

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, November 12, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: VAUGHAN BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTRE –
2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

FROM:

Zoran Postic, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

This report provides an update on key accomplishments from the programs and initiatives undertaken this past year by Economic Development's Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC).

Report Highlights

- VBEC operates a small business support centre and delivers small business and entrepreneurship advisory services.
- VBEC delivers leading entrepreneurial development services in the Greater Toronto Area and York Region. VBEC delivered key projects including business advisory consultation services, training, webinar and workshop delivery, and administered entrepreneurship programs such as, Starter Company Plus, and Summer Company. These projects aim to promote the growth of the City's business community and attract businesses and talent to Vaughan.
- In 2023, VBEC assisted 136 business starts and expansions, undertook 1,018 business consultations, responded to 8,066 inquiries, and provided 84 seminars to 1,608 participants.
- \$323,525 annual funding received from the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) in support of VBEC activities.

Report Highlights continued

- The VBEC Year in Review report provides a snapshot of upcoming transformative, ambitious, and sustainable and purpose-driven projects that will encourage new business start-up, growth and expansion in 2024.

Recommendations

1. THAT the Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre – 2023 Year in Review report be received for information.

Background

Economic Development works to profile and support Vaughan's transformative, ambitious and purpose-driven economy to make Vaughan a place where entrepreneurship, business, tourism, and art can prosper and grow.

Vaughan is **Transformative**. Our economy and business community continue to change the way business is done. The Economic Development department enables transformative projects.

Vaughan is **Ambitious**. The City of Vaughan undertakes world-class projects that elevate opportunities for our talent and businesses that strive to lead their industries.

Vaughan is **Purpose-Driven**. The City of Vaughan is proud to lead a community that is dedicated to doing business with purpose. Our community works to build Vaughan as a vibrant and inclusive community where all can prosper.

The City of Vaughan's Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC) is part of the City of Vaughan's Economic Development Department which receives funding from the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) to support programming.

VBEC delivers the largest programs amongst provincially funded Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBECs) in York Region. VBEC delivers one of the province's highest volumes of business consultations and inquiries. This is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit of Vaughan's residents and the City's vibrant and growing economy.

Ministry funding in support of VBEC activities has remained stable at \$323,525 annually (including a minimum amount of \$148,000 dedicated to direct to entrepreneur grants through Starter Company Plus and Summer Company). Over the past three-year term,

this represents close to \$1 million in provincial funding invested directly into Vaughan's small businesses and entrepreneurial community.

Vaughan has more than 19,700 businesses, that employ nearly 220,000 people. More than 87 per cent of local businesses employ fewer than 20 employees. VBEC is the City's support agency for this key business segment.

VBEC helps entrepreneurs and small business owners start or grow their business through several business consultation initiatives:

1. **Business advisory services** for the public, offered at no cost, both one-on-one and in small groups, answering critical questions about business planning and identifying next steps, resources, and opportunities.
2. **High quality entrepreneurship programs** like Starter Company Plus, Summer Company, and Better Your Business that deliver training, mentorship, and the opportunity for participants to apply for provincial grants.
3. **Focused seminar and workshop series** for entrepreneurs to connect with their peers and stay up to date with best practices. Including the Business Planning Launchpad Series and Small Business Week.
4. **Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations** that leverage the expertise and networks of local educational institutions, business accelerator and incubator programs for the benefit of Vaughan residents and businesses.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Committee of the Whole \(2\) Report Extract – Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre – 2022 Year in Review \(December 5, 2023\)](#)

[Committee of the Whole \(2\) Report Extract – Strengthening and Advancing Small Business and Entrepreneurship Services \(March 8, 2022\)](#)

[Committee of the Whole \(2\) Report Extract – Strategic Business Plan for Economic and Cultural Development, 2020-2023 \(September 24, 2019\)](#)

Analysis and Options

Economic Development supports businesses through advisory support, programs, education, and strategic partnerships. Through those services, VBEC helped 136 businesses start and expand in 2023.

