

# IMAGINE

# BC

*Dialogues on the Future of British Columbia*  
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

## IMAGINE SEA TO SKY CONSENSUS REPORT

WHISTLER, BC | SEPTEMBER 28–29, 2006



DIALOGUE PROGRAMS, CONTINUING STUDIES  
In association with the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

## A Gathering of Emerging Leaders in an Uncertain Sea to Sky Corridor

**“What I have to offer is how much I love this place. I want to look after our community.”**

— Linda Blake  
Whistler Housing Authority

**“We represent very different perspectives... and the outcome [of this dialogue] is better than the individual pieces.”**

— Mecki Facundo  
Whistler Chamber of Commerce

**“I plan to be here long after 2010. I want it to be in good shape for my kids.”**

— Tina Symko  
VANOC

On September 28 and 29, 2006, IMAGINE BC and the Whistler Forum for Dialogue convened a dialogue to consider the future of the Sea to Sky Corridor. IMAGINE BC has hosted several similar sessions in regions across the province in addition to its province-wide discussions and reports from IMAGINE BC.

Most participants were alumni from Leadership Sea to Sky, a Whistler Forum for Dialogue program that draws participants from throughout the diverse Sea to Sky Corridor. The IMAGINE BC Sea to Sky dialogue provided a unique opportunity for this group of dynamic and thoughtful citizens from the region to reflect on the opportunities and challenges facing the region, and to consider what legacy they want to leave for the next generation.

The Thursday evening and all-day Friday sessions gathered leaders from Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations; the Pemberton, Squamish, and Whistler municipal councils; the Squamish Planning Department; the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC); the Whistler Housing Authority; the Whistler Chamber of Commerce; smart growth BC; the Resort Municipality of Whistler; as well as leaders in the tourism, real estate, construction, and software fields.

At the welcoming dinner, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity of stepping out of their “silos” and looking at the issues affecting the Corridor as a region. There was an eagerness to contribute different perspectives, to build relationships, to find opportunities to collaborate, and to take fresh ideas and perspectives back to their communities and places of business. Participants shared their concerns for the current and future health and sustainability of the Corridor’s eco-systems, economies, and cultures, to be explored in the dialogue sessions. In fact, one participant, a former Whistler resident now living in Vancouver, took the time to drive up for the dialogue motivated by what he has noticed as troubling changes in the local environment. A glacier that had towered over his head on a mountaineering trip in the early 1990s has since receded 200 meters. In his words, “There is something deeply wrong here. Part of the place was gone and part of me was gone as well.”



## Sense of Place and People: “The skiing, the biking and the trees brought me here but it is the people who keep me here.”

Over the Thursday dinner, participants shared stories of place and identity, stories that deeply tie them to the Sea to Sky and represent their connection to the Corridor.

For all but one, a member of the Lil'wat Nation, the Sea to Sky is not a birthplace but a place of destination. Many came for a brief adventure and never left. Sometimes coming here was intentional, as it was for a Whistler resident who fell in love with it sight unseen and moved here because it offered a direct flight to Germany and Manila, her and her husband's homelands. Several expressed a connection to the land that bordered on the mystical, as in the case of the Toronto-born resident of Paradise Valley who came up by train from Vancouver and saw an eagle in full flight beside her window, seemingly acting as a guide: “It was a magical moment. I was hooked.” But for a ski instructor who moved here in 1991 in search of the perfect ski run, the people and the sense of community he has found here have become far more important than mountains or eagles.

For one participant, getting lost and sparking a full search-and-rescue effort while skiing out of bounds as a child, was a defining moment that gave rise to a profound attachment to the Corridor. For another, her connection to the Corridor has arisen from a process of leaving and returning, feeling more and more at home each time.

Some have discovered a sense of belonging in what they've been able to create here — a book club, a mountain biking club, or a church — to explore both identity and relevance in changing times. Others have found inspiration in what they hope to create, as is the case with a recent immigrant from Japan who is committed to creating a diverse, inclusive, year-round tourism industry that offers more than skiing. A Pemberton resident, passionate about co-creating a local economy that is vital and equitable, draws inspiration from her daughter who on a recent walk together, “said to me, ‘Mom I don't want to leave here.’ If she feels that way, I can't leave. It makes me want to stay here forever.”



