

## MC Sub-committee Report

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**DATE:** Wednesday, October 30, 2024

**WARD:** 4

**TITLE: VMC PARKS AND WAYFINDING MASTER PLAN – FINAL  
REPORT**

**FROM:**

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

**ACTION: DECISION**

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**Purpose**

To seek the VMC Sub-Committee's support and recommend to Council approval of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan (PWMP), comprising the Parks Master Plan and the Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan.

**Report Highlights**

- The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan provides: (1) a Parks Master Plan, which aims to guide the timely development of parkland within the VMC, and (2) a Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan, including a Signage Pilot, to help people move through its public realm.
- The Parks 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 Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan helps residents, visitors, and businesses perceive and navigate through the VMC and guides the development of signage in the downtown area as it evolves.

### **Report Highlights (continued)**

- The Signage Pilot fabricated and installed signage prototypes near the VMC Subway Station and the SmartVMC Bus Terminal to assess their effectiveness and durability.
- Staff ensured the VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan underwent a robust and strategically coordinated public consultation process to optimize stakeholder input.
- The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan was closely coordinated with existing and ongoing plans and studies, including the VMC Secondary Plan Update, 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”.

### **Recommendations**

The VMC Sub-Committee recommends Council approve:

1. The proposed VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan, comprising the Parks Master Plan [Attachment #1] and the Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan [Attachment #2]; and
2. That staff be directed to implement the actions contained within the VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan.

### **Background**

The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan outlines a master plan scheme and establishes an implementation strategy to facilitate the timely development of parks and open space for VMC residents, commuters, and visitors, as outlined in the VMC Secondary Plan (VMCSP) and envisioned in supportive placemaking studies, together with the development of a public realm wayfinding strategy that can be implemented incrementally to achieve a legible and cohesive public realm. The study has been coordinated with the VMCSP, which will deal with land use designation.

Growth trends in the VMC are outpacing the provision of social infrastructure, with parkland being an area of particular concern. In this context, the study has identified opportunities to add active parkland and improve the public realm, both within and adjacent to the VMC.

The PWMP was initiated in May 2020 with the successful proponent, Janet Rosenberg & Studio. 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 population 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, and 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.

The study was updated and advanced throughout 2022 to bring it into alignment with the Parkland Dedication By-law 168-2022, which was endorsed by Council on June 28, 2022. Significant coordination took place with, and input provided into, the City's DC background study update, Community Benefit Charge Bylaw study, and Parkland Dedication By-law study.

Throughout 2023 the study was brought into alignment with various changes to Provincial legislation, including Bills 23 and 109, and with advances to the VMCS. The implementation strategy was completed in 2024, including an Order of Magnitude Class "D" cost estimate and continued refinements to the plan based on input from landowners and other studies. The study also undertook significant coordination on parkland typologies with the ongoing Greenspace Strategic Plan.

The master plan, which can be implemented over time in a measured response to development, provides the City with options for service level delivery, to ultimately create a diverse, multi-functional, and seamlessly interconnected parks and open space network.

### **Consultation on Parks Master Plan**

The study was initiated immediately prior to the pandemic, so consultation methods focused on virtual connections. The initial PWMP survey received over 500 responses, both online and through hard copies, with 75% of survey respondents saying parks and open spaces were most important when considering where to live.

The second phase of the consultation plan took place in May 2021 through virtual focus groups with members of the public. These focus groups were recorded, and the presentation was posted on the City's Have Your Say webpage for a broader engagement with the public over an extended period.

The third phase of consultation on the study took place in November 2021 using the City's Have Your Say platform. The consultant worked with Staff to create an engaging presentation to educate, inform, and generate valuable feedback.

Further consultation included:

- In March 2022, the study presented the refined plan at separate landowner and resident meetings.
- In September 2023, the study was presented to the Technical Advisory Committee, and received feedback from multiple departments.
- In September 2024, staff met with the TRCA to discuss Destination Parks and implementation strategies.

Ongoing discussions with landowners and external stakeholders have informed the master plan, as has internal coordination across departments.