In 2023, VBEC undertook 1,018 business consultations, responded to 8,066 inquiries, and provided 84 seminars to 1,608 participants.

1. Business Advisory Services Key Accomplishments in 2023

VBEC offers advice to entrepreneurs and businesses of all stages and sizes. Whether mulling a first business idea or looking for solutions to complicated business challenges, VBEC is here to help. The VBEC team offers one-on-one and small-group consultation services by appointment via tele- or video-conferencing or in-person.

Consultations with entrepreneurs and business owners could include discussions about:

- Business planning support, including marketing strategies, financial forecast and cash flow, and general business development.
- Information on the development process, regulations, zoning, licensing, permits, business registration and legal structure.
- End-to-end site selection support.
- Connections to funding sources, financing and grants.
- Connections to business professionals, organizations and resources from various levels of government.
- Research and business intelligence support.
- Business development and marketing support for tourism organizations.
- Business workshops, seminars, events and networking opportunities.

Consultations by Sector	
Sector	No. of Consultations
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	4
22 Utilities	1
23 Construction	33
31-33 Manufacturing	22
41 Wholesale Trade	21
44-45 Retail Trade	241
48-49 Transportation & Warehousing	5
51 Information & Cultural Industries	37
53 Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	4
54 Professional Scientific & Technical Services	228
56 Administrative & Support & Waste Management	30
61 Education Services	74
62 Health Care & Social Assistance	53

71 Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	28
72 Accommodation & Food Services	126
81 Other Services (Except Public Administration)	102
Other	9

Consultations by Month	
Month	No. of Consultations
January	93
February	124
March	94
April	94
May	107
June	90
July	84
August	115
September	63
October	36
November	89
December	29

Some highlights and key accomplishments from 2023 include:

In-Person Services

VBEC staff are available for in-person drop-in services at Vaughan City Hall five days per week (Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays).

VBEC continued its delivery model offering a hybrid business advisor approach offering virtual tele- or videoconferencing as well as in-person drop-in consultations and services at Vaughan City Hall five days per week (Monday to Friday).

Open for Business Construction support

These services continue to be provided via one-on-one advisory consultations. Economic Development staff actively canvassed in areas such as Woodbridge Ave and Kleinburg BIA and participated in a Public Information Centre (PIC) alongside Infrastructure Delivery staff to ensure that local businesses were aware these services are available.

Vaughan is an economy of entrepreneurs and job creators. The city boasts a high concentration of entrepreneurs with 33,680 self-employed residents and 11,699 businesses with 1-4 employees.

Local businesses have continued to be temporarily impacted during construction projects like the City's [Woodbridge Avenue Improvements and Streetscaping](#) and the [Kleinburg Village Improvements and Watermain replacement](#). These improvements are key for the long-term health of the city's economy and enable a climate for business success.

In August 2023, Economic Development launched the Vaughan Business Construction Support Program and website – vaughanbusiness.ca/ConstructionSupport

Further support for businesses affected by major city construction projects is now coordinated together with the Communications, Marketing and Engagement department. This includes providing small businesses with marketing and signage collateral and a tool kit to local businesses to inform the public that these businesses remain open while construction is underway in the area. The online resource also includes business advisory services including strategies for digital adoption, and more.

Mentorship

VBEC understands that diverse connections are at the core of innovation and company growth. The **Vaughan Business Café** offers entrepreneurs, small business owners, and corporate partners a way to connect to ask questions, share ideas, and form new professional relationships. The Café is an online platform for businesses to connect with collaborators, mentors, and advisors. It is open to all entrepreneurs and business professionals in Vaughan and is offered at no cost to participate.

Since launching in 2019, the platform has grown to 450 members and brokered 6,183 introductions to date, facilitating meaningful conversations in a purpose-built and proactive way.

