

Economic Prosperity Task Force Findings Report

Acknowledgments

Council Members

- Chair: Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco
- Vice-Chair: Deputy Mayor, Local and Regional Councillor Mario Ferri

Economic Prosperity Task Force Members

We want to thank all residents, businesses, and stakeholders for your ongoing participation in the Economic Prosperity Task Force. We truly appreciate your time, talent, and input toward this critical city-building initiative.

- Mike Yorke, Carpenters' Union
- Chuck Thibeault, Central Counties Tourism
- Paula Bustard, SmartCentres
- Susan Niczowski, Summer Fresh Salads
- Daniel Hengeveld, Toronto Global
- Brian Shifman, Vaughan Chamber of Commerce
- Melissa Chee, ventureLAB
- Lisa Phillips, York University
- Jamari Ambursely, Oat Canada
- Alessia Iafano, City of Vaughan Resident
- Dan Vahid Mashatan, City of Vaughan Resident
- Diana Nuredini, City of Vaughan Resident

Vaughan Economic Development Team

- Michael Genova, Chief, Communications and Economic Development
- Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development
- Kitty Yung, Project Manager, Smart City Business Program

Purpose

This report outlines the findings and recommendations from the City of Vaughan's Economic Prosperity Task Force. In addition, it seeks the endorsement of seven opportunity statements developed by the Task Force for consideration by the City in developing its 2023-27 Economic Development Business and Action Plan.

Report Highlights

- The Economic Prosperity Task Force membership comprises nine regional industry stakeholders and three resident representatives.
- Seven opportunity statements, including potential actions to realize the identified opportunity, were discussed and finalized between 2020 and 2022.
- The seven opportunity statements were verified via a community engagement project with three Task Force-approved target markets: recent graduates, older adults, women executives, and entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council endorses and refers the seven Opportunity Statements to staff as input to the next Economic Development Strategic Business Plan, 2023 – 2027;
2. THAT Council receive the Economic Prosperity Focus Group Findings Report; and
3. THAT an Economic Prosperity advisory body be established for the 2022 – 2026 Term of Council.

Background

Vaughan is transformative, ambitious, and purpose-driven, with York Region's largest economy and a rapidly growing community. Transformative and ambitious city-building projects are supporting growth.

Exciting and ambitious projects continue transforming the community. These projects include the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC), the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital (Canada's first smart hospital), a robust industrial and commercial base, and infrastructure investments like subway extensions and the newly opened Highway 427 extension.

A strong economy is the foundation of a well-run city. The City of Vaughan plays a vital role in developing a community that will retain our existing business leaders and innovators while attracting the entrepreneurs and talent needed to continue growing local prosperity.

Vaughan is one of Canada's fastest-growing cities, with a population of more than 340,000 that is projected to grow to 570,000 by 2051. Employment is expected to keep pace with population growth, increasing from 236,000 jobs in 2021 to over 350,000 jobs by 2051.

The Economic Prosperity Task Force focused on spurring sustainable economic growth, creating more jobs, incomes, less poverty, higher living standards, and a healthier municipality.

The Task Force's mandate was to advise on how the City could best deliver an economic development function that would increase the well-being of citizens by making it easier for businesses to thrive. The Council-approved mandate of the Task Force was to:

1. Serve as a forum for the discussion among residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to improve local economic development strategies.
2. Identify global marketing strategies that improve Vaughan's foreign-direct investment offerings.
3. Explore ways to invest in Vaughan's local talent pool, thereby strengthening the human capital of the city's local workforce.
4. Serve as a catalyst that encourages the business community to invest back in the broader community, thereby further fulfilling the mandate of the Spirit of Generosity that embodies Vaughan.
5. Align the work of the task force members with the Council-approved priorities identified in the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.
6. Share updates and presentations with advice and recommendations related to the Task Force, culminating with a final report of recommendations no later than June 2021.

The Task Force operationalized its mandate by developing Economic Development Opportunity Statements for the City of Vaughan to explore.

