

VMC Sub-committee Report

DATE: Wednesday, October 4, 2023

WARD: 4

TITLE: VMC SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE: PHASE IV –
RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM:

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on the status of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre ('VMC') Secondary Plan ('SP') Update, currently in Phase IV – Recommendations, which provides the recommended option based on the key messages identified in the Phase III - *Elaborate a Preferred Framework* consultation to produce a preferred framework that best achieves Council's vision for a world class downtown as a complete and balanced community, and to seek Council's endorsement on this preferred option including its proposed expansion boundary areas.

Report Highlights

- As the City's emerging downtown and central business district ('CBD'), the VMC is poised to become a multifaceted community encompassing different types of buildings with a mix of uses that are transit supportive and pedestrian friendly, and the City's hub for finance, innovation, and culture.
- An update to the VMC Secondary Plan ('VMCSP') is being undertaken to address provincial and regional policy updates, and to respond to the rapid and predominantly residential growth that threatens the realization of a vibrant, balanced, and successful downtown.
- The VMCSP Update will result in a renewed policy framework that supports the completion of a downtown and CBD as a complete, community that is well supported by municipal services and social infrastructure to 2051 and beyond.
- Phase IV – Recommendations, provides a recommended option based on the key messages identified in the Phase III - *Elaborate a Preferred Framework* consultation to produce a preferred framework that best achieves Council's vision of a world class downtown.
- The VMCSP Preferred Option recalibrates uses to deliver a thriving CBD, utilizing an Office Feasibility Assessment that was undertaken to improve the viability of development that delivers office uses as well as other non-residential land use options that maintain the objective of ensuring the VMC becomes the most diverse area of the City.
- The VMCSP Update is being coordinated with concurrent studies including the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan ('PWMP'), VMC Transportation Master Plan Update ('TMP'), and the VMC Functional Servicing Strategy Report. The findings of these studies inform the update to the VMCSP.

Recommendation

1. That the VMC Sub-Committee:
 - a. endorse the southeastern boundary expansion Area A as contained in Attachment 2;
 - b. endorse the northern boundary expansion Area B as contained in Attachment 2; and
 - c. endorse the preferred option as contained in Attachment 3.

Background

The VMC, as shown on Attachment 1, is the City of Vaughan's (the 'City's') emerging downtown and CBD; it is poised to be the financial, innovation and cultural centre of the City, with a vibrant sense of place, a high-quality public realm and environmentally sustainable design practices. The VMC will be a complete and balanced community

encompassing different built form typologies, and a mix of uses that are transit supportive and pedestrian friendly.

The current and in-force VMCSPP provides a strong vision and policy foundation for the VMC and has helped guide development since its partial approval by the Ontario Land Tribunal ('OLT', formally the Ontario Municipal Board and Local Planning Appeal Tribunal) in 2015. Since this time, development interest in the VMC has exceeded expectations, resulting in an intensity of development that was not anticipated when the VMCSPP was initially developed.

The City is undertaking an update to the VMCSPP to address provincial and regional policy updates, and to respond to the rapid and predominantly residential growth that is putting pressure on realizing Council's vision for a vibrant, balanced, and successful downtown. The VMCSPP Update will result in a renewed policy framework that supports the completion of a downtown and CBD as a complete community that is well supported by municipal services and social infrastructure to 2051 and beyond.

The VMCSPP Update will be a nuanced recalibration exercise, not a departure from the original plan, as many elements of the original vision are strong, relevant and based on policy, legislation and best practices. The Update will be an opportunity to adjust elements of the Plan that need to be refined in order to maintain the original vision of delivering a complete and sustainable community into the future.

It is recognized that development interest is the catalyst that will help the City realize its ambitions for a vibrant downtown; however, in response to the mostly residential development trends, planning intervention is required through the VMCSPP Update to avoid the creation a bedroom community. The VMCSPP Update seeks to balance the heavy residential development trends through the promotion of mixed use and varied building typologies; as well as a recalibration for hard and soft infrastructure, including parks, community services and civic facilities, transportation, and municipal servicing systems in order to achieve a healthy, balanced, complete and successful community.

The VMCSPP Update is currently starting the fourth of a five-phase project.

The VMCSPP Update was initiated in August 2020 and is being undertaken by the City's Policy Planning and Special Programs Department in concert with a consulting team that includes Gladki Planning Associates, dtah, Parcel Economics and Ken Greenberg (the 'consultant team').

