

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, December 6, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: A CULTURE AND HERITAGE CENTRE FEASIBILITY STUDY

FROM:

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council's endorsement to undertake a Feasibility Study to evaluate the impact a proposed Culture and Heritage Centre may have on both tourism and economic development, and to seek, through a Request for Proposal, the services of an established company/consortium with experience in economic impact modelling and the tourism industry to be funded through federal and provincial grants.

Report Highlights

- The City of Vaughan is the only municipality on Ontario that does not have a Heritage Centre or Museum
- A Feasibility Study is needed to validate the argument for the establishment of a Vaughan Heritage Centre
- External funding through a FedDev grant and additional Provincial assistance is available to fully cover the costs of the Feasibility Study
- the Feasibility Study will examine options for optimum location, interpretive planning programs, and financial implications of the proposed Vaughan Heritage Centre

Recommendations

1. THAT Council endorse the undertaking of a Feasibility Study that evaluates the financial and operational impact of a proposed Vaughan Heritage Centre facility;
2. THAT Council endorse and support the applications for funding to commission through RFP the Feasibility Report for the Vaughan Heritage Centre; and
3. THAT Council authorise the City Clerk to sign agreements for FedDev and Provincial grants on behalf of the City.

Background

The lands upon which the City of Vaughan is situated have a rich and varied history that deserves to be celebrated

The territory was home to many First Nations, which each had unique histories, traditions, and customs. Located in the Territory and Treaty 13 lands of the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation, the City of Vaughan rests upon the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee people.

The first European who arrived in Vaughan was French explorer Etienne Brulé, who travelled across the Humber Trail in 1615. His path was also used by other Frenchmen who came to participate in fur trading with the First Nations. In 1792 Upper Canada was divided into 19 counties and a new network of roads was laid out to divide the counties into small townships. The first people to arrive in the area were mainly Germans from Pennsylvania, a smaller number of English-descent families and a group of French Royalists. In 1814, migration was taken over by an influx of immigrants from Britain who were skilled millers, blacksmiths, merchants, and carpenters.

Due to WWII, the Vaughan population landscape was further transformed with the addition of residents from various nationalities including Italians, Jews and Eastern Europeans. The influx and immigration of these groups helped to build Vaughan as a multicultural community, with consistent population growth throughout the 1960s-1970s, leading to the establishment of the Town of Vaughan in 1971. Today Vaughan Italian Canadians account for 53.5 per cent of the City's population and are the largest Italian community in Canada.

Since then, Vaughan has experienced rapid economic and population growth and has sought to provide attention to the fundamentals of building a holistically healthy, engaged, and diverse community mosaic. A complete community's "ecology" is the result of multiple endeavors and people working to build economic and social capital.

Previous Reports/Authority

None.

Analysis and Options

The City of Vaughan is the 17th largest municipal population in Canada, and the only major urban centre in Ontario with no permanent museum and/or cultural heritage centre.

Strong, successful communities acknowledge that celebrating heritage is a required dynamic component of City programs.

Our heritage – tangible and non-tangible – is an important part of who we are and what we identify with, as individuals and communities. This cultural identity relies on the memory of communities and individuals and the artifacts that illustrate these memories: it is key to identity, well-being, decision making and actions.

These artifacts of memory may be tangible, like a portrait, pot, chair or anything made by our ancestors, but memories are also made of intangible assets such as stories, music, song, dance, etc. These intangible cultural heritage assets are also an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other cultural norms within our broader community.

Currently no City department or service has any core mandate component dedicated to collecting, documenting, preserving, conserving, or exhibiting the City of Vaughan's cultural or heritage resources. There is a strong argument to be made that the creation of a Heritage Centre for the City of Vaughan will have positive impact on the community, both through economic development via tourism and local pride-of-place visitation.

The initiation of a feasibility study will identify the capital and operational costs, optional sites, and operational parameters for the proposed Heritage Centre. The feasibility report will outline the economic impact of a new Culture & Heritage site and budgetary implications assessed for Council's consideration.

TARGET AUDIENCE

While Vaughan has a core of long-term residents, our growth has been with young families and new Canadians. This demographic allows Vaughan to be enriched by young people with diverse life experiences. Staff proposes that – while respecting and celebrating the continuing contributions of our long-term resident communities – we need to consider the needs and wants of young professionals, young families, and a diverse workforce.

Staff submits that – for the Heritage Centre to become sustainable and to become the social asset it is being conceived of – it must provide opportunities for Vaughan residents to see themselves and their lives benefited directly by their repeat visits. Therefore, the exhibitions and program offerings must be regularly refreshed, dynamic, and diverse in their medium of communications. Our audiences are all curious persons, self-activating in their desire for lifelong learning relevant to them and this includes tourists to our region who want to understand who we are, our histories and our future.

