

## WTA President's Report - October 21st, 2023

Since our last AGM on December 10th, 2022 your board have been working diligently to ensure tennis has a bright future in Whistler.

The Northlands rezoning process has stalled. Phase 1 began June 1st, 2021. Two and a half years later the new planning department head, Dale Mikkelsen, has asked Beedie to now work on a plan to locate the facility onsite rather than an offsite location that was initiated during the Phase 1 and early Phase 2 engagements.

Last February, municipal staff, reported to council on the results of the Phase 2 public engagement. Their report concluded that the top priority for the community is employee housing. The WTA decided to undertake our own review of the survey questions and results. After analysing the survey the WTA came to a somewhat different conclusion. We wrote two letters, one to the Mayor and Council, the other was a letter to the Pique Newsmagazine. The addendum at the end of this report has the Letter to the Mayor and Council.

A local supporter of both tennis and pickleball decided that it would be useful to show some concept drawings for an offsite multi-use racquet centre, one on Spruce Grove and another on a raised platform above the day skier's lots 4 and 5. He commissioned the drawings and the WTA has distributed them to initiate discussions about those two possibilities.

Guy Darby, myself, and Ben Thomas, representing pickleball, met with Waldorf School board of directors. We hoped that the initiative would help develop a relationship with the Waldorf school board. We brought the Spruce Grove concept drawings to the meeting. They show there is room for the school, the existing baseball diamonds, and a multi-use racquet centre. I believe that the Waldorf board was disappointed that the drawings did not show a larger, enhanced school facility than what currently exist. The WTA is not seeking solutions that eliminate other community assets.

On June 28th we had the most informative meeting of the year. It was with Dale Mikkelsen, the new department head of planning. He is the senior staff member on the Northlands file. Dale was open and forthright about staff's position on the recreation amenity. Unfortunately we take issue with many of staff's positions. His main points were:

1. At this time it would not appear that we have a park with the available land for a multi-use racquet facility.
2. At this time Meadow Park is not anticipated to have space for an indoor racquet amenity due to other priorities and environmental conditions on the site.
3. The parks department's Spruce Grove master plan engagement will not begin until at least 2027 due to timing of funds and other park priorities. No changes to the park's use are possible until the engagement is complete and a draft plan is developed.
4. The park's department has penciled in some other sport activities, such as little league baseball diamonds and an additional turf field, that will likely be priorities for the Spruce Grove space. There is no current timeline for these elements.
5. Phase 2 of the public engagement process is not near completion because many items are yet to be determined, such as the design, housing mix, CAC, and onsite/offsite amenities.
6. The planning department has asked Beedie to design a plan that has a "right sized" indoor multi-use racquet centre on the Northlands site.
7. That the onsite facility will not be to the scale that the WTA envisions. (The WTA has learned through contacting owner operators that the minimum requirement for financial viability is 6 indoor tennis courts, 4 outdoor tennis courts.)
8. That ideally, the indoor recreation space will accommodate many user groups other than tennis and pickleball, such as basketball, badminton, floor hockey, etc.

The WTA has a second meeting scheduled with Dale. This time the focus will be on the WTA's evidence based ideas to achieve the best result for a multi-use racquet centre with a strong community social contribution.

Throughout the past year two WTA directors, Ben Cherniavsky and Robert Leblanc, met several times with Curtis Neeser, from the Beedie Group. One of the pressing issues at those meetings was the need to resurface the 3 outdoor tennis courts. The summer before last there was no outdoor tennis at the WRC due the courts being in complete disrepair.

Jamie Grant was also pressing this issue with Beedie. Thanks to our combined efforts and Beedie's good will the courts were resurfaced in early summer. We finally had a great summer of outdoor tennis at the club.

In August, Guy Darby and Esther Gorman organized a drop-in social to celebrate the resurfacing of the three outdoor courts. It was a beautiful afternoon and the event was well attended.

WTA director, Bryce Leigh, conducted research into 6 tennis facilities. The purpose was to look at operating models and revenue sources. The good news is that all 6 of the facilities are financially self-sustaining, no matter if they are publicly or privately owned, or run by a non-profit organization. Tennis Canada reports that there are no indoor/outdoor racquet facilities in the country that are losing money. There are many viable operating models that we can adopt in Whistler.

September 30th, Esther and I attended the Tennis BC AGM. There was lots to celebrate. BC has the highest level of tennis participation in Canada. The new Tennis BC Hub in Richmond is thriving. Another Hub is planned for West Vancouver. There are 79 Tennis BC member clubs. 1,700 entrants to the Stanley Park tournament. There were two major televised events in Vancouver; the Billy Jean Cup and the Laver Cup. Many of the WTA directors attended these events.

Recently, I have been meeting, one to one, with all of Whistler's councillors. The meetings have been productive; a useful exchange of ideas and possible paths forward.

Last week, I had a telephone meeting with Curtis Neeser of the Beedie Group. They have been frustrated by length of the process and the change in direction to the racquet centre to be located on the Northlands site. They would like the community to consider locating the facility on RMOW park land or the large property east of Blackcomb Way. Beedie owns the land. It is an environmentally sensitive parcel that would require an environmental assessment report before being seriously considered.

On October 31st we will meet again with senior planner Dale Mikkelsen. Unfortunately Guy Darby, who was at the first meeting is unable to attend. Robert LeBlanc will attend and we have invited Ben Thomas from

the Sea to Sky Pickleball Club to demonstrate that we are united in our goal for a multi-use indoor/outdoor racquet centre.

