

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, February 9, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: ADVANTAGE VAUGHAN: PHASE 3 OF VAUGHAN'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

For Council to endorse the economic development initiatives outlined in the Advantage Vaughan Plan as part of ongoing efforts to support existing businesses, enhance residents' skillsets, and safeguard the local economy in response to COVID-19.

Report Highlights

- Advantage Vaughan is Phase 3 of the City's economic development efforts to respond to COVID-19. It builds off Phase 1: the Vaughan Business Action Plan (March 2020) and Phase 2: the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan (June 2020).
- The plan is funded through the Council-approved 2022 Budget and draws from an up to \$300,000 capital fund, formerly the Economic Prosperity and Social Capital marketing fund, for targeted economic support.
- Advantage Vaughan will:
 - Provide additional funding to programs led by the Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC) to deliver training, mentorship and micro-grants for local entrepreneurs;
 - Create a new Talent City Vaughan program to support organizations providing opportunities for residents, and vulnerable groups, to enhance their skillsets; and
 - Provide additional funding to Recreation Services' Fairs and Festivals Support Program to help strengthen in-person events when it is safe to hold them.

Report Highlights continued

- Leveraging the resources of the new Office of Communications and Economic Development, these programs will further accelerate strategic communications, marketing and promotional efforts to Economic Development department clients about the advantages of doing business in Vaughan.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council approve the pilot Advantage Vaughan economic development programs as presented in this report;
2. THAT Council approves the allocation of funds from the Economic and Business Recovery Program approved as part of the 2022 Budget to the programs outlined in this report;
3. THAT the Director, Economic Development, (or designate) be authorized to execute agreements, as required, during the 2022–2023 time frame related to awarding grants and/or sponsorship funding to eligible individuals and organizations through the Talent City Vaughan program outlined in this report;
4. THAT Council directs the Economic Prosperity Task Force to establish a panel of three members from the existing Task Force to adjudicate Talent City Vaughan applications;
5. THAT agreements shall be in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor (or designate), and the content shall be satisfactory to the Chief, Communications and Economic Development (or designate);
6. THAT staff report results of the pilot programs to Council in the first quarter of 2023 with recommendations about potential future programs; and
7. THAT Council instructs the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC) Board of Directors to assign the Tourism Vaughan Advisory Committee the task of developing and reporting ideas, no later than May, 2022, to use TVC business and destination development resources to animate the City in 2022.

Background

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic in response to COVID-19. Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua and Members of Council, and the City's administration, responded to this news by taking decisive action to keep people safe and the local economy strong.

Since the City declared a state of emergency, Vaughan's Economic Development department has been at the forefront, delivering more than 1,550 business advisory

consultations, addressing more than 6,150 business inquiries and providing 346 workshops to 6,675 attendees, and the City continues to help.

The Pandemic and the Economy

Pre-COVID-19: Canada's national economy faced challenges.

Even before the pandemic, the Canadian economy faced significant challenges. For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pointed to several factors in January 2020, including an aging workforce and a need to increase trade to justify a Canadian economic outlook that predicted a flat growth rate in 2020 and 2021.¹

The pandemic exacerbated this situation. Implementing emergency orders and the temporary closure of businesses to protect public safety significantly impacted the economy. In 2020, Canada's real gross domestic product (GDP) fell 5.4 per cent² and saw a 4.6 per cent increase between the third quarter of 2020 and 2021.³ National unemployment rose in 2020, peaking at 13.7 per cent in May and falling to 8.6 per cent in December 2020.⁴ The national unemployment rate reached a low in December 2021, falling to 5.9 per cent (seasonally adjusted) – down from 7.1 per cent in August.⁵

Despite the challenges of the global pandemic and national economic trends, the City of Vaughan remained an economic leader in 2020.

Vaughan continued to account for nearly 40 per cent of York Region's GDP throughout 2020 as home to nearly 19,000 businesses and more than 213,000 employees. The City's economy generated more than \$22 billion in GDP, down from just over \$24 billion in 2019,

¹ See: "World Economic Outlook, January 2020", January 2020 <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/01/20/weo-update-january2020> (accessed May 17, 2020); and, "Six Charts on Canada's Economic Outlook for 2019", June 2019 <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/06/20/NA062919-Six-Charts-on-Canadas-Economic-Outlook-for-2019> (accessed May 15, 2020).

