

## Committee of the Whole (2) Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, February 8, 2022

**WARD(S):** ALL

**TITLE:** 2021 VAUGHAN-RAMLA SUMMIT: DEVELOPING A CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN

**FROM:**

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

**ACTION:** DECISION

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### **Purpose**

This report aims to advance the development of a Cultural Partnership Action Plan between Vaughan and Ramla, Israel.

### **Report Highlights**

- In May 2019, Vaughan Council approved the new Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy to advance Vaughan's commitment to international partnerships with global cities and organizations.
- On Nov. 24, 2019, during the Israel Business Mission, Mayor Bevilacqua and Mayor Vidal signed an MOU to advance shared cultural opportunities and experiences between both cities, consistent with the Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy.
- On Nov. 23, 2021, Mayor Bevilacqua, in partnership with Mayor Vidal, chaired a virtual summit between Vaughan and Ramla. Summit discussion included developing ideas, objectives and deliverables that will make up the Cultural Partnership Action Plan.
- City staff are working towards a new four-year Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan for presentation to Council in 2023 for approval.

## **Recommendations**

1. That this report be forwarded for information to both the Economic Prosperity Task Force and the Tourism Vaughan Board of Directors.
2. That staff work with counterparts in Ramla, Israel, the Israeli Consul General in Toronto, and other relevant stakeholders to develop a Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan, provide ongoing updates to Council and present a final version to Council for approval in 2023.
3. That staff provide updates to Council on the development of the Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan as requested.

## **Background**

### **Local Jewish and Israeli Cultural Connections**

Many important factors contribute to Israel as an essential cultural and economic development city-building partner and a logical choice for international missions and partnerships.

At the time of the most recent census in 2016, 13,655 residents in Vaughan, or 4.5.1 per cent of the overall population, identify their ethnic origin as Jewish or Israeli.<sup>1</sup> Vaughan's total Jewish and Israeli population constitutes 23 per cent of the entire Jewish and Israeli people in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Vaughan also has the highest percentage of those with knowledge of Hebrew in the Toronto CMA: it is home to 36 per cent of all speakers in the Toronto CMA who have a working knowledge of Hebrew (source: 2016 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada).

In 2010, Israel was also identified as a priority area in Vaughan's 10-year Economic Development Strategy. Home to synagogues, Jewish community centres and educational institutions, Vaughan's Jewish and Israeli communities have an active, engaged and leading presence in the community.

Celebrating Israel's history and identity is fundamental to Vaughan. Each May, Vaughan proudly marks Jewish Heritage Month and raises the flag of Israel at Vaughan City Hall to recognize Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel Independence Day. In addition, celebrations like Vaughan's annual menorah lighting ceremonies to welcome Chanukah has become a much-anticipated tradition people of all faiths enjoy. These observances provide an opportunity to acknowledge the strength, resiliency and sense of mission embodied by

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<sup>1</sup> See: Vaughan Census Profile, 2016: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3519028&Geo2=CMACA&Code2=535&SearchText=toronto&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>. Accessed December 31, 2021.

the Jewish and Israeli people whose contributions continue to make a lasting and positive impact in Vaughan and beyond.

### **2019 Vaughan-Israel Business Mission**

In partnership with the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, the City undertook a business mission to Israel from Nov. 22 to Nov. 30, 2019. Mayor Bevilacqua led the City's delegation, joined by Local and Regional Councillor Linda Jackson, Ward 4 Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, Ward 5 Councillor Alan Shefman and City staff. Delegates included representatives from the Vaughan Healthcare Centre Precinct project representing York University, Mackenzie Health and ventureLAB. Niagara University, which expanded to Vaughan in Jan. 2019, also took part.

The mission's mandate is to strengthen Vaughan's economic and cultural connections with Jewish and Israeli communities – particularly with the people and community leaders of Ramla.

### **Vaughan-Ramla MOU**

Since 1993, Vaughan and Ramla have maintained a proud and enduring international partnership. In May 2019, Vaughan Council approved the new Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy to advance Vaughan's commitment to international partnerships with global cities like Ramla. In June 2019, Mayor Bevilacqua wrote to Mayor Vidal about Vaughan's new policy and detailed a clear desire to maintain the Vaughan-Ramla relationship.

