

Five-Year Strategic Business Plan

Designated Recipient: District of Squamish

Community Name: Squamish

Date Prepared: October 27, 2017

MRDT Expiry Date: November 1, 2019

Five-Year Period: 2018-2023

Section 1: Five-Year Strategic Overview

Vision and Mission

The vision of Tourism Squamish is:

To become the premier adventure destination in British Columbia offering epic outdoor experiences from Sea to Sky that highlight our rich natural surroundings and preserve local culture.

The mission of Tourism Squamish is to:

Work collaboratively with partners to execute strategic marketing and sales programs that deliver both more visitors and higher yield visitors to Squamish throughout the year;

Foster and support remarkable visitor experiences and outdoor adventures that celebrate and preserve our natural and cultural history and secure broad benefits to our residents;

Provide industry leadership and create awareness within our community of the value of tourism by actively measuring the impact of the products and services that we offer to our visitors.

Tourism Squamish will conduct its business in a manner that is:

- **Open and transparent** - processes are open to public scrutiny; opportunities to be informed and provide input are made available and decisions and their rationale are known by all interested stakeholders
- **Accountable** – annual reports are provided to stakeholder, local government and Ministry of Finance as per funding agreements.
- **Sustainable** – triple bottom line (socially / environmentally and fiscally responsible)
- **Strategic** – Tourism Squamish reads the market closely and crafts strategies that promote Squamish’s unique competitive position, brand and key messages in a disciplined and logical way;
- **Industry supported** – as evidenced by general support for organization, growing membership and by participation in specific marketing/sales/service initiatives
- **Customer focused** - within the context of community values/vision, customer’s needs are a priority
- **Collaborative** – clear roles for each participating organization – supportive of each other- Tourism Squamish works together with other organizations and individuals and provides opportunities to participate in relevant DMO programs
- **Unified** - creative dialogue/debate encouraged but once a decision is made – all are supportive
- **Action and results oriented** – measure a baseline + measure progress + report results

Strategic Context

Tourism globally is a major economic player and forecasts are projecting growth. Nationally Canada has opportunities, particularly with the favourable exchange rate keeping Canadians at home and Americans interested in traveling north. Provincially, British Columbia is faring better than many other provinces and showcased record-setting numbers in 2014, '15 and '16. Squamish too, experienced impressive results. A community-wide branding process that defined who Squamish is and what the community has to offer combined with more strategic marketing focusing on specific experiences has resulted in unprecedented media coverage and year over year increases in hotel occupancy and hotel tax revenues.

But distinct issues face tourism in Canada, and BC, that require a united advocacy effort to ensure the success of the industry, which is why Tourism Squamish is an active member of the Tourism Industry Association of BC. Issues such as labour shortages, local housing costs and sharing economy concerns affect the destination and must be addressed collaboratively as an industry. Locally, Squamish has a need for more research to better measure marketing efforts and estimate the impact of the visitor economy. Encouraging a customer-service culture within the destination, supporting businesses to improve product experience and encouraging product development are all factors that need addressing.

The opportunity exists to increase the marketing budget through an increase in the municipal and regional district tax collected by the eligible accommodators. These increased funds are essential to more fully engage in:

- collaborative partnership opportunities available through Destination BC
- marketing efforts to take advantage of the current favourable exchange rate
- managing the ongoing social media and travel media activities that drive visitation and require constant and authentic engagement with visitors, and conducting research

Overall Goals, Objectives and Targets

Tourism Squamish's six organizational goals are to:

Goal #1: Govern and manage effectively

Objectives: 1) provide high level guidance and direction 2) establish standards of organizational conduct 3) protect the interests of the organization 4) provide oversight and monitoring

Goal #2: Maintain financial sustainability

Objectives: 1) successful MRDT renewal at the 5-year mark 2) increase MRDT to 3%; 3) successful renewal of District of Squamish 3-year funding agreement in 2019; 4) increase in Tourism Squamish membership by 5% annually

Goal #3: Grow awareness of Squamish as a visitor destination

Objectives: 1) increase visitors serviced at Visitor Centre (Adventure Centre) and by the Street Team by 5% annually; 2) increase in relevant travel writers and travel media coverage by 3 stories per year; 3) increase in social media engagement by 10% annually

Goal #4: Increase room nights in the Squamish accommodation sector

Objectives: 1) increase hotel occupancy rate of 1% annually, relative to PKF results, and 3% off-season (Oct 1 – Apr 30); 2) increase website traffic in target markets by 5% annually; 3) increase consumer e-newsletter engagement by 5% annually; 4) increase Tourism Squamish app downloads by 10%