² "Gross domestic product, income and expenditure, fourth quarter 2020", March 3, 2021. [The Daily — Gross domestic product, income and expenditure, fourth quarter 2020 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211130/dq211130a-eng.htm) (accessed January 6, 2022).

³ "Gross domestic product, income and expenditure, third quarter 2021". <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211130/dq211130a-eng.htm> (accessed January 6 2022)

⁴ "Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months (accessed January 23, 2022). "Exceptional times continue in the labour market" May 8, 2020. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200508/dq200508a-eng.htm> (accessed May 8, 2020).

⁵ "Labour Force Survey, October 2021". <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211105/dq211105a-eng.htm> (accessed January 6, 2022)

and continues to boast a diverse business community that is the basis of the City's resilience – no one industry accounted for more than 16 per cent of firms in the City.⁶

With increasing rates of vaccination allowing the removal of public health restrictions across Vaughan, York Region and Ontario, the economy is poised to re-enter a period of expansion. As a result, Vaughan's economic recovery is underway. The Conference Board of Canada forecasted that GDP in Vaughan will reach pre-pandemic levels by 2021 with continued growth after that into 2023 and 2024.⁷ Vaughan's real GDP in 2020 was \$22.61 billion and was forecasted to reach \$24.28 billion in 2021.⁸

Vaughan's diverse and growing pre-COVID economy was well-positioned to respond to the global pandemic.

Before COVID-19, Vaughan had one of the country's fastest-growing business communities with an annual average of more than 4 per cent growth in both GDP and employment.

Vaughan's economy has proven itself resilient and diverse. Since 2010, more than 60,000 jobs have been created in Vaughan, driven by the development of critical centres like the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) and industries like manufacturing, supply chain and logistics, and professional services. Vaughan is also a hub for entrepreneurship, with small businesses making up more than 85 per cent of firms in the city.

The resilience of Vaughan's business community is evident through the pandemic. Dozens of companies worked with the City to donate personal protective equipment (PPEs) or food to front-line workers, pivot their production to supply PPEs or raise funds for local causes. Companies also continue working with the Economic Development department to engage in programs like York Region's PPE supply chain database and Ontario Together. Ontario Together is a province-wide effort to help organizations get free rapid tests, sell supplies to the government, search for PPE suppliers and testing services, or apply for funding.

City-building continues.

Since 2010, more than \$13 billion in building permits have been issued by the City and, despite the global pandemic, city-building did not slow down in 2020. Vaughan issued

⁶ See: Vaughan Economic and Cultural Development Year in Review, 2020.

<https://vaughanbusiness.ca/media/2021/07/2020-Year-in-Review-%E2%80%93-Economic-and-Cultural-Development-and-Tourism-Vaughan.pdf> Accessed January 5, 2022.

⁷ The Conference Board of Canada Annual GDP Forecasts.

⁸ Ibid

more than \$1 billion in building permits in the last year alone – a significant investment into the community's future.

The City of Vaughan's Economic Response to the Pandemic

March 2020 – Vaughan becomes first Ontario city to declare a state of emergency and Council approves the Vaughan Business Action Plan.

As noted, on March 11, 2020, the WHO declared a global pandemic in response to COVID-19 and on March 17, Vaughan became the first Ontario city and the first municipality in York Region to declare a state of emergency. That same day, Council endorsed the Vaughan Business Action Plan, which included temporary measures to safeguard the local economy and protect businesses and consumers.

The Vaughan Business Action Plan marked Phase 1 of the City's economic development response efforts to COVID-19 and included five key measures:

1. **Support the restocking of store shelves** – by suspending noise by-laws and weight restrictions on roads to assist with ensuring stores have items people need.
2. **Enhance the movement of goods** – by suspending by-laws restricting the loading and unloading of commercial vehicles, transport trucks, and other vehicles between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., allowing for 24-hour delivery.
3. **Improve business ground-transportation** – by suspending the weight and size of vehicles that can travel on certain roads throughout Vaughan, ensuring the sufficient, safe supply of goods to stores.
4. **Suspend the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT)** – to support the travel and tourism industry by not requiring accommodation providers to charge the Municipal Accommodation Tax at Vaughan properties.
5. **Maintain small business services** – by ensuring, where possible, Small Business and Entrepreneurship front-line services are continued (either online or by phone).

