

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 21, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: ACCESS VAUGHAN STRATEGIC REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide a strategic review and next steps for the Access Vaughan department for consideration and approval and to seek Council approval for the rebranding of Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan.

Report Highlights

- The timing of this report coincides with important milestones for Access Vaughan, such as the creation of the Office of Communications and Economic Development, the May 2 reopening of City Hall to the public, and planned opportunities to renew and strengthen the mandate of Access Vaughan, including findings from the Access Vaughan Audit (underway).
- In Q1 2022, the Office of Communications and Economic Development overtook responsibility for the public reopening of City Hall and delivery of in-person services. Access Vaughan is the lead department to oversee improvements for in-person service delivery.
- Training and development are critical to the success of Access Vaughan and the citizen service representatives (CSRs). The average duration for new-recruit training is four to six weeks. Each new recruit will train on over 16 different learning modules (each learning module is built on different departmental inquiry types) and seven different software applications so the CSR can create service requests, obtain information, and provide first point resolution. This training program enables new recruits and agents alike to provide service via three separate service channels: in-person, telephone and email.
- The Office of Communications and Economic Development enhances synergies between Access Vaughan and Corporate and Strategic Communications. The two departments are working more closely to ensure the public receives timely and accurate information and service – whether it is by phone, email, in-person or social media.
- Upon approval from Council, to oversee ongoing citizen experience and service improvements, a staff working group will be formed to develop a new project charter and project team to: successfully transition to the new service delivery design in City Hall, manage the communications and execution of rebranding Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan, and implement findings from the Access Vaughan Audit.

Recommendations

1. That the Access Vaughan Strategic Review and Next Steps staff report be received; and
2. That the decision to rebrand Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan be approved.

Background

Context: Access Vaughan Strategic Review and Update

In January 2022, Vaughan Council directed staff to report further about Access Vaughan's operational efforts. This directive is partly in response to the January 2022 blizzard that impacted Vaughan and communities across the Greater Toronto Area. The timing of this report coincides with critical milestones for Access Vaughan. These include, but are not limited to, the creation of the Office of Communications and Economic Development, where Access Vaughan was moved to; the May 2, 2022 reopening of City Hall for in-person service for the public following the end of the declared state of emergency; and planned opportunities to renew and strengthen the mandate of Access Vaughan's efforts to improve the citizen experience and deliver Service Excellence to the public, including the Access Vaughan Audit presently underway by the City's Internal Audit department.

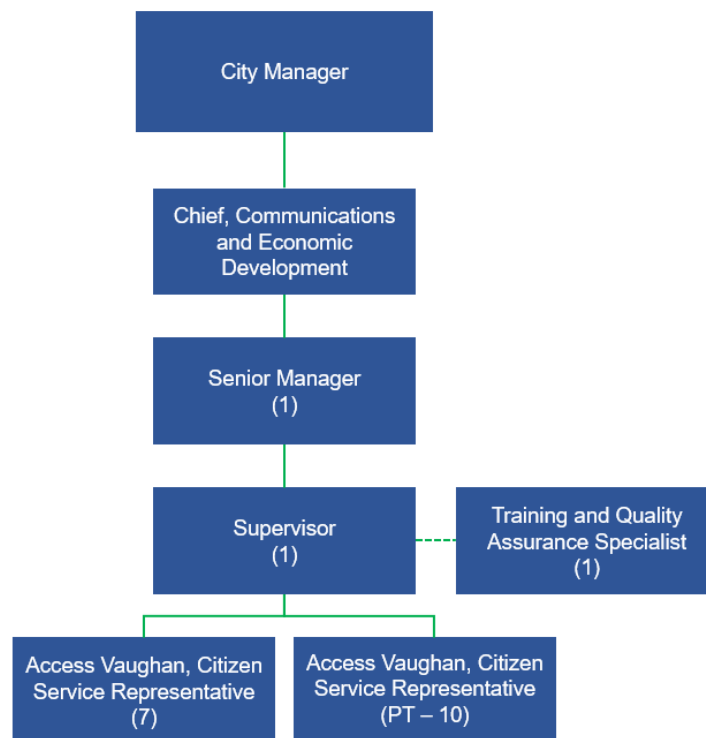
Recap: Access Vaughan

Launched in 2006, Access Vaughan is the City of Vaughan's contact centre, responsible for responding to telephone, email, and in-person inquiries. Since then, Access Vaughan has received more than 3 million phone calls. The average monthly call volume is more than 17,600 calls, whereas the average monthly email volume is more than 2,000 emails.

