

## VMC Sub-committee Report

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**DATE:** Wednesday, October 4, 2023

**WARD:** 4

**TITLE:** VMC PARKS AND WAYFINDING MASTER PLAN UPDATE –  
OCTOBER 2023

**FROM:**

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

**ACTION:** FOR INFORMATION

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**Purpose**

To provide an update on the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan (PWMP), its progress and implementation, and how it contributes to the creation of a complete community in the VMC.

**Report Highlights**

- The VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan has completed a master plan and cost estimate and devised an implementation strategy outlining priorities and strategies for parkland delivery.
- A detailed wayfinding strategy has been developed with prototype signage installation and public engagement occurring in early Q4 2023.
- The master plan will create a compact, balanced, and meaningful parks and open space network reflective of the urban context within the VMC boundary
- Efforts are being undertaken to maintain a healthy balance between current population trends and available soft infrastructure, including community services, parks, open spaces, and facilities within the VMC, with access to larger sporting facilities, trails, and green space nearby.

**Recommendation**

1. That the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan Update - October 2023 report be received for information.

## **Background**

The VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan (PWMP) was initiated in May 2020 with the successful proponent, Janet Rosenberg & Studio. The challenges of COVID-19 made clear how vital parks are to our citizens, especially in high-density communities that have little private open space. The VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan will provide the City with a Parks and Open Space Master Plan that identifies parkland provision gaps, generates recommendations, and prepares a plan that can be implemented in a timely manner to fulfill the VMC parkland target at a mid-to-long term time frame.

A draft Assessment Report, with background research and an evaluation of the parks and open space in the VMC and environs, was presented to the VMC Sub-committee in November 2020.

Building on the findings of the Assessment Report and Phase 1 public engagement process, the PWMP presented parks and open space scenarios to the VMC Sub-committee in March 2021, based on draft design principles and a facility fit study. Park facility requirements were based on projected populations and demographics, and scenarios were studied that looked at parkland opportunities both within and outside the existing VMC boundary.

In June 2021, the study presented a refined scenario that incorporated aspects of the previously reported options, including intensifying parkland within the VMC boundary, expanding north and south, and providing significant parkland in potential boundary expansion study areas.

The study was well received at the Vaughan Design Review Panel in September 2021. Feedback from the panel was incorporated into the master plan.

In November 2021, the study presented continued refinements to the master plan, including creating a three-dimensional model and rendering of the proposed parks and open space system, while also looking at implementation: when parks can be delivered and how much they will cost.

Virtual meetings with local landowners and residents took place in March 2022 to gain further input into, and support for, the master plan.

In 2022, the PWMP underwent significant revisions due to the impact of Bill 109, *More Homes for Everyone Act*, which received Royal Assent in April 2022, and Bill 23, *More Homes Built Faster Act*, which received Royal Assent in November 2022, which superseded previous legislation around parkland dedication and resulted in a significant decrease in anticipated parkland dedication and/or cash-in-lieu (CIL) collection.

Recalibration of the PMWP, in response to these legislative changes, emphasized the need to protect and acquire land within and outside the VMC for additional parkland and open space. This precipitated an update to the early PWMP park costing, phasing and implementation strategy.

In September 2023 the PWMP was presented to an internal Technical Advisory Committee. Comments received were integrated into the master plan.

The master plan, which can be implemented over time in a measured response to development, will create a compact, balanced, and meaningful parks and open space network within the VMC boundary with access to larger sporting facilities, trails and green space nearby, while providing the City with options for service level delivery.

### **Signage Pilot**

As part of the strategy to promote the implementation of an interconnected parks and open space network in the downtown, a signage and wayfinding masterplan and strategy was developed to help define how residents, visitors, and businesses perceive the VMC and assist them in moving through it.

The first part of the signage and wayfinding component of the study involved the creation of a master plan to incorporate signs in the downtown as it develops; the design of a family of exterior pedestrian and cyclist signs including materials, details, and specifications, as well as determining potential locations of signs. The second part of this study involved the creation of a series of prototypes which have been fabricated and are slated to be installed in key areas of the VMC in early Q4 2023.

### **Previous Reports/Authority**

Previous reports relating to the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan can be found at the following links:

[VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan Update and Advanced Signage June 2022](#)

[VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan - Implementation Plan November 2021](#)

[VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan Update - Refined Scenario June 2021](#)

[VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan Update March 2021](#)

[VMC Studies Update April 2023](#)  
[VMC Studies Update September 2022](#)  
[VMC Studies Update November 2020](#)  
[VMC Studies Update May 2020](#)

## **Analysis and Options**

Growth trends in the VMC are outpacing the provision of social infrastructure, with parkland an area of particular concern. It is expected that with growing density additional parkland will need to be secured to provide adequate active and passive recreation facilities to serve VMC residents, day commuters, and visitors.

Changes to provincial legislation are further straining the City's ability to acquire parkland. This legislation caps the amount of parkland (or CIL) that the City may receive at 10% of the developable land (or land value, for CIL), independent of the height and density of the development. This provision is the limiting factor for parkland dedication in almost all development scenarios in the VMC, resulting in a significant decrease in potential parkland.

### **Delivering parkland for downtown residents**

In the context of the VMC's growth and changes to provincial legislation, the study has identified opportunities to add active parkland, provide necessary facilities and improve the public realm, both within and adjacent to the VMC.