Council also voted to ensure that end dates of by-law suspensions be subject to extension should the Emergency Management Team and Council deem it necessary.

June 2020 – As COVID-19 continues, Council further responds by endorsing the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan.

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continued, the City responded by launching the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan as Phase 2 in economic development efforts. It included three measures:

1. **Secure Vaughan as York Region's largest employment centre** through programs that will help local business owners build resilience into their businesses and adapt to the new normal:
 - a. Review and support Vaughan's municipal policy regime to allow businesses to succeed while protecting public safety.
 - b. Deliver business development and entrepreneurship programs to help local businesses understand the opportunities available to them in Vaughan in a post-COVID context.
 - c. Support marketing initiatives that promote local commercial activities.
 - d. Understand and share trends changing how business is conducted and that are accelerated by COVID-19, like alternative work arrangements, e-commerce, etc., through ongoing research and communications.
2. **Build resilience into Vaughan's key strategic sectors** (health, tourism, supply-chain and logistics, and manufacturing) to ensure that economic opportunities continue in Vaughan in a post-COVID world:
 - a. Understand the impact of COVID-19 on Vaughan's economy through formal stakeholder engagement via existing partnerships and boards to identify partnership opportunities in a post-COVID world to strengthen respective sectors.
 - b. Assess, report on, and implement available municipal financial tools to support business wherever possible with government partners.
 - c. Prepare emergency regulatory, program, and marketing packages to quickly support key industries in future crises.

- d. Work inclusive of the TVC to engage with Vaughan's tourism sector to attract and host safe multi-day cultural festivals, sports events and meetings, and conventions in a post-COVID context.
 - e. Work inclusive of the TVC to partner with regional, provincial and federal tourism marketing groups to promote Vaughan as a safe destination for domestic leisure and business travel, staycations and industry investment.
 - f. Ensure that the Vaughan Healthcare Centre Precinct economic opportunity study is completed and considers the opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in future-facing healthcare paradigms.
 - g. Evaluate the next steps in the Vaughan performing arts centre project to consider the potential impacts of COVID-19, ensuring that future work reflects how social distancing is changing how we consume the arts.
3. **Share Vaughan's reimagined public spaces within social distancing measures** and invite the community to experience the cultural fabric of Vaughan through public art and cultural development, highlighting Vaughan as a welcoming community as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.
- a. Support local culture and heritage events and creative amenities through digital public engagement to maintain a sense of community, recognizing Vaughan's culture during times of social distancing and supporting the safe transition back to in-person engagements when permitted.
 - b. Leverage public art on digital channels to inspire a sense of place-making, convey Vaughan's unique identity with the community and welcome people to experience Vaughan's public spaces when social distancing is lifted.

Over and above the Vaughan Business Action Plan and the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan, there continues to be ongoing economic development support available to residents and businesses.

Advisory consultations: The Economic Development team continues to offer advisory consultations to entrepreneurs and businesses of all stages and sizes via tele- or videoconference, email and phone. For information, additional resources or to book a consultation, Vaughan's business community can visit vaughanbusiness.ca.

Open for Business: Created with the By-law and Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services team, the voluntary [Open for Business online directory](#) includes services and Vaughan-based businesses that are open or providing modified operations by phone, online, takeout or delivery in compliance with provincial and municipal regulations. Vaughan businesses interested in being included in the list must apply through this [online form](#).

Innovation space at Pierre Berton Resource Library: the City, in partnership with Vaughan Public Libraries (VPL) and ventureLAB, has a new innovation space in Vaughan. ventureLAB's satellite location at the Pierre Berton Resource Library provides resources and advisory support to local technology startups.

Entrepreneurs can book desk space through [ventureLAB's Innovation Hub Membership](#), subject to ventureLAB's COVID-19 safety protocols. With the City's three Resource Libraries currently open with capacity and safety restrictions, entrepreneurs can access the site to co-work, connect with other innovators, gain advisory support, and attend workshops and other events.