Goal #5: Maximize member and stakeholder engagement

Objectives: 1) Increase member program buy-in by 5%; 2) initiate two member research projects

Goal #6: Advocate for destination development initiatives

Objectives: Maintain participation on Economic Development Steering Committee; 2) assist in the identification, growth and enhancement of our product experiences; 3) become the organization for data, policy and direction for future tourism development

Strategies – Key Actions

Tourism Squamish has seven key strategic areas of focus:

1. Governance and Stakeholder Relations
2. Media Relations
3. Festivals, Events & Sport Tourism
4. Leisure Travelers
5. Visitor Servicing
6. Research
7. Destination development

1. Governance and Stakeholder Relations

As a Destination Marketing Organization, we will govern the organization effectively, to encourage stronger membership engagement and community support.

Key Actions:

Year One

- Increase membership base and engagement (focusing on more restaurant/retail members)
- Review and refine communication with members and wider community, particularly regarding marketing metrics/impacts of marketing initiatives
- Conduct Stakeholder Survey
- Develop stronger relationship with District of Squamish

Year Two-Five

- Increase membership base and engagement
- Ensure effective governance, conduct annual review, update strategic planning, complete required reporting
- Maintain strong relationship with District of Squamish
- Succession planning for board and staff
- Alignment with District of Squamish Official Community Plan

2. Media Relations

Continue to utilize and aggressively pursue three types of media: earned, owned and paid. Earned encompasses community recognition, social shares, key influencer and travel media. Owned includes our websites, blog, newsletter, fresh sheet, social media and content marketing. Paid involves digital and print marketing, video content, pay per click targeting and guest blogs.

Our focus will be on increasing low cost earned media opportunities through building relationships with established and emerging journalists, bloggers and key micro influencers.

Key Actions:

Year One

- Remain active with the Travel Media Association of Canada and its membership
- Reach out to relevant targeted media and influencers with an invitation for a customized visit to Squamish, establish and build relationship for future visits
- Develop and distribute “must-see, must-do” itineraries and biannual story starters fresh sheet to media database to encourage and increase exposure for Squamish
- Actively seek to collaborate on opportunities to cohost media with Tourism Vancouver, Tourism Whistler, Tourism Pemberton and Destination BC

Year Two – Five

- Attend Canada Media Marketplace (hosted by Destination Canada) annually to establish connections with the most influential US travel media (traditional and influencers)
- Attend Travel Media Association of Canada (TMAC) show
- Seek community PR opportunities

3. Festivals, Events, Celebrations & Sport Tourism

The primary focus is on Squamish’s “signature” festivals and events to capitalize on their notoriety and the people attending these events to promote and increase overnight stays. Secondary focus is on growing the sport tourism events in Squamish as well as promoting the “training” opportunities that accompany them.

Some of the key festivals and events in Squamish include Squamish Days Loggers Sports, Squamish Triathlon, Squamish Mountain Festival, Squamish 50, Polar Express, Thomas the Train, Brackendale Eagle Festival, Squamish Wind Festival, Squamish Beer Festival, Spawkwus Mountain Bike Race, BC Bike Race and RBC GranFondo.

Key Actions:

Year One

- Increase awareness of events through:
 - Blog posts
 - Pay per click targeting key search terms
 - Social media channels
 - Banner ad placement on relevant websites
- Inclusion of event calendar in the *Squamish Adventure Guide*

- On-going collaboration with partners ensure a consistent approach to maximize communication and marketing opportunities for all signature events
- Develop and distribute Festivals and Events calendar to partners and visitors
- Host outreach events for festival and event partners to collaborate and share marketing efforts in addition to offering support where we can.

Year Two – Five

- Ensure on-going relationship-building with new events to enhance marketing efforts
- Encouraging/supporting festival/event development by being the initial point of contact
- Increasing content on website for consumers planning celebrations (family reunions, weddings, etc.) Attention will be paid to adding content around weddings.

4. Leisure Travelers

Tourism Squamish will market to residents of the Lower Mainland, Western Washington and Oregon (families, couples and individuals) with holiday time period, overnight and weekend getaway ideas. 2018 initiatives will highlight the increased value of the US dollar for American visitors.

The focus will be on sport specific and active adventure leisure travelers and families who visit destinations specifically to partake in their activity of choice during relevant seasons or to get outside and enjoy nature. Focus on highlighting the destination's world class sport, adventure and natural experiences including: mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing, wind sports, water sports, fishing, rafting, nordic skiing, backcountry skiing and snowmobiling.