Joan McIntyre  
*MLA for West Vancouver-Garibaldi*

**“The beauty of this place, the Squamish Chief for example, has an impact on people whether you appreciate it daily or not.”**

— Cameron Chalmers  
 District of Squamish

**“All we had were our headlights but then we saw the lights of Mount Currie and Pemberton shining through the snow — the most beautiful lights we'd ever seen. We had planned to stay six months in the Sea to Sky Corridor but we never left.”**

— Mike Ciebien  
 Durfeld Log Homes

**“It is such a tight community that it's not unusual to see two cars parked by the side of the road and people talking. The first time I parked by the side of the road talking to someone in their car, I felt I belonged.”**

— Jason Kawaguchi  
 Whistler Real Estate Company

**“In July of 2003 I was in Prague to witness the announcement that the games were coming to Whistler ... The world is coming to visit us ... and it's pretty awesome.”**

— Ruth Dick  
 Lil'wat Nation

## Dialogue Amidst Diversity: “The meaning that flows between”



Friday morning’s session began with William Roberts, President of the Whistler Forum introducing Joan McIntyre, MLA for West Vancouver-Garibaldi, to the group. Ms. McIntyre spoke passionately about the importance she sees for a healthy democracy of dialogue and of sharing perspectives along the Corridor.

Setting the stage for the dialogue, Dr. Joanna Ashworth, from Simon Fraser University’s Dialogue Programs and director of IMAGINE BC, invited the participants to think of dialogue as a creative process of “thinking together” that will not be driven by reaching an agreement, and can inform good decision-making, releasing

it from the obligation to arrive at a definitive set of solutions. IMAGINE BC’s nonpartisan nature means that participants are free to consider new directions and to think in unexpected ways by making room for differences.

Dr. Ashworth went on to say that as communities and organizations deliberately include a diversity of disciplines and points of view in their dialogue and deliberations they will increase their capacity to address complex problems.

Asking the group what makes for a good conversation prompted a number of responses including trust, authenticity, and being respectful of differences. One participant pointed out that being on the same wavelength can give rise to a good conversation, but so can coming from opposing points of view. In response to a question about whether or not dialogue needs to be verbal, Dr. Ashworth said dialogue is as much about the meaning that flows between words as it is about the words themselves. It is also about paying attention to how one listens. Taking note when interpreting, judging, rejecting, or accepting what a person is saying and then choosing to suspend opinion instead, makes room for a more expanded conversation.

Dr. Ashworth spoke about the different modalities of dialogue — shared polite monologues; discussion; reflection; and “flow,” a generation of ideas and directions that could not have been anticipated. The sharing of stories at the opening session of the IMAGINE BC Sea to Sky session was an example of “flow.” As participants shared their own stories of their connection to the region they evoked significant memories, experiences and understandings. Dr. Ashworth said that dialogue moves from one modality to another in a nonlinear fashion. She also identified a useful model for understanding the dynamic nature of dialogue — the mover or leader of ideas, the followers, who are willing to inquire deeply into these ideas, the opposer who offers different perspective and the process bystander who pays attention to the emotional climate of the conversation — all four essential elements that comprise a dialogue. While most individuals in the room are leaders in their respective organizations and may tend to play a “mover” role, the IMAGINE BC Sea to Sky dialogue afforded them an opportunity to assume different roles at different times. Part of the art of dialogue arises from attending to the quality of the conversation and knowing which role is most advantageous at any given moment.

**“Listening to understand is qualitatively different from listening to agree or disagree. When we listen to understand, we assume the best intention in the other, we assume generosity, we stay curious. We take the stance, ‘I’m genuinely interested and I will want you to say more ...’”**

— Dr. Joanna Ashworth  
Simon Fraser University

## Listening to Discover More of Who We Really Are

Friday morning’s interactive panel focused attention on “Future Images of Our Communities”:

Lil’wat Chief Negotiator **Lyle Leo** spoke of the need for his people to be able to speak for themselves and to represent their own stories in the Corridor and in the world. As the fastest-growing First Nations community in Canada, moving beyond a survival level, upholding their cultural values, and being able to sustain land and resources within their traditional territory is of critical importance to his people’s future. Pointing out that the Corridor is at a young stage in its evolution Mr. Leo also stressed the importance of dialogue within his community, with other First Nations, and with all levels of government. He cautioned, however, that “sustainability and dialogue are big words that mean nothing if we don’t apply them.”

