

HOW WE GOT HERE



As the District of Squamish contemplated the 2022-26 Five Year Financial Plan (5YFP), a number of scenarios were proposed to fund future facilities. The following document provides some background information for the public on how we got here and what is informing our decision-making. This document is divided into three sections: facilities current state overview, how we got here, and gains in the last decade.

The 2022-26 5YFP includes costs to replace a number of end-of-life facilities across the District and invest in new facility infrastructure. Council considered the budget in fall 2021, and had various conversations with the community to receive public input prior to making funding decisions.

The conversation was hosted in part on the District's new community engagement platform – Let's Talk Squamish – where residents could provide comments and ask questions on the decisions in front of Council. Two public information meetings were also held virtually and in person during the fall review period of the 5YFP.

Visit us online for facilities project information: [Squamish.ca/facilities](https://www.squamish.ca/facilities)

FACILITIES RENEWAL - AT A GLANCE

- 75% of the District's facilities are at end of life (up to 52 years old) and need replacing or significant upgrades. This will require investment of \$150M +. A Real Estate and Facilities Strategy (2017/18) and Master Plan (2019) provides the "what, when and how" for this schedule of replacements.
- The Real Estate and Facilities Master Plan (REFMP) prioritizes three Immediate (0-3 years) Critical facilities to be replaced – the Valleycliffe Fire Hall, Tantalus Fire Hall and Public Works Yard. All three are underway (construction or design) and funding is in place in the current 5YFP (2021-25).
- The next priority projects to schedule are Near Term (4-5 years) Critical facilities. These include the municipal offices, built in 1972 which are no longer adequate in size (despite new remote work opportunities) and function for the growing community, and a Transit Maintenance Facility, required for local/regional transit expansion, to electrify the bus fleet, and to leverage \$23M in federal/provincial funding currently available (requires a five-year lead time). A Brennan Park Recreation Centre upgrade (phase one of a larger Brennan Park upgrade project) joins this list to take advantage of grant funding potential, realize significant energy savings and reduce high greenhouse gas emissions.
- Brennan Park Recreation Centre (future phases: rink, pool, wellness centre) and the Library are important community buildings requiring expansion and upgrades (timing to be determined). These are good candidates for partial funding from grants from higher levels of government; such grants would require contributing funds to be provided by the District.

- The 2022-26 5YFP adopted in December 2021 by Council includes a recommendation and associated costs in the year 2025 to lease space required for the municipal offices. Leasing municipal office space instead of building a purpose-built municipal hall is recommended to:
 - Reduce the impact on the District’s cash flow over an extended period.
 - Limit the impact on the District’s borrowing capacity.
 - Increase the capacity for the District to invest sooner in community facilities Brennan Park Recreation Centre and the Library, in a timeframe that is desired by the community.
- In the 2022-26 5YFP, the District tax impacts are driven in part by facilities replacements and the REFMP lays out the steps for this to take place. View the [report discussed by Council on September 28](#). View [Frequently Asked Questions](#) that we’ve prepared to help provide more information to residents.

HOW WE GOT HERE

In 2017/18, the District of Squamish developed a Real Estate and Facilities Strategy, followed by Council endorsement of a Real Estate and Facilities Master Plan (REFMP) in 2019. These documents identified that the District’s facilities had reached a critical state with 75% of the District’s facilities at 25 to 52 years old.

Over decades, lack of investment in planning and budgeting for reserves for the eventual need to replace facilities has resulted in the need for significant financial investments to be committed to now and in the coming years. Historically, common practice was to focus on short term tax strategies. Keeping taxes low was the focus at a time when the community was faced with the loss of high-paying industry jobs and a transition to a new economic future was the focus. While these decisions were well-received at the time, hard decisions about long-term planning and infrastructure investment were put off, creating a monumental task for future Councils and taxpayers.

2011 saw the beginning of a more forward-looking strategy whereby approval of a long-term financial plan laid the foundation for future Councils to prepare for infrastructure replacement – pipes in the ground, keeping up with information technology, and eventual replacements of facilities.

Recent Councils and District staff have worked hard to address shortfalls created by the past, and simultaneously respond to the rapid growth that has transformed Squamish and created a new set of unique challenges. Affordability, the need for local jobs creation, the need for more employment space for businesses and industry to expand, and the policy work required to help shape a climate change-friendly community of the future are just some of the pressing concerns of recent years.

Looking even further ahead, the REFMP identifies the need to begin rebuilding financial reserves for the next generation of facility replacements 25+ years from now, once the current facility backlog is addressed.