Key Actions:

Year One

- Attend Vancouver outdoor adventure consumer show
- Encourage visitation during non-peak periods by promoting mid-week specials
- Summer BC Transit #ExploreSquamish bus wrap campaign in lower mainland; Global TV #ExploreSquamish campaign including commercial spots and contesting
- Maintain Explore Squamish website
- Capitalize on the high visitor traffic at the Adventure Centre by encouraging visitors to sign up for consumer e-blasts, contesting and special deals
- Maintain ongoing strategic email campaign (monthly) to increase subscribers and distribute fresh and newsworthy content
- Track and repurpose content created in the social streams
- Execute "Countdown to Christmas" campaign to encourage Lower Mainland families to visit Squamish during pre-Christmas and Christmas period
- Targeted mail drop to home in the lower mainland promoting Squamish
- Create and sell Squamish multi adventure packages through website
- Publish *Squamish Adventure Guide* for visitors to pick up in destination as well as to distribute to Visitor Centre's across the Province and
- Engage in Destination BC cooperative program opportunities as they arise

Year Two – Five

- Attend 2018 Seattle and/or Portland Consumer shows
- Update Explore Squamish website; new website planned for 2020

5. Visitor Servicing

Be a visitor friendly community by providing exceptional customer service to all of the guests we welcome through the Visitor Centre and our mobile Street Team. Utilize street level marketing tactics to educate and entice day-trippers to explore and discover Squamish. Develop the Adventure Centre into the Sea to Sky hub.

Key Actions:**Year One**

- Engage our visitors and encourage social conversation through the use of the #ExploreSquamish hashtag
- Maintain *Street Team* mobile visitor servicing program
- Utilize the Visitor Centre staff to capture visitor data and encourage guests to experience more during their visit or to stay longer (increase sales)
- Maintain app to further enhance the Squamish visitor experience through easily accessible information and itineraries
- Maintain participation in Destination BC Social Media Visitor Servicing Program
- Confirm partnerships to revive visitor centre (Adventure Centre) – update original plans for visitor engagement and interactive marketing displays within centre
- Collaborate on customer service training program with Chamber/BIA

Year Two – Five

- Increase *Street Team* presence
- Upgrade interactive marketing displays within Visitor Centre to increase visitor engagement with destination information

6. Research

Determine baseline of tourism economic impact in Squamish and conduct research to more accurately measure stakeholder support as well as results of marketing initiatives.

Key Actions:**Year One**

- Work with Destination BC to develop 2-5-year research plan – may include Net Promoter Score and value of tourism model
- Implement automated system to accurately collect data
- Encourage stakeholder support for information sharing
- Conduct Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey
- Explore EQ opportunities

Year Two – Five

- Implement research plan

7. Destination Development

Advocate and work on behalf of our visitors, our stakeholders and our community to encourage a customer-centric culture that enhances the visitor experience, encourages repeat visitation and addresses challenges hindering industry growth.

Maintain momentum with the initiatives from the Branding & Marketing Action Plan, while assisting in the identification, growth and enhancement of new product experiences.

Key Actions:

Year One

- Maintain participation on Brand Leadership Team to implement Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan
- Develop an Event Policy in partnership with the District's new Economic Development Officer
- Develop Airbnb policy in partnership with District of Squamish
- Explore EQ opportunities
- Maintain membership with TIABC
- Attend industry events
- Support/encourage Chamber to promote tourism business development support materials to members (e.g. DBC's *Tourism Business Essentials*)
- Raise awareness of importance of customer service training; collaborate on customer service training program with Chamber/BIA
- Film-Induced tourism - working with District of Squamish to build Creative BC's library of Squamish locations/assets; promoting what has been filmed in destination on Explore Squamish website; gathering film activity metrics from members

Year Two – Five

- Maintain participation on the Economic Development Steering Committee
- Maintain film-induced tourism activities
- Maintain membership with TIABC
- Attend industry events
- Continue to raise awareness of importance of customer service training; collaborate on customer service training program with Chamber/BIA
- Work with District of Squamish on Airbnb policy
- Work with District of Squamish to address transportation and local transport

Brand Positioning

The Squamish Brand Enhancement and Marketing Action Plan Project was undertaken in 2014. Following nine months of intense work representing 550 volunteer hours, the Squamish brand strategy and marketing action plan was revealed.

The formulation of the brand strategy stems from the analysis of data from 1,143 surveys that asked seven open-ended questions about locals' (and visitors') perceptions of Squamish. The process showed that Squamish is a community that embraces an outdoor lifestyle; that is youthful, active, vibrant and creative; that is inspired by and in awe of our natural surroundings; that leads an unscripted way of life; that is entrepreneurial; and that is proud and respectful of First Nations' heritage and logging industry roots.

