

To: City of Vaughan  
From: Michele Walter & Meg Friedman, AMS  
Date: May 31, 2022  
Project: Vaughan Phase 2 – Cultural Arts Centre  
Re: Phase 1 Emerging Recommendations

## MEMO

This memo describes the emerging recommendation to the City of Vaughan, regarding the development of a cultural arts centre in the VMC and associated policy framework to support the endeavor.

In 2019, AMS Planning & Research and our partners at Hariri Pontarini Architects worked with the City of Vaughan, Culture and Economic Development Department to assess the opportunity for capital development of a cultural arts centre in the VMC. The recommendation, accepted by the VMC Sub-Committee in December 2019, was to develop an approximately 400-seat, flexible event and presentation venue, freestanding or in the pedestal of a structure 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 1 noted that a third-party operator of the venue itself was a desirable outcome but was silent 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.

As we have embarked on Phase 2 this year, we note that much has changed – and much has remained the same. 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 trajectory is uninterrupted: the expansion of residential and office space, particularly in the VMC, continues to draw enthusiastic interest from an affluent, culturally diverse population.

Recognizing these forces and anticipating their impacts on the VMC as a cultural nexus is the core of our work now and going forward. Given the foundation of the 2015 *VMC Culture and Public Art Framework*, we believe 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).

To understand how the hub and spoke model might work, we have researched 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. In the table below, we describe the exemplars, their legal structure, signature events that activate their venue(s) or districts, and the primary beneficiaries of their transformative impacts.

<i>Operator/ Producer</i>	<i>Operator Type</i>	<i>Signature Event</i>	<i>Ambitious</i>	<i>Authentic</i>	<i>Transformative</i>	<i>Purpose- driven</i>
Bloordale Improvement Association	BIA (charity)	Big on Bloor	✓	✓	Local arts ecosystem	✓
Northeast Minneapolis Arts District	Not-for-profit	Art-a-Whirl	✓	✓	Local artists and art lovers	✓
Sonic Unyon	Commercial	Supercrawl	✓	✓	Industry	✓
Pittsburgh Cultural Trust	Not-for-profit	Broadway touring	✓		Regional arts participation	✓
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Quasi-public	Granville Island	✓	✓	Geographic focus	✓
Quartier des Spectacles	Not-for-profit	Luminothérapie (winter) 21 Swings (spring)	✓	✓	Geographic focus	✓

## Observations

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.** In Granville Island, this is the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), a Crown Corporation that serves as the designated operator of the Island. CMHC is charged with governing the physical asset and is the leaseholder for over 300 small business operators who activate space on the Island. In Montreal, the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership is the primary district operator. As a not-for-profit agency the Partnership enjoys considerable programmatic flexibility, while embracing municipal, provincial, and federal leadership to provide both financial support and input on policies. The takeaway for Vaughan is that a formal, robust partnership between the City and one (or more) well-resourced private sector agencies will be a key to successful cultural activation over the long term. In Vancouver, the successful approach was to identify an existing (and mature) private agency. In Montreal, the Partnership was developed from whole cloth, and populated with individuals well versed in navigating public-private endeavors. At this juncture either of these approaches might be suitable for Vaughan.
- **Commitment to enriching the cultural ecosystem by *first* leveraging existing assets and subsequently investing in built assets – a “spokes first” approach.** In both Granville Island and the Quartier des Spectacles, an initial step toward formalizing the cultural district was to document the baseline assets. This included an inventory of creative businesses, venues suited to cultural activity, and public input to gauge interest in cultural investment and activation. The 2015 *VMC Culture and Public Art Framework* already codifies these initial steps in the following objectives and recommendations.
  - Objective 2: Establish Rich Cultural Resources. *The VMC is a top destination for cultural entertainment in the Greater Toronto Area. The VMC is a place where state-of-the-art facilities and spaces provide a vast range of experiences for all users.*
    - Recommendation 7: Identify existing strengths and gaps in Vaughan’s current cultural resources.
  - Objective 5: Animate the Urban Environment with a Variety of Cultural Programs and Activities. *The VMC is a place of cultural transformation, embracing experiential learning and social interactivity. Its diverse cultural venues encourage the collision of people and ideas; promote knowledge exchange, social enrichment and fun.*
    - Recommendation 13: Develop and implement a multi-year business a funding model to support cultural development in the VMC. Leverage funding mechanisms for arts and culture.



- Action 13B: Initiate a public-private sector led “Cultural Leadership Committee” with the mandate to provide advice, expertise, advocacy to move cultural initiatives forward.
- **Empowered leadership holds a ‘seat at the table’ for culture.** Consistent with Action 13B above, both Granville Island and the Quartier des Spectacles established a leadership structure that was (in large part) stable and had some independence from the political process. Creating a Cultural Leadership Committee, which we imagine to be largely filled with private sector leaders, would be positioned as enacting cultural development priorities endorsed by the VMC Sub-Committee. The Cultural Leadership Committee would be similar in its responsibilities and composition to the QdS Partnership and the (newly established) Granville Island Council, both of which bring together creative industries leadership with other industry leaders, landowners, elected officials, and more to drive meaningful economic and cultural outcomes.

The attached presentation provides additional insights to the research and rationale that support this recommendation.



## CONCLUSIONS

- Policy development is an opportunity.
  - Secondary Plan, Official Plan development is concurrent with this study. City stakeholders indicate an opportunity to integrate cultural policy with these efforts.
  - Identifying and resourcing a champion(s) to advance future cultural development will be key.
- A people-first approach responds to Vaughan's unique value proposition.
  - Activations should be at the centre of the cultural strategy, responding to longstanding (and new) residents' heritage and affinities.
  - The built environment should enable development of a richer, deeper cultural ecosystem, through activations (policies) and capital investment (a 'hub').
- Clearer public sector goals would instill confidence and draw investment.
  - Key VMC landowners are eager for City leadership to state concrete objectives within policies or programs.
  - The private sector is poised to lead the evolution of a cultural ecosystem, with appropriate City engagement in a formal partnership.
- Pending the impact of Bill 108 and the allocation of related Community Benefit Charges, resources are an open question