

June 19, 2015

Chris Hamilton
Executive Project Director
Environmental Assessment Office
PO Box 9426 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9V1

Dear Mr. Hamilton,

Re: Environmental assessment of the Proposed Garibaldi at Squamish (GAS) Project

On behalf of our nearly 700 members, the Whistler Chamber of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to participate in the public consultation process for this development proposal. On the subject of consultation, however, it is important to note that on page 18 of the proponent's Executive Summary (April 2015) the Whistler Chamber of Commerce (WCC) is listed as one of the stakeholders that GAS claims to have consulted with. The Whistler Chamber of Commerce has received no direct communication from Garibaldi At Squamish Inc. and does not consider that it has been consulted in a material way.

As a business organization, the WCC supports well-considered growth and intelligent investment that drives long term economic health in the Sea to Sky Corridor. Yet the proposal put forward by Garibaldi At Squamish, Inc. in its current form does not appear to support either. On January 3rd, 2014, the WCC sent a letter to the Environmental Assessment office voicing our concerns on the socio-economic impacts of the proposed development. The purpose of this letter is to further illustrate and underscore our concerns around these socio-economic impacts.

A report released in May 2013 by Go2HR (*Regional Tourism and Hospitality Industry Labour Demand and Supply Projections Final Report, Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc.*) projects there will be significant labour shortages by 2020 in the Vancouver, Coast and Mountains tourism region. Almost 9000 full time positions will be without qualified labour to fill them. The Food & Beverage sector will have the biggest gaps to fill, followed by Recreation & Entertainment and then Accommodation. These three areas aptly sum up the three main drivers of the Whistler economy. With another resort community in the Sea to Sky corridor, Whistler will be competing for an already shrinking labour force, and in sectors like Recreation, for **very** specialized skill sets as possessed by ski lift technicians and snow cat operators. Increased and competing demand for this small labour pool will lead to higher labour costs and threaten business margins and profitability. Squamish will also feel the effects of this labour crunch as it begins to assert itself as a world-class tourism destination in need of more workers. Recent changes to key federal immigration streams, like the Temporary Foreign Worker and Working Holiday Visa program, will also serve to exacerbate the Sea to Sky corridor's documented labour shortage moving forward.

Additionally, with a flat trend in skier visits – regardless of the capital investment made across the province in recent years – the source of GAS visitors will certainly be a cannibalization of Whistler's existing resort guests. This "visitor drain" to a competing concept just to the south will negatively impact Whistler's retail business community. It has taken decades of consistent, conscious planning and hundreds of millions of dollars of investment to perfect our Village retail experience, yet Whistler retail businesses still suffer when guest visits fall below annual averages. Another retail experience – and resort – on the Sea to Sky will put additional strain on the Whistler retail ecosystem which has been working hard to recover since 2008. The same logic can be applied to GAS and the likelihood of "splitting" visitors would also harm the proposed development, leading to a net result of neither resort realizing complete, sustainable success.

When the labour supply implications of this proposed development are considered in conjunction with fewer guest visits the specter of business bankruptcies becomes a reality. Ninety three percent of our members are small businesses and do not have the margins or reserves to sustain this “double hit”. It is these same, small businesses – the restaurants, retail and entertainment outlets – that produce the off-mountain experience for our guests. Without a healthy number of these businesses Whistler loses its “magic” and ability to deliver the unforgettable experiences guests have come to expect from North America’s number one ski resort (as voted by *Ski Magazine* in 2015).

In recent years, Whistler’s resort partners – including Whistler Blackcomb, the Resort Municipality of Whistler, Tourism Whistler and the WCC – have expanded their offerings and efforts to grow Whistler into a true four season resort that will stay vibrant for decades to come. As just one example, as of 2014 the WCC annually invests over \$300K in a training partnership with the University of Victoria’s Gustavson School of Business to offer world-class service training for small businesses that would not otherwise be able to afford or access such high calibre content. Investments like this are made with the belief that our local businesses have every opportunity to grow due to more favourable economic conditions post 2008; however, GAS will drastically change our socio-economic conditions and threaten our ability, and confidence, to invest.

Whistler is a cornerstone of the provincial tourism economy and annually contributes approximately \$1.3 billion to the provincial GDP and is responsible for generating almost \$1 billion each year in tourist revenue inflows to the province. Whistler generates over \$1.1 million each day in tax revenue to the three levels of government and now attracts 2.7 million visitors annually. The creation of another commercial center just south of Whistler will have an immediate impact on the economic climate of Whistler and the WCC wishes to go on record stating that this proposed development, if approved, will seriously threaten one of Canada’s most iconic and highest revenue producing ski resorts.

Sincerely,



Val Litwin
Chief Executive Officer
Whistler Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Government of British Columbia

- The Honourable Shirley Bond (*Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training*)
- The Honourable Mark Polak (*Minister of Environment*)
- The Honourable Coralee Oakes (*Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development*)
- The Honourable Steve Thompson (*Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations*)
- The Honourable Naomi Yamamoto (*Minister of State for Tourism and Small Business*)
- The Honourable Jordan Sturdy (*MLA West Vancouver – Sea to Sky*)
- Kevin Jardine (*Associate Deputy Minister*)
- Tim Sheldon (*Deputy Minister*)
- Norm Lee (*Executive Director*)

Canada West Ski Areas Association

- David Lynn (*President & CEO, CWSAA*)

Resort Municipality of Whistler

- Nancy Wilhelm-Morden (Mayor)

Whistler Blackcomb

- Dave Brownlie, CEO of Whistler Blackcomb

Whistler Chamber of Commerce

- All members