Inclusivity, equity and accessibility are critical to Access Vaughan service delivery as reflected by the following services:

- **Language Line** – Access Vaughan features an over-the-phone interpretation system – Language Line – which provides verbal translation in more than 150 languages. Residents can request this service with a citizen service representative, free of charge.
- **Textnet** – To enhance service, Access Vaughan leverages the Textnet service and software that enable deaf, deafened, hard of hearing or speech-impaired residents to more easily access and converse with citizen service representatives (CSR). Contact centre staff are trained to use the technology. Textnet enables the public to continue to use their familiar TTY communication device; however, it converts the communication to a pop-up text message that appears on a computer screen – essentially creating an online conversation. The public can access Textnet service by calling: 1-866-543-0545.
- **UbiDuo** – Communication device for the deaf, hard of hearing or hearing person to converse without the use of an interpreter.

As shown below in the organizational structure, Access Vaughan is situated within the Office of Communications and Economic Development, in the City Manager's Portfolio. The Access Vaughan Leadership Team consists of a Senior Manager, Supervisor, and Training and Quality Assurance Specialist. Access Vaughan has a complement of seven full-time and 10 part-time CSRs. While there is a blended total of 17 part-time and full-time CSRs, approximately 12 CSRs are scheduled per business day. This is because part-time staff are scheduled up to 24 hours per week. There is always at least one CSR dedicated for email response. Both full-time and part-time staff are entitled to vacation time, and, as is the case with any other team, Access Vaughan also manages unknown variables such as sick days, other personal events and staff turnover. Access Vaughan staff operate from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday to Friday. A third-party vendor, Liveconx, provides after-hours services, which run from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. Monday to Friday and all day and night on weekends. The Council-approved creation of the Office of Communications and Economic Development continues to be an opportunity to further leverage existing budgets and resources to support the work undertaken by Access Vaughan.



Training and development are critical to the success of Access Vaughan and the CSRs

The average duration for new-recruit training is four to six weeks. Each new recruit will train on over 16 different learning modules (each learning module is built on different departmental inquiry types) and seven different software applications so the CSR can create service requests, obtain information, and provide first point resolution. This training program enables new recruits and agents alike to provide service via three separate service channels: in-person, telephone and email.

At a high level, the training consists of the following areas:

- current functions of a CSR for all service channels,
- payment processing functions (these functions were formerly performed by Financial Services staff and are now performed by Access Vaughan CSRs as Access Vaughan has absorbed the payment processing function), and
- new job functions for in-person service delivery, which have been updated to reflect the current temporary counter space and the forthcoming service design of City Hall

Ongoing training and education sessions are delivered ad hoc as new service integrations are identified and implemented. It is important to note that this comprehensive training program (including the ongoing training sessions) is executed by the Access Vaughan Leadership team concurrent to the department's daily operational activity. At times (such as peak volume periods), this can create business pressures to maintain service delivery levels while successfully executing training sessions.

December 2021 Council-approved corporate restructuring

As reinforced throughout the two-year declared state of an emergency in response to COVID-19 and during anticipated and unexpected incidents, such as severe weather events, guaranteeing accurate, effective, timely and responsive information remains a critical priority for Members of Council, staff, stakeholders and the community. The importance of this priority is reflected in the December 2021 Council-approved corporate restructuring, which created the new Office of Communications and Economic Development, consisting of the Access Vaughan, Corporate and Strategic Communications and Economic Development departments.

Enhancing strategic relations between Access Vaughan and Corporate and Strategic Communications to achieve first-point-of-contact resolution

The Office of Communications and Economic Development is strategically positioned to deliver on the idea that public information is a public service by ensuring Access Vaughan CSRs receive the most updated information so that public inquiries, no matter how they are received, are resolved as soon as possible.

Although a dedicated senior communications staffer has since been assigned to supporting Access Vaughan, all Corporate and Strategic Communications staff work with departments across the corporation to develop and provide approved messaging used by CSRs when engaging with the public. The goal is for consistent messaging to be delivered throughout the corporation – from CSRs to appearing in media products, printed newsletters and on the City's website, among other places. Conversely, CSRs are better positioned to inform Corporate and Strategic Communications staff about top-of-mind issues, which communications staff then respond to by increasing promotional efforts across many communications channels.

As part of this enhanced synergy because of the Office of Communications and Economic Development, Corporate and Strategic Communications works with Access Vaughan to maintain a monthly *You Asked, We Answered* communications campaign. This series

involves the City releasing popular questions and answers received and responded to by CSRs to enhance the citizen experience and continue providing timely, relevant and top-of-mind information.