2. Entrepreneurship Programs Key Accomplishments in 2023

Dedicated entrepreneurship programs offer residents and local business owners training, mentorship, and the opportunity for participants to apply for provincial grants.

Starter Company Plus

In addition to core business advisory services, the Province contracted the City to deliver the Starter Company Plus program. Starter Company Plus is a training and mentorship program to help businesses develop, grow and adapt to new ways of doing business as a result of lessons learned from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through Starter Company Plus, participants had the opportunity to apply for a Provincial grant of up to \$5,000 to implement their new business strategies.

Eligible applicants were supported under two training streams: existing brick-and-mortar, with training focused on supporting business owners with physical storefronts, office or industrial locations or new start-up and home-based businesses, with training focused on creating a comprehensive business plan, marketing strategy, and financial forecasts.

\$165,000 in provincial grants were directly invested in local business owners.

Some key statistics from the program are:

- Dollar value of investment leveraged: **\$ 3,625,846**
- 33 businesses funded and completed the program
- Total Applications: 298
- Businesses Started and Expanded: **61**
- Jobs Created: **97**
- Ward Breakdown of SCP grant recipients:

Ward	# Funded
1	7
2	4
3	8
4	4
5	4
Other	6
Total	33

Summer Company

The Summer Company program is funded by the Ontario government's MEDJCT. Administered locally in Vaughan by VBEC, Summer Company contributes to Vaughan's **Economic Prosperity and Social Capital** by helping new businesses start and teaching new business owners the skills they need to be our community's future leaders.

In addition to the opportunity to receive up to \$3,000 in provincial grant funding to start their businesses, students aged 15 to 29 years old are provided access to business advisory services and workshops delivered through Niagara University, facilitating university-level business training and mentorship for the program.

In 2023, VBEC worked with 11 students in the program. Through an effective outreach and marketing campaign, VBEC received applications from 47 students, 20 of whom were interviewed by VBEC staff.

The successful participants were celebrated at a kick-off event at Niagara University in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, in June. **38 participants** and guests attended an eventful evening of networking and idea sharing from some of Vaughan's student entrepreneurs and complimentary food and beverages.

At the end of the summer, each student received a Certificate of Completion from Niagara University.

\$33,000 in provincial grants were directly invested into local student businesses

Some key statistics from the 2023 program include:

- Total Revenue earned for all 11 businesses: **\$103,000**
- 11 student businesses funded and completed the program
- Businesses Started: **11**
- Jobs Created: **20**
- The median age of participants was 18 years old.
- Of the 11 accepted participants, 5 students were completing secondary school, and 6 were enrolled in post-secondary or graduate studies.
- Ventures represent a variety of industries, including professional services, manufacturing, and recreation.
- Ward Breakdown of Summer Company grant recipients:

Ward	# Funded
1	5
2	1
3	3
4	0
5	1
Other	1
Total	11

Better Your Business: Social and Environmental Sustainability Program

The Better Your Business program is a new program offered by the City of Vaughan that supported five Vaughan-based businesses in incorporating the United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their corporate practices.

In 2023 five businesses received one-on-one consultations with York University Professor Mark Terry, PhD, who helped guide the development of the participants' new sustainable business model to incorporate the UN's 17 SDGs. Once the new sustainable business models were completed, they were shared with the United Nations and once approved, each business received a certificate of compliance to communicate their leadership and commitment to being socially and environmentally sustainable to display for their business, customers, and clients.

The Better Your Business program helps Vaughan's business community become more socially and environmentally responsible by:

- Reducing their carbon footprint.
- Work towards being inclusive for all.
- Demonstrate ambitious leadership and a commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

This program represents a continuation of VBEC's previous leadership in social enterprise and corporate social responsibility, building on established networks of support, feeding into other opportunities and the capacity to support businesses to become ambitious and transformative.