We are confident that there will be a racquet centre in Whistler's future but we don't know where it will be located or if it will be of a scale and configuration to be successful.

Whistler Tennis Association Board of Directors.

### **Addendum**

To: Mayor and Council

From: The Whistler Tennis Association Board of Directors

John Konig - President, 2225 Gondola Way, Whistler, BC, V8E 0B4

Members of the Whistler Tennis Association (WTA) were present at the council meeting on February 21<sup>st</sup> when RMOW planning manager, John Chapman, presented a report on the Phase 2 Community Engagement Process for the redevelopment of 4500 Northlands. Overall, we were pleased to hear municipal staff acknowledge that, according to the feedback they compiled in this process, the protection of a long-standing recreation facility is a priority for the community.

The WTA obviously holds and champions the same view. We believe our message carries much more weight now that the consensus on the issue is clearly evident in the extensive public engagement process. The WTA feels compelled to clarify a number of conclusions that we draw from our own analysis of the Phase 2 Community Engagement report which we felt were not fully reflected in the presentation, particularly with respect to a multi use racquet centre. There were, in our view, also some errors of omission that we feel must be identified.

First of all, a bar graph on page 9 of the report illustrates how respondents answered the following question, which appeared at the beginning of the survey:

“What land uses do you feel are best-suited and should be prioritized for this site? Select the uses that should be included. Check all that apply.” 3 of the 19 options offered were; Employee housing, Large scale recreation facility (including tennis and pickleball), World class tennis facility.

From the 365 participants who completed the questionnaire 237 prioritized employee housing, 189 prioritized a large scale recreation facility (including tennis and pickleball), and 120 prioritized a world class tennis facility, leading staff to conclude that employee housing was the “top priority”. We feel this is misleading because the questionnaire effectively split the community's support for a multi-use racquet centre into two separate categories. If the votes for both of these very similar choices are consolidated then 309 prioritized the community's desire for a multi use racquet centre. It becomes clear that recreation is the “top priority”.

It is interesting to note that while support for a multi use racquet centre was split into two categories, support for child care facilities, health care offices, community spaces, senior centre were combined into one category giving it a strong third place finish right after a large scale racquet centre.

The community's expressed support for recreation does not end there.

Question 4 of the report asked:

“The above development overlay demonstrates the physical footprint of the existing tennis facility that occupies the site. Retaining this footprint would limit the ability to deliver a mix of housing forms, as well as other community uses and public open space. Given the space requirements, do you feel a dedicated tennis/pickleball facility with indoor courts, like what currently exists, should be a priority inclusion on the site?”

Despite the arguably leading nature of this question, 53% of respondents answered *yes* (i.e. we want to keep the facility even if it means less housing), vs. only 38% *no* (i.e. take down the WRC and build more housing). Why is the result to this critical question not highlighted in the report?

Incidentally, The Pique Magazine ran an online poll shortly after the RMOW presented the Phase 2 Community Engagement Report to council, asking: “[How do you envision the future of the Whistler Racket Club?](#)” Results from over 1400 respondents reflected a nearly unanimous degree of support to prioritize recreation with only 5% of votes cast indicating the “Whistler doesn't need a racket club.” The remaining 95% of votes were split between three different options to retain (12%), rebuild (55%), or relocate (28%) the Whistler Racket Club.

We also wish to draw council's attention to Question 5 of the Phase 2 Engagement Report, which is perhaps an even more leading or at least a more loaded question than Question 4 discussed above. It asks:

"Other community amenities could be included on site including employee housing, childcare, healthcare space, and community space. Should a dedicated tennis/pickleball facility be a priority for the resort community above other community needs?" A slim majority of respondents replied "Yes" to this provocative question.

Although the WTA prefers not to think about this process in zero-sum terms, pitting one community asset and its users against another, we think this speaks to the strong desire within the community to make recreation, and more specifically a multi use racquet centre, the top priority for Whistler in the Northlands Blvd. redevelopment process.

If the community were to decide to eliminate an existing recreation facility to meet other community needs, why is this question posed in a way that pre-determines the fate of the WRC as the one and only asset that should be sacrificed? Could the same goal not be accomplished by removing existing baseball diamonds, a driving range, a skating rink, a few holes on one of the three golf courses, etc.? The WTA does not advocate for the removal of *any* existing recreational asset, but if this is the debate that staff wishes to raise in the community then we expect it to be presented in a fair, comprehensive, and thoughtful way.

Finally, we highlight the last question in the Phase 2 Community Engagement Survey, which asked respondents to express: "Any final thoughts that weren't captured in the questionnaire." According to our analysis of the results, recreation once again came out on top with 86 of the responses to this question expressing their support for a multi-use racquet centre vs. just 21 responses mentioning employee housing.

The WTA would like to reiterate that we prefer not to frame this process in zero-sum terms. Our mandate is to advocate for tennis within a multi use racquet centre. The WTA supports the inclusion of staff housing in the comprehensive Northlands rezoning process, but only insofar as it does not eliminate an existing recreational and social amenity that has served the needs of thousands of residents of and visitors to Whistler for over 30 years. The unequivocal support that was expressed in the Northlands Phase 2 Report for recreation as the top priority echoes our position.

Whistler Tennis Association Board of Directors.