

VMC Sub-committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 21, 2022

WARD: 4

TITLE: UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE IN THE VMC

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

This report highlights progress on Phase II of the development of a Cultural and Performing Arts Centre study in the VMC and on work to build capacity for arts and culture in Vaughan's downtown. This report presents the draft approach recommended by consultants that a "hub-and-spoke" model for developing a cultural arts district in the VMC be pursued, and that the City launch a coordinated communications and economic development effort to welcome visitors and cultural organizations to the VMC to experience Vaughan's arts and cultural scene.

Report Highlights

- Cultural hubs are amenities that create community and provide social and economic benefits, including: city building and placemaking; investment attraction; job creation; tourism attraction; academic and social innovations; and civic pride.
- The Phase I - Feasibility Study concluded that market demand and community need is evident to support a cultural hub in Vaughan's downtown given the critical mass of high-order transit and highway infrastructure, open spaces, and ongoing population, business and employment growth in the VMC.

Report Highlights (continued)

- The City has commissioned AMS Planning and Research and Hariri Pontarini Architects (consultants) to conduct Phase II of the project, focused on site(s) selection, a partnership model and the development of an implementation strategy that builds on the findings of Phase I and includes a facilitated consultation process with VMC landowners and key stakeholders to make recommendations that inform the ongoing VMC Secondary Plan Update, which is expected to be advanced through 2023.
- The proposed Phase II implementation strategy includes the creation of multiple, distinct but connected spaces for arts and culture through a hub-and-spoke model that will enable broader opportunities for activation and participation that will help develop the VMC as Vaughan's premier cultural destination.
- The result of the Phase II recommendations will provide direction on a scaled approach to implementing priorities, policy framework, strategies, structures, timelines, and funding/operational requirements essential to enhancing Vaughan's cultural sector, with benchmarks to measure success.
- Staff are proposing the launch of a VMC Arts & Creative Advisory Group, that would launch in the new term of Council, to lead coordinated efforts to create, support and build on cultural arts activity in the VMC.
- As a more immediate next step to support art and culture in the VMC, Economic Development staff will launch Experience!VMC to identify and promote existing cultural and art activations in the VMC to be experienced by residents and visitors to the area.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council endorse the pursuit of a "hub-and-spoke" model for developing a cultural arts district in the VMC as presented to the VMC Sub-Committee by AMS, the lead consultant.
2. THAT Council endorse the launch of a VMC Arts & Creative Industries Advisory Group in the next term of Council to coordinate the development of hub-and-spoke arts activations in the VMC.

Background

A number of foundational plans and strategies have pointed to the need for and importance of developing the VMC as an arts and creative industries hub. These include:

- The [York Region Official Plan \(2009\)](#) identified the VMC as one of four Regional Centres, which are intended to "contain a wide range of uses and activities and be the primary focal points for intensive development that concentrates

residential, employment, live work, mobility, investment, and cultural and government functions.” The Region’s Official Plan calls for the preparation and implementation of secondary plans for Regional Centres that include public art policies.

- [Green Directions Vaughan \(2009\)](#), the City’s Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan outlines a series of goals and supportive actions with implications for the future of the VMC, including enhancing social cohesion by creating more common indoor and outdoor public spaces, public art, parks and open space, and central hubs for arts, culture, and recreation.
- The [Vaughan Official Plan \(2010\)](#) recognizes the VMC as a cultural and creative hub for the City by requiring the implementation of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Culture and Public Art Framework (OPA #24.)
- [Vaughan Economic Development Strategy: Building a Gateway to Tomorrow's Economy \(2010\)](#) includes the following proposed actions: Position Vaughan as the gateway of economic activity to the Greater Toronto Area; develop Vaughan as the incubator of entrepreneurial and economic activity for the economic region; provide best-in-class economic development services and grow Vaughan’s dynamic quality of place and creative economy.
- The [VMC Secondary Plan \(2012/2017\)](#) establishes a vision and mandate for cultural activation in the VMC. Section 7.4 Cultural Facilities and Public Art includes policies that support the development of one or more major cultural facilities in the VMC through the undertaking of a Cultural Arts Centre Feasibility Study Plan for the VMC.
- The [VMC Culture & Public Art Framework \(2015\)](#) gives strategic directions to design and build great public and private spaces that host events and programs that enliven the downtown with activity year-round and recommend investing in major cultural facility(ies) as anchors for creative and cultural developments in the VMC. Some objectives and recommendations include:
 - OBJECTIVE 1: Enable Art and Cultural Investments with Supportive Municipal Policy Structures
 - OBJECTIVE 2: Establish Rich Cultural Resources
 - OBJECTIVE 3: Leverage Creativity and Culture to Attract and Retain People as Key Drivers of Innovation and Economic Growth
 - OBJECTIVE 5: Animate the Urban Environment with a Variety of Cultural Programs and Activities
 - OBJECTIVE 7: Implement a Recognizable Cultural Identity for the VMC that Communicates an Innovative, Transformative and Authentic Experience
 - RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest in major cultural facility(ies) as anchors for creative and cultural developments in the VMC.
 - RECOMMENDATION 3: Integrate cultural resources and assets into new investment and development (both public and private) within the VMC.

