

VMC Sub-Committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, March 05, 2019

WARD(S): 4

TITLE: VMC MARKETING UPDATE

FROM:

Tim Simmonds, Interim City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on VMC marketing and business development activities planned and delivered between 4th quarter 2018 and the present time.

Report Highlights

- The volume and pace of marketing and business development activity has increased significantly, with a new strategic approach targeting a business audience.
- Economic and Cultural Development has engaged land owners, developers, tenants, real estate intermediaries, community and cultural organizations, and local businesses to strengthen the City's messaging and approach.
- New and refreshed communications products include: VMC micro-site, photography collection, Lure Book brochure, and Virtual Reality Tour.
- The VMC has been profiled at top business and real estate events including the CoreNet RE Emmy Awards Gala, Presidents of Enterprising Organizations Conference, Mayor's Luncheon, and the LandPRO Conference, reaching 2,250 people in the target audience.
- The City is in discussions to add a VMC study tour to the 2020 Urban Land Institute Spring Meeting, attended by up to 4,000 influential leaders in real estate.
- The VMC has also been widely profiled through earned media, Celebrate Vaughan Magazine, paid advertising, and pop-up community engagement events.

Recommendations

1. THAT this report be received

Since the last VMC Sub-Committee in June 2018, Economic and Cultural Development has worked to deliver a robust marketing and business development program for the VMC.

Leading up to the launch of the Mobility Hub, the primary audience for marketing and communications was Vaughan residents. The launch was highly successful and the latest ridership numbers from TTC show that approximately 15,000 people use the VMC Subway Station on a daily basis.

Given the success of the Mobility Hub and residential sales, the economic development priority has shifted to raising awareness of the VMC as an emerging downtown among the business community and promoting the VMC as an attractive location for office and retail business development. Citizens continue to be engaged through city communications channels and products like Celebrate Vaughan magazine.

The bulk of the activities in this report took place September 2018 onwards.

Previous Reports/Authority

June 2017: [Communications Plan for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre](#)

Analysis and Options

Connected with Business

ECD has been gathering information about the VMC to inform our marketing and business development strategy.

Staff have actively engaged land owners, developers, tenants, real estate intermediaries, members of council, community and cultural organizations, and local businesses via the following projects and activities:

- Economic Development and Employment Sector Strategy (EDESS) workshops
- The first-ever Vaughan Business Satisfaction Survey
- Cultural and Performing Arts Centre Feasibility Study workshops
- Regular business visitations

The workshop findings will be compiled and analyzed at a later date. The Business Satisfaction Survey found that 52 per cent of respondents felt that the City of Vaughan is effectively promoting the VMC as a location where businesses want to invest. This is a strong baseline that ECD will build on.

VMC Micro-site: Signature Marketing Vehicle

The VMC micro-site, myVMC.ca, continues to be an important communication channel. In Q4 2018, it was updated and refreshed to speak more clearly to a business audience, highlight the latest developments, and shift perceptions that the VMC is still a blueprint.

Staff have also begun moving content from the City's internal webpages at vaughan.ca/vmc to the micro-site. The goal is to consolidate information on the VMC and direct web traffic to a single location.

The micro-site is regularly updated to highlight the latest developments and maximize search engine optimization. Larger upgrades will be incorporated as budgets and staff time allow to improve user experience.

Photography

In September 2018, staff identified that the current stock of VMC photography did not capture the impressive scope of development and placemaking efforts to date. To show that the VMC is indeed an emerging downtown, photographers were retained to capture

high quality photos of the public spaces, exteriors of the buildings, transit assets, and pedestrian activity. These photos have been deployed across existing digital collateral and new print collateral.

Lure Book Brochure

Economic and Cultural Development and Corporate and Strategic Communications Departments collaborated to develop a promotional brochure for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

The VMC Lure Book features a blend of text, graphic, and photo content designed to make an impact on the target audience of top-level corporate executives, corporate real estate executives, commercial realtors and brokers, and site selection professionals. It highlights the VMC's value proposition to businesses with balanced emphasis on the VMC's current state of development and future vision.

Virtual Reality Tour

One of the challenges in promoting the VMC is visually conveying the current and future scale of development. To convert this challenge into an opportunity, a virtual reality video was produced to offer an immersive, first-person perspective. It is presented as a guided tour.