A further synergy because of the Council-approved reorganization is that during an emergency situation, Corporate and Strategic Communications and Access Vaughan form the Public Information Section. The creation of the Office of Communications and Economic Development now makes this arrangement a permanent entity during an emergency response and in undertaking routine business.

Office of Communications and Economic Development works closely with Council staff

Department heads from the Office of Communications and Economic Development hold monthly briefings with Council staff. These are updates about planned communications and call volumes, among other initiatives, and an opportunity to receive feedback from Council staff on issues that require enhanced communications based on what Council staff receive directly from constituents. Council staff provide valuable situational analyses that help each of the Office of Communications and Economic Development departments prioritize work. In addition, the weekly Access Vaughan email updates complement the standing briefings to Council.

Resolving questions and comments received on social media

In addition to inquiries received by telephone or email, Corporate and Strategic Communications responds to questions received over the City's official corporate social media accounts. There is always an attempt by communications staff to achieve first-point-of-contact resolution. However, when a social media inquiry needs escalation, the query is sent to Access Vaughan. A CSR then creates a service request to resolve the issue further. Communications staff respond to public inquiries over social media daily, including on evenings and weekends. The rise of social media to communicate with the City is further proof of the effectiveness of the December 2021 Council-approved reorganization to enhance synergies between Access Vaughan and Corporate and Strategic Communications.

Extensively process mapping the citizen experience at City Hall to improve in-person services

In Q1 2022, the Office of Communications and Economic Development overtook responsibility for the public reopening of City Hall and the new citizen experience for in-person services. Access Vaughan continues to be the lead department to oversee improvements for in-person services. As well, several other departments made extensive contributions to establishing the temporary counter space and achieving a successful May 2 reopening effort of City Hall.

In anticipation of the May 2 City Hall reopening, a new staff working group was established, meeting weekly from March to May, to document and understand a citizen's experience of in-person service. The working group's efforts included:

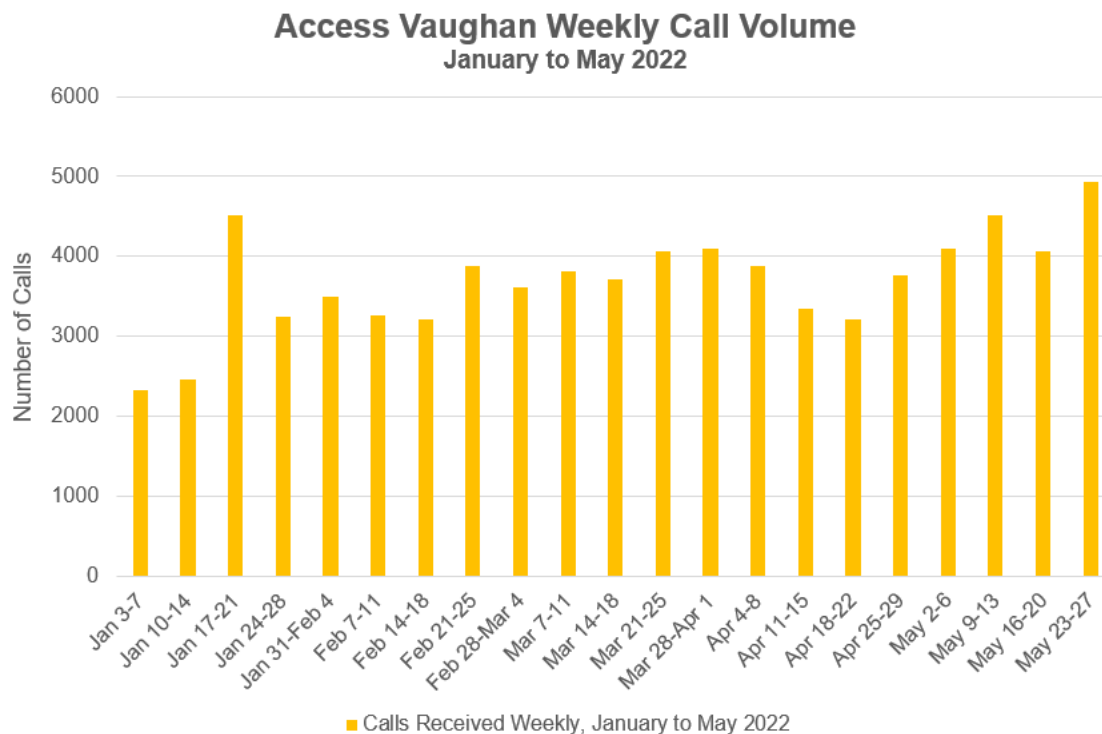
- consulting with several internal departments as required to determine critical components of the temporary counter space design.
- designing and implementing the temporary counter space layout, including the appropriate number of service stations, IT requirements and dedicated spaces for department-specific service delivery.
- establishing processes around a new Welcome Desk, staffed by Access Vaughan CSRs, to resolve the citizen inquiry at the first point of contact or triage the citizen inquiry to the appropriate department staff members. This action involved creating a new process for CSRs to contact different departments for those staff to come to the atrium and assist the public at one of the temporary service stations.
- training Access Vaughan CSRs to assume new responsibilities for in-person service, namely monetary transactions previously performed by Financial Services department staff.
- providing orientation sessions to all department staff executing service delivery in the atrium and temporary counter service stations.
- establishing a new queuing system, process and public waiting area.
- designing and displaying new signage throughout City Hall to improve the citizen experience, including creating QR codes to allow residents to serve themselves with select services on demand.
- planning for anticipated health, safety and security risks for both staff and the public.
- recruiting and training volunteer greeters for the initial public reopening effort.
- briefing Members of Council and Council staff about the reopening.

