

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, April 6, 2022

WARD(S): ALL

**TITLE: AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN
& IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

FROM:

Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council endorsement and adoption of the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan (the "Plan") and Implementation Strategy in support of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan, highlighting Council's commitment to citizens to provide a diverse community that is supportive, accessible, and equitable, where everyone including our seniors can live, work, retire, age well and feel a sense of belonging.

Report Highlights

- The City of Vaughan, in consultation with and guidance from the Older Adult Task Force, has developed an Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy that align to the City's strategic priority of Active, Safe and Diverse Communities, and respond to the needs identified by older adults/seniors in the community.
- Upon Council approval and ratification of the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy, the City will apply to receive membership in Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.
- The priorities identified in the Plan & Implementation Strategy will be considered for inclusion in the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan and reported back on a yearly basis through the Strategic Plan Oversight Teams (SPOT).
- The City of Vaughan will demonstrate its commitment to delivering on this Plan by sharing annual progress reports outlining the status of each priority.

Recommendations

1. That Council endorse and adopt the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan;
2. That Council endorse and adopt the Vaughan Age-Friendly Community Action Plan - Implementation Strategy; and
3. That staff be directed to apply for the City of Vaughan to achieve recognition as an age-friendly community through membership in Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.

Background

The City of Vaughan is a growing municipality, expected to reach a population of approximately 500,000 by 2041. It is projected that older adults (55 years and older) will make up the largest portion of the population of Vaughan, representing more than 30 per cent of the total population, by 2031. Population aging has spurred calls locally, nationally, and internationally to address the diverse needs of seniors and their desire to age as healthfully, independently, and safely as possible, and where necessary, to receive care in their own home and communities as their physical, social, and financial needs change and/or intensify.

The City's Older Adult Task Force has an overall mandate to make recommendations on the implementation of initiatives and opportunities that move towards an age-friendly community, the promotion of healthy seniors and steps towards attaining membership as an age-friendly community through the Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.

In consultation with and guidance from the Older Adult Task Force, the City has developed an Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy that involved completing a review of local data and key age-friendly indicators, conducted a review of best practices and promising approaches from other communities and captured the insights, feedback, and ideas from residents and community stakeholders to create an age-friendly vision and concrete actions for the City of Vaughan to become a more age-friendly community.

The concept of age-friendly communities was developed in 2006/2007 when the World Health Organization (WHO) developed the *Global Age-Friendly Cities Project*. This project brought together cities from around the world that had an interest in supporting healthy aging by creating communities that were more age-friendly. The activities of this project helped to identify eight key areas of community life in which communities can become more age-friendly:

- Outdoor spaces and public buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment

- Communication and information
- Community support and health services
- Social participation

The *WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities* was established in 2010 and now includes 100 cities and communities worldwide, including age-friendly initiatives across many communities in Canada. In Ontario, the province developed an *Age-Friendly Community Planning Guide*, updated in 2021, that is aligned with the WHO framework and that defines an age-friendly community as “one that responds to both the opportunities and challenges of an aging population by creating physical and social environments that support independent active living and enable older people to continue contributing to all aspects of community life”.

The City of Vaughan has taken steps to create a more age-friendly community, where all residents can be active and engaged members of society at every stage of life. Age-friendly communities support aging with dignity, respect, and independence, and promote the inclusion of older adults in all areas of community life. By planning for the needs of the older-adult population, age-friendly communities are designed to better meet the needs of all residents. An age-friendly community aligns with the City’s Service Excellence strategic priority of Active, Safe and Diverse Communities.

To achieve the goal of becoming an age-friendly community, the City embarked on the process of developing an Age-Friendly Community Action Plan. This ten-year action plan sets out a long-term vision, collective goals, and inclusive strategies to improve upon the ability of seniors to remain in their homes and live well within their communities.

Objectives of the City’s Age-Friendly Community Action Plan, include:

1. To recognize the diversity of Vaughan’s aging population not only in terms of age but also ability, gender, sexual orientation, culture, support needs, and income.
2. To support policies that create complete, accessible, and welcoming neighbourhoods.
3. To support independent, active, and healthy aging for all residents.
4. To realize a shared responsibility among community members and partners to fulfil the vision of this Plan.
5. To achieve recognition of the city of Vaughan as an age-friendly community through membership in Ontario’s Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.