Across all touchpoints in the engagement plan, certain themes emerged from the public and stakeholder feedback that was received. Overall, the following five (5) themes resonate strongly: parks and green spaces, walking and cycling, connectivity, flexible spaces, and health and well-being. These themes have been incorporated throughout the PWMP.

### **Consultation on Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan**

The Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan's consultation process was conducted simultaneously with the above-mentioned PWMP consultation. Additionally, an 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 was also carried out.

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

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

[VMC Development Activity Update - April 2023](#)

[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 November 2020](#)

[VMC Studies Update May 2020](#)

## **Analysis and Options**

The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan comprises the Parks Master Plan [Attachment #1] and the Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan [Attachment #2].

### **Parks Master Plan**

Growth trends in the VMC are outpacing the provision of social infrastructure, with parkland an area of particular concern. The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan (PWMP) has identified opportunities to add active parkland and improve the public realm, both within and adjacent to the VMC. It outlines a comprehensive system of parks, open spaces, and facilities, to be developed incrementally over time.

This system is designed to meet the City's planning goals and, most importantly, the needs of current and future residents, workers, and visitors in the VMC. The study is a master plan and is being coordinated with the VMC Secondary Plan Update, which will deal with land use designation.

Building on the findings of the Assessment Report and public engagement process, draft design principles and facility fit study, the study has developed an ultimate Parks Master Plan supported by an implementation strategy outlining short-to-long term parkland targets for the VMC. The master plan identifies up to 28.1 hectares of Public Squares and Urban Parks within the VMC, and up to 22.9 hectares of parkland outside of it, some of which may be shared with other Strategic Growth Areas. This parkland can be implemented over time in a measured response to development and provides the City with options for service level delivery.

The study provides a comprehensive roadmap for acquisition, expansion, and improvements to parkland in the VMC, addressing population and employment growth projections to 2051. The initial phase of the plan, spanning from 2024 to 2031, aims to address the critical shortage of active parkland in the VMC by targeting the acquisition of 4.9 hectares of new parkland. When combined with the existing 10 hectares of city-owned land, this will bring the VMC's total parkland to 14.9 hectares.

At full build-out in 2051, with an estimated VMC population of 128,000, the plan envisions 32.82 hectares of active parkland, maintaining a ratio of 0.26 hectares per 1,000 people. Current projections indicate that only 83% of this goal can be achieved through existing means, namely parkland dedication and payment-in-lieu. This shortfall stems largely from recent provincial policy changes, notably Bills 23 and 109. These bills limit the City's ability to secure parkland or receive payment-in-lieu through development applications by capping parkland dedication based on site size rather than vertical density.

While the ratio noted above is lower than traditional suburban standards, it reflects the reality of high-density urban development and the need for innovative approaches to park provision in Strategic Growth Areas. The PWMP compensates for a lower ratio by emphasizing high-quality, multi-functional, densely programmed parks and improved connectivity to larger open spaces and trail networks outside the VMC boundary.

Accessibility is a key focus of the master plan, with an emphasis on equitable distribution of parks and facilities throughout the VMC and a commitment to walkability. It has identified 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 VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan undertook a comprehensive review of projected park development and construction, detailing costs and funding sources over a 30-year period, divided into three (3) phases, by way of an Order of Magnitude Class "D" cost estimate, which is appropriate for the level of planning consistent with a master plan. The study identifies a funding gap of 9.9% over the three (3) phases, with the gap being most pronounced in the middle decade. Regular reassessment and adjustment of both costs and funding strategies will be crucial as the VMC develops.

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 those fully led by a partner.

Recognizing the rapid pace of urban development and changing community needs, the plan incorporates flexibility and adaptability as core principles. This approach allows for the evolution of park spaces over time in line with development, ensuring they remain relevant and responsive to the community's shifting demographics and preferences, making the VMC an enduringly attractive place to live, work, and visit.

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 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 and Toronto's Northwest Cultural Trail.

### **Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan and Signage Pilot Project**

As part of the strategy to promote the implementation of an interconnected parks and open space network in the downtown, a Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan and strategy was developed to define how residents, visitors, and businesses perceive and navigate through the VMC. The Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan was created to support the goals and intent outlined in the *VMC Streetscape and Open Space Plan* and the Parks Master Plan.