The Economic Prosperity Task Force met virtually to discuss various economic development topics, including business resilience, the city's economic identity, city building, foreign direct investment, workforce development, small business support, tourism development, and placemaking.

Staff have summarized each discussion into an opportunity statement with relevant suggested actions. These unique opportunity statements will inform the development of the next Economic Development Business and Action Plan.

The Task Force operated in two phases:

- ***Summer 2020 to Summer 2021: Opportunity Statement Development***
- ***Fall 2021 to Spring 2022: Opportunity Statement Community Consultation***

In phase 1, the Task Force discussed progressively more specific topics relevant to Economic Development in Vaughan. These were:

- Building resilience in response to COVID-19
- The City of Vaughan's Economic Identity
- The City of Vaughan's Built Environment and the Economy
- International Business Development (Foreign Direct Investment Engagement *and* Trade Development)
- Talent Development
- Tourism Development and the Creative Industries
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship Support

In phase 2, the Task Force worked with the Office of Communications and Economic Development staff to consult with recent graduates, female entrepreneurs and business owners, and older adults. These groups were asked to review and discuss the opportunity statements and add pertinent issues to the discussion.

Findings

The co-creative and advisory model used by the Task Force, in which regular discussions are held between the City, Stakeholders, and Residents, proved of great value to staff working to advance the local economy.

By working directly with Members of Council, residents, and stakeholders, staff were able to understand better the issues and opportunities facing the community. As such, staff are recommending the continuation of such a forum in the next council term.

The Task Force Approved the Following Statements, which were verified and refined via community consultation:

1. Covid-19 Impact Opportunity Statement

Recent challenges have demonstrated that an economy needs to be adaptable and flexible, and the inter-dependencies of sectors need to be acknowledged and fostered to drive resilience and success. Furthermore, physical, policy, and program infrastructure needs to be in place to help organizations be flexible and adapt to challenges.

2. Vaughan's Economic Identity Opportunity Statement

The City of Vaughan is a leader in the Greater Toronto Area's (GTA) economy. Our location has made Vaughan a catalyst for innovation and transformation while providing opportunities for businesses and talent to thrive.

The City of Vaughan stands out amongst its neighbours. Fueled by an ambitious approach to city building, a subway, and major projects like the new downtown and healthcare centre precinct, Vaughan's massive transformation allows businesses and talent to capitalize on the excitement, opportunity, and culture of urban centres with the comfort of the suburbs. In addition, Vaughan's population is diverse, providing unparalleled access to talent with the technical and business skills that have driven Vaughan's economy to a growth rate that outpaces the national and provincial averages. Economic Development has an opportunity to shift Vaughan's narrative as an edge-city in the GTA to capture the reality that ours is a world-class city with fast-moving, transformational projects and opportunities.

How can we do this? Initial thoughts include:

- Engage, educate, and empower business leaders in a variety of sectors.
- Use stories from current business owners - why are you here? What were you able to accomplish by being in this local economy?
- Communications campaign with key messages related to Vaughan's transformative growth.
- Campaign focus could include: Healthcare Centre Precinct - world-class health and safety; VMC - a downtown rising - only city outside Toronto with subway access (intersection with talent), lifestyle projects like the North Maple Regional park and super trail system; all of these speak to a city that leads with innovation.

3. Built-Form Opportunity Statement

Vaughan is a leader in Ontario's manufacturing, construction, and supply-chain/logistics sectors. With growing financial, insurance, and professional service industries, an emerging healthcare cluster, and innovation as the backbone of multiple sectors, Vaughan has an opportunity to create an environment for prosperity.

These industries require flexible commercial, industrial, office, and institutional spaces to adapt to and prosper in the post-COVID economy and community development to establish a connection between residents and businesses to support their growth.