Understanding how residents want to receive services and what those services are will significantly impact Access Vaughan's work in the future

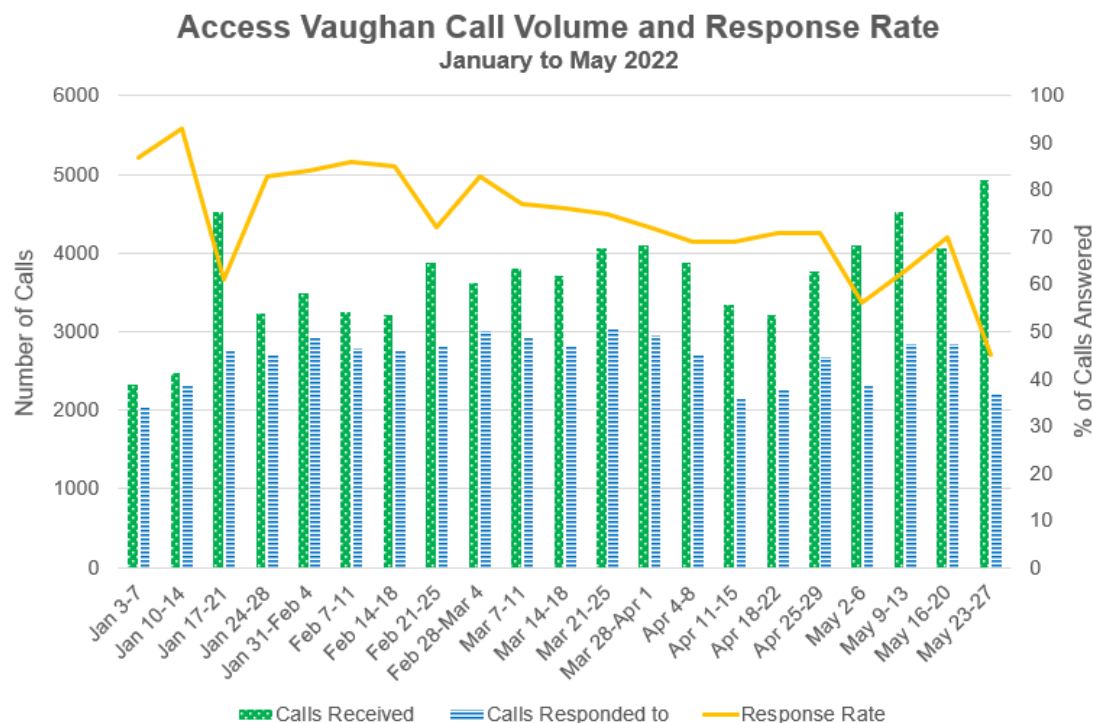
The 2022 Citizen Survey is currently being developed and will include questions about how Vaughan residents wish to access and receive City services. The city-wide statistically accurate survey is expected to be completed by Q4 2022 with a staff report and presentation to Vaughan Council in Q1 2023. The findings of the Citizen Survey are critically essential to shape future planning efforts and enhancements for in-person service.

Access Vaughan performance metrics

Since the May reopening of City Hall, Access Vaughan CSRs have continued to collect data on the volume of inquiries for in-person, telephone and email services. Some of these performance metrics are displayed below.