On Nov. 24, 2019, during the Israel Business Mission, Mayor Bevilacqua and Mayor Vidal signed an MOU at Ramla City Hall to advance shared cultural opportunities and experiences between both cities. The MOU initiated the process to:

- Reaffirm, champion and modernize the Vaughan-Ramla relationship under Vaughan's new *Cultural and Economic Partnerships Policy*;
- Develop a comprehensive four-year action plan that advances cultural opportunities between the two cities with a robust framework to maintain this renewed partnership;
- Ensure that this action plan has clearly stated identified goals and objectives; and
- That annual public reporting on the deliverables outlined in the action plan takes place to both the City Councils of Vaughan and Ramla, respectively.

## **2021 Vaughan-Ramla Virtual Summit**

On Nov. 23, 2021, Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua chaired a virtual summit between Vaughan and Ramla consisting of elected representatives and stakeholders to outline principles that will form a strategy. The summit directly results from the City's 2019 Business Mission to Israel, where Mayor Bevilacqua and Mayor Vidal signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to advance shared cultural opportunities and experiences between both communities

The summit discussion focused on five key pillars to help develop ideas, objectives and deliverables that will make up the Cultural Partnership Action Plan. These include:

1. Combatting Antisemitism, Racism, and Encouraging Interfaith Dialogue;
2. Tourism;
3. Education and Thought Leadership;
4. Economic and Cultural Development; and
5. Intergovernmental Relations.

Staff identified a strong desire for knowledge exchange between Ramla and Vaughan. The five areas identified will serve as pillars for action to achieve knowledge exchange. These action areas will provide opportunity for Vaughan and Ramla residents to learn, increase their opportunity, and further enhance the standard of living for residents of both cities.

Participants and speakers included diplomats, subject matter experts, municipal stakeholders and senior staff from both municipalities:

- Idit Shamir, Consul General of Israel in Toronto and Western Canada
- Ofir Simchi, Head of Community Leaders Forum, Ramla
- Aliza Silvera, Head of Community Leaders Forum, Ramla
- Jason Grossman, Associate Director (Ontario), Public Affairs, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA)
- Ron Peled, Head of Tourism Department, Ramla
- Noa Ben Yosef, Head of Education Department, Ramla
- Margie Singleton, CEO, Vaughan Public Libraries (VPL)
- Vince Rinaldo, Vice President, Ontario Administration, Niagara University

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

1. [March 9, 2020 CW \(2\) Staff Report](#): 2019 Israel Post-Mission Report
2. [Sept. 24, 2019 CW \(2\) Staff Report](#): 2019 Vaughan Chamber of Commerce Business Mission to Israel.

## **Analysis and Options**

In 2023, Vaughan and Ramla will mark the 30th anniversary of formal relations between the two municipalities. This significant milestone overlaps with the new 2022-2026 Term of Council.

Consistent with the requirements outlined in the City's Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy, throughout 2022, staff from the Office of Communications and Economic Development, in collaboration with Ramla counterparts, will lead further stakeholder discussions to identify deliverables and timelines to achieve the mandate of the agreed-upon MOU.

City staff recommend having the new four-year Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan presented to Council for approval in 2023 and implemented throughout the new Council mandate.

## **Financial Impact**

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

## **Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

The forthcoming Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan is an opportunity to engage further relevant stakeholders and the broader Israeli and Jewish from across York Region and the Greater Toronto Area. The deliverables from the Action Plan have the potential further to enrich the well-being of individuals and organizations beyond Vaughan.

## **Conclusion**

The development of a new four-year Vaughan-Ramla Cultural Partnership Action Plan is consistent with the Council-approved Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy. In addition, the timing of the development anticipated approval and implementation of this Action Plan aligns with the mandate of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan and will be an important guiding document as part of the work undertaken by the Office of Communications and Economic Development during the 2022-2026 Term of Council.

**For more information**, please contact:

- Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development, ext. 8891
- Michael Genova, Chief, Communications and Economic Development, ext. 8027

### **Attachments**

1. [Nov. 24, 2019 Media Statement](#): Vaughan and Ramla Renew Global Partnership
2. [Nov. 2019 Backgrounder](#): Israel Trade Mission 2019: Strengthening Partnerships, Creating Opportunities.
3. Vaughan-Ramla Memorandum of Understanding
4. May 14, 2019 [Cultural and Economic Partnerships Corporate Policy](#)

### **Prepared by**

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### **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