The branding process resulted in a 55-recommendation strong Branding, Development & Marketing Plan, which can be viewed at: squamish.ca/yourgovernment/projects-and-initiatives/squamish-brand-enhancement-project/

Brand Positioning Statement: To youthful, intelligent, and active people who highly value outdoor activity and their connection with their natural surroundings, Squamish is the community that has, within 10 minutes, more breathtaking outdoor adventure opportunities than any other community in Canada.

Brand Promise: You can experience the world's most epic outdoor adventures—from sea to sky—all within 10 minutes of one another.

Tagline: *Hardwired for Adventure*. This tagline represents the remarkable network of natural and manmade infrastructure – lakes, mountains, rivers, trails, climbing routes and water access – that provide limitless opportunities for adventure of all shapes and sizes. It also speaks to the people of Squamish and their innate desire to embrace all that the natural surroundings have to offer. Hardwired for Adventure also reflects how connected Squamish is for business ventures. From the state of the art highway connection to Vancouver and Whistler and the fibre optic cable that runs along it to the multi model transportation infrastructure, Squamish is hardwired for business adventure. The growth of the knowledge-based, tourism, and education industries, are all reflections of a forward-looking economy, and a youthful entrepreneurial community.

Reasons to Believe / Squamish's Product:

Within 10 minutes of one another Squamish has:

- More than 3,500 rock climbing routes and boulder problems including the famous Stawamus Chief
- More than 200 km of world-renowned mountain biking single-track trails
- Access to some of the best kite boarding and windsurfing conditions in North America
- Expansive backcountry alpine hiking, ski touring and snowmobiling (on the doorstep of eight Provincial Parks)
- Ocean, lake and whitewater fishing, standup paddle boarding, kayaking and boating (with access to Howe Sound, eleven lakes and at least five rivers)
- Largest bald eagle feeding area on the West Coast

Target Markets

Geographic markets (in order of priority):

- The 75,000 residents that live within a 40 km (25 mile) radius of Squamish
- Visitors passing through the area
- The 2.5 million residents within an 80 km (50 mile) radius
- The 3.6 million residents within a 160 km (100 mile) radius
- Washington State residents (6.9 million) – with a focus on overnight stays
- Oregon State residents (3.9 million) – also garnering additional overnight stays

Management, Governance and Administration

The District of Squamish is the MRDT applicant; however, the District contracts Tourism Squamish to draft and implement the five-year Strategic Plan. Tourism Squamish is governed by a 12-member board of directors. There are 2 FTE staff including an Executive Director and a Manager of Membership & Marketing. Funding comes from four main sources: Municipal & Regional District Tax, District of Squamish contribution, Tourism Squamish memberships, and retail sales.

History: In 2006, representatives from local tourism businesses and organizations designed the Squamish Community Tourism Plan, with support from the Destination BC *Community Tourism Foundations* program. As a result of these efforts, Tourism Squamish was founded in 2007 as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) to expand and promote the local tourism industry sector. It was conceived as an economic development initiative of the Squamish Sustainability Corporation, and became an independent organization when it was incorporated as a not-for-profit society in May 2010. The Tourism Squamish Society is a dynamic and entrepreneurial destination marketing organization.

The Society is governed by an industry appointed Board of Directors and represents more than 125 tourism businesses, which comprise the local tourism economy.

Tourism Squamish has three primary business functions:

- Visitor Services
- Destination Sales & Marketing
- The Squamish Store - Retail

The Society represents the tourism industry within the District of Squamish (Britannia to Brackendale, including Paradise & Squamish Valley), with a vision and constitutional mandate to:

Act as an ambassador and steward of our destination, promoting a healthy tourism sector in order to secure broad benefits for our community. This will be achieved through a comprehensive approach to planning, continued infrastructure development and a sustainable tourism structure.

Sources of Funding (updated for 2018, these are projections)

Tourism Squamish has three main sources of funding:

- 2% Municipal and Regional District Tax: \$253,386
- Applying for 3%, if in place by start of Q3 (July 1) will add an additional \$69,000
- Membership Fees, racking, cooperative marketing etc.: \$72,500
- Municipal Grant (District of Squamish): \$50,000
- Fee for Service to operate Visitor Centre (District of Squamish): \$100,000
- The Squamish Store (Retail): \$158,000
- Map & Souvenir Sales (Visitor Centre): \$13,600
- Commissions (accommodation, activity, transportation): \$27,000

An annual presentation is given to the District of Squamish Council outlining the tactics and performance. The District of Squamish has been a financial supporter of Tourism Squamish for 6 years. The current grant of \$50,000 is in place until 2019.