The VMCSPP Update is being undertaken in five phases, which is structured as follows:

- Phase I - Background and Issues
- Phase II - Prepare and Develop Land Use Options
- Phase III - Elaborate a Preferred Framework
- Phase IV – Recommendations (Draft Secondary Plan)
- Phase V - Final Implementation of Secondary Plan Update

Phase I - Background and Issues, was completed and presented to the VMC Subcommittee on March 2, 2021. Through Phase I, challenges, risks and concerns for the VMC were identified by the public, landowners and other stakeholders, which lay the foundation for the Phase II work.

Phase II – Prepare and Develop Land Use Options was presented to the VMC Subcommittee on June 21, 2022. It involved utilizing the key messages identified from Phase I to develop two preliminary land use options that addressed the challenges and constraints. The two land use options that were developed also took into consideration fixed and variable elements, such as approved and proposed development, the natural heritage network, roads and highways under the jurisdiction of other levels of government, etc., and balanced these with development interest to deliver on Council's vision of a world class downtown and complete community.

- Land Use Option 1 maintained the intensity of development with a lens on achieving built form variety and supplying adequate social infrastructure.
- Land Use Option 2 recalibrated uses to deliver a thriving CBD, utilizing an Office Feasibility Assessment that was undertaken to improve the feasibility of development that delivered office and non-residential uses.

Phase III - Elaborate a Preferred Framework has focused on developing the preferred option based on the feedback received through the Phase II consultation process as well as the conclusions from the Office Feasibility Assessment which are discussed in greater detail later in this report.

The approach behind the preferred option analysis and recommendation has always remained to create a vibrant, diverse, thriving downtown and CBD, through a balanced and complete community that includes a mix of building typologies with unique residential, office and mixed-use development serviced with soft and hard infrastructure that supports the needs of a successful city centre.

Pending the endorsement of this report, Phase IV will develop the policies required to achieve this vision.

Extensive consultation continues to take place with the public, landowners, and other stakeholders.

A robust public and landowner engagement strategy has been developed with the consultant team, as well as the City's Corporate and Strategic Communications Department, to ensure that meaningful engagement is achieved during each phase of this project. The focus of the Phase III engagement strategy has been to present the preferred option to obtain feedback on how the key messages from Phase II are being addressed, and how this recalibration will achieve Council's vision for a vibrant and balanced downtown.

As part of the Phase III engagement strategy, the following initiatives were undertaken:

Community Meeting (Open House)

A live, in-person Community Meeting took place on September 14, 2023, open to interested members of the public and stakeholders, and included a presentation on the preferred option. Question-and-answer periods took place before and after the presentation and gave the public the opportunity to circulate at their own pace, look at boards prepared by the consultant team, ask questions, and give their opinion. The boards displayed information about the Preferred Concept including 2D figures, overall population and employment figures and predicted images from a digital 3D model. City staff and the consultant were stationed at each board to answer questions and explain details to the public.

Online Engagement

The project's dedicated website, www.v Vaughan.ca/vmcplan, continues to provide important project information, including key milestones and ongoing opportunities for engagement. Attendees, as well as those who were unable to attend the Community Meeting, had an opportunity to participate through various engagement tools available on the website. The online engagement period was available from September 8th to the 28th, 2023.

Social Media and Digital Marketing Outreach

A social media campaign was undertaken on the City's social media channels to advertise the Community Meeting and the online engagement opportunity. In addition, notice of the Community Meeting was posted on the City's website at www.v Vaughan.ca, and using the City's digital sign network.

Newspaper Ad

An ad for the Community Meeting was placed in the Vaughan Citizen and Thornhill Liberal, appearing from September 7th to the 14th, 2023, in both editions of the newspapers.

Landowner Engagement

Landowner engagement was conducted towards the end of Phase III:

- between September 5th and September 8th, presentations were made to the landowner groups on the preferred option and included a question-and-answer period.

As in previous engagements, landowner group meetings were organized and conducted within three separate groups – one meeting for the landowners east of Jane Street, another for the ones west of Jane Street, and one meeting for the landowners within the proposed expansion areas – as a way of acknowledging the different priorities, issues, and challenges within each of these groups.

Technical Advisory Committee ('TAC') Engagement

Ongoing consultation with the VMCS Update's TAC continues. Presentations on the preferred options were given to internal TAC members, which are comprised of staff from key departments within the City; and a presentation was given to external TAC members, comprised of key stakeholders from external government agencies and organizations. These are discussed later in this report.

A fulsome description of the engagement outcomes, including comments provided as part of this VMC Sub-committee Meeting, will be provided within a Phase III Engagement Summary to be available on the VMCS Update dedicated webpage (www.vaughan.ca/VMCPlan) at a future date.