This graph shows the weekly call volume coming into the Access Vaughan Contact Centre. Some key trends to note from this graph are that there are increases in call volume during weather events (significant and otherwise) and when the temperatures increase and citizens are spending more time outdoors. The communications campaign, launched in March 2022 in advance of the City Hall reopening on May 2, encouraged citizens to continue leveraging telephone and virtual services in light of the ongoing and constantly evolving COVID-19 situation. This likely contributed to the increase in call volume from May 2 onwards. It is important to note that since March 2020, the City has advanced and enhanced virtual services making this an accessible and user-friendly alternative. The increased online service offerings have also contributed to an increase in email inquiries to Access Vaughan.



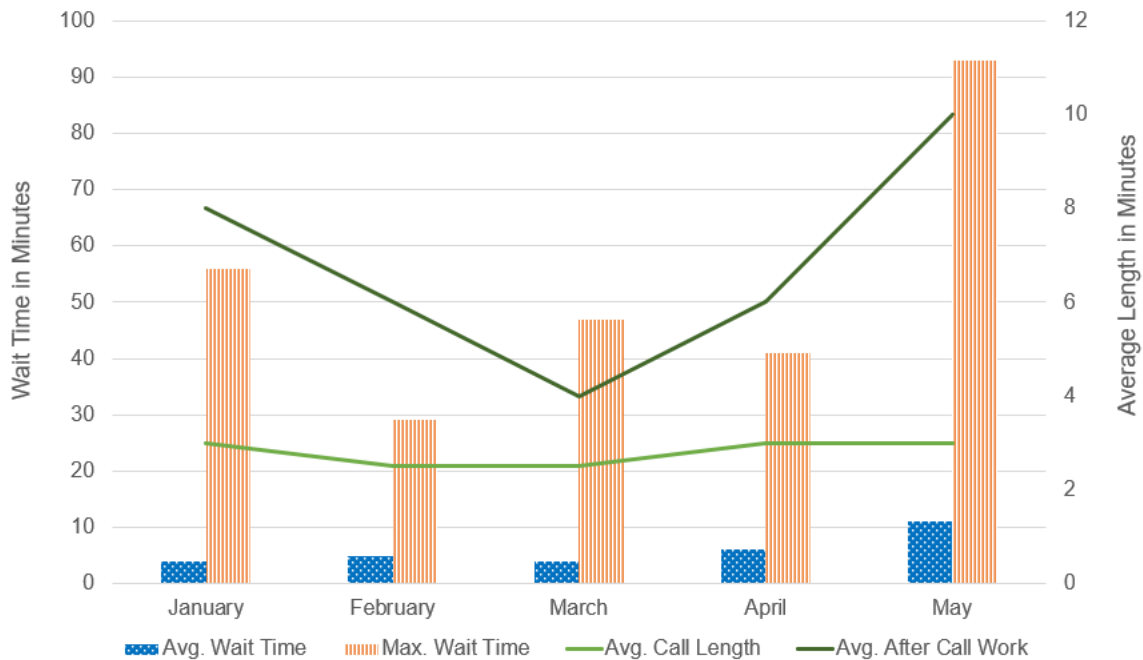
This graph shows the calls received and the calls responded to, by week, from January to May 2022. The number of calls is shown on the left y-axis, and the percentage of calls answered (or Response Rate, which is the yellow line) is shown on the right y-axis. One key trend to note here is the difference between calls received and calls responded to; the greater the difference in calls received versus calls responded to, is consequent to an increase in call volume and/or staffing shortages. Some examples that generate an influx of calls are the Jan. 17 snowstorm, Recreation summer camp and summer program registration (during the weeks of Feb. 21, Feb. 28 and March 7), tax instalment due dates (during the weeks of March 24, 28, and April 4) and the thunderstorm weather event during the May 21 weekend.

Do all calls receive a response?