3. Seminars and Workshops Key Accomplishments in 2023

VBEC provides one-stop services for Vaughan's aspiring entrepreneurs and existing business owners, with access to business information, resources, training and hands-on assistance to start or grow a business in Vaughan.

Annual Seminars and Workshops

84 seminars were delivered to 1,608 participants in 2023.

Throughout 2023, seminars and workshops were delivered on numerous topics including AI Tools for Small Business, Launch & Grow Your Food Venture, Tech Venture Series, Business Model Canvas & Customer Personas, Accessible Business, and others.

A number of these sessions were delivered through collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders including YSpace/York University, TechConnex, The Black Entrepreneurship Alliance (BEA), and Vaughan Public Libraries (VPL).

Business Planning Launchpad Series

921 residents received business planning support through the Launchpad Series.

VBEC presented this four-part workshop series, delivered multiple times throughout the year that helped entrepreneurs work on a business plan and create a viable budget and financial projections and get ready for a Starter Company Plus grant application. This was a free, virtual program designed for startups and established small businesses to get their ideas on paper through a step-by-step process of developing a business plan.

Training sessions and mentorship consultations with the entrepreneur advisor were delivered from March to November.

Small Business Week

Over the course of Small Business Week, a total of 302 participants attended 11 seminars, workshops, and networking events.

Celebrated annually in October, Small Business Week is a nationally recognized celebration of small businesses' contributions to our economy. The Business

Development Bank of Canada (BDC) has led national small business week celebrations for 45 years.

Small Business Week kicked-off on October 16, 2023 with an in-person networking event with a keynote presentation from Carlos Cadogan sharing more on 'The Future of DEI in Small Business' presented in partnership with TechConnex. Throughout the week, VBEC hosted the annual Vaughan Small Business Week programming through a combination of virtual seminars and in-person networking opportunities.

Programming was delivered in partnership with local business support organizations, including Vaughan Public Libraries, Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, YSpace/York University, The Black Entrepreneur Alliance (BEA), TechConnex, Futurpreneur, Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), and Professor Mark Terry on behalf of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, Youth Climate Report, and the Vaughan Better Your Business Program.

In partnership with YSpace and the Black Entrepreneurship Alliance, VBEC offered a fireside chat session during the small business week where 57 local food and beverage entrepreneurs participated in 'Being a Diverse Founder in the Food & Beverage Industry' session.

4. Strategic Partnerships Key Accomplishments in 2023

VBEC helps innovators take new ideas from conception to market by offering local commercialization support and access to a thriving innovation ecosystem. These partnerships help Economic Development to deliver on the Economic Prosperity, Investment and Social Capital Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan priority by contributing to efforts to build Vaughan as a hub for entrepreneurship.

The City's small business advisors are leaders in York Region and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in building partnerships to deliver robust and successful programs.

VBEC seeks partnerships and collaboration with governmental partners, non-governmental, not-for-profit private stakeholders, and occasionally, private sector, for-profit organizations. These organizations include:

York University's YSpace

YSpace is York University's innovation hub creating positive change by fostering a community of innovators, entrepreneurs, and changemakers. YSpace is home to YSpace Digital, a suite of virtual programs to support entrepreneurs from ideation to scale mode.

Through YSpace's Food & Beverage venture support VBEC was able to offer programming for food and beverage entrepreneurs. 95 local entrepreneurs were supported by VBEC and YSpace through the Food & Beverage program.

This partnership offered specialized workshops to support early-stage food and beverage entrepreneurs and to help grow this industry locally. This programming builds on the success of VBEC's partnership since 2020 with the YSpace Food Accelerator Program, a first-of-its-kind program in Ontario supported by York Region.

VBEC's partnership with York University's YSpace extends with support to early-stage technology ventures through the YSpace Venture Catalyst program. The program supported 40 entrepreneurs.