The VMCS Update is being coordinated with other supporting studies.

The VMCS update is being coordinated with concurrent projects in the VMC, including the Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, and the Functional Servicing Strategy Report. To date, work from the PWMP has been incorporated into the preferred option, as shown on Attachment 3, and has helped inform the parks strategy.

The TMP, as well as the Millway Avenue and Interchange Way Municipal Class Environmental Assessment ('MCEA') studies are currently in Phase 2, where transportation solutions are currently being identified, evaluated and assessed based on the land use options and population and job projections developed as part of the

VMCSP Update. The population assumptions tied to the land use options will be run through the transportation model to evaluate their appropriateness; the findings of these models will be presented to the VMC Sub-committee at a future meeting.

Developments from these related studies, as well as work on the City's Official Plan Review, will continue to guide the policy framework and inform the final recommendations of the VMCSP Update.

Previous Reports/Authority

The following are links to previous reports regarding the VMC Secondary Plan update:

1. [VMC Studies Update, November 10, 2020, VMC Sub-committee Report \(Report No. 2, Item 3\)](#)
2. [VMC Secondary Plan Update – Phase I, March 2, 2021, VMC Sub-committee Report \(Report No. 1, Item 1\)](#)
3. [VMC Secondary Plan Update – Phase 2 Approach, June 8, 2021, VMC Sub-committee \(Report No. 2, Item 1\)](#)
4. [VMC Secondary Plan Update: Phase 2 - Land Use Options, June 21, 2022, VMC Sub-committee \(Report No.2, Item 2\)](#)

Analysis

The approach underpinning the preferred option analysis is the achievement of a vibrant, diverse, thriving downtown and CBD, as a complete community with unique residential, office and mixed-use development. The VMC will be structured around a transit-oriented, fine grain street network for all modes of transportation - including walking, driving, and cycling – and development will be linked by a network of high-quality parks, public squares, and open spaces.

It is recognized that a number of intensification areas are emerging within the City, impacting and expanding the skyline, however, the vision of the VMC remains the same, that it will be the economic and cultural centre of the City. The VMC will be one of several intensification areas within the City, identifiable by high density development, but will be a marque destination distinguished by a thriving, diversified employment base with cultural destinations and amenities, differentiating it from the City's other intensification areas.

An Office Feasibility Assessment was completed to understand the market demand for office in the downtown.

The COVID-19 Pandemic greatly impacted the landscape of work; and the long-term impacts of this global event are still being analysed. However, as the economy has re-activated and we have adjusted to the “new normal”, we’ve seen people returning to offices – mostly in a hybrid work arrangement – which underscores the importance of planning for and preserving office space.

In support of maintaining a significant office component in the VMC, a detailed financial feasibility and sensitivity analysis was undertaken by Parcel Economics; the Office Feasibility Assessment (the ‘Feasibility Assessment’) was commissioned in partnership with the City’s Economic Development Department. The primary purpose of this analysis was to evaluate the current and potential future underlying economic conditions affecting the feasibility of office development in the VMC over the long-term planning horizon.

Recognizing the current challenges associated with developing new office uses, this analysis has helped to identify a number of mechanisms – or policy solutions – to help improve feasibility conditions. Recognizing that there is no single “silver bullet” solution, improving conditions to facilitate the growth of office uses within the VMC will require a multi-pronged approach that involves a combination of policy mechanisms focused on: built form and densities; financial incentives; and other process-related improvements to achieve cost savings.

The Feasibility Assessment demonstrated that by utilizing a combination of policy mechanisms, the financial conditions for office development are improved, which ultimately encourage the growth of a critical mass of office activity within the VMC over the long-term planning horizon. Specific policy mechanisms that have had the most significant impact on improving the financial feasibility of office development include:

- mixed use development/density provisions;
- above-grade parking options with appropriate urban design treatments;
- rebates/relaxation of one-time municipal fees (e.g. development charge rebates);
- other financial incentives;
- shortened entitlement periods.

The Feasibility Assessment highlighted that office development is a long-term investment, which requires patience to implement successfully. Consideration will need to be given to balancing current development pressures that predominantly focus on residential uses with longer-term goals relating to growth in office employment and other

non-residential uses. The results of this Feasibility Assessment will be relied upon to support policy-related decisions for the VMCSPP Update.

Evaluating the appropriateness of the potential boundary expansion has led to a recommendation to incorporate these to the VMC.

A number of site-specific employment land use conversions along the north and east periphery of the VMC have been approved by York Region Council, which permit the redevelopment of these sites for non-employment uses. Given the close proximity of these properties to the existing VMC boundary and their respective conversion approvals, the incorporation of these sites into VMC by way of potential boundary expansion areas, is being recommended as part of the preferred option.