**Cameron Chalmers**, Director of Planning, District of Squamish Planning Department, said that Squamish is at a critical decision point. Will it derive its identity as part of the Sea to Sky Corridor or as a suburb of Vancouver? Will it be primarily rural or urban in character? While expressing concern about “killing our identity through growth,” he also pointed to a more neutral attitude toward growth that he sees emerging in his community, as opposed to “all growth is good.” He also said that improved communications between the District of Squamish and the Squamish Nation would benefit all.

**Shannon Gordon**, Sustainability Coordinator, Resort Municipality of Whistler, pointed to the impact of development on natural areas and of climate change on the ski industry. She also decried the loss of residents, including personal friends, who have left the area because they can’t afford to live in Whistler. Ms. Gordon was optimistic, however, about what she sees as a more sophisticated, integrated approach to resolving issues and planning for the future. In the case of Whistler, community leaders have chosen a future that is environmentally and socially sustainable with a diverse, healthy economy.

**Jordan Sturdy**, Mayor of Pemberton, commented that the situation in his community parallels that of Canada as a whole: “We know who we aren’t but we’re having trouble knowing who we are.” He spoke of the need to diversify Pemberton’s economy and to be less dependent on workers in the tourism industry who are commuting to Whistler every day. He said that the Regional Growth Strategy is a promising development and he is committed to employing principles of smart growth in developing his community, but indicated that “we want to be the ones driving the boat.”

When asked for their responses to the panelists’ comments, participants spoke of the complexity of the issues, the diverse needs of the different Corridor communities, and the need for collaboration in reconciling these needs.

**“If we aren’t taking the time to learn about one another’s challenges, how can we find solutions to common problems?”**

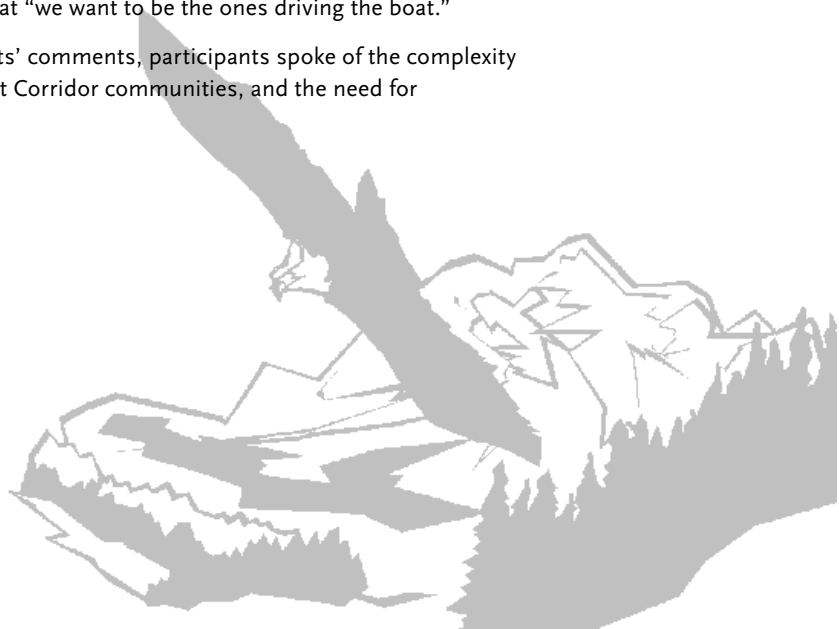
— Ruth Dick  
Lil’wat Nation

**“Squamish is known as a green community but Wal-Mart, MacDonald’s, and 7-11 are what you see from the highway.”**

— Cameron Chalmers  
District of Squamish

**“It’s about sustaining relationships, sharing resources, coming together, harmonizing, bringing new leaders to the playing field.”**