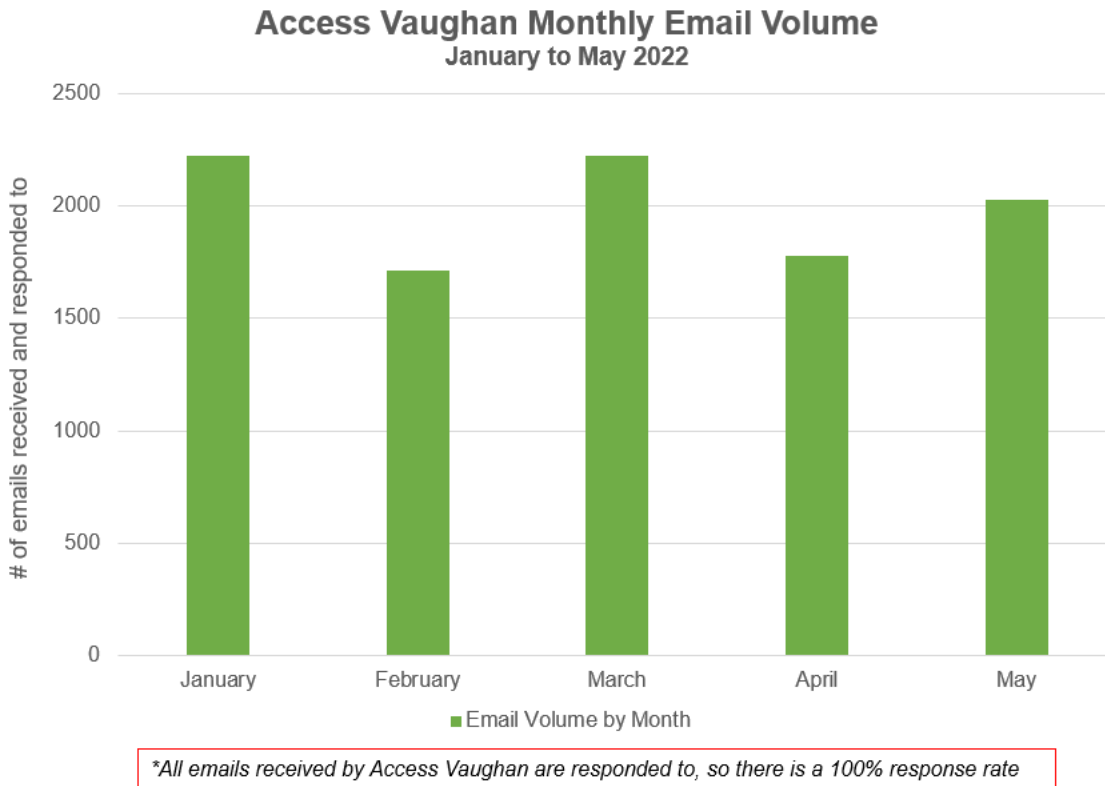
All calls connected to Access Vaughan agents receive a response. Some reasons why calls may not connect to an Access Vaughan agent are: citizens dial incorrectly, determine there is a more ideal time to make their inquiry or determine that they prefer not to wait to speak to an agent.