Once the Vaughan Heritage Centre is fully interpreted, the primary goals will be:

- to attract new and diverse audiences,
- to encourage repeat visitation, and
- to function as a community hub whereby local residents utilize the Heritage Centre year-round for special events, programs, and activities.

MAKING THE CASE FOR A HERITAGE CENTRE

Having reviewed the current cultural plans, assets, and objectives for tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Vaughan, staff has found that presently no department or service in the City of Vaughan has a specific mandate dedicated to the collection, documentation, preservation, conservation, and presentation of the City of Vaughan's cultural heritage resources (see Attachment 1). A survey of similar sized communities indicates that Vaughan is the largest city without a permanent collection that celebrates its peoples and histories.

Many of the potential assets required to build such a celebration centre – whether as a traditional museum or heritage centre – already exists within the city's assets, or with organizations within the city who would be logical partners, supporters, and volunteers. What is needed is a master plan to achieve such a Heritage Centre for the City of Vaughan.

PHASE ONE: FEASIBILITY RFP AND REPORT

The Feasibility Study will provide a guideline for the development of this project, allowing ample opportunity for appropriate public and City oversight, and respecting the quality and value of proposed programmes and services. The goals of the Vaughan Heritage Centre should aim to:

- make Vaughan's diverse cultural heritage come alive for visitors;
- make the site relevant to them;
- create enlightening, compelling and evocative visitor experiences;
- tell stories that relate to the broader context within the province and beyond

The City of Vaughan already has programmes in various departments which address contemporary cultural expressions, whether these be Cultural Months/Days, special music, art, dance or even food events (both annual and occasional) or which celebrate aspects of Vaughan's unique and powerful mix of cultures in a very public and engaging manner. What is missing is a means of connecting the heritage past to a context for these events: a facility (physical and virtual) where a visitor or new resident can go, at their convenience, to connect with the history and celebration of the many communities and peoples who make up Vaughan's cultural fabric – from its First People (past and present) to its current inhabitants, to its vision for our future.

A feasibility study for this initiative must be initiated to identify the capital and operational costs, optional sites, and operational parameters for the proposed Heritage Centre. The feasibility report should outline budgetary implications assessed for Council's consideration.

Phase 1 Feasibility RFP will cover:

1. Full detail on the methodology to be developed and used to be able to track and report the economic impact of tourism if a new Culture and Heritage Centre site were to be created
2. A list of potential existing assets that should be considered for use as the new Culture & Heritage Centre site

3. Detail on what information should be collected and how it will be used to report on the economic impact of tourism in the region
4. Learnings from other municipalities that have Culture & Heritage sites and create benchmark data: how many staff, size of the physical facilities, size of operating budget, number of exhibitions per year. This data will be used for average benchmark comparison as the project develops further.

Phase 1 deliverables will consist of:

1. Development, implementation, and management of the proposed methodology, to be approved by City of Vaughan
2. Direct collection management of data from stakeholders, as approved by City of Vaughan ensuring proper competition and privacy laws are met
3. A full report on the economic impact of tourism through the lens of Culture and Heritage

Phase 2 Deliverables (not budgeted through this study) – if the Phase 1 Feasibility Report is approved by council, next steps would be 3 concurrent RFPs for:

1. a functional plan and architectural concept plan
2. build-asset engineering assessment study
3. 5-year operating budget

Financial Impact

Staff has met with representatives from Federal and Provincial funding bodies and has submitted non-binding applications for \$100,000 funding through FedDev grant (requiring no interest or payback) plus an additional promissory \$63,000 through an Ontario Tourism grant (with no interest or payback). The total estimated Feasibility Study cost, including 15% contingency, is \$162,000 that will be fully covered by the grants; if funding is not acquired, the project will not commence.

Upon the successful completion of the Feasibility Study Report, staff will present Council with accurate data on capital cost and operating budget for the Heritage Centre.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

There is no broader regional impact as a result of this study. Should Council decide to commission a Heritage Centre there will be impact on Regional Tourism.

Conclusion

Cultural Heritage staff has prepared a proposal outlining the need for a Culture and Heritage Centre in the City of Vaughan. The draft proposal was used as basis for a FedDev grant application augmented by a Provincial grant that will fully cover the estimated costs for a Feasibility Study Report to outline the financial and operational implications of developing the proposed Vaughan Heritage Centre. Staff recommends that Council endorse the undertaking of a Feasibility Study that evaluates the financial and operational impact of a proposed Vaughan Heritage Centre facility, endorse and

support the applications for funding to commission through RFP the Feasibility Report for the Vaughan Heritage Centre, and authorise City Clerk to sign agreements for FedDev and Provincial grants on behalf of the City.

For more information, please contact: Nick Borcescu, Senior Heritage Planner, Cultural Heritage, Development Planning, ext. 8191.

Attachment

1. Heritage Centre Proposal.

Prepared by

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Approved by



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