— Lyle Leo  
Chief Negotiator  
Lil’wat Nation



# Is There an Overarching Corridor Identity?

## The ideal future for the Sea to Sky Corridor

**“I try to keep things simple. I try to think about what’s best for the greater community (i.e., the Corridor) for the long term. What decisions can we make now that we won’t regret twenty years from now?”**

— Jordan Sturdy  
Mayor, Village of Pemberton

The need for an aligned vision of the ideal future to be shared throughout the Corridor emerged in the series of dialogues on the “ideal future.” Collaboration and transparency in the way communities work together was emphasized, and communication among policy makers within and between the communities was cited as an area needing improvement.

Balance was another significant value that was expressed throughout the group conversations. Balanced economic growth entailing a balance between public and private sector growth objectives, and between corporate and community interests, was seen as a priority.

Equity was another important value. There was a consensus about the necessity for sharing regional resources and information, and for closing the gap between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, at a community level as well as at an individual level. Taking pride in all communities, not just one’s own, was considered essential.

Sustainability at all levels was also emphasized — e.g. preserving green space, farmland, and community identities.

Below are some specific attributes that were discussed. Although categorized as environmental, economic or social, there is considerable overlap between and among categories.

### Environmental

- a Corridor-wide respect for green spaces, which are easily accessible
- no increase in environmental footprint, as reflected in an aerial photo taken thirty years from now
- healthy fish and wildlife populations, including a thriving sockeye salmon population

### Economic

- a vibrant economy that everyone can share in, not just the elite
- all businesses and citizens more involved in decision-making
- a stabilized business environment without seasonal fluctuation
- a vibrant agriculture industry in which food that residents consume is locally produced

- the absence of urban sprawl and appropriate infrastructure to strengthen and expand existing communities
- a common tourism strategy, more diversity in tourism, better tourism markets for “niche” businesses
- acknowledging our physical limitations and our inability to grow continuously

### Social

- population stabilized within the Corridor
- to be a region known worldwide for its exemplary education, culture, and sustainability, in addition to its mountains and recreational opportunities
- an integrated and connected public transportation system between communities that is affordable, convenient, and frequent
- more ethnic, age, and economic diversity in the Corridor, which would involve more information about, more exposure to, and more understanding of others’ ways
- better inclusion of First Nations
- more diversity in arts and culture
- more diversity in sports and other recreational activities
- the establishment of “learning communities” to give ordinary citizens an opportunity to become educated on issues impacting the Corridor and to be pro-active in devising solutions

## If the Population Doubles, do We Still Want to Live Here?

### Social, economic, ecological concerns about the present state of the Corridor that will have an impact on the desired future

In discussing their concerns about the Corridor and its future participants spoke of the lack of communication and often a lack of understanding between communities. Political collaboration at a regional level was considered weak, with people focusing only on their own communities, as opposed to the Corridor as a whole. In the case of First Nations, this was particularly grave. One of the participants from the Lil'wat Nation reported a lack of desire on the part of governments and citizens to learn about the issues facing First Nations at a community, day-to-day level.

A number saw the lack of effective collaboration in the region as having politically negative consequences because of not being able to leverage 2010 benefits beyond 2010.

A related concern had to do with the prospect of unmanaged growth as the population of the Corridor expands. Many complained about a prevailing tendency for short-term crisis management as opposed to long-term planning. The Whistler 2020 process was admired from all sides but generally the long term planning processes Corridor-wide are uneven. Fears were expressed about not being able to adapt to change quickly enough as a result.

Looming above these concerns was the shadow of global warming and the impact of the glacier retreat. Not getting snow in 2010 could be the least of their worries.

Here are some additional concerns that were expressed. Although categorized as environmental, economic, and social, all are interrelated.