- RECOMMENDATION 7: Identify existing strengths and gaps in Vaughan's current cultural resources.

In 2018, the City of Vaughan commissioned Hariri Pontarini Architects, AMS Planning and Research, and FDA to conduct a Phase I Feasibility Study for a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC).

The study assessed market demand and community need supported by extensive engagement, best-practices, development concepts, management and operating models, and financial analysis.

The Study has its roots in the objectives established under the VMC Secondary Plan. To reinforce the VMC and the City's identity, the Secondary Plan anticipates one or more major civic facilities, including a landmark cultural facility.

As per Section 7.4.2 of the Secondary Plan, cultural facilities to be considered shall include, but are not limited to: a performing arts centre; a visual art centre/museum; an outdoor amphitheater; sculpture garden and/or a fine arts school. A specific cultural facility site was not pre-determined in the VMC Secondary Plan.

The Phase I study was completed in November 2019 and concluded that market demand and community need is evident to support a cultural hub in Vaughan's downtown, given the critical mass of high-order transit and highway infrastructure, open spaces, and ongoing population, business and employment growth in the VMC. Since then, Staff have advanced the project adopting the decision-making framework proposed by AMS Planning and Research and started Phase II of the project, Site Selection and Development, which will build on the findings of the Phase I final report and deliver on Council's direction that Staff advance implementation and business planning for a Performing and Cultural Arts Centre in the VMC as a key priority for the downtown.

From Phase I, the VMC Performing and Cultural Arts Centre Goals are to:

1. **Vision:** Gather people to a creative hub location in the VMC
2. **Programming:** Offer a mix of high-quality local and more distant content
3. **Partnerships and users:** Select local partners and market-rate users
4. **Design:** Appeal to many users with a quality, flexible space/set of spaces
5. **Capital funding:** Secure funding through public-private collaboration
 - a. **Operating finances:** Engage public and private subsidy, with earned revenue offsetting program costs
6. **Governance:** Not-for-profit (existing or new entity)

In 2021, the City commissioned AMS Planning and Research and Hariri Pontarini Architects to complete the Phase II work.

Phase II is focused on a review and update of the operational models developed through the Phase I work, reflecting on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, along with a facilitated consultation process with VMC landowners and key stakeholders that results in the recommendation of a site or site model, and partnership model.

The findings and recommendations of Phase II - Site Selection and Development will assist the City in addressing the following relevant issues:

- mandate of the cultural arts centre
- governance model
- business operating model
- operating budget and capital budget forecast for the first five years
- size of facility(ies), number of seats, land requirement and building size
- site selection
- economic and community impact
- partnership and funding opportunities

The result of the Phase II recommendations will provide direction on a scaled approach to implementing priorities, policy framework, strategies, structures, timeline, and funding/operational requirements essential to enhancing Vaughan's cultural sector, with benchmarks to measure success.

The Phase II work will be completed in 3 stages. Currently, the consultants have completed Stage I of the project and will move on to Stage II according to the direction provided by Council regarding the adoption of a “hub and spokes” approach.

As part of the Stage I work, the consultants have completed the following tasks:

1. Background review
 - a. Review of recommendations from Phase I study and synthesize new data
2. Convene working group with project leads from the City of Vaughan
3. Stakeholder Facilitation I
 - a. Identify stakeholders and conduct interviews with key informants, including TVC board members, major landowners and developers, cultural programming providers and City staff
4. Comparable venue learnings
 - a. Select and analyze comparable exemplars to derive learnings for a cultural arts district in Vaughan

The final Phase II report, which will address the mandate and governance of the cultural arts district, business operating models and operating budgets, site selection, economic and community impact, and partnership opportunities, will be presented to VMC Sub-Committee in early 2023.