Research

The research project phase included a scan of background reports, policies, and documentation from local senior governments, and the World Health Organization. A collection and synthesis of existing data on demographics, current services, and key age-friendly indicators were reviewed, along with a review of best and promising practices in age-friendly planning.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Listening to and learning from the experiences of residents and community stakeholders is the core component in defining a direction forward and in creating a more age-friendly community for all. An inclusive and robust community engagement plan was critical to the development of the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, and given the ongoing safety and public health regulations, the community consultation activities conducted were primarily either telephone or virtual/online events. During the month of September 2021, staff were able to conduct in-person engagements at the Maple Community Centre (MCC) and the North Thornhill Community Centre (NTCC).

Our approach to community engagement included:

- Accessibility Advisory Committee presentation
- Age-Friendly Community Action Plan workshops with residents and stakeholders
- Community engagement – in-person at MCC and NTCC
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Task Force presentation
- Focus groups with community service providers, organizations representing vulnerable populations, older adult clubs, and staff
- Interviews with Members of City Council, City staff, and community leaders
- Older Adult Task Force meetings/presentations

Communications to support the outreach and project to date have included:

- Access Vaughan | Synthia pre-recorded message played for 'on hold' callers
- Dedicated City phone extension and email address
- Dedicated website section
- Digital signs throughout the city
- Engagement newsletter
- Extensive social media campaign
- In-Person community engagement
- Media coverage (Vaughan Citizen, thestar.com, yorkregion.com, Toronto.com)
- Mobile signs (5 – one in each ward)
- Online surveys with residents
- Public Service Announcements
- Radio ads in top 5 languages (English, Russian, Italian, Mandarin and Persian) spoken in Vaughan
- Telephone surveys with adults 55+
- Vaughan Public Library Handouts
- Video recordings of workshop presentations posted on City project website

Current State | What We Are Hearing

To launch the engagement process, our first activity was a community visioning workshop. This workshop was an initial opportunity to hear from residents on how they imagined an age-friendly Vaughan. Refined and validated by the Older Adult Task

Force, this project's vision affirms "Vaughan is a community of choice for all generations."

A second workshop was held with residents and the community with a focus on the current state of age-friendliness, namely, current policy framework, jurisdictional scan, demographic profile, age-friendly indicators, projected future characteristics, including an inventory and review of older adult services.

Residents and the community were presented with key findings and preliminary recommended actions of a draft Age-Friendly Community Action Plan at a third workshop in June 2021.

During the engagement process, we heard diverse views and insights on a wide range of issues related to current strengths, challenges, and opportunities in age-friendly planning across the City, as outlined below:

Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings

- Residents value the number parks, trails, and greenspaces across the city.
- There is a need to improve accessibility and safety in some areas with increased lighting, adequate rest spaces, and even surfaces.
- People would like to see more options for inter-generational activities such as play spaces in parks and community gardens.

Transportation

- While the City has many transportation options for residents including accessible options, residents express the need to expand transportation options for people with disabilities.
- Other opportunities suggested by residents and stakeholders include creating greater awareness of the current transit system (i.e., pathways and options), improving lighting in some areas, integrating transit systems (across jurisdictions), and providing a subsidized transit option for seniors and caregivers.

Housing

- The need for more affordable housing choices including more accessible and supportive housing options was a priority expressed throughout the engagement activities.
- More in-home support options are important for people's health, independence, and well-being.

Respect and Social Inclusion

- Residents want to celebrate seniors and ensure they are valued members of the community.
- Need to reach out more to our vulnerable and isolated residents.
- Need to take steps to be an equitable and safe city.

Civic Participation and Employment

- There is positive civic engagement of seniors underway in the city.
- Residents and stakeholders would like to see greater awareness of volunteering and employment opportunities, creation of mentorship opportunities, and “tapping into the wisdom” of seniors.

Communication and Information

- Recognition that the City has a number of platforms and approaches for communicating with residents.
- Need to increase the awareness of what is being offered across the city.
- Needs for more outreach to seniors who do not speak English and people who may be isolated.

Community Support and Health Services

- There are many health services within the city.
- Awareness of services and access to services (i.e., affordability, transportation) can be barriers.
- Residents and stakeholders would like to see a ‘one-stop’ access to services and information, increased mental health supports, caregiver supports, and leveraging technology to increase access to health services.