How can we do this? Initial thoughts include:

- Review of by-laws/policies to allow for multiple businesses in one space, multi-use areas that may combine business, retail and office.
- Encourage the use of technology to enable the transformation and adaptability of space.
- Enrich our communities around our existing commercial areas by investing in public art and cultural activations.
- Support strategic clustering of businesses and housing to facilitate opportunities for collaboration, growth, and consumption.

- Activate our public spaces to encourage customer and citizen engagement in the public sphere and create unique experiences through artistic and cultural facilities to drive interest and support of surrounding businesses.

4. International Business Development Opportunity Statement

The City of Vaughan is an international city. Our diversity means that the world is woven into our cultural and commercial fabric. As an international city, Vaughan is a thought leader and can elevate its global standing to benefit its businesses and residents by participating in global activities and discussions of best practices.

As a global leader and participant in international discussions, the City of Vaughan can further leverage its unparalleled market access, low cost of doing business, highly skilled and diverse workforce, multi-modal mobility, economic and political stability, and urban amenities. By adopting an international approach to talent, commercial, and cultural development, the City's economy and community can be enriched, making Vaughan the world's gateway to Ontario and Canada.

By focusing on our key industry sectors like advanced manufacturing, logistics and supply-chain, healthcare, and arts and culture, Vaughan's international approach can show the world that science, innovation, enriched culture, and prosperity are linked with diversity.

How can we do this? Initial thoughts include:

- Incorporate international as an approach in city-building and citizen experience initiatives (e.g. planning, culture, events)
- Continue to work with partners to develop and promote sector-focused opportunities such as hardware, health tech, construction, manufacturing, and supply chain.
- Partner with academic institutions to help attract companies through their students, faculty, and R&D functions
- Encourage and assist local SMEs for international business development by leveraging provincial and federal government tools and programs.
- Expand the business retention and expansion project to identify the areas of support businesses need for international expansion (e.g. export support for SMEs, trade skill exchange program to engage with the City's ED team)
- Explore alternative models of trade missions – linking them with sector-focused virtual trade shows, connecting with global trade commissioners for B2B introductions
- Continue and develop marketing campaign including the new city-building projects, quality of life, cost of living.

5. Talent Development Opportunity Statement

The City of Vaughan has an educated and diverse talent pool. Businesses in sectors from healthcare, the knowledge industries, and professional services to manufacturing, the trades, hospitality and retail, and supply-chain logistics can find an effective and innovative workforce in Vaughan.

To continue to be an economy that is the envy of the Province and Canada, Vaughan has an opportunity to engage its talent further. Mobilizing Vaughan's diverse residents, its experienced late-stage career professionals, and its entrepreneurs from all walks of life, particularly in growth segments like women, newcomers, and youth, is key to Vaughan's economic development.

A primary opportunity in helping Vaughan's residents is in helping them understand how to use their talent: where are opportunities in all sectors and at all stages of career development; who can help unlock opportunities; and how can they be better positioned to grow their skills to fit emerging opportunities?

How do we do this? Initial thoughts include:

Talent Attraction

- Connecting schools with hidden professionals as they have a high level of knowledge – e.g. COSTI senior and student program, the ability for students to ask realistic questions of people experienced in different sectors.
- Mentorship and networking opportunities between students, recent grads and industry.
- Hands-on experiences with industry.

Talent Development and Retention

- Connect businesses to training programs and professional development opportunities to help develop employees and company capacity.
- Work with employers to provide talent with opportunities to serve a more diverse function in the workplace.
- Work with employers to develop entry-level talent, and recognize the skills complementary skills developed in other industries.
- Support entrepreneurs from segments of the population who are under-represented in business startups, mainly supporting women to start and grow businesses.

6. Tourism Development and Creative Industry Opportunity Statement

Vaughan is a vibrant urban city where art is accessible to all and valued as a placemaking catalyst. Diversity is celebrated by highlighting our diverse cultural traditions. In addition, Vaughan is home to a cluster of premier attractions that brings millions of visitors annually. The people and places that make Vaughan an incredible place to visit also create a community that is a great place to live, work and play.