**“There’s an exodus of older people experienced in management and ownership and the younger people are taking over. Do they value smart growth principles?”**

— Ralph Forsythe  
Whistler Councilor

#### Environmental

- impacts of increasing recreational activities
- unmanaged development and urban sprawl, evidenced by spotty residential and commercial development off the highway
- highway upgrades and their negative impact on the environment

#### Economic

- lack of local control over resources (recreation, forestry, water, etc.)
- unstable business environment
- losses in the small business sector due to “corporatization,” and businesses being taken away from the town centre
- the economic and social impacts of secondary home ownership (What if only 50% of the people who buy here are going to live here?)

- retail is geared more to tourists than to locals (e.g. London Drugs)
- a lack of diverse employment opportunities
- a lack of diverse business models
- a lack of human resources development opportunities and programs; difficulty attracting and maintaining skilled and professional employees
- lack of human resources succession strategy for the region as second generation immigrants don't replace their parents (e.g. Pemberton farms could be negatively impacted)
- the absence of a stable population of residents has negatively impacted the tourist experience (“Whistler is no longer real.”)
- voices from industries other than skiing in Whistler or forestry in Squamish are not welcome at the table

#### Social

- a shortage of services such as parking and schools for the influx of newcomers to Whistler and Squamish
- the high cost of living in the Whistler and increasing costs in the rest of the Corridor
- a potential shortage of food as the population expands
- the prospect of wealthy foreigners buying up property and the animosity this creates among much less well-off locals who serve them
- private companies are not always aligned with or connected with the community
- prevailing public skepticism about the political process; a perception that decisions have already been made and that their input won't make a difference
- poor regional transportation system

## Different Places, Similar Challenges

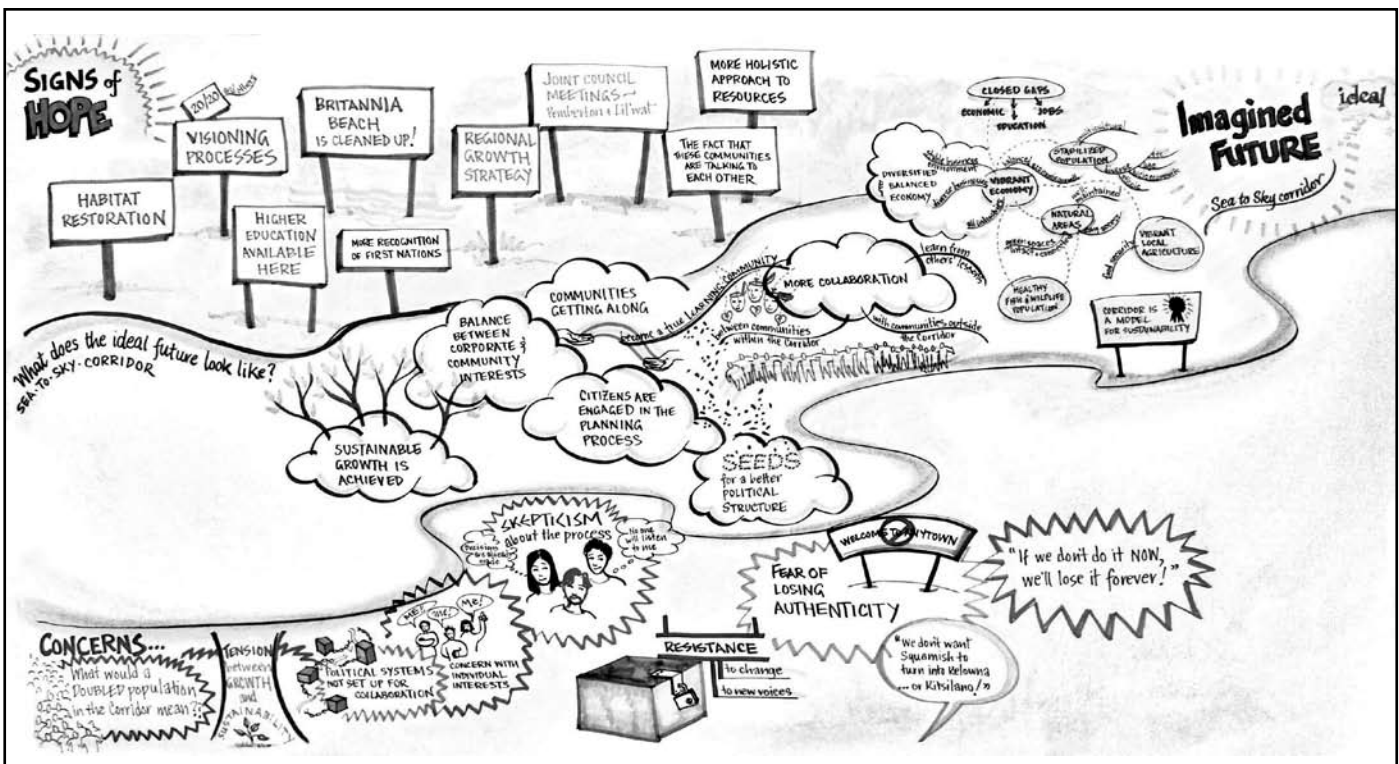
Participants named other centres that could serve as either models or cautionary tales for the Corridor.