The video has been showcased via virtual reality headsets at several business conferences and events including the events highlighted below, and it will continue to be a centerpiece at upcoming events. Once a few final touches are complete, it will be released to the public.

Profiling at business and real estate-focused events

Staff have attended, networked and sponsored a number of strategic business development and real estate events to reach target audiences. Each event was leveraged as an opportunity to share the Lure Book, virtual reality tour, and new photography collection, and engage in one-on-one networking.

- CoreNet RE Emmy Awards Gala, November 2018, attended by 250 high level decision makers in corporate real estate.
- Presidents of Enterprising Organizations Conference, November 2018, attended by 200 CEOs, presidents, and c-level executives.
- Vaughan Chamber of Commerce Mayor's Luncheon, February 2019, attended by 800 business, government and community leaders ([video](#)).
- LandPRO Conference, March 2019, expected attendance from 1,000 land professionals, including developers, realtors/brokers, lawyers, planners, architects, and engineers.

- The City is in discussions with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to add a VMC study tour to the 2020 ULI Spring Meeting agenda. This conference attracts 3,500-4,000 influential leaders in real estate.

Mobility Hub Anniversary Pop Up

In December 2018, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Mobility Hub marked its first anniversary. In celebration of the anniversary, VMC evening commuters were surprised with music, an ice sculpture, and complimentary lattes and hot chocolate. Baristas served 1,000 beverages ([video](#)).

Earned-Media Support

The Corporate and Strategic Communications Department continues to feature the VMC in a series of different media products. Of note, the announcement of Niagara University has generated considerable positive earned-media coverage of the downtown ([video](#)).

From June 12, 2018 (the last VMC Sub-Committee of 2018), to present there have been 15 different earned-media products issued that feature the VMC. The VMC is featured for the second year in a row on the cover of the annual Celebrate Vaughan magazine, which goes to all homes and businesses in Vaughan, as well as two dedicated feature editorials and highlighted in the Momentum Report. The VMC also has a dedicated section in volume 1 of the 2019 Budget Book.

There continues to be an ongoing social media effort to promote the VMC on all corporate social media channels. This content continues to be included in the City's bi-weekly City Update electronic newsletter, the weekly Council eNews distributions, and the bi-monthly Vaughan Economic Monitor.

Moving forward, a comprehensive multi-year communications plan is currently being developed to further identify earned-media opportunities to promote the VMC year-round to targeted audiences.

Paid Advertising

The VMC was also profiled via paid advertising in the following publications:

- Taiwan Merchants Association of Toronto
- The BRIDGE (Markham Richmond Hill Vaughan Chinese Business Association newsletter)
- L'Altra Italia
- CityLife Magazine
- Area Development Magazine

Intended Outcomes

The marketing and business development activities to date have resulted in 41 new connections and exposure to approximately 2,250 people in the target audience of business and real estate professionals.

In 2018, the VMC micro-site had 61,698 page views from 8,432 users. This was the micro-site's first full calendar year in operation and will serve as a baseline for future measurement.

Targets for 2019 include engaging 100 members of the target audience (commercial realtors/brokers, corporate real estate executives, top-level corporate executives, and/or site selection professionals) and increasing traffic to the micro-site. The intended outcomes are to increase awareness of and interest in the VMC, with the ultimate goal of office and retail business development.

These activities support the 2031 targets for commercial office space, retail space, residential units, and population tracked and reported on by the VMC Project Team.

Financial Impact

The business development and marketing activities highlighted in this report are funded from the Economic and Cultural Development Department's operating budget.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Successful profiling and buildout of the VMC is beneficial to our infrastructure funding and operating partners (Toronto Transit Commission, York Region, Government of Ontario, Government of Canada, Toronto Region Conservation Authority) as it drives usage of these projects and shows return on investment. The Region and TTC are regularly engaged by EDC.

Conclusion

Feedback from the business development marketing activities undertaken since August 2018 have been overwhelmingly positive. Partners such as York Region and SmartCentres are pleased with the quality and direction of the marketing pieces. Members of the target audience have expressed surprise at the ambition, scale, and pace of development in the VMC.

Throughout 2019, staff will keep the momentum going by (re)attending business and real estate events, building and reinforcing relationships with real estate and investment gatekeepers, expanding our promotional materials portfolio, and engaging in earned media and advertising.

For more information, please contact: Michelle Samson, VMC Economic Development Officer.

Attachments

None

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