Since the conclusion of Phase I of the Feasibility Study, the City has launched several initiatives to support and catalyze art and culture in the VMC.

Recent cultural programming drawing visitors to experience culture in the VMC has included several City-driven events such as the annual Culture Days activations, as well as Music in the Square and Concerts in the Park events in Transit Square. The City has also supported cultural programming coordinated by third-party partners, such as Rogers Hometown Hockey, Holiday Fair in the Square and Night of Lights.

The VMC has also been the destination for recent permanent and temporary public art installations, including the PXL Gallery and ArtWalk by SmartCentres and Metropolis in Motion and Futura by QuadReal and Menkes. The City is also supporting the establishment of planned future permanent and temporary public art installations at Expo City, near the David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community and at Assembly Park.

Project Context

Cultural Centre development is grounded in projections of economic growth and community vitality

A Cultural Arts Centre in the VMC can stimulate more than \$100 million in economic activity related to one-time construction, and on an annual basis has the potential to inject over \$2.5 million directly into the local and regional economy. Indirect and induced impacts, such as spending in the supply chain, hospitality sector and retail trades represents additional benefits for businesses, jobs and households in the VMC, Citywide, and in the Greater Toronto Area.

The development of a cultural hub in Vaughan supports the community Vision, Key Priorities and Themes outlined in the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan, creating a cultural legacy for Vaughan, and serving as a driver for economic growth, city-building and creating an active, safe and diverse community.

The City of Vaughan is building a downtown – an intense, dynamic community that will continue to grow as the heart of the City, economically, socially, physically and culturally.

Successful contemporary city centres share basic traits:

- They have a critical mass of buildings and people in the city;
- They contain a range of uses and activities, providing diverse opportunities for living and working;
- They are centres of learning, shopping, recreation, and culture;
- They are accessible by all modes of urban transportation, including public transit, bicycle, and on-foot; and
- Their public realms are rich and generous; built to a high standard, and comprised of a variety of spaces and institutions, including places for civic gatherings and celebrations.

In this context, the development of the VMC as a creative and cultural hub is reflected in policies, master plans, strategic and business plans, including: the VMC Secondary Plan; VMC Culture and Public Art Framework; the Economic Development and Employment Sectors Study, and at the macro level, the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

Arts and cultural institutions contribute to an enriched and diverse community; and serve as a driver of economic growth attracting talent, business investment and social capital to the City's downtown and the broader region. At once, a magnet for creativity, social and cultural innovations, these institutions also need to be supported with the appropriate level of leadership, vision and sustained investment from the private and public sector. They need to be authentic to the community. Their mission, values and programming must resonate with residents, businesses and visitors, where an 'one-size fits all' philosophy cannot apply.

In the development context of the VMC, burgeoning residential, retail commercial and office projects, urban parks and open spaces, an emerging recreation, hospitality and entertainment sector, anchored by a public transit network that spans the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), will see the downtown evolve over a period of decades, with progressively richer and deeper amenities. The governance and operating model for today's arts and cultural hub may evolve, with its capacity morphing to accommodate the needs of users and audiences as the VMC matures, becoming a regional destination.

Vaughan is a lively and growing marketplace.

The Phase I study concluded that Vaughan is a marketplace primed for growth and experimentation due to the following factors:

- Growing, active families
- Multi-cultural with no single, dominant group

- Rapid in-migration from other metros and countries suggests programming diversity will be essential
- Education and affluence tend to correlate with arts participation
- Higher incomes suggest capacity to purchase upscale tickets and packages
- Sensitivity to brand and aesthetics presents opportunities for membership programs and private donor engagement

A strong planning context and framework exists to support the development of a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

The vision for a rich culture base in the VMC is well articulated in planning, policy and placemaking documents, recognizing that civic and cultural facilities, and other destinations, will attract people from across the city and region and generate economic impacts for businesses in the VMC, Citywide and across the Greater Toronto Area.

The VMC Secondary Plan recognizes that “successful downtowns have a strong identity, sense of place and civic attractions. To these ends, it is an objective of this plan to establish civic uses and spaces in the VMC that serve residents from across the city and to realize a high quality of development and public realm initiatives. To reinforce the VMC’s and the city’s identity, the plan anticipates one or more major civic facilities, including a landmark cultural facility”.

The Plan further notes that cultural facilities may be developed as a catalyst for broader development and to establish an identity and civic role for the VMC.

