Squamish area lure brochure available both in print and electronically.
- ◆ Development and production of a Squamish Travel Guide, which would have a strong focus on packaged products.
- ◆ Effective advertising and promotion in travel guides, including those published by Vancouver Coast & Mountains, Tourism Vancouver and Tourism BC.
- ◆ Selective advertising in activity based publications where Squamish has a specific competitive advantage including mountain biking, windsurfing/kite boarding, kayaking, rafting, birding, hiking, fishing, and some other activities.
- ◆ Effective customer relationship management work with major tour operators and cruise lines with potential to bring groups of visitors to Squamish.

KEY MESSAGES FOR LURE BROCHURE

The key marketing messages for the Squamish lure brochure to be produced in 2005 should focus on the area's existing strengths and product offerings. Therefore, the key marketing messages should include the following:

- ◆ “From oceanfront to mountaintop” – photographs of Squamish’s spectacular setting at the head of Howe Sound and heart of the Coast Mountains should be emphasized, as this is the setting for the numerous outdoor adventure and recreational activities for which Squamish is known.
- ◆ The strategic location vis-à-vis Vancouver and Whistler should be emphasized along with Squamish’s key attributes that are not offered by these other mega destinations, including:
 - The Chief
 - World-class rock climbing
 - World-class windsurfing
 - World-class mountain biking
 - The unique natural environment of the Squamish estuary
 - Eagle viewing
 - Direct access to outstanding back-country areas such as the Tantalus Range.
- ◆ The brochure should highlight the multitude of outdoor adventure, recreation and ecotourism activities offered in the Squamish area including:
 - Rock climbing and mountaineering
 - Mountain biking and cycling
 - Camping
 - Bird watching and eagle viewing
 - Canoeing and kayaking
 - Nature tours and orienteering
 - Freshwater and saltwater fishing
 - Boating and scuba diving.
- ◆ The brochure should also showcase the cultural heritage of the area including the distinctive Aboriginal culture of the Squamish Nation, the significant railway heritage, as Squamish is famous for the *Royal Hudson* steam train excursion (soon to be revived) and West Coast Railway Heritage Park, as well as the significant mining heritage at the B.C. Museum of Mining and performing arts events featured at the Eagle Eye Theatre.
- ◆ The brochure should highlight the range of accommodation and other facilities available in Squamish including:
 - Hotels, Motels and B&B’s

- Outdoor centres, resort lodges and cabins
- Wide range of restaurants and fast food outlets
- Extensive shopping opportunities including outdoor adventure equipment, gift shops and First Nations arts and crafts.

Clearly there are too many images to try to include in one lure brochure, but it will be important to strike a balance between the outstanding natural environment, the numerous outdoor activities, the cultural heritage, and the availability of quality facilities and services. All of this is only a short distance from two of the continent's top tourism destinations and host to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games – Vancouver and Whistler. Squamish's locational proximity relative to the major 2010 Olympic games' venues should be emphasized.