Access Vaughan Citizen Experience – Telephone

January to May 2022

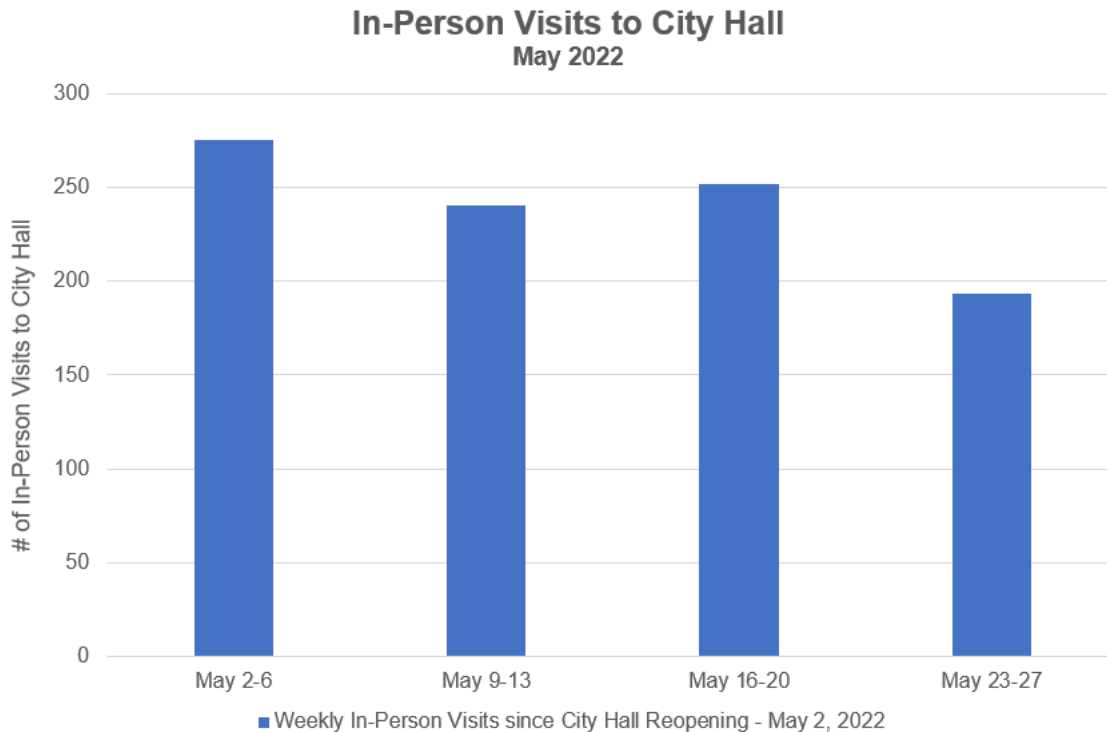


This graph shows the average wait time (blue bar), maximum wait time (red bar), average call length (light green line), and the average after-call work for CSRs to complete (dark green line), by month, from January to May 2022. Call length reflects the time an agent spends communicating with the citizen, while the after-call work time reflects what the agent needs to do to complete service delivery. For example, creating files, assigning files, tracking their interaction and communicating with other City staff as required. Access Vaughan responds to a variety of different inquiry types. Some inquiry types exclusively require information sharing to achieve first-point resolution and no additional action, while other inquiry types require both information sharing and additional action, such as case file creation and call-out to City staff to ensure issues are addressed in priority sequence. A key trend to note is that the after-call work is highest in January and May as a result of the winter weather event and the Victoria Day weekend thunderstorm, as almost every call relating to those events required a file to be created and assigned for follow-up service delivery. It is also important to note that the average wait time for telephone service reflects more commonly what citizens are experiencing when they call the Access Vaughan contact centre, whereas the maximum wait time reflects the longest possible wait time during that month.



This graph shows the total number of emails received by Access Vaughan (the total number of emails actioned or responded to) by month from January to May 2022. Some key trends to note are the increase in emails during:

- January, related to the Jan. 17 snowstorm.
- March, related to property tax inquiries (primarily requests to join the pre-authorized payment program prior to the ^{first} interim bill instalment due date).
- May, due to the May 21 thunderstorm.



This graph shows the number of people who visited City Hall for in-person service delivery once the building reopened to the public on Monday, May 2, 2022. Some key trends to note are increased volume during the first week of reopening, primarily related to requests for marriage licenses, and a slight increase the week of May 16, in tax payment processing, ahead of the May interim instalment due date. In-person volume continues to be monitored to identify areas for improvement in service delivery. An example of a service improvement that was implemented consequent to the monitoring of in-person metrics, was creating a dedicated space for tax inquiries. In-person data showed a steady increase in volume and interest of tax-related service inquiries. As a result, service delivery was modified to reflect the required improvements (in this case, the dedicated service station for tax-related inquiries).

Previous Reports/Authority

N/A

Analysis and Options

Continuous improvement is critical to implementing the corporation's mission statement: *Citizens first through Service Excellence*. Therefore, the following recommendation is being proposed: the alignment of the Access Vaughan department with the Service Vaughan Strategy by rebranding Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan.

This enables continuous improvement within Access Vaughan, ensuring that citizens receive the most efficient and effective service delivery.

Alignment of Access Vaughan department with the Service Vaughan Strategy by rebranding Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan.

The proposed alignment of Access Vaughan and Service Vaughan mandates and narratives present an opportunity to bring about greater clarity to both internal and external audiences – namely staff and the public – to work toward the singular goal of delivering an exceptional citizen experience.

For context, Service Vaughan is a long-standing corporate initiative to implement corporate standards that enhance the citizen experience. The vaughan.ca/ServiceVaughan website is also the City's hub for residents and businesses to complete online services or report an issue with a City service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In fact, it features over 65 different services that the public can undertake online – from requesting sidewalk repairs and purchasing garbage tags to registering for a recreation program and getting a pet license. Staff are working to make additional services available online.

As a recap, the Council approved Service Vaughan Strategy includes four components:

1. Integrated service

- Identifying and implementing in-person service integrations with all departments to ensure first-point resolution, where possible.
- Executing telephony enhancements to prioritize call reasons (e.g. municipal emergencies), better triaging incoming calls, reducing wait times and increasing first-point resolution for telephone-based service (please note that telephony enhancements were launched in May 2022).

2. Digital transformation

- Identifying opportunities for innovation and process improvement.
- Leveraging tools and technology (e.g. CRM) to further automate service delivery.

3. Service standards and performance measurement

- Develop service standards for all types of service delivery (in-person, on call, email, social media) to ensure accountability.
- Track and monitor performance metrics to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.