Social Participation

- The City has many recreational programs and activities for older adults and has strong support for the City’s Older Adult Clubs.
- Future programming and events need to continue to consider and respect the diversity of residents while also ensuring access (i.e., affordability, awareness, accessibility).

Emerging priorities, include:

Within the various conversations and feedback from residents and stakeholders, the following priorities for age-friendly planning in the city of Vaughan emerged:

- Ensuring accessibility in all areas of community life (transportation, community spaces, housing, information, and programs and services).
- Increasing the range of housing choices available to meet people’s diverse needs.
- Creating greater awareness and connection to services.
- Ensuring all residents feel safe, respected, and included in the community.
- Planning our communities and spaces through the lens of age-friendliness.
- Providing opportunities for all residents, including older adults, to engage in community planning.

Community Action Plan | Priorities

At the local level, the City of Vaughan has a strong policy context for age-friendly planning including setting a direction within the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan to support the strategic priority of Active, Safe, and Diverse

Communities. Local planning initiatives and policy documents support various aspects of age-friendly planning including the support of active transportation, complete community design, accessibility and inclusion, physical activity and wellness, and safety.

The City of Vaughan's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan priorities, include:

Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings

When people view a neighbourhood as safe and accessible, it encourages participation in outdoor activities and engagement with the community. Accessibility involves removing barriers that limit opportunities for people with disabilities, including older adults with age-related limitations and/or disabilities.

Recommended Actions 1 to 5

1. Continue to explore opportunities to expand winter snow removal program for seniors
2. Through parks planning, continue to ensure that park and open space design incorporate spaces and amenities that are accessible and encourage physical activity, wellness, and recreational opportunities for all ages
3. Continue to make improvements to street lighting, pedestrian crossings and signal times, and overall community safety
4. Expand opportunities to support the development of community gardens accessible to all ages and abilities
5. Identify opportunities to create more walkable neighbourhoods

Transportation

The condition and design of transportation related infrastructure, such as signage, traffic lights and sidewalks, affect personal mobility. Access to reliable, affordable public transit becomes increasingly important when driving becomes stressful or challenging, or when driving is no longer available as an option.

Recommended Actions 6 to 9

6. Continue efforts to enhance bus stop accessibility, equity, comfort, and safety
7. Work with community partners to promote, and support opportunities to expand, alternative transportation modes such as ride sharing, volunteer drivers, and other options to increase access to amenities and services by residents with special needs including mobility impairments
8. Create greater awareness of all transportation options across the city

9. Explore opportunities to provide a needs-based transit subsidy for low-income residents

Housing

The availability of a range of appropriate, affordable, accessible, and supportive housing options that incorporate flexibility through adaptive features, style, and location choices, are essential for age-friendly communities.

Recommended Actions 10 to 13

10. In support of the City's Affordable Housing Strategy, establish policies and identify opportunities to provide a range of housing forms that meet the diverse and changing needs of residents
11. Explore opportunities for funding and community partnerships to pilot a HomeShare program in Vaughan
12. Share information and promote funding options for home adaptation, repair, and modification programs
13. Support community partners to promote and increase in-home supports for seniors and people with disabilities

Respect and Social Inclusion

Community attitudes, such as a general feeling of respect and recognizing the role that older adults and people with disabilities play in our society, are critical factors for establishing an inclusive and age-friendly community.

Recommended Actions 14 to 17

14. Celebrate the contributions of seniors and youth through a local art exhibition
15. Work with community partners to increase awareness and share resources to combat ageism and elder abuse
16. Work with local seniors' clubs to explore opportunities for integrated programs and activities
17. Engage and partner with community organizations to identify and develop programming opportunities that support diverse needs of residents and older adults

Civic Participation and Employment

Civic engagement includes the desire to be involved in aspects of community life that extend beyond day-to-day activities, such as volunteering, becoming politically active, voting, or working on committees. The ability to continue working or find new

employment provides economic security for older adults, as well as people of all ages and abilities. This includes having access to accessible environments, including accessible workplaces.

Recommended Actions 18 to 20

18. Explore and promote City and community volunteer and employment opportunities
19. Expand age-friendly awareness among local businesses
20. Engage with the Older Adult Task Force (OATF) as part of City planning initiatives

Communication and Information

Age-friendly communities provide information about community events or important services that is both readily accessible and in formats that are appropriate for older adults and people with disabilities. An age-friendly community recognizes the diversity of its population and promotes initiatives to reach as many people as possible.