GAINS IN THE LAST DECADE

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL (PIPES IN THE GROUND)

The last 10 years have seen major investments and strides made to stabilize municipal infrastructure maintenance and replacement, such as for water and sewer infrastructure. Similar to what most other communities have faced across North America, pipes that were laid underground 50+ years ago are reaching end of life and communities are grappling with the need to replace them. The 2011 Asset Management Plan was developed and helped put the District of Squamish on the leading edge of infrastructure asset management in Canada. Ten years later, a suite of Master Plans defines our annual investments and prioritizes maintenance and replacement of infrastructure until 2040. The Water and Sewer Utilities are now self-funded through their Utilities fees, with negligible annual rate increases for tax payers to absorb. In 2021, the District committed to \$11.5M in upgrades to the Wastewater Treatment Plant to keep up with population growth and compliance with regulations. The upgrades will accommodate growth to a population of 33,000 and the entire cost is funded by development and reserves.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE REPLACEMENT

A multi-year effort to overhaul and modernize software systems, improve information technology infrastructure and ensure the security of the District's network in a 21st century environment has been underway since 2015. This work is multi-faceted and is an essential program to modernize the District's business and technology systems. The work focuses on building a technology foundation that will help improve citizen services and access, help staff meet and exceed the demands for information and online services, improving the organization's business processes and operational efficiency, while also focussing on cybersecurity.

LONG-TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING

Guiding financial principles have been developed with recent Councils to ensure that taxes do not fluctuate greatly from year to year, while ensuring that revenues are sufficient to support the long-term goals of the community. Reserves have been established for a variety of long-term needs to ensure that the District is meeting the needs of today while planning for the future, and limiting future impacts on tax payers at that time. The goal is to bring forward stable and sustainable increases to the community annually to grapple with rising costs, rather than hold taxes at zero and then place the burden on future Councils when they are faced with dire needs. We also use our Development Cost Charges Bylaw and Community Amenity Contribution Policy to ensure that developers contribute to our infrastructure and amenities as the community grows.

FLOOD HAZARD MANAGEMENT

The District's award-winning Integrated Flood Hazard Management Plan lays out a set of actions to adapt to sea level rise and larger precipitation events as a result of climate change, and adopt a higher standard of protection for the Squamish and Mamquam River dikes in light of the significant number of homes and businesses they protect. Developed over three years, the plan was adopted by District Council in 2017, has been actioned every year since, and has attracted millions in grant funding from provincial and federal governments.

TRANSFORMING A CAR-CENTRIC COMMUNITY

In 1964 Brackendale, Mamquam and Squamish – three distinct communities spread north to south through the valley – amalgamated to form the District of Squamish. Squamish grew as a car-centric community spread out across different neighbourhoods, and recent Councils have worked hard to improve safety and develop alternative commuting options along the road network with the introduction of bike lanes, sidewalks, improved transit and a focus on safe routes to school.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

In July 2019, District of Squamish Council passed a Climate Emergency Resolution and outlined a plan to weigh every decision through a climate lens. The resulting Community Climate Action Plan identifies Six Big Moves to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, and to be on track to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Across the organization, \$14.3M worth of projects in the 2021-25 Financial Plan help us to tackle climate mitigation or adaptation projects.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING

As climate change raises the possibility of greater destructive storms, wildfires and other natural disasters, the District has a series of initiatives and partnerships in place to build resiliency within all neighbourhoods and Squamish Nation reserves. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan was updated in 2018 and has begun implementation. FireSmart initiatives are underway; there is an all-community evacuation plan, new Wildfire Development Permit Area guidelines are being considered; and an emergency alert system is in place.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND DIVERSITY

The issue of affordable housing in Squamish emerged rapidly as housing demand skyrocketed with increases to the population who were drawn to Squamish by the easy commute to Vancouver and the outdoor-centric lifestyle. The District's work to address this issue began in 2015 with the convening of a Housing Task Force. A number of housing projects have since broken ground or been built to deliver units across the housing spectrum, including the 76-unit Buckley Avenue building; the 45-unit Under One Roof facility; 232 units of affordable seniors housing, and additional affordable units and purpose-built rental secured in developments across the community, to be ultimately managed under a housing organization. There is more work to be done to be sure.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL JOBS

A focus on increasing the number of local jobs per capita and generating a net increase of employment lands on pace with terrestrial and marine needs, are two key goals in the Council Strategic Plan, with work being actioned to stimulate job growth for economic and social gain. Priority target sectors were identified and are promoted, and an employment land/space inventory and demand model has been developed and is incorporated into zoning updates to ensure supply can be generated with future development.

[squamish.ca/economic-development-programs](https://www.squamish.ca/economic-development-programs)

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTIVITY AND PUBLIC SPACES

New facilities, new parks and neighbourhood planning have been a focus of this Council, and three new facilities are underway or getting close to being shovel ready. The new Valleycliffe Fire Hall is scheduled to be complete in April 2022 and will house the fire administration offices and the Emergency Operations Centre. Construction of the Tantalus Fire Hall is scheduled for mid 2022 once the temporary fire hall is moved from Valleycliffe. A new Public Works building and equipment facility will begin construction in the first half of 2022. Dentville Park, University Heights Park (completed), Waterfront Landing Park and Oceanfront Park are all new parks for the community to enjoy once completed.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

- The [Real Estate and Facilities Master Plan](#) (REFMP) is available in its entirety online. The plan is extensive, and an Executive Summary and detailed Table of Contents will help you navigate it.
- Keep up-to-date on current facility replacements and upgrades underway on the [REFMP Project Page](#).
- A Frequently Asked Questions is underway.