Training and education: Businesses and entrepreneurs can use the City as a resource to find ongoing training and education to move their business online, pivot their strategy or start anew. The Economic Development department also promotes virtual webinars, seminars and classes from different organizations. There is something for everyone. The public is encouraged to learn more about upcoming events by visiting [vaughanbusiness.ca/events](#) and keeping up with the City's newest business resources and initiatives by signing up for the Economic Development department's eNewsletter at [vaughanbusiness.ca/enewsletters](#).

Another area of focus for the Economic Development team is helping businesses access Provincial and Federal Government supports, including small business grants, loans and programs that assist in maintaining their workforce.

The City of Vaughan's efforts have yielded ongoing and meaningful results for our businesses.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Economic Development has had three over-arching objectives:

1. To provide our business community with the most up-to-date, relevant, and reliable information possible concerning the pandemic and the economy.

2. To help our business community navigate the various programs provided and decisions taken by other levels of government and business support agencies.
3. To understand the impact of the pandemic on the business community.

To achieve these objectives, Economic Development has undertaken a series of actions with significant operational results.

Objective	Action	Result
1	Pivot department website landing page to a one-stop information centre for all relevant business programs and announcements regarding COVID-19	353,430 page views on all our websites since the onset of the pandemic
	Launch segment focused e-newsletters with targeted, relevant information for small businesses; arts and culture; tourism and hospitality; business development	565 eNewsletters sent out since the onset of the pandemic
2	Maintain and enhance business inquiry service to provide businesses with quick access to information	Addressed more than 6,150 business inquiries since the onset of the pandemic
	Maintain and enhance business consultation service for support on strategy, relevant connections, and adjusting business models	Delivered more than 1,550 business advisory consultations since the onset of the pandemic
3	Co-led Supply Chain Study with York Region, City of Markham and City of Richmond Hill in partnership with Supply Chain Canada to assess the resilience of the manufacturing sector supply chain and better understand the impacts of COVID-19 and how to assist businesses to recover from the pandemic	Undertook study in 2020, with report released in spring of 2021. Report is a key feeder to Toronto Global's new Supply-Chain program.
	Host roundtables across different topics and/or industries to help facilitate connections between companies with interesting solutions, exchange best practices and information, and learn more about current business climates.	Hosted seven roundtables since the onset of the pandemic: Advanced Manufacturing, Cybersecurity in Advanced Manufacturing, Tech Talent, FinTech Innovation, Smart City

		Technologies, Health Innovation and COVID-related innovations
	Produce knowledge products to monitor and track local investment stories, and local, regional, and national economic trends	Launched in Fall 2021, providing monthly snapshot to Council and Senior Leadership Team – Executive

In supplementing the business community's response to COVID-19, Economic Development has used its marketing, program, and research resources to be proactive and provide services in four areas:

1. To provide training and hands-on support to local businesses in pivoting operations to adapt to the new normal
2. To educate businesses on the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19
3. To ease, wherever possible, extraordinary regulatory burdens on business
4. To maintain community arts and cultural connections

Objective	Action	Result
1	Delivered Starter Company Plus Program and Summer Company program to help businesses start and grow while encouraging the adoption of digital tools	Received more than 500 applications since the onset of the pandemic
	Launched the visitvaughan.ca website to help local attractions maintain visibility	Secured support from Central Counties Tourism (CCT) and launched with all major Vaughan attractions and accommodations
	Supported the Open For Business online directory led by Licensing and Permit Services	More than 100 businesses featured on the platform
2	Partnered with local institutions like the Vaughan Public Libraries, the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, and NiagaraU to deliver webinars and town halls	346 webinars to 6,675 viewers since the onset of the pandemic
	Supported the #ShopVaughanLocal Campaign led by Corporate and Strategic Communications (CSC)	More than 1,000 Instagram and Twitter uses
3	Launched the Vaughan Business Action Plan	Eased noise restrictions by-laws to support movement of goods; supported hospitality industry by suspending the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) to September 1, 2020
	Supported Business Registration easements provided by Bylaw	In 2020, a grace period of 90 days was established for business license renewals, which defers renewal of existing business licenses up to 90 days past the expiry date.
4	Moved the City's art collection to a virtual platform	Two exhibitions launched
	Advanced Public Art projects	More than a dozen public art installations in various stages of development

In addition to ongoing results, the City's targeted initiative for COVID-19 response has yielded the following highlights.

