



BACKGROUND

Reinventing Squamish: Fraser Basin Council Presents New Plan to Revitalize the Downtown Waterfront

This report presents the culmination of thousands of hours of work by hundreds of people who, at the behest of the District of Squamish Mayor and Council, have invested in the development of an extraordinary vision for the Squamish Downtown and Waterfront.

The state of Downtown Squamish has been a focus of attention for some time, and a variety of efforts have been undertaken to examine options for revitalization, including the development of a detailed design plan for the commercial and residential areas in that section of the community.

This plan, the Downtown 2000 Plan, was finalized and submitted to Council in November of 2000. Among the key concepts in the Plan was the recognition of a Downtown Waterfront Planning Precinct on the Mamquam Blind Channel Waterfront. This unique character area was identified as having the potential to drive revitalization of the downtown through public access to the water and opportunities for residential and commercial waterfront development. Although many of the principles of the Downtown 2000 Plan were widely accepted, concerns with the cost of the plan and questions regarding stakeholder buy-in stalled implementation of the plan.

In December, 2002 Council endorsed the Squamish 2000 Plan in principle and directed staff to update the plan to reflect changing circumstances in the District, including the acceptance of the University Project, Sea to Sky Highway upgrades associated with the 2010 Olympic Bid and changing demographics in the District.

On April 3, 2003, the Fraser Basin Council (FBC) convened a dialogue session in Squamish under its Strengthening Communities initiative. A key recommendation from attendees at this session was that the FBC facilitate stakeholder consultation to help determine potential futures for the Squamish downtown waterfront.

On August 27 the District organized, in collaboration with Fraser Basin Council, a downtown waterfront workshop intended to educate stakeholders on waterfront development opportunities, engage stakeholders in dialogue, establish key issues associated with waterfront development and discuss possible next steps. Dr. David Gordon, one of the foremost waterfront experts in North America, made a presentation on what actions make for successful or unsuccessful waterfront development. This session broadened the discussion to consider all of the District's developable waterfront and how best this should be done.

Some of principles that were understood by the workshop attendees were:

- A Master Plan is a necessity;
- Stakeholder and community participation in the planning is essential;
- The most effective waterfront development projects around the world have been carried out by single entities that own the land, or at least key components of it, and could act at arms length of local government but in the public's interest;
- Public participation in delivering basic infrastructure and suitable land use regulations is essential and a 60/40 split (Private/Public) in investment has proven most effective;
- Public benefits to waterfront development should be delivered early, such as boardwalks and greenspaces;
- The coming 2010 Winter Olympics could accelerate the speed of the development by up to 10 years.

Following this workshop members of Council, staff and the FBC attended an International Waterfront Conference in Montreal from September 14-16.

Subsequently, the District of Squamish entered into an agreement with Fraser Basin Council and through them with the University of British Columbia's Sustainable Communities Program, to produce a detailed downtown-waterfront concept plan through the employment of a generous public process and intensive charrette planning initiative. This process took place through November 2003 to February 2004, the result of which is the Concept Plan being released today.

The District of Squamish also entered into formal negotiations with the Province of British Columbia, with the support of Nexen Canada Ltd, for the transfer of the 78 acres of waterfront property loosely known as the 'Nexen lands,' though identified in the Concept Plan as part of the downtown waterfront.

In addition, the District of Squamish established the Squamish Waterfront Development Corporation as a legal entity with a board of directors. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the District of Squamish, the SWDC will be responsible for the development of community-owned waterfront lands.

The University of British Columbia was hired to work closely with the District of Squamish and Fraser Basin Council to design an effective public process that would involve residents and stakeholders in the decision-making process around the downtown-waterfront planning.

The process steps were designed and implemented as follows:

- November 18, 2003: a mini launch of the plan was presented to Council;
- November 27, 2003: a formal public launch was held to introduced the project and began to articulate the goals and objectives of the planning process;
- December 9, 2003: was the first public workshop where participants were separated into groups to identify key values around the decision-making and planning;
- January 15, 2004: the second public workshop was held and groups

were asked to add clarity around more detailed goals and objectives associated with the land-use and planning;

- February 4 & 5, 2004: 30 selected community representatives and stakeholders were invited to participate in the first two of four detailed planning days;
- February 10, 2004: the public was invited to view and review the work carried out by the charrette participants after the first two days, and make comments and suggestions to ensure the process was on track;
- February 10 & 11, 2004: the third and fourth detailed charrette planning days where participants added the final details to the concept plan, and designers articulated the plan into visuals;
- February 11, 2004: the final public presentation of charrette plan;
- April 6, 2004: the DRAFT final plan is presented to Mayor and Council;
- April 7, 2004: public launch and formal 'hand-off' of plan from Fraser Basin Council to District of Squamish, and public introduction of Squamish Waterfront Development Corporation board.

More than 150 people attended each of the public sessions associated with the planning process and over 200 surveys were filled out and returned to the planning team with comments and feedback, almost entirely overwhelmingly positive, regarding the process and progress of the plan. The results of the surveys were formally compiled and analyzed by an independent professional agency for verification and credibility through the process.

All the Charrette Team participants have indicated satisfaction with the results of the plan and the process via which it was developed, and the draft plan was extremely well-received by the public at the final presentation on February 11, 2004, at Totem Hall.

The DRAFT Final Plan articulates in greater detail the components and design standards associated with the plan, as defined by the public and charrette participants.

This detailed plan provides the District of Squamish with potent direction on how area residents and stakeholders wish to see the waterfront lands take shape over the next decade.

The final design highlights the essential public infrastructure components identified as priority, such as the water's-edge boardwalk, generous public greenspace, and central greenways interspersed throughout the plan.

Other key components include the Legacy Arts Centre, hotel/convention centre, multi-modal transportation hub, beach and interpretive area, high-density residential, full-service marina with berths to accommodate passenger ferry service and eventually cruise vessels, commercial and light industrial, as well as special features like the pedestrian bridge across the Mamquam Blind Channel.

This plan, once endorsed fully by council in its final form, will act as the primary guiding tool for both the District of Squamish and the Squamish Waterfront Development Corporation as it proceeds to the next stage.

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