Building on the findings of the Assessment report and public engagement process, draft design principles and facility fit study, the PWMP has developed an ultimate VMC master plan supported by a costing and implementation strategy outlining parkland targets for the VMC over various timeframes. The master plan identifies up to 20.5 hectares of Public Squares, Neighbourhood Parks, and Urban Parks within the VMC, up to 6.9 hectares in the potential north and south expansion areas, and up to 41.2 hectares outside of it, some of which may be shared with other intensification areas.

The master plan creates compact, balanced, and meaningful parks and open spaces within the VMC boundary, while recognizing a need, shared with Vaughan's other intensification areas, to access larger sporting facilities, trails, and green space outside of its boundary. The master plan further identifies the need for a robust active transportation network, in order to seamlessly connect parks and open space, within the VMC and across the City. The study is being coordinated with the VMC Secondary Plan Update, which will deal with land designation.

The consultant continues to develop a framework for recommendations focused on implementation, operations & maintenance, and park governance, and has prepared a draft of the final VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan report which is being reviewed and refined.

The consultant has developed, in consultation with Staff, a VMC parks governance decision-making framework to help the City identify beneficial opportunities to facilitate the programming, activation, and operations & maintenance of parks and open spaces in the VMC. As Vaughan's downtown continues to grow, its park programs, activities, and maintenance regimes will also evolve. This framework will allow the City to evaluate opportunities to deliver services in a more efficient manner through relationships with not-for-profit and/or private entities. The governance models explored range from fully City-led initiatives to fully led by a partner.

### **The plan in action**

As the majority of parks are development driven, Staff have been partnering with landowners to advance parks where possible with particular emphasis on an increase in active park facilities required to serve the projected population and demographics identified for the VMC in the PWMP.

The City has recently acquired the land for the North Urban Park and is developing strategies for the detailed design and implementation of the park to meet service level requirements and facility provision. Staff continue to coordinate the delivery of the strata park in the VMC's north-east quadrant, which is projected to be open to the public in Q4 of 2023, and Millway Avenue Linear Park, in the south-west quadrant, which is slated to commence construction in Q4 2023.

The study team continues to communicate with external stakeholders about parkland opportunities outside the VMC and work to facilitate future studies of possible active transportation connections beyond the VMC, including with the South York Greenway to create a diverse, multi-functional, and seamlessly interconnected parks and open space network.

### **Signage design continues to pilot stage**

As part of the strategy to promote the implementation of a diverse, multi-functional, and interconnected parks and open space network in the downtown, a signage and wayfinding master plan and strategy has been developed to help define how residents, visitors, and businesses perceive the VMC and assist them in moving through it.

The consultant has developed and refined potential options for VMC signs, with significant input and evaluation by various City departments and transit authorities. These refined designs were presented to VMC Sub-committee and comments received were incorporated into the family of signs which will address the various needs of the VMC parks and open space network.

The second part of this study, the advanced signage and wayfinding component, involved the creation of a series of prototypes to test the design ideas on site through a pilot project. Staff worked with the consultant and successful vendor to develop the construction drawing package and fabrication of the prototype signs, which are to be installed in key areas of the VMC in early Q4 2023.

### **Wayfinding consultation strategy**

Public consultation for the signage and wayfinding component with interested stakeholders will take place soon after installation of the pilot project in early Q4 2023. Staff will make periodic technical reviews for durability during the winter season and stakeholder engagement will continue through Q2 2024.

Staff is currently developing creative strategies to engage residents and visitors to obtain valuable feedback which will be incorporated in the final report for consideration in future implementation plans. To date the project has gone through a thorough internal review process involving a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprising key City Senior Leadership members, internal Staff from different departments; other agencies such as the TTC, YRT and York Region, and major landowners and developers in the VMC.

Staff will continue to update stakeholders as this project moves forward.

### **Coordination with related studies**

The findings of the PWMP will inform the Community Services & Facilities study to be completed as part of the VMC Secondary Plan Update. The PWMP is being coordinated with the concurrent updates of the VMC Secondary Plan, VMC Transportation Master Plan, and the VMC Functional Servicing Strategy Report.

The parks master plan is targeted for completion in Q4 2023, with the prototype signage public consultation continuing through Q2 2024.

## **Financial Impact**

There are no financial impacts resulting from this report. A costing model that captures the costs and funding sources for VMC parkland has been developed. This information has been used to reconcile the expected implementation capital cost and available Park DC's, to identify funding gaps.

## **Operational Impact**

The studies staff are undertaking have been robustly coordinated across City departments and with external agencies and other stakeholders, through regular Technical Advisory Committee meetings and other engagement touchpoints. The various VMC plans and studies inform each other and are being closely managed to ensure their collective contribution to the Term of Council Strategic Priority of City Building to "Develop the VMC as a complete community, with emphasis on cultural development".

## **Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

Collaboration continues with regional stakeholders, which is an important factor in realizing the success of the VMC. Certain options developed through the PWMP will require coordination with regional stakeholders and external agencies to determine their feasibility and advance their implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Building a downtown is an ambitious goal. The average density of proposed developments continues to increase, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of community services, active parkland, social and hard infrastructure.

The PWMP continues to advance the master plan for the VMC's parks and open spaces, vetted by public and stakeholder input, and coordinated with concurrent VMC studies and new provincial legislation. The study will ultimately contribute to the downtown's continuing development as a complete and balanced community that is transit supportive and pedestrian friendly, with a vibrant sense of place, a high-quality public realm, and environmentally sustainable design approaches.

The VMC team continues to collaborate across internal departments, public agencies, residents, landowners, and other stakeholders to deliver a complete community.

**For more information**, please contact Christina Bruce, Director of Policy Planning and Special Programs, ext. 8231.

**Attachments**

N/A

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