Highlight results from the Vaughan Business Action Plan include:

- *Helping small businesses navigate the various resources available to them and pivot to the new normal with more than 6,150 business inquiries handled and 1,550 in-depth business advisory consultations delivered since March 2020.*
- *Enabling small businesses to go digital and maintain operations through the Digital Boost program, which trained more than 300 local small business owners in the summer of 2020.*

Highlight results from the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan to date include:

- *Co-leading a Supply Chain Resilience Study with Supply Chain Canada, York Region, and the Cities of Markham and Richmond Hill. The study was released in 2021, with implementation being taken by the partners and Toronto Global to improve supply-chain resilience by:*
 - *Supporting cyber-security measures*
 - *Identifying near-shoring opportunities*
 - *Increasing connectivity between local manufacturers*
- *Hosting four industry roundtables to facilitate local and regional connections between companies in:*
 - *Cybersecurity in Advanced Manufacturing*
 - *Tech Talent*
 - *FinTech Innovation*
 - *Smart City Technologies*
- *Training more than 350 entrepreneurs through Starter Company Plus*
- *Supporting local retail and services through the Post Promise and Safe Travels programs with nearly 100 businesses displaying the consumer confidence marks*
- *Leveraging more than \$400,000 in federal support for the tourism industry through the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund*
- *Securing nearly \$1,000,000 in GDP for the local tourism industry in 2022 through the hosting of the Toyota Canada National Soccer Championships*
- *Working with Bylaw to allow local eating establishments and banquet halls to temporarily expand or establish patios, while maintaining physical distancing. This marks the latest in a series of measures championed by Vaughan City Council to support the business community during the global COVID-19 pandemic.*

Meanwhile, city-building continues despite COVID-19 with significant investments and economic development initiatives, including:

- Maintained an investment pipeline of more than 50 qualified investors that led to nearly 700 new jobs in the City in 2021 and included marquee investments like General Assembly Pizza and Toronto Research Chemicals*
- Delivered the International Economic Developer's Council (IEDC) Gold Award-winning Activate!Vaughan Innovation Program to nearly 100 entrepreneurs with volunteer support from companies like Ikea Canada, KPMG, Mackenzie Health, Sterling Industries, Alectra Utilities, and ventureLAB*
- Partnered with NiagaraU to deliver the Provincial Summer Company Program to teach students how to open and run a successful business*
- Opened the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre's first Public Art exhibit, Metropolis in Motion, with more than a dozen more city art-related projects underway*

To further support Vaughan's economy, Council approved a corporate Re-Organization in December 2021 that allows for efficiencies between Corporate and Strategic Communications and Economic Development by creating the Office of Communications and Economic Development.

The December 2021 Council-approved corporate restructuring created the new Office of Communications and Economic Development (OCED). Based in the City Manager's Portfolio, OCED consists of the departments of Corporate and Strategic Communications, Economic Development and Access Vaughan.

The new structure presents a vital opportunity to remove silos and leverage existing budget, staff resources and institutional knowledge to provide the public, businesses, stakeholders and Council with information that delivers extraordinary customer service, enhances the citizen experience and provides opportunities.

Since March 2020, Corporate and Strategic Communications has worked with Economic Development to develop and issue approximately 353 business-specific communications products. These products consist of Public Service Announcements, News Releases, Mayor's statements, Council Communication Packages and Vaughan News eNewsletters.

Previous Reports/Authority

[VAUGHAN BUSINESS RESILIENCE PLAN](#), Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee Report, June 23, 2020.

[VAUGHAN BUSINESS RESILIENCE PLAN PROJECT MATRIX](#).

[ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TASK FORCE – APPROVAL OF TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS](#), Committee of the Whole (2) Report, May 20, 2020

[EXTENSION OF MUNICIPAL ACCOMMODATION TAX SUSPENSION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19](#), Committee of the Whole (2) Report, May 20, 2020

[Vaughan Business Action Plan](#)

[York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership](#)

[CITY OF VAUGHAN ECONOMIC MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL NOVEL CORONA VIRUS \(COVID-19\) PANDEMIC](#), Special Committee of the Whole, March 17, 2020

[TOURISM VAUGHAN CORPORATION \(TVC\) – 2020 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN](#), Committee of the Whole (2) Report, March 9, 2020

[STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN FOR ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, 2020-2023](#), Committee of the Whole Report (2), September 24, 2019

[Economic and Cultural Development Business Plan, 2020-23](#)

[SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP SERVICES UPDATE](#), Committee of the Whole Report, April 2, 2019

[VAUGHAN DESTINATION MASTERPLAN](#), Committee of the Whole (2) Report, October 13, 2021

[Vaughan Destination Master Plan – Executive Summary](#)

Analysis and Options

February 2022 – Advantage Vaughan is the next phase of Vaughan’s Economic Development response to COVID-19.