The two VMC boundary expansions areas being recommended are Study Area A, as shown on Attachment 2, which would extend the existing boundary east to Creditstone Road on the south side of Highway 7 following the existing Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA) 56 boundary, resulting in a continuous, linear east boundary line; Study Area B, also shown on Attachment 2, would extend the existing boundary north, incorporating the lots on the north side of Portage Parkway, the new boundary line would follow the existing PMTSA 54 and 67 boundaries respectively.

The recommended boundary expansion areas were evaluated separately and on their own merits; however, the key principles that underpinned the evaluation were similar: that the boundary expansions introduce meaningful and compatible transitions to the surrounding context and existing prestige employment uses; that appropriate buffering of uses will be achieved; that the expansion area will offer opportunities to supplement the much needed additional parkland and social infrastructure required within the VMC; and that the boundary expansion can be contained to the geographies outlined in Study Areas A and B.

It should be noted that regardless of the outcome of the recommended VMC boundary expansion relating to this report, the lands afforded employment land use conversions will continue to be permitted to redevelop for non-employment uses; however, the policy framework that they will be subject to is the City's Official Plan, as opposed to the VMCSPP which is recommending more compatible uses, heights and densities that better align with the vision of delivering a complete and balanced downtown.

Key messages from stakeholders have been incorporated into the preferred option.

As previously noted, the VMCSPP Update has included a robust public and stakeholder consultation component, and feedback from the various groups has been taken into consideration as part of the development of the land use options.

Key messages from stakeholders that have been incorporated into the preferred option, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- “Retail needs to be in walking distance in all four quadrants.”
- “There needs to be places for entertainment.”
- “Having a concentration of office space will benefit the VMC.”
- “Congestion is my biggest concern.”
- “I am excited about increasing density in the VMC and having a downtown.”
- “We need to prioritize the building of schools.”
- “Jobs should be concentrated around transit hubs.”
- “There should be as much green space as possible.”
- “Active transportation paths that connect neighbourhoods.”
- “I want to see gallery spaces and places for creative industries.”
- “I would love to be able to work and live in Vaughan.”

The City and consultant team will continue to engage the public and stakeholders through each Phase as the project progresses.

A preferred option has been developed.

Building on the key messages that have come out of Phase II, and Phase III and with a focus on achieving a vibrant downtown and complete community, a preferred option has been developed:

The preferred option, as shown on Attachment 3, recalibrates land uses to achieve a balance of uses in order to deliver a vibrant downtown and thriving CBD as originally intended for the VMC. A variation from the existing VMCSPP includes the renaming of the “Station Precinct” to “Mixed Use Non-residential uses required”, which utilizes the findings of the Feasibility Assessment to improve the possibility of development that delivers office and other non-residential uses. Within areas prioritized for office, the Feasibility Assessment has identified a supportable portion of density to be developed as office and has identified additional tools that can be considered to further improve the feasibility of office and other non-residential development.

Staff propose to bring forward a VMCSPP Update Draft Policy for endorsement by the VMC Sub-Committee at a future meeting.

The preferred option creates a density hierarchy for built form; where densities are increased on a block-by-block basis within the “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” designation for development that delivers a reasonable non-residential component to the downtown. Policy will be developed to facilitate the delivery of the non-residential component against the increased density to ensure that other non-residential uses that are employment-focused are delivered in lockstep with residential, rather than being left to later phases.

Outside the core “Mixed Use Non-residential uses required” areas, the preferred option recalibrates the plan with a lens on achieving built form variety and supplying adequate social infrastructure which largely maintains the height and density permissions currently allocated with the in-place VMCSPP and balancing the current development trends with additional building variety – particularly mid-rise – to achieve human-scaled development and a varied skyline. This approach balances the demand for development with social infrastructure, community and civic facilities, and parks.

The preferred option replaces the “South Precinct” with the “Mixed Use (Office Uses Required)” along Jane street and the “Neighbourhood Precinct” designations towards the west. The permissions for the “Neighbourhood” designation in this area have been altered to allow for a greater mix of uses complementary to the existing residential development in that area.

The “East Employment Precinct” has been replaced with Non-residential Mixed Use along Creditstone Road to maintain a ‘buffer’ along the east edge. The “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” designation has been assigned along all the lands fronting onto Highway 7, in line with the work undertaken on the Feasibility Assessment. This same designation has also been applied to the balance of the lands north of Doughton Road to bolster the employment base along the south side of Highway 7.