Recommended Actions 21 to 23

21. Expand digital access and literacy among residents and seniors
22. Enhance online presence of community information and services
23. Continue efforts to ensure communication and promotional materials create positive and inclusive images celebrating the city's diversity

Community Support and Health Services

Access to and awareness of community support services and mental and physical health programs contribute to quality of life and age-friendliness.

Recommended Actions 24 to 25

24. Explore opportunities to develop a Community Hub
25. Develop relationship with the Western York Region Ontario Health Team to further advocate for health services in Vaughan

Social Participation

Social participation involves the level of interaction that older adults and people with disabilities have with other members of their community and the extent that the community itself makes this interaction and inclusion possible.

Recommended Actions 26 to 28

26. Continue to explore options to expand recreational program delivery including more options for intergenerational programs, programs for people living with dementia, programs that meets the needs of diverse ethno-cultural groups, programs in other languages, and outdoor and virtual programming
27. Explore opportunities for additional training for front-line staff to support seniors
28. Work with community organizations to coordinate monthly 'Coffee Connections'

Overarching Priorities

To further support the age-friendly actions identified in the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan, it is recommended that the City's Older Adult Task Force be established as the Age-Friendly Vaughan Advisory Committee (AFVAC) to support the overall leadership and monitoring of the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan. Membership of the AFVAC should continue to expand to include a diverse range of experiences and voices.

In addition to the role of the AFVAC, additional recommended actions to support the creation of an age-friendly system at the City of Vaughan, include:

1. Developing a 'checklist' or decision-making framework. The goal of this decision-making framework is to provide a structure to guide decision making through an age-friendly lens across municipal departments. The framework could include considerations and principles that may be built into plans, policies, and daily work at the City. This framework should also be developed in consultation with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force.
2. Establishing the requirement, through the procurement process, that consultants who deliver work for the City demonstrate a commitment to the principles and vision of this Plan.
3. Examining opportunities to establish an Age-Friendly Coordinator role at the City
 - a. Role of the Coordinator could include attending regular AFVAC meetings and acting as a liaison with AFVAC and community partners including, other levels of government; assisting in preparing communication and promotion materials; coordinating and monitoring implementation of plan actions; seeking out funding opportunities; and assisting in planning and coordinating local events and activities.
 - b. Staff would review internal resourcing options before moving forward with establishing an Age-Friendly Coordinator role.
4. Joining Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.

5. Exploring membership to the WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.
6. Supporting the work underway to establish an Intergovernmental Age-Friendly Working Group to further support the initiatives of this Plan through partnerships with other levels of government.
7. Considering the priorities identified in the Plan for inclusion in the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan and reporting back on a yearly basis through the Strategic Plan Oversight Teams (SPOT).
8. Preparing, and sharing, annual age-friendly community progress reports. These reports would list each recommended action and whether it is fully, partially, or not implemented yet.
9. Conducting a full review of the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan in 2026.

Implementation Strategy

The 28 priorities within the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan have been prioritized within an Implementation Strategy which has been developed to support the direction of the Plan's execution.

The Plan also identifies several core strategies that demonstrate the City's full commitment to the vision of this Plan and to creating a city-wide approach to age-friendly planning. These include developing an age-friendly decision-making framework; establishing the Older Adult Task Force as the Age-Friendly Vaughan Advisory Committee to continue to support and guide age-friendly planning across the city; requiring, through procurement, a commitment to age-friendly principles; joining Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives; considering the priorities of this Plan for inclusion in the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan; supporting work underway to establish an Intergovernmental Age-Friendly Working Group; preparing annual community progress reports; and conducting a full review of the Plan in 2026.

These recommendations are critical to the implementation of the Plan and demonstrate the commitment and promise of the City in becoming a more age-friendly city.

As the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan moves forward, City Staff will work to operationalize this Plan and Implementation Strategy through the City's Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan and the various departmental business plans. This will be achieved through the leadership of the newly formed age-friendly executive working group and through additional discussions with various City Staff, as appropriate.

Operationalizing this Plan and Implementation Strategy will be with the leadership of an executive working group comprised of representatives from the Community Services Portfolio, the Office of Transformation and Strategy, and the Office of Communications and Economic Development.

Previous Reports/Authority

N/A

Analysis and Options

Applying an age-friendly mindset which respects the needs of our older adult population will result in a built environment that supports the needs of the broader community.