The program is designed to validate start-up ideas and bring a proof-of-concept to life. This program offers workshops and facilitated peer-to-peer mentorship sessions specifically for Vaughan-based ventures. These sessions were tailored to early-stage technology ventures and focused on building the right product, finding your customers, and getting venture funded.

TechConnex

TechConnex is a member-directed industry association focused on the growth of tech businesses and their people through the sharing of best practices, business insights, and bright ideas.

Continuing the partnership with TechConnex in 2023, additional tech-focused workshops and seminars were delivered throughout the year to 177 businesses under a jointly hosted 'Future of Technology' series, including a keynote session during Small Business Week.

To date, the 'Future of Technology' series has included smart cities, mobility and transportation, and artificial intelligence. Ventures, early-stage, and growing, will benefit from this series as businesses look to enhance technology tools to build resilience and scalability.

ventureLAB

ventureLAB is Vaughan's provincially designated Regional Innovation Centre (RIC). Economic Development supported the opening of a Hardware Catalyst Incubator for health technology companies.

Through a \$2.5 million investment from the Government of Ontario, ventureLAB and Sterling Industries operated a MedTech-specific Hardware Catalyst Incubator for hardware and semiconductor companies.

Vaughan Chamber of Commerce (VCC)

The VCC is a membership, networking and business association in Vaughan. With a growing membership of engaged businesses, the Vaughan Chamber brings together Vaughan's Business Community and represents organizations from all sectors of the economy.

As part of The City of Vaughan and Economic Development's yearly partnership with the VCC, VBEC participated in several events and networking opportunities throughout the year to collaborate and network with the Vaughan business community.

Key event partnerships with the VCC included:

- The **34th Annual Vaughan Business Achievement Awards Dinner** on May 17 celebrating business excellence in the City of Vaughan as the sponsor of the Small Business of the Year award.
- The **14th Annual Women's Symposium** on November 15, York Regions' largest and most dynamic gathering of women business professionals, as an exhibitor.
- And **monthly networking** events as a sponsor throughout the year on behalf of Economic Development.

Ogo Tawa - Black Artrepreneur Program (BAP)

VBEC provided advisory services, introductions to other Provincial SBEC offices and showcased VBEC services to 28 Ogo Tawa program participants in 2023.

Ògo Tàwa, is a creative art and culture non-profit organization that helps underserved and under employed artists of African descent enhance their financial security by providing a platform to showcase and sell their creative works. Ògo Tàwa leads the

Black Artrepreneur Program (BAP) a program that is designed to support business skill development for Black Canadian artists entrepreneurs, and those from the creative industries.

VBEC and Economic Development are a community support organization to Ògo Tàwa's BAP, and provide participants with facilitation, one-on-one advisory and introductions to other Provincial SBEC offices based on participants' locations across Ontario.

Black Entrepreneurs Alliance (BEA)

VBEC delivered seminar content and showcased VBEC services to 26 BEA program participants in 2023.

Since BEA's launch in 2021, Black Creek Community Health Centre and York University have worked with many community organizations, government funders and local partners to offer innovative programs to boost entrepreneurship and create a more inclusive ecosystem for Black entrepreneurs to thrive.

The food program provides a community of agri-food entrepreneurs and supporters with the goal is to empower entrepreneurs with the skills and framework needed to validate and launch food businesses into the market.

VBEC and Economic Development are pleased to be a community support organization and provide facilitation and one-on-one advisory to participants of the Product Feasibility Bootcamp.

York Entrepreneurship Development Institute (YEDI)

VBEC has delivered seminar content and showcased VBEC services to 44 international YEDI program participants in 2023.

York Entrepreneurship Development Institute (YEDI) is recognized as a leader in entrepreneurship education and training, offering a range of options for entrepreneurs to reach their educational and growth goals.

VBEC provided facilitation and advisory to participants of their international program.

Vaughan Public Libraries (VPL)

VBEC and VPL jointly host small business-related seminars, including topics on Seniorpreneurship (Aging well), Entrepreneurship for Old Adults, and information sessions promoting our Starter Company and Summer Company programs.