The West “Employment Precinct” has been replaced with the “Non-residential Mixed Use” designation mixing with the “Environmental Open Space” uses. Policy will be developed that requires additional open space to be secured as a buffer to the 400 and 407 series Highways throughout the VMC.

The preferred option utilizes a dispersed, nodal approach to incorporate retail, and a “hubs-and-spokes” approach to the placement of community and civic facilities. Millway Avenue continues to be an important focus for retail; however, a greater proportion of streets and open spaces are now permitted retail uses. Highway 7 is recommended to become an active corridor with a more flexible recommendation of retail, service commercial, integrated community facility or public use frontages, creating a new axis of activation that runs through the centre of the VMC along this the existing rapid transit corridor. Retail is also recommended in concentrated areas within each quadrant, with the exception of the smaller northeast quadrant. Flexible active uses will be generally fronting onto the parks and open space system, to create destinations for shopping and dining while activating the streetscape and open spaces.

Community and civic facilities, including both freestanding and integrated facilities, are dispersed with the intention of providing cultural and community destinations throughout each quadrant of the VMC. This community and civic facilities approach aligns with the direction of the Cultural Arts Centre Study - Phase 2, also being considered at this VMC Sub-committee meeting.

The preferred option takes the approach of developing slightly larger but combined school sites that will allow for co-location. The proposed school sites are 6 acres and can accommodate co-location schools which can be simultaneously utilized by the two different school boards. This approach helps to address the imbalance in social amenities and deliver on much needed school sites to serve the significant residential population, while also being cognisant of the land consumption typically required for this use.

Expansion Area A incorporates a new school site; parkland; and the “Neighbourhood”, “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” and “Non-residential Mixed Use” designations. The “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” designation is an extension of the designation being applied to the lands fronting- and one block south of- Highway 7, while the “Non-residential Mixed Use” designation provides for appropriate transitional uses between the potential expansion area and the existing heavy industrial uses to the East.

Within Expansion Area A, the proposed school site is located south of Doughton Road and east of Maplecrete Road. The “Neighbourhood” lands are located south of the current “Neighbourhood” designation. Parkland is located south of the school block and east of the “Neighbourhood” designation and extend east to

Creditstone Road. The location of the parkland will provide much needed parkland to the area and act as a buffer to the existing industrial uses to the east.

Expansion Area B incorporates a new school site; parkland; the “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” and “Non-residential Mixed Use” land use designations. The application of the “Mixed Use (Non-residential Uses Required)” designation responds to the proximity of the lands to the YRT Bus Terminal and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Subway Station, as well as the work undertaken by the Feasibility Assessment. These lands are also allocated a meadows along the north edge which will provide access while helping to create a transition to the existing employment lands to the north. The proposed school site to be developed into a high school to serve the VMC, and potentially adjacent intensification areas along Highway 7 is larger than 6 acres and is anticipated to be assembled with lands outside the proposed expansion area. The “Non-residential Mixed Use” designation, located at the west limit of the expansion area, provides for appropriate transitional uses between the expansion area, Highway 400, and the existing industrial uses to the north.

Financial Impact

There are no financial requirements for new funding associated with this report.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Ongoing collaboration with regional stakeholders continues, which is an important factor in realizing the success of the VMC. The preferred option has been presented to an internal and external TAC, who include, but is not limited to, York Region, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the York Region District School Board, the York Catholic District School Board, the Ministry of Transportation, Infrastructure Ontario, York Region Transit and the Toronto Transit Commission. The TAC will continue to be engaged as part of the subsequent phases of this project, and their feedback will be instrumental in advancing a preferred option.

Conclusion

The VMC is continuing to transform into a vibrant, modern urban centre encompassing all amenities required for a healthy urban lifestyle, complete with residential and office development. As the intensity of residential development continues to increase, it is imperative that this residential density be supported by hard and soft infrastructure.

The preferred option delivers on Council's vision of a vibrant, diverse, thriving downtown and CBD that is a complete and balanced with unique residential, office and mixed-use development. It is structured around a transit-oriented, fine-grain street network for all modes of transportation - including walking, driving and cycling – and plans for development linked by a network of high-quality parks, public squares, and open spaces. If endorsed, Phase IV will develop the policies required to achieve this vision.

For more information, please contact Gaston Soucy, Senior Manager, Planning and Urban Design, VMC, Policy Planning and Special Programs Department, ext. 8266.

Attachments

1. VMC Boundary Context and Location Map.
2. VMC Recommended Boundary Expansion Areas.
3. VMC Recommended Land Use Framework.

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