The VMC Culture and Public Art Framework builds on the Secondary Plan policy structure, envisioning the VMC as a top destination for cultural entertainment in the GTA where state-of-the-art facilities and spaces provide a vast range of experiences for all users.

Partnership is key to the successful development of a cultural arts hub. Collaboration may engage universities, City agencies, private developers, and area not-for-profits, each with unique skills and capacity to drive the development process.

The Phase II work is focused on consulting and engaging with the primary landowners in the VMC, along with cultural arts stakeholders, operators, and users to identify potential sites, uses, operational and governance models to develop the cultural arts hub. Engaging a strong network of partners is key to establishing a variety of complimentary community and civic spaces to foster, incubate and host creative and cultural activities.

Previous Reports/Authority

[VMC Culture and Public Art Framework, November 2015](#)
[Feasibility Study for a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, VMC Sub-Committee Report, December 4, 2019](#)

Analysis and Options

Analysis of the economic and social conditions surrounding the development of a cultural arts centre in the VMC has revealed that the most appropriate model is a “hub and spokes” model. Under a hub and spokes model, multiple distinct, but connected spaces for arts and culture would be established in the VMC, enabling broader opportunities for activation and participation.

The Phase I recommendation made to the VMC Sub-Committee in December 2019, included a 400-seat, flexible event and presentation venue, freestanding or in the podium of a building in the VMC, and to activate it with a broad array of creative offerings. This approach responded to the rapid growth and cultural diversity of Vaughan. Phase I noted that a third-party operator of the venue itself was a desirable outcome but did not comment on what further responsibilities that operator would hold regarding Vaughan’s cultural ecosystem – that is, the constellation of artists, producers, creative businesses, and other entities which collectively generate a rich cultural life for local communities and visitors.

There have been notable changes to the economic and social environment since Phase I. The pandemic has caused dramatic changes in consumer appetites and the availability of goods and services and has impacted financial markets in ways that are only now becoming clear. At the same time, Vaughan’s remarkable growth trajectory has not been interrupted: the continuous development of residential and non-residential space, particularly in the VMC, continues to draw enthusiastic interest from an affluent, culturally diverse population.

Given these new realities, the appropriate model for a cultural arts centre is hub and spokes, rather than the previously imagined ‘centre of culture’. This will enable a fuller and more intentional evolution of Vaughan’s cultural ecosystem, wherein Vaughan’s assets are inventoried, leadership is rallied, and these elements form the basis, rather than the outcome, of capital investment in a cultural facility(ies). Further, development of a hub and spokes in the VMC should be driven by a collaborative approach between the public and private sectors.

Through the Phase II work, the consultants has been studying six initiatives, four in Canada and two in the US. Each exemplar illuminates a facet of Vaughan's opportunity to create ambitious, authentic, and transformative partnerships that drive positive outcomes. While each exemplar provides insight into Vaughan's cultural development opportunities, two suggest an achievable, ambitious path forward. Granville Island in Vancouver, BC and the Quartier des Spectacles in Montreal, QC both exemplify a uniquely support-driven strategy for 'hub and spoke' design and implementation. They reflect common themes that have surfaced in stakeholder discussions with the City of Vaughan:

- A collaborative relationship between the public and private sectors;
- Commitment to enriching the cultural ecosystem by *first* leveraging existing assets and subsequently investing in built assets – a “spokes first” approach;
- Empowered leadership must hold a ‘seat at the table’ for culture.

The attachments to this report include a more detailed explanation of the exemplars and their relevance as described above.

A cultural arts district in the VMC will include existing assets such as:

- a. The City's community space in the David Braley Centre of Community;
- b. The Vaughan Public Libraries VMC Library;
- c. The YMCA;
- d. Permanent Public Art installations;
- e. Private initiatives and temporary activations like ArtWalk and Assembly Park;
- f. City-led Concerts in the Park events;
- g. CSO activations and other not-for-profit events like the Vaughan Film Festival
- h. Parks and trails within the VMC
- i. Shopping options in the VMC – as identified through MyMainStreet

In future phases, the City may leverage the VMC Cultural Reserve, funded by current Section 37 agreements and future Community Benefits Charges, to contribute with the funding of future activations and partnerships.

Situated closely to one another, within the VMC, these cultural institutions would operate as a collective network, creating critical mass and generating greater economic benefit and opportunities for access than one institution operated independently. This concept would also allow a future cultural hub in the VMC to be flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of Vaughan's growing community, particularly as the VMC evolves and matures through future development.