**Canmore, Alberta**, has experienced a growth boom since the 1988 Olympic Winter Games. One participant described a four-hour walk while visiting the area, in which he did not run into a single human being.

**Kelowna, BC**, with its rows of strip malls and chain stores, was presented as an example of what Squamish could become if its growth is not properly monitored.

The town of **Invermere, BC**, faces comparable challenges to the Corridor in the sense that its economy used to be resource-based and is now recreation-based. The town faces a water shortage in the summer months when it is crowded with cottagers, but few people are there in February. **Tofino** faces a comparable situation.

Gearing up for 2010, **Park City, Utah**, host of several events in the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, is a source of many lessons learned in a number of areas, including business development before, after, and during the Games.



## Sea to Sky: From One Generation to Another

Imagine the future from diverse perspective, the participants formed groups to prepare newscasts depicting three possible futures for the Corridor: the darkest possible scenario, the status quo 30 years from now, and an ideal future.

### Sea to Sky Blacks Out

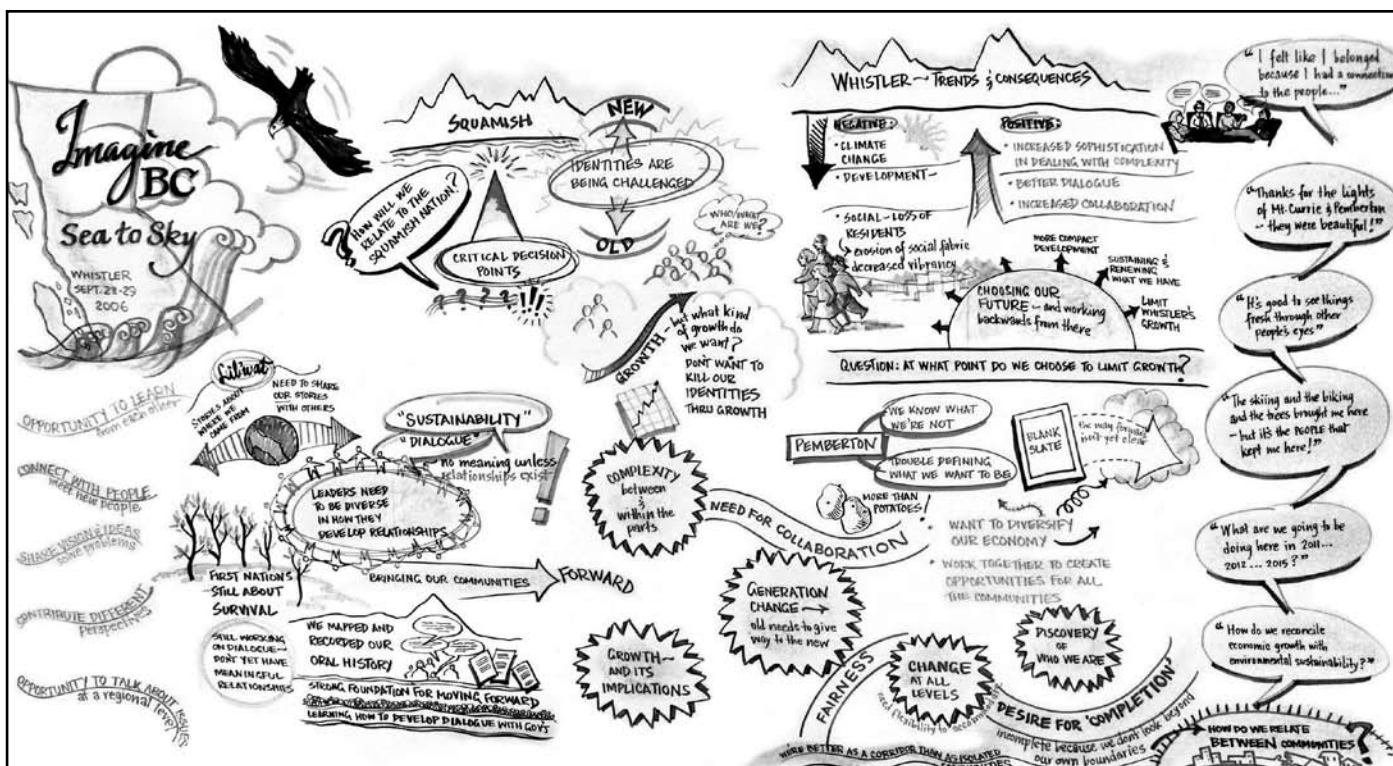
Global warming has meant that there is no snow once again and Halliburton has cancelled their season tickets. Forest fire risk remains high and bears have officially been declared extinct. There is a severe water shortage and citizens can expect to experience rolling blackouts indefinitely. While the quality of life indicator is at an all time low, bankruptcies are at an all-time high. This is due to the drastic decline in the U.S. dollar, which has now become the currency of this area. Due to riots in the streets fomented by Mt. Currie separatists, President Barbara Bush has ordered a repeal of all passports.