The first phase of this effort involved the creation of a wayfinding master plan by Cygnus Design Group, a sub-consultant, to guide the development of signage in the downtown area as it evolves. This included designing a cohesive family of exterior pedestrian and cyclist signs encompassing materials, details, specifications and potential locations of these signs. The consultant developed and refined potential options for the VMC signs, with significant input and evaluation from various City departments and transit authorities.

The second phase of the study involved the VMC Signage Pilot, which tested signage prototypes in key areas of the VMC. Four (4) signage prototypes were fabricated and installed in Q4 of 2023 near the VMC Subway Station and the SmartVMC Bus Terminal to assess their effectiveness and durability.

### **Specific Consultation on the VMC Signage Pilot Project**

Throughout Q2 and Q3 of 2024, City staff gathered public feedback through multiple engagement methods, including:

1. an online survey that was available for all residents and visitors of the VMC to access and complete via the sign QR Code and the City of Vaughan Website;
2. a User Experience (UX) Advisory Group of four (4) community members who provided detailed feedback on the functionality, design, accessibility and overall effectiveness of the signage through a workbook assignment; and
3. an in-person pop-up at a Concerts in the Park event in Transit Square, where staff engaged with residents and visitors about the signage pilot and encouraged them to complete the online survey.

The online survey, which concluded on September 30, 2024, gathered responses from 74 participants, primarily from those that live in the VMC specifically, and Vaughan in general. Most respondents were travelling to the VMC for work, to access local amenities, and/or engaging in leisurely activities. Findings indicated that half agreed that the signs helped them reach their destinations, and most felt the signs met their accessibility needs. Visibility assessments showed that half found the signs visible from a distance, while most appreciated the colour contrast and confirmed the legibility of the font size and typeface. When evaluating the signage maps, most considered them legible and found the map legend easy to interpret. The physical condition of the signs received positive ratings. However, some respondents noted difficulties in locating signs, suggesting improvements such as clearer mapping and better placement of signage.

The UX Advisory Group evaluated the Pilot Signage through a workbook assignment completed on April 30, 2024, providing positive feedback on the signage's effectiveness and functionality. Participants offered helpful recommendations to enhance the legibility of the map material and suggested exploring the colour contrast of the signage further. Additionally, they suggested replacing the cyclist curb-mounted signage with upright standing signage, similar to the Trail Signage, to improve visibility and address concerns for adverse weather conditions and damage from roadway vehicles.

These findings provided valuable insights on the effectiveness and durability of the Pilot Signage and will be considered alongside the feedback from internal city departments. The signage prototypes will be further refined based on this feedback to enhance the VMC Wayfinding Signage.



### **Coordination with related studies**

The findings of the PWMP continue to inform the VMC Secondary Plan Update. The PWMP is coordinated with the VMC Transportation Master Plan, the VMC Functional Servicing Strategy Report, and the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

### **Virtual consultation continues**

Stakeholders will have further opportunities to discuss land designation and park distribution through the VMC Secondary Plan Update.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial impacts resulting from this report. An Order of Magnitude Class “D” cost estimate was completed that captured the capital cost for developing the VMC parks. This information has been used to reconcile the expected implementation capital cost and available Park DC’s, identify funding gaps, and will inform future decision making.

### **Operational Impact**

The PWMP has 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 ongoing 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**

The study coordinated with the Region and various external agencies, including the TRCA. Continuing collaboration 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**

The continuing transformation of the VMC’s urban landscape reflects the City’s planned growth. As the downtown grows, the demands on the quantity, quality, and connectivity of the parks and open space become more pronounced. Active parkland and social infrastructure are critical priorities for the VMC.

The VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan provides clear direction on how parks and open space can work with development to enhance the vitality and quality of life of residents, workers, and visitors of the VMC.

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 and balanced community.

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

### **Attachments**

1. VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan, Parks Master Plan, Janet Rosenberg & Studio, October 30, 2024.
2. VMC Parks & Wayfinding Master Plan, Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan, Cygnus Design Group, October 30, 2024.

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