Realizing the age-friendly vision for the city of Vaughan requires the collective efforts of a broad range of stakeholders to come together to implement the recommended actions and ultimately become a more age-friendly community to all residents.

The City of Vaughan has taken on a leadership role in the coordination and facilitation of the actions outlined within the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy. Various departments within the City play a significant role in setting policy that supports the principles and actions outlined within the plan and supports the continued growth of the municipality through an age-friendly lens. The City also has an important role in collaboration, communication, education and advocacy.

Community Organizations and Service Providers assume a number of roles in age-friendly planning including the direct provision of health services (primary care, in-home supports, emergency care, mental health), support programs (accessible transportation, friendly visiting, food banks, literacy, and language), housing (social housing, long-term care, supportive housing), and social connection (local clubs and networks).

Private Sector also has a responsibility in age-friendly planning by ensuring safe and inclusive spaces for residents to live, retire, work, shop, visit, and play.

The Vaughan community has an important role in supporting the vision of the Plan by being welcoming and inclusive of all people of all ages and abilities. Communities can also support the development of an age-friendly city through advocacy and education.

The risks associated by not taking steps to become an 'age-friendly' city include increased social isolation and loneliness among seniors and more vulnerable residents. Failure to adopt such a plan may also lead to poor health outcomes, both physically and mentally, as well as greater financial insecurity among lower income seniors and residents. This may lead to reduced levels of dignity and independence which can further amplify the marginalization of seniors and vulnerable populations.

In order to mitigate these risks, this Plan & Implementation Strategy will be jointly led by the Community Services Portfolio, the Office of Transformation and Strategy, and the Office of Communications and Economic Development.

Financial Impact

Any actions outlined in the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy that may have future budget considerations will follow the corporate budget process.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Regional Municipality of York fulfils a number of roles in creating age-friendly communities including through various planning tools (i.e., Official Plan, Seniors Strategy, Transportation Master Plan, Housing and Homelessness Plan). York Region is responsible for facilitating affordable housing, administering and funding various community programs, the provision of transportation and policing, as well as regional land use and development. York Region is also an important partner in advocacy and collaboration with community organizations and service providers.

Government of Ontario has a broad role in age-friendly planning. The province has established a framework, [Creating a more inclusive Ontario: age-friendly community planning guide for municipalities and community organizations](#) (2021), and provides funding for age-friendly initiatives. The Ontario Government also sets a policy framework for growth across the province. The Province also has a significant role as a funder of many services, infrastructure, and programs across communities and across the 8 key areas of age-friendly communities.

Government of Canada also provides a policy direction for age-friendly planning, [Age-Friendly Communities in Canada – Community Implementation Guide](#), and provides funding that shapes how our communities grow.

Conclusion

It is projected that older adults (55 years and older) will make up the largest portion of the population of Vaughan, representing more than 30 per cent of the total population, by 2031.

The goal of the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan is to assess the City's social and physical environment using the eight World Health Organization (WHO) dimensions of community life and identify priority areas for meeting the needs of the aging population.

As part of the background research, the project team reviewed the City's current policy framework, conducted a jurisdictional scan of best and promising practices, and demographic & socio-economic analysis, heard from over 800 people through various community engagement activities. Community outreach of the Plan was shared using a number of communication tactics.

The endorsement and adoption of the Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy is consistent with the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan commitment to ensuring Active, Safe, and Diverse Communities. Age-friendly communities support aging with dignity, respect, and independence, and promote the inclusion of older adults in all areas of community life.

Importantly, by planning for the needs of the older-adult population, age-friendly communities are designed to better meet the needs of all residents.

Following Council's resolution to actively support, promote and work towards becoming age-friendly through the endorsement of the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan & Implementation Strategy, staff will apply to achieve recognition of the City of Vaughan as an age-friendly community through membership in Ontario's Network of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives.

The City will also demonstrate its commitment to action by publicly posting the City's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan, and commit to measuring activities, reviewing action plan outcomes and reporting on them publicly.

For more information, please contact: Robert Braid, Recreation Manager – Community Centres, ext. 8009; or Viviana Precopi, Manager, Special Projects – Community Services, ext. 8139

Attachments

1. Creating a city for all ages: Vaughan Age-Friendly Community Action Plan
2. Vaughan Age-Friendly Community Action Plan: Implementation Strategy
3. Presentation by J. Consulting Group Inc. on the City of Vaughan's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan

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