As the world tracks toward the second anniversary of the WHO-declared pandemic in March 2022, Advantage Vaughan is Phase 3 of the City’s strategic economic efforts to respond to COVID-19 and builds off measures in the Vaughan Business Action Plan and the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan.

Advantage Vaughan is a series of programs to support four strategic pillars of our economy:

1. Local small business owners and entrepreneurs
 2. Vaughan’s residents who make up the City’s talent base
 3. Vaughan’s local organizations which animate our community and foster local destination development opportunities
 4. Community branding and marketing to demonstrate the advantages of doing business in Vaughan
-
1. ***To support small businesses as they continue to weather the pandemic, Economic Development will provide additional funding to programs led by the Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC) that deliver training, mentorship and micro-grants for local entrepreneurs who qualify.***

As noted in this report, the Economic Development department has undertaken a series of initiatives to help small businesses in Vaughan during the pandemic. In 2022, Vaughan looks forward to announcing:

- The use of more than \$300,000 in federal investment to support main street businesses, such as consumer-facing retail, restaurants, and personal services;
- A renewed Small Business Enterprise Centre investment from the Province of Ontario of nearly \$1,000,000 over three years;
- The conclusion of a regional and province-wide program worth more than \$150,000 for small businesses training and micro-grants; and

- A renewed mandate, brand and strategic communications campaign for the Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC) – formerly the Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre – to reach and inform local entrepreneurs and residents about the front-line services offered by VBEC staff to support the community more effectively. VBEC will continue its mandate of overseeing small business programs funded by other levels of government and stakeholder groups.

The Small Business Resilience Program within Advantage Vaughan will be a key element of the ongoing support for our entrepreneurs.

The new Advantage Vaughan program will more than double the size of the already successful Starter Company Plus program, which trained and mentored more than 350 local entrepreneurs and provided provincial and regional grants to more than 30 local businesses in the last year.

The program will:

- Provide business training to local small businesses to help them adjust business models based on current conditions
- Connect business owners to mentorship and networking opportunities
- Facilitate up to 58 provincial \$5,000 grants for qualified participants (see appendix 2 for criteria)

Training and mentorship are available to any small business owner, entrepreneur, or prospective entrepreneur.

Provincial funding will focus on independently operated, brick and mortar businesses operating from a commercial space and will:

- Provide grants to owner-operator businesses re-animating vacant retail property for façade improvement, landscape beautification, or digital infrastructure;
- Provide grants to independent retail, restaurant, and other main-street businesses to reconfigure space to adjust to the 'new normal' bricks-and-clicks commercial environment; and
- Provide grants to small manufacturers to upgrade facilities to improve capacity in logistics, automation, or physical space in a socially distanced new normal.

2. *To better understand and support available programs for residents, Economic Development is creating a new Talent City Vaughan program to support organizations providing opportunities for residents to enhance their skillsets.*

Economic Development works with a variety of stakeholders to support talent development. Primarily, the department focuses on facilitating connections and opportunities to discuss real-world challenges and solutions for employers and employees. To date, efforts have included:

- Working with York Region to support internationally educated professionals through the Gateway Conference pre-COVID-19
- Partnering with NiagaraU to train students in entrepreneurship
- Deepening our affiliation with ventureLAB, our provincially designated Regional Innovation Centre, to offer innovation training to residents
- Hosting a mentorship resource page on vaughanbusiness.ca
- Curating a community of more than 350 members on the Vaughan Business Café for business mentorship
- Submitting, with our partners York University and Mackenzie Health, applications to deploy training programs for health workers
- Running a program in partnership with the Centre for Social Innovation to teach 10 residents who are leaders and champions in local social innovation

Residents, as our local talent base, have many employment needs. Investing in them will enhance Vaughan's competitive advantage.