### Sea to Sky Stays the Course

The BC Government MLA announced approval of a high-speed, Corridor-wide commuter service with stops at Lion's Bay, Porteau Cove, Britannia Beach, Garibaldi, Squamish, Whistler South, Pine Crest/Black Tusk, Callaghan, Function Junction, Creekside, Whistler Village, Wedge Mountain Estates, Soo Valley, Pemberton, Mt. Currie, Lillooet, and many others. Cohort #1 of Leadership Sea to Sky has been granted seniors passes.

### Sea to Sky Unplugs

The Sea to Sky Corridor received official recognition from the United Nations for being a model of sustainable energy production. The Corridor has already been acknowledged internationally for having reversed global warming. This latest triumph marks yet another milestone in a long list of milestones for the Corridor, long known for being the healthiest, most livable community in the world, and a premier tourist destination.



## **Building Capacity for Corridor Collaboration: “The fact that our diverse communities are now talking to each other is a step forward.”**

### **Signs of hope: People, projects, initiatives from here or elsewhere that exist for creating your desired future**

**“It’s not about being fearful of developers. Citizens and communities don’t know how much power they have.”**

— Lone Smith  
smart growth BC

**“I’m hopeful that we can minimize our footprint and the new population won’t encroach on wetlands or old growth forest.”**

— Cameron Chalmers  
District of Squamish

**“Howe Sound Secondary parents and kids are organizing a potlatch to be held a year from now. Everyone’s excited.”**

— Randy Lewis  
Environmental Manager  
Squamish Nation

In the final plenary session, participants came up with a number of indicators that offer reason for optimism about the Corridor’s future. Dialogues such as IMAGINE BC Sea to Sky and the Whistler Forum’s Leadership Sea to Sky programs, as well as visioning processes such as Whistler 2020, Pemberton and Mount Currie’s Winds of Change, and Squamish’s smart growth on the Ground were highlighted because of their role in offering opportunities for big picture thinking among a spectrum of community interest groups. The Regional Growth Strategy for the Sea to Sky Corridor was cited by many as a step in the right direction.

The 2010 Winter Games, although seen as a source of concern, was also viewed as a potential source for positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes if the VANOC legacies are embraced at a regional level.

Other signs have been organized under three headings — environmental, economic and social — but because these categories are interrelated, many indicators fall into more than one category.

