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STIONS ABOUT WHISTLER

Many feel (myself included) that Whistler is already overbuilt and it is just short-sighted economics that are driving this (cap removal)."

I couldn't help but nod in agreement. Many of us indeed...

He forged on. "As you know, the quality of any skier's experience is largely determined by a resort's comfortable carrying capacity. In other words, it's all about balance. Attract more skiers than you can handle and the experience falls apart and the reason to come is altered. Likewise, if you overbuild the base area, occupancy (or lack of) becomes a bigger and bigger issue. The operator needs to attract more and more people, overwhelming the capacity of the attraction, and again the experience falls apart."

Regular readers of Alta States will surely not be shocked by his comments. After all, I've been arguing that Whistler has been dangerously close to that tipping point for years. Nor should readers be surprised by the following:

"I've also been reading more on 'steady state economies'," wrote Harley (for an intro to this fascinating subject, visit www.steadystate.org). "With the bed unit development cap in place, Whistler has been unknowingly applying a form of the steady state approach for years. And that's exactly where we need to be! In my opinion, abandoning the development cap holds the very significant risk of completely compromising the quality of experience Whistler generally has to offer. In other words: why kowtow to the realtors and developers in favour of an undefined vision?"

His final point — on the impact of pay parking in the village — proposed a radical re-think to an issue that is still far from resolved. "It's always been my experience in visiting other places around the world, that the best memories are created when visitors rub shoulders with residents. So, while I get the simple economics behind pay parking, the negative impact of locals simply choosing not to go into the village anymore hasn't really been given enough consideration."

The solution? "One of the ways to stop worrying about this impact," argued Harley, "is to start thinking about the village as the

1. Why do you live in Whistler? What are you passionate about?

First it was the mountains; now it's the people, too. It's the stories, the adventures, the growing and the experiencing of life's rites of passage with my friends. Although I'm 'just' a seasonal resident, my soul resides in Whistler. And it has for a long time. The friendships that I have here are multi-decades long; my relationship to the mountains here spans most of my adult life.

My passion is sliding on snow. Or water. Or anything else that offers a self-propelled outdoor buzz. My passion is adventure. Getting lost in the mountains. Playing in the white stuff. Getting back in touch with nature's honesty. But that's just part of it, for I'm also passionate about intellectual and artistic pursuits. Film festivals and writers' festivals and book clubs and local music nights — these are the stuff that a culture is truly built on.

But it seems of late that we are going in the opposite direction. Increasingly I'm becoming disillusioned with the "bigger is better" approach at Whistler. Too much infrastructure. Too much glitz. Too many hands in your pocket. Too many businesses that really don't care. Too many events for special interests. Not enough understanding of what makes this environment unique!

2. What makes Whistler a great place?

Its ability to define itself on its own terms. Its youthful, exuberant, irreverent style. Its wild and nasty and unconscionable weather. Whistler (at least in its original iteration) never tried to be the "next" Aspen or the "new" Vail. It was always proud of its screwball Coast Mountain roots. Unfortunately, we're quickly losing that distinction. We're trying too hard to become all things to all people. And on that path, my friends, lies disaster...

3. What are some of our community's biggest successes?

Becoming a thriving mountain resort despite (and because of!) its difficult geography and demanding weather. Attracting the outgoing,

mountain town by challenging the status quo and re-inventing ourselves in keeping with a "steady-growth economy" vision? Or do we succumb to the "sky is falling" cries of business carpetbaggers and transform Whistler into a cheap mountain vision of suburban Surrey? (And frankly, Surrey-By-The-Snow has no future). Stripped of its fancy rhetoric, that's really what Whistlerites are facing today.

5. How can the people in this community make sure the direction we take now leads to a stronger, more resilient resort community?

Get involved! Do what Brent Harley and so many other community volunteers do every day of their lives. It's a sad truism indeed, but the squeaky wheel usually does get the grease. Don't let those with a louder agenda (i.e. more bucks) than yours carry the day. Listen to what's going on. Think about what you want. Talk about it with your peers. Then throw your opinion into the ring and be ready to back it up. As they say, "it takes a lot of ideas to come up with one good idea."

6. It is the year 2060. You are alive and well. What does your Whistler look like?

Gaaw — what a loaded question. On the one hand, I see rusted lift towers and abandoned hotels. Whistler in 2060 is a ghost town. I see professors taking students on field trips here and linking Whistler's short-sighted development policies to clear-cut logging practices in the previous century. "Whistler was all about rape and pillage development," they might lecture. "It was all about getting in and out as fast as possible. Greed ruled and the result was collapse."

On the other hand, I see a vibrant community of outdoor-oriented folk working and playing in a mountain resort famous for its balance between art, education and physical well-being. Much of the mountain infrastructure is gone, of course. And helicopters and snowcats no longer operate in the corridor. After all, things changed dramatically after the third Gulf War and