Investing in knowledge infrastructure is critical to any effort to build back better in the face of the ongoing global pandemic. Local, national and international businesses need access to top talent to retain and grow their competitive advantages in the competitive business world. Likewise, residents need opportunities to enhance their skillsets to secure and keep well-paying jobs.

Marginalized communities have been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 intensified the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as immigrants and racialized communities; female workers, particularly mothers with young children; employees in low-wage jobs; and youth. The disruptions to the workforce from the pandemic could cause lasting structural changes and result in uneven job recovery, especially for the above groups.

According to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, female workers experienced more significant job losses than male workers across all major age groups. Young workers were struck by the pandemic, with employment declining at nearly five times the pace of job loss for workers aged 25 and over. Employment among immigrants ages 25 to 54, who represent more than one-third of total employment in this age group, declined by 6.6 per cent – nearly three times the rate of job loss among those born in Canada (-2.3 per cent). The unemployment rate increased more sharply for both recent immigrants (11.1 per cent) and long-term immigrants (8.4 per cent), compared to those born in Canada (6.7 per cent).⁹

Supporting vulnerable communities is an integral part of economic recovery. It is vital to address gaps in Vaughan's workforce by increasing diversity in the workforce (through micro-skilling and up-skilling), supporting women in the workforce, and bringing youth into the workforce.

The Talent City Vaughan Program will enhance local skills and workforce development offerings by supporting regional organizations that develop local talent.

Economic Development will allocate \$50,000 for Talent City Vaughan to support community-wide workforce skills development led by community and social service organizations.

Talent City Vaughan is a new program to help residents access and undertake upskilling and reskilling opportunities. The program's overall aim is to support workforce development throughout the City of Vaughan. The program will also prioritize organizations supporting marginalized groups for equitable recovery (see Appendix 3).

Economic Development will deploy the program to attract organizations and initiatives committed to providing Vaughan residents with:

- Skills development
- Workforce development (including the skills to start and grow businesses)

This program will be open to regional not-for-profit Community and Social Service Organizations. Participants will apply for a community micro-grant of up to \$10,000 based on the number of residents they deliver training to. Organizations do not have to be Vaughan-based, but the services they provide for the program must be for the Vaughan community only.

⁹ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, *Ontario's Labour Market in 2020*, February 18, 2021

The Economic Prosperity Task Force will establish a panel of three members from the existing Task Force to adjudicate applications.

3. ***To help develop Vaughan as a destination, Advantage Vaughan will provide additional funding to Recreation Services' Fairs and Festivals Support Program AND task the Tourism Vaughan Advisory Committee (TVAC) (with Tourism Vaughan resources) to deploy programs that enhance visitation.***

The City of Vaughan has taken several steps to support the local retail and attractions industry. Although retail support, including support for restaurants, is well covered by small business services, further initiatives have been undertaken. These include:

- Completing the Vaughan Destination Master Plan (VDMP) to guide the development of Vaughan as a tourist destination
- Securing key amateur sports events like the Canada Soccer Championships
- Working with stakeholders like Central Counties Tourism to encourage overnight stays in Vaughan
- Launching the HostinVaughan.ca site to provide a resource for event planners hosting in Vaughan at non-City-owned venues
- Providing resources on [Hosting An Event in Vaughan](#) for event organizers wishing to host on City-owned venues
- Sharing the Safe Travels and Post Promise Accreditations and Toolkits with local businesses to boost consumer confidence
- Supporting the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce's SupportVaughanLocal program alongside City campaigns like #ShopVaughanLocal, #DineVaughanLocal and #PlayVaughanLocal

To build on this success, local cultural organizations are key partners in providing opportunities for residents and businesses to play locally and grow Vaughan as a destination.

The Advantage Vaughan plan proposes to provide additional financial support to the Fairs and Festivals Support Program administered through Recreation Services. The purpose of the Fairs and Festivals Support Program is to demonstrate Vaughan's support for various initiatives, such as community-based heritage, village fairs and festivals, by establishing criteria that will enable qualifying groups to receive further assistance. The value of support is a 75 per cent discount applied to the total cost of the rental, to a maximum of \$3,500 per year and is limited to Community Service Organizations (CSO), including:

- use of City-owned property (facilities, parks and sports fields);
- services-in-kind (with the exception of third-party service providers); and,
- Buildings and Facilities and/or Parks and Forestry Operations staff (\$400 maximum).