As planning and development of a future arts and cultural district continues, Economic Development will establish a VMC Arts and Creative Industries Advisory Group to support the development of arts and cultural amenities that will eventually serve as hubs and spokes.

Staff will work to establish an VMC Arts and Creative Industries Advisory Group, reporting to Council through Economic Development. The advisory group will be comprised of VMC cultural stakeholders including landowners and developers, residents, tourism professionals, and local retail/service providers.

The purpose of the advisory group will be to create a critical mass of arts and cultural amenities that will serve as hubs and spokes for a future district. Through identifying event, asset and activation opportunities, the advisory group will lead coordinated efforts to create, support and build on cultural arts activity in the VMC.

Recruitment for the VMC Arts and Creative Industries Advisory Group will take place through a Clerks process and will launch in the next term of Council.

As a more immediate next step to build on efforts to support art and culture in the VMC, Economic Development staff will launch Experience!VMC to welcome visitors and cultural organizations to the VMC to experience Vaughan's arts and cultural scene. Economic Development will identify and promote distinct but connected spaces and activations in the VMC to be leveraged by cultural arts communities and organizations, and to be experienced by visitors to the area.

The City will work with multiple landowners, operators, and stakeholders to share the various options for residents and visitors while in the VMC through:

1. Identifying and promoting existing cultural and art activations and assets in the VMC to:
 - a. Raise awareness of the VMC as a vibrant community
 - b. Encourage residents and visitors to experience existing events and activations
 - c. Develop a critical mass of stakeholders in the VMC's culture

Experience!VMC will leverage this year's Summer Vaughan Local campaign which will promote community events happen across Vaughan this summer. Through Summer Vaughan Local, *Experience!VMC* will catalogue and promote cultural programming and events taking place in the VMC throughout the summer to attract residents and visitors to participate. *Experience!VMC* will also leverage the visitvaughan.ca website to share ways that visitors can engage with cultural events, activations and amenities in the VMC.

Experience!VMC will be managed by staff in the Office of the Chief Communications and Economic Development. Economic Development, through the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC) and its expertise in sector-cluster development, will manage industry and community stakeholders to generate economic and visitor impact. Communications, through its Economic Development unit, will leverage TVC and City Channels to communicate *Experience!VMC*.

Close coordination with the VMC Secondary Plan update will inform policies that support the development of a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

The VMC Secondary Plan (VMCSP) update has developed two land use options which include arts and culture as a key components to achieving a vibrant downtown and complete community. Option 1 utilizes a concentrated, linear approach to incorporate retail, as well as community and civic facilities along Millway Avenue, and include both freestanding and integrated facilities. Option 2 utilizes a dispersed, nodal approach to incorporate retail and a “hubs-and-spokes” approach to the placement of freestanding and integrated community and civic facilities with the intention of providing cultural and community destinations throughout each quadrant of the VMC. This approach aligns with the direction of Phase II of the Cultural Arts Centre Study. following council endorsement, this approach will be refined through development of the VMCSP update preferred concept.

Financial Impact

The first phase of Feasibility Study advised that the City carefully considers and plans the management of a long-term operating subsidy, including appropriate governance and funding models. This is a principle that will guide the Phase II work on this project. The final Phase II report will provide recommendations regarding a governance model, business operating model, a operating budget and capital budget forecast for the first five years and potential funding opportunities.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The potential development of a cultural hub may have implications for York Region’s Centres and Corridors and future Economic Development Action Plans. Copies of this report and subsequent work plans will be communicated to York Region Planning and Economic Strategy, the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, York Region Arts Council, VMC stakeholders and landowners.

Conclusion

Council's endorsement of a "hub-and-spokes" model for developing a cultural arts district in the VMC and the launch of a VMC Arts & Creative Industries Advisory Group will help drive the development of a hub-and-spoke arts district in the VMC. Following Council endorsement, the consultant will develop policy recommendations to inform and support the ongoing VMC Secondary Plan Update to ensure that this vision is captured.

For more information, please contact: Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development, Ext. 8891.

Attachments

1. Creating Public Value: Exemplar Learnings – City of Vaughan Cultural Arts Centre, AMS Planning & Research, May 31, 2022.
2. Memo: Phase 1 Emerging Recommendations, AMS Planning & Research, May 31, 2022.

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Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager