

Attachment 1

Public Q and A forum on the City's online citizen engagement platform

Summary

In an effort to foster transparency and public engagement, the City of Vaughan established a dedicated Q and A forum to provide residents with an open platform to pose questions and receive public responses from the City project team. The Q and A forum was a key component of the digital billboards public consultation process, aiming to address inquiries, offer clarifications and ensure residents had access to comprehensive information, including maps of the potential sites. From Oct. 1 to Nov. 1, a total of 14 questions were submitted. A comprehensive direct-mail notice was distributed to selected postal codes surrounding each billboard location and covering a generous radius. This outreach not only aimed to inform residents about the project, but also to encourage active community participation through a couple feedback channels, including this online Q and A platform, where everyone could conveniently post their questions.

The following report provides a consolidated overview of the key themes of the questions received, as well as a list of the questions themselves and the responses provided. The diverse inquiries reflect the community's interest not only in the proposed digital billboards but also in broader discussions around alternative revenue generation and community involvement.

Key themes

The Q and A forum on the City's online citizen engagement platform, [Have Your Say](#), was predominantly set up to receive question about the proposed digital billboards; however, feedback was overwhelmingly constructive and demonstrated public interest in alternative revenue generation strategies. Overall, the questions and feedback received showcase the public's willingness to explore alternative revenue sources, suggesting a general receptiveness to innovative financial solutions beyond the immediate topic of digital billboards. Notably, the following themes emerged:

- 1. Interest in alternative revenue streams:** The majority of questions expressed curiosity and interest in diverse revenue-generation ideas beyond digital billboards.

2. **Creative revenue proposals:** Suggestions included naming rights, retail spaces in community centres, lotteries, auctions and user fees, showcasing the public's creative idea range when it comes to revenue-generating possibilities.
3. **Memorial contributions and naming opportunities:** Residents proposed innovative ways to contribute, such as memorial items, naming streets, and planting trees (some of which the City is already doing), reflecting a desire for community involvement.
4. **Concerns about visual impact:** While a minimal number of questions (one) expressed concerns about visual pollution of the proposed digital billboards, the majority of feedback focused on broader revenue strategies.
5. **Diverse perspectives:** The questions and feedback received reflect diverse perspectives, highlighting that residents are open to discussions on various revenue initiatives and not singularly fixated on the specifics of digital billboards.

Questions and answers

Q: Does the City have any land that they could develop for commercial leasing?

A: No. At this time, all the City's holdings have been acquired for future public use. No commercial leasing opportunities are being explored.

Q: Has the City given any thought to including some retail spaces within our community centres/ other public buildings (Tim Hortons, Starbucks, etc.) to help off-set operating/other costs?

A: Yes. The City currently has facilities that include retail spaces that generate revenue, such as City Hall and Sports Village. Future opportunities that complement City programming and user experience can be explored. Businesses are encouraged to register as vendors on the City's [Bids and Tenders page](#) to be notified of future opportunity listings. Alternatively, you can submit proposals anytime by emailing procurement@vaughan.ca.

Q: How about a City of Vaughan lottery?

A: Although the City of Vaughan is a qualified donee according to the Canadian Revenue Agency (an organization/municipality that can issue official donation receipts for gifts it receives from individuals and corporations), the City is not permitted to conduct charitable gaming events, including lotteries, to generate revenue from the public for City events, programs or services, under the regulations of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

Q: What about a City of Vaughan Auction where businesses/ services can be donated to the City and people could bid on them? You could set the minimum starting price. Could be a new espresso machine to a new condo or house?

A: Any in-kind donations made to the City – whether solicited or unsolicited – in support of food banks, toy drives or animal shelter donations, for example, are accepted when appropriate and allocated to a specific program, event or charity.

Q: Create a memorial items list for residents who would like to plant a tree(s), a bench, donate to civic art/ streetscaping, donate to a capital project (put a brick on the wall in a community centre - this is similar to what they did at Pier 1 in Halifax). etc. in memory of someone.

A: In addition to the Incoming Sponsorship and Donation Policy that outlines programs and events available for sponsorship or accepting donations, the City also has a Naming of [City Parks, Open Spaces, Community Facilities and other Municipal Buildings and Properties Policy](#) (PDF) that outlines how residents can submit a name designation in honour of an individual or group for a bench, public park, street, facility, building or property. Through the City's Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations department's [Green Guardians](#) environmental stewardship program, [Corporate Tree Planting](#) events and [Tree and Bench Dedications](#) generate alternative revenue for the City.

Donations of public art or art inventoried in the City's Corporate Art Collection, along with donations of cultural property, including, but not limited to, Vaughan Archives, fall outside of the scope of revenue generation and within an arts and heritage mandate of the City.

Q: I am opposed to adding any more sign pollution to our already visually polluted neighborhoods - especially digital billboards. They are visually distracting, create light pollution, add to greenhouse gas emissions (unnecessary waste of electricity). On top of that it does not seem like they generate all that much revenue (\$133k/yr/sign). I would rather pay \$2 more on my property taxes than be bombarded with more visual pollution when I leave my house! How can I voice my displeasure with this idea besides having to attend the community center meeting? Suggest you set up an on-line voting option where residents can vote on the idea.

A: The City's [Sign By-law 140-2018](#) (PDF) has requirements that regulate how signs like digital billboards can operate and includes restrictions to deter visual distraction. Per the by-law, the digital billboards the City has in operation display static copy (content that remains still as a fixed image for a set period of time). Each message is displayed

for 10 seconds at a time, allowing for passing traffic to see only one at a time, on average, with seamless transitions.

The City's Sign By-law also includes measures to reduce light pollution. The digital billboards currently in operation are equipped with LED technology, including modern brightness controls and configured with dual redundant photocells, which are capable of sensing ambient light and intuitively managing the output brightness even in the event of a hardware failure. The current digital billboards, and any future ones, must strictly conform to all relevant codes and regulations. For more information, read the [Digital Billboard FAQ document](#) (PDF).

We can assure you that your comment will be included in the public record alongside feedback collected at the Open Houses. The City of Vaughan is working with an external engagement consultant to collect all the feedback received during the public consultation phase. Public feedback will be captured in a report to Council with suggested recommendations on how to proceed. Vaughan Council will make the final decision informed by this report. If you wish to remain updated on the progress of the program, you can also sign up to receive [email updates](#).

Q: Create more commercial opportunities within larger parks to allow specific retail/ services to operate and generate revenue for the City.

A: The City doesn't currently have commercial retail services in our parks and open spaces. However, staff are exploring commercial opportunities, where space allows, to generate revenue in larger parks. The City will post these opportunities on the [Bids and Tenders page](#) when available. Businesses are encouraged to register as vendors to be notified when such opportunities arise. Alternatively, you can submit proposals anytime by emailing procurement@vaughan.ca.

Q: Is the discussion specifically on the proposed digital billboards or are you also seeking public opinion on additional alternative funding ideas?

A: Both! We are seeking public feedback on alternative revenue generation initiatives, including the proposed digital billboards, and welcome additional alternative funding ideas.

Q: What about giving residents/ businesses the ability to name a new street for a set fee?

The City has a [Street Naming Policy](#) (PDF), which includes Street Naming Procedures outlining how new streets are named. Per the policy, "the gifting or auctioning of a street name is permitted, provided the proposed street name satisfies the Street Naming

Procedures for approval.” The policy doesn’t outline a set fee or provide specific guidance on how the money collected may be used to generate alternative revenue for City programs and services.

Q: Does the City have a dedicated full time grant specialist whose is responsible to search and apply for every available grant for all of the Departments in order to increase City funding? Many non-profit companies have this position.

A: Yes, the City has a dedicated full-time program manager working within the Economic Development department’s Strategic Economic Initiatives unit, who actively searches and applies for available grant, donation and sponsorship opportunities to support various City departments. This program manager plays a crucial role in identifying and pursuing alternative revenue generation initiatives that align with Vaughan’s objectives and priorities, helping to secure additional resources to support the community's needs. The program manager also oversees the City’s innovative digital billboard advertising contracts.

Q: Could we allow businesses to paint ugly bridge structures for a period of time with their log. Woodbridge Avenue has that ugly rail bridge?

A: The City is currently in a few outdoor advertising agreements that provide in-kind City messaging on railway overpasses throughout Vaughan. Through these agreements, these railway bridges are refurbished, and a digital billboard is installed on both faces to provide the City with free advertising space for City-related messaging. Although these bridge projects do not generate alternative revenue, they do beautify the neighbourhood and provide the City with additional communications channels.

Painting bridge structures would require additional costs to the City and would fall under the commissioning protocols of the Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program. Per the City’s protocols, business logos do not qualify as public art. Opportunities are being explored to expand mural installations under the jurisdiction of the Public Art Program to creatively enhance the sightlines of bridge infrastructure where feasible, however this would not be an alternative revenue generation program.

Q: Consider user fees for defined individuals/ groups using city's facilities to help offset future buildings and parks rehabilitation.

A: User fees and service charges are paid by residents and businesses when accessing certain services, such as recreation programs or the issuance of permits. This includes programs and camps the City’s Recreation Services department offers each year and facilities and rental spaces available for permits. Growth-related infrastructure and services, including future building and park rehabilitation, are supported by growth planning and development-related fees.

The 2023 budget includes total revenues of \$355 million, of which \$236.2 million are from taxation. The remaining \$118.8 million of the City's revenues come from user fees, reserve (i.e. savings) transfers, investments, grants and other sources. The City continues to review user fees regularly to ensure they cover the cost of providing services while being comparable to neighbouring municipalities.

Q: Would selling the naming rights to city buildings for a specified period of time bring in any monies?

A: Yes. Naming City buildings and assets is part of the alternative revenue model the City has developed to help alleviate pressures off the tax base. In fact, the City of Vaughan secured a \$50,000 sponsorship from Saputo to help offset the costs of refurbishing tennis courts located at Torii Park – now known as Saputo Tennis Courts.

The City of Vaughan is currently working on an update to its Incoming Sponsorship and Donation Policy that includes naming rights to City buildings and the spaces within them. All naming of City facilities and the terms upon which that naming occurs will be presented to Council for approval, and final agreements are negotiated with the City Manager and City Solicitor.

Q: Would it be possible for some land close to or in the conservation area near Kortright to be available for monthly/annually rent (as is in Montreal in a park near the stadium) -a win-win situation where the city makes money without increasing the taxes and some citizens could experiment with a little organic farming-so necessary and relevant for all of us-as families (an opportunity to teach the little ones how to grow from scratch), to socialize, to spend time in air virtually free of pollution, as seniors-to prevent isolation and provide the chance to improve and preserve mobility and flexibility with an aim to lead a healthier life (think reducing the costs with medication, hospitalization, the burden on the caregivers). Of course, this is just an example of a location-it can be replicated wherever fertile land could be offered for renting.

A: The City of Vaughan currently has a [Community Gardens program](#) and there is one location where residents can rent a plot of their own - Sugarbush in Thornhill. At the moment, there is only that one location with that governance structure and no fee to rent so this program is not a revenue source for Vaughan. We are currently working to expand the number of community gardens in each Ward and are open to the potential to fundraise as part of this beloved municipal offering. Thank you for providing an example of how this is done in Montreal we will pass that along to the appropriate staff to investigate further.