The newly formed Tourism Vaughan Advisory Committee will be tasked with reporting to the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC) Board on ideas to use TVC business and destination development resources to animate the City in 2022.

The TVC has successfully delivered several support programs to the local industry throughout the pandemic. This has included:

- Suspending the Municipal Accommodation Tax from March to September 2020
- Working with Central Counties to create dedicated Vaughan travel incentive programs like 'It's Our Treat'
- Including Vaughan in the Great Taste of Ontario Campaign from the Culinary Tourism Alliance

The TVAC will be asked to work within the bounds of the Vaughan Destination Master Plan to further animate Vaughan in 2022.

Furthermore, the collaboration with Recreation Services is a strong model for leveraging City services to further enhance Vaughan as a destination. As per the VDMP, there are opportunities, for example, in advancing the destination through beautification, enhanced marketing, streetscaping, wayfinding, etc.

4. To inform the public and businesses about opportunities in Vaughan, Advantage Vaughan will accelerate strategic communications, marketing and promotional efforts to Economic Development department clients about the advantages of doing business in Vaughan.

The Council-approved corporate restructuring allows both departments to build on their existing collaboration and past success. A new Economic Development-Communications Business Unit has been formed in the Corporate and Strategic Communications department. The mandate of this group will be to deliver on this particular Advantage Vaughan initiative "to accelerate strategic communications, marketing and promotional efforts to Economic Development department clients about the advantages of doing business in Vaughan."

Economic Development and Corporate and Strategic Communications are currently developing two new contract positions to better support the marketing and communications efforts of the Tourism Vaughan Corporation. These positions will be part of the Communications-Economic Development Business Unit and will be responsible for helping in the implementation of the Advantage Vaughan plan, where appropriate.

Advantage Vaughan will equip our stakeholders with the resources they need to be the champions of our economy through the distribution of refreshed communications toolkits.

To share the benefits of doing business in Vaughan, Advantage Vaughan will produce and share communications kits for our stakeholders (local businesses, talent, non-governmental organizations, and City of Vaughan leadership) in the following areas:

- Destination development and Tourism Vaughan messaging
- Renewed industry profiles in key clusters
- Small business support toolkits for partners like the Kleinburg Business Improvement Area
- Advantage Vaughan pitch decks and material

Financial Impact

The proposed Advantage Vaughan plan is funded through the Council-approved 2022 budget. It draws from an up to \$300,000 capital fund that was formerly the Economic Prosperity and Social Capital marketing fund. The funds will be allocated as follows (up to):

- \$175,000 to the Starter Company Plus program (35 program spots)
- \$50,000 to Talent City Vaughan
- \$30,000 to the Fairs and Festivals fund
- \$45,000 for program delivery costs, including marketing and training support

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Similar grant programs within the Greater Toronto Area municipalities offer similar projects outlined in the Vaughan Advantage plan. The pilot programs outlined in this report continue to position Vaughan as a leader region-wide, allowing economic opportunities. Advantage Vaughan aligns the community with its peers to promote innovation and opportunity.

Similar programs operate in other municipalities, such as the BIA Innovation Fund (City of Toronto), Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund (Regional Municipality of York), or Advance Brampton Fund (City of Brampton).

Conclusion

Upon approval of this report, Economic Development will finalize program marketing collateral and launch intake. Key dates include:

- The Vaughan Advantage plan will launch in spring 2022.
- The Talent City Program will open for applications in April 2022.
- Destination development work within the TVC will continue with Board meetings scheduled for March, May, and July, and TVAC meetings for February, April and June.

Council and stakeholders can expect to receive communications packages on an ongoing basis.

For more information, please contact Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development or Michael Genova, Chief, Communications and Economic Development.

Attachments

1. Attachment 1 – Starter Company Plus Evaluation Criteria, Economic Development, January 7, 2022
2. Attachment 2 – Talent City Vaughan Program Criteria, Economic Development, January 7, 2022

Prepared by

Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development

Michael Genova, Chief, Communications and Economic Development

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