4. In-person citizen experience

- Improving the in-person citizen experience at City Hall by implementing all components of the new design for service delivery, including a new main service counter, private and semi-private meeting rooms and a digital service area.

The Service Vaughan Strategy is a major focus area for service delivery excellence as the citizen experience is being modernized and improved. To fully bring about the positive changes as intended by the vision of this strategy, it must be situated within a department's mandate and operation. As a result of the Council-approved corporate restructuring, the new Office of Communications and Economic Development is taking ownership of the strategy, similar to the reopening of City Hall operations for in-person service. **To enable the alignment of Access Vaughan with the Service Vaughan**

Strategy, the recommendation is for the department and the strategy to become one and the department to be rebranded as Service Vaughan. Moving forward, this naming convention will avoid any public confusion and ensure greater clarity for both staff and citizens about the strategic role of the department and the department's objectives in alignment with service delivery excellence.

Implementing findings from the Access Vaughan Audit (currently underway)

Furthermore, the 2022 Internal Audit Risk Based Work Plan includes an audit of Access Vaughan. Preliminary work on this project began on Feb. 8, 2022. Access Vaughan staff continue to collaborate with Internal Audit staff to ensure a fulsome audit is completed. Internal Audit was a critical stakeholder department in helping undertake process mapping, identifying potential risks to staff and the public, and planning for the May 2 reopening of City Hall.

The objective of the audit is to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls, processes and procedures in place to mitigate the business risks associated with managing Access Vaughan.

The audit scope includes reviewing that:

- strategic plans are appropriately developed, implemented and monitored, and align with the City's strategic initiatives and priorities.
- there is adequate management oversight, ensuring the proper execution of the Access Vaughan operations.
- key performance indicators have been developed, and management tracks, monitors and reports on the critical success factors of the department.
- budgetary and financial records appropriately reflect operational and capital objectives.
- policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, updated and applied consistently.
- information technology systems are being leveraged and used to their maximum capabilities.

In preparation for the new Council term, areas for service enhancements and alignment efforts include establishing a new staff working group that includes representation from departments that oversaw the reopening of City Hall. A working group is a critical governance infrastructure that will also help develop a new project charter and project team to manage areas for improvement and further implement the findings of the Access Vaughan Audit. This effort will also bring greater clarity to resource needs and budget requests.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the approval of this report.

The existing budget from the Office of Communications and Economic Development will be used to support the communications campaign related to the rebranding efforts (once approved).

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Although there are no direct regional considerations, Access Vaughan works closely with counterparts in York Region to ensure the consistent delivery of messaging and the triaging of issues to the appropriate level of government. This undertaking was critically important during the declared state of emergency – and the ongoing pivots in response efforts to COVID-19 – when there were heightened inquiries about public health measures and restrictions announced by York Region, Public Health and the Ontario and Canadian governments. The Corporate and Strategic Communications department continues to undertake ongoing public education campaigns about different levels of government, to assist with the triaging of public inquiries.

Conclusion

The Council-directive to provide a strategic review and update about Access Vaughan coincides with several important milestones for Access Vaughan. These include the creation of the Office of Communications and Economic Development, the May 2 reopening of City Hall for in-person service for the public, and planned opportunities to renew and strengthen the mandate of Access Vaughan, which will include findings from the Access Vaughan Audit presently underway.

Currently, the Office of Communications and Economic Development, established by Vaughan Council in December 2021, will continue to enhance staff relations between Access Vaughan and Corporate and Strategic Communications to achieve first-point-of-contact resolution. The departments are working more closely to ensure the public receives timely, accurate and responsive information and service – whether by phone, email, in-person or social media.

To continue modernizing service delivery and enhancing the citizen experience, the recommendation is being made to align Access Vaughan and the Service Vaughan Strategy by rebranding Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan. This rebranding will provide greater clarity to both staff and citizens about the strategic role and objectives of the department. Upon approval, staff will develop a comprehensive communications plan to publicly launch the department rebrand, with full rollout expected by Q4 2022.

A staff working group will be formed to develop a new project charter and project team with the goal of successfully and efficiently transitioning to the new service delivery design of City Hall, managing the communications and rollout for the rebranding of Access Vaughan into Service Vaughan, and actioning the findings from the Access Vaughan Audit.

The Office of Communications and Economic Development will ensure Council continues to receive ongoing reporting about Access Vaughan operations.

For more information, please contact:

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Attachments

N/A

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Approved by

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

Nick Spensieri, City Manager