VPL is Vaughan’s public library system serving communities in the City of Vaughan and consists of twelve libraries. VPL also hosts hundreds of programs and events each year catering to a wide range of audiences including local residents, students, and entrepreneurs. VBEC continues to collaborate with VPL on a number of seminars and workshops including topics on Seniorpreneurship(Aging well), Entrepreneurship for Old Adults, and information sessions promoting our Starter Company and Summer Company programs.

Small Business Centres of Ontario Network

The SBC Ontario network has formally organized as a non-profit professional association in 2021 and includes managers, business advisors, and teams from all 54 of the province-wide SBEC locations, which includes VBEC, as well as industry leaders and partners. The association’s goals are to support the growth and professional development of its centres business advisors, to advocate on behalf of small business centres and to seek funding opportunities to support the network.

2024 Look Ahead

As small businesses in Vaughan account for more than 87 per cent of all businesses in the city, small businesses are the backbone of our thriving economy. Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre, the Economic Development Department and the City of Vaughan want to help businesses grow. VBEC will continue to deliver service excellence into 2024.

2024 Upcoming Activities	
1. Business advisory services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-Person Services continue• Construction Support Program continuation• Vaughan Business Café renewed agreement with platform provider Ten Thousand Coffees

<p>2. Entrepreneurship Programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starter Company Plus – target 33 businesses funded • Summer Company – target 11 student business owners funded • Better Your Business: Social and Environmental Sustainability Program – target completion of 5 strategic plans • Continue to seek out opportunities for external, Provincial and/or Federal funding announcements to leverage incremental, net new funding investment for the benefit of residents and businesses in the City of Vaughan
<p>3. Seminars and Workshops</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver Small Business Week 2024 • Continuation of the Business Plan Launchpad Series • Continuation of the YSpace Food Venture and Tech Venture series' • Continuation of the TechConnex Future of Technology series • Additional topics offered will include Explore Alternative Revenue Streams for Brick & Mortar Businesses, Shopify & Amazon Techniques, Sourcing, Tax Considerations, and Intellectual Property for Small Businesses
<p>4. Strategic Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships continue with YSpace, TechConnex, ventureLAB, Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, Ogo Tawa - Black Artrepreneur Program, Black Entrepreneurs Alliance (BEA), and Vaughan Public Libraries. • The SBC Ontario Network had selected Vaughan as the host City for the second consecutive year for its annual in-person conference in May 2024 bringing 150-200 small business advisors from across the Province into Vaughan

Financial Impact

None.

Operational Impact

None.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre (VBEC) - 2023 Year in Review complements communications and outreach strategies to help raise the profile of Vaughan's economy.

A copy of the publication will be uploaded on vaughanbusiness.ca and distributed to critical local/regional partners and stakeholders, such as York Region Economic Development, the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, other Chambers of Commerce, consuls in the Ontario and Canadian marketplaces, ministries, local and regional stakeholders, and prospective business relocation opportunities. Sharing this publication with key stakeholders will help raise the City's profile, attract new partners and investments, and support the expansion of the local business community.

Conclusion

The City of Vaughan's entrepreneurial spirit defines the City's thriving business community and continues to attract investment to the city. With the support of Council, Economic Development continues to provide service excellence to local entrepreneurs and small business owners as part of the 2022-2026 Term of Council.

Staff will finalize and circulate the designed infographic of the unit's Year in Review to Members of Council and on Economic Development's microsite and social channels for public distribution and marketing purposes.

For more information, please contact: Don De Los Santos, Senior Manager, Economic Services, don.delossantos@vaughan.ca.

Attachments

1. Vaughan Business and Entrepreneurship Centre – 2023 Year in Review, Economic Development, Nov. 12, 2024 (attachment to be provided prior to meeting)

Prepared by

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