

## Committee of the Whole (2) Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, April 16, 2024

**WARD(S):** ALL

**TITLE: PROJECT SEARCH REPORT ON FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**FROM:**

Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

**ACTION:** FOR INFORMATION

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**Purpose**

As per Council direction, this report provides information on the feasibility of the operation of "Project SEARCH."

**Report Highlights**

- "Project SEARCH" is a program that aims to assist young adults with disabilities in transitioning to employment.
- Project SEARCH was implemented as a pilot project from September 2022 to June 2023.
- Staff have researched alternative funding avenues and engaged an alternate educational partner for a new collaboration to continue Project SEARCH without success therefore we cannot continue the program at this time.

**Recommendation**

1. That this report be received for information.

**Background**

People with disabilities in Ontario face employment barriers, including high unemployment rates, underemployment, lack of accessibility, and negative stereotypes. The City of Vaughan has the highest disability rate among local municipalities at 21.4%, with a significant employment disparity between those with and without disabilities. Initiatives like "Project SEARCH" can help tap into the untapped potential of this community.

"Project SEARCH" is a program that aims to assist young adults with disabilities in transitioning to employment. The license to operate the program was purchased from Project SEARCH with funding from the Ministry of Education by the Catholic District School Board. The City of Vaughan, in collaboration with the York Catholic District School Board and Community Living York South, ran a pilot program for ten individuals with disabilities in York Region during 2022-2023. The goal was to help them successfully transition from high school to meaningful employment. Four out of the eight individuals who completed the program were able to secure employment using the skills they acquired.

Despite its success, the York Catholic District School Board ended the partnership agreement on June 27, 2023, due to budgetary issues. Therefore, without sustained financial support from the Province and an instructor from the board, continuing the program in its current form is not feasible at this time.

### **Previous Reports/Authority**

[Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of June 28, 2022 \(Item 4, Report No. 30 of the Committee of the Whole\)](#)

[Extract from the Council Meeting Minutes of June 20, 2023 \(Item 5, Report No. 28 of the Committee of the Whole\)](#)

### **Analysis and Options**

The "Project SEARCH" program is a model that is employer-led; therefore, the host employer/organization is responsible for delivering the program as part of its core business. The organization must fully participate in setting up and organizing the model and overseeing its delivery. At the City, the "Project SEARCH" pilot program was facilitated by one instructor from the school board and two skills trainers from Community Living York South. They taught the necessary skills for workplace success in both classroom and on-the-job settings. In addition, experienced City of Vaughan staff mentored students on the job to develop their skills and provide real-world feedback.

Although the project was largely successful, it faced some operational challenges. One of the main challenges was the lack of dedicated full-time staff to oversee and coordinate the program, which resulted in an inconsistent experience for everyone involved. Additionally, there were instances where the number of interns exceeded the number of skill trainers, which did not meet the recommended standards set by "Project SEARCH" and the City's requirements. This happened due to a partner's labour shortages, which impacted the support available to the participants.

For “Project SEARCH” to succeed, the following option was considered for both staffing and funding.

Partnership with an alternate School Board and other Community Agencies:

- The City could initiate outreach to various school boards within the jurisdiction, assessing their inclination to collaborate with "Project SEARCH."
- The approach might also involve liaising with community organizations that specialize in training, especially those that focus on differently abled individuals, such as March of Dime and Abilities Centre.
- As per the Project SEARCH licensing model:
  - The School Board would provide the in-class instructor (cost covered by the school board)
  - The community agency would provide skill trainers and a job developer (cost covered by the community agency)
  - The City would provide the Project Coordinator

Challenges

- Securing a partnership remains a variable, given the discretion of the School Board to select a specific municipality per academic year and the unpredictability of identifying community partners with the necessary funding to employ skill trainers.
- If there is withdrawal of support from external collaborators, the workload will exceed the capacity of a single full-time staff member. This could necessitate a reconsideration of the project's scope.
- The municipality's potential reliance on external financial sources could introduce risks to the project's continuity.

### **School Board Involvement**

The Project SEARCH model requires the involvement of a business partner and school board. York Region District School Board, which has obtained the required license from Project SEARCH to operate in York Region, has partnered with a local hospital as its business partner for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the City cannot proceed with the operationalization of Project SEARCH at this time.

### **Financial Impact**

N/A

### **Operational Impact**

N/A

**Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

N/A

**Conclusion**

Lacking a partnership with an education partner, staff cannot continue the program at this time.

**For more information**, please contact: Zincia Francis, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, ext. 8159.

**Attachments**

None

**Prepared by**

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**Approved by**



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**Reviewed by**



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