#### **Environmental**

- increased concern and attention to the environment among the general public
- Britannia Beach has been cleaned up and is pumping clean water
- BC Museum of Mining at Britannia Beach and its focus on sustainability
- development of regional trail system (Sea to Sky trail project and Friendship Trail)
- habitat restoration along the Squamish River watershed
- the public cares about the environment as evidenced in the support for the Green Party among the electorate in this area
- Lillooet wants a smart growth workshop
- although massive growth is occurring in Squamish, more than 50% of it is in the downtown area

#### **Economic**

- more sophisticated, holistic approach to resource management — e.g. the Squamish Nation management of fisheries and forestry
- a shift in the control of resources from the provincial to local level
- increasing integration of First Nations into economic systems and structures
- a Corridor-wide human resources strategy has started and has the appropriate people at the table
- increased awareness about local food security — e.g. Whistler’s successful farmers’ market, Pemberton Valley agriculture

#### **Social**

- more recognition of First Nations culture, role, and contributions — e.g. the Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre, and joint council meetings between the Village of Pemberton + Lil’wat Nation
- children are now better educated on environment, health, social issues
- thought and resources are being expended to provide a future for children in the community
- more resident engagement on local issues such as housing, labour shortage, and affordability
- higher education available in the Corridor (Quest University, Capilano College)
- recent election results in Whistler and Pemberton point to public support of sustainability
- Squamish Nation parents and children raising money for school programs, to be matched by the tribal council

## The World Looks for Diversity: “What will it take for everyone in the Corridor to be in the same canoe?”

### Questions and Implications for Action

Participants concluded the dialogue by reflecting on themes, insights, and questions that could move the process forward in future conversations.

The need for collaboration across the Corridor was a strong theme throughout the dialogue and there was a strong commitment to continue the regional dialogue among members of the group, and to promote it in their communities.

One issue that emerged as critical to the future of the region concerned how best to manage its growth. It was acknowledged that there are different perceptions concerning growth. Some communities want it and some do not. Disparities in financial resources and imbalances in economic engines mean that communities face very different perspectives, needs, and constraints. It would seem that the following question would be a fruitful focus for future dialogues:

*At what point in a Corridor like Sea to Sky do we choose to limit growth?*

Another issue that was discussed at length in the concluding session concerned how to involve rank-and-file members of the community in the decisions that affect them. It was agreed that celebrations and festivals are a far more effective way to engage people than meetings. The issue of the Corridor’s artistic identity was raised as a question for future dialogues.

**“It’s the people as a force that will make the change that we’re articulating.”**

— Liz Jones, Director  
Lil’wat Land and Resources  
Department

## Sea To Sky Thought Leaders

Joanna Ashworth  
*Facilitator,  
Simon Fraser University*

Jerry Bauer  
*Idelix*

Linda Blake  
*Whistler Housing Authority*

Cameron Chalmers  
*District of Squamish*

Kerry Chalmers  
*Community Foundation  
of Whistler*

Mike Ciebien  
*Durfeld Log Houses*

Ruth Dick  
*Lil’wat Nation*

Mecki Facundo  
*Chamber of Commerce*

Shannon Gordon  
*Whistler 2010*

Patricia Heintzman  
*99 North Magazine*

Lyle Leo  
*Lil’wat Nation*

Randall Lewis  
*Squamish Nation*

Lucy Philips  
*Lil’wat Nation*

William Roberts  
*Whistler Forum*

Ione Smith  
*smart growth BC*

Jordan Sturdy  
*Village of Pemberton*

Liz Jones  
*Lil’wat Nation*

Jason Kawaguchi  
*Whistler Real Estate Company*

Tina Symko  
*VANOC*

Jay Wahono  
*Business Owner, Whistler*

Dan Wilson  
*Resort Municipality of Whistler*

Denise Wood  
*Resort Municipality of Whistler*

Marla Zucht  
*Whistler Housing Authority*

**IMAGINE BC** is a series of annual dialogues presented by Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs, Continuing Studies that has set out to change the way British Columbians think and talk about the future of their province.

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