This sector holds an important place in Vaughan's economy as a job creator and for its role in attracting businesses, residents, and visitors. The City should continue partnering with community organizations and businesses to foster cultural programs and events as they contribute to a strong identity and sense of place.

A primary opportunity is to raise awareness of Vaughan's arts, culture and tourism assets and to connect economic drivers to engage with these placemaking opportunities.

How can we do this? Initial thoughts include:

- Focus on signature events that are great placemaking for the resident community and can attract visitors.
- Develop art and culture asset map and package to understand connections better and facilitate introductions and opportunities.
- Educating companies on Vaughan's cultural amenities (e.g. experience Vaughan)
- Highlight and promote Vaughan's strengths to residents and visitors (e.g. food tours).
- Explore partnership with Vaughan Public Libraries and educational institutions to develop and showcase Vaughan's vibrant art and culture sector.
- Review by-laws and look for ways to make it easier for art, culture, and tourism initiatives to flourish.
- Event planning through the lens of a resident and visitor.
- Consider infrastructure to accommodate visitors (e.g. path, active transportation).

7. Small Business and Entrepreneurship Opportunity Statement

Small business is the backbone of Vaughan's economy, with more than 85% of its businesses employing fewer than 20 people. To ensure that our economy remains vibrant in all sectors, the Economic Development Department has invested in this segment of our economy by building a supportive community of businesspeople, reducing barriers to business startup and growth, and working with various stakeholders to ensure that the resources needed for business success are available.

To continue to build Vaughan's economy in a post-pandemic world, the entrepreneurial skillset will be even more valuable as companies adapt to the new normal. As such, Economic Development will focus on reducing business ownership and expansion barriers and connecting businesses with various partners in the entrepreneurship support ecosystem. This will help high-potential job creators AND those with higher barriers to business ownership caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

However, these efforts must be amplified by a concerted effort to identify and promote Vaughan as an entrepreneurial hub for specific emerging and growing clusters.

How will we do this? Initial thoughts include:

- By including startup programs targeting those groups with the highest barriers to business startup
 - Youth, women, newcomers, etc.
 - Support sectors hardest hit by COVID-19 to transition into a more resilient operating model and encourage new revenue streams,
 - Encouraging side-hustle (and legitimizing grey-market activity) as a means for those who cannot afford to give up a steady income and, in fact, even as a means for existing businesses to diversify their offerings.
 - Advocate for adjustment of program eligibility/intake criteria to allow for alternate entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Provide predictability and clarity for those commercializing talents/ideas.

- Create an information package containing key contacts and organizations such as buildings, utilities, taxes, permits etc.
- Providing self-serve information virtually – e.g. How to Start or Own a Business infographic.
- Focus on building the entrepreneurial skillset in Vaughan through workforce development initiatives
 - Identifying and filling mentorship gaps.
 - Connecting small businesses to hiring incentives and training/co-op placement opportunities.
 - Encourage student consulting opportunities to infuse new ideas into traditional business models (and as a means to showcase local talent).
- Vaughan to identify how to make our mark. What is Vaughan about?
 - Communications – e.g. sharing Vaughan news, key sectors and resources to target audiences.
 - Become thought leaders to increase Vaughan’s visibility (e.g. sharing specialized knowledge, expertise, and best practice).
- Identify and encourage anchor organizations to act as “first customers” interested in piloting innovative ideas
 - Focus on procurement practices in large organizations (including even within the City).
 - Hospital/healthcare solutions.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Economic Prosperity Task Force has provided invaluable insight into the emerging opportunities for Vaughan’s economic development. The opportunity statements will provide staff with an important input in developing its business plan for the next term of Council.

Once approved, staff will:

- Consult the opportunity statements while developing the 2023-27 Economic Development Business and Action Plan.
- Work with Clerks to establish terms of reference for a future advisory body.
- Work with Clerks to recruit an economic development advisory group in Q1 of 2023.

For more information, please contact Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development: raphael.costa@vaughan.ca