

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, February 5, 2025

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – STRATEGIC INVESTMENT
CONCIERGE PROGRAM

FROM:

Michael Genova, Deputy City Manager, Strategic Initiatives

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To secure strategic investments into the City, Economic Development (EcDev) is seeking Council endorsement of the new Strategic Investment Concierge Program (program criteria and service delivery model) that will help attract high-impact commercial, office, and industrial investments as per the outlined criteria that future-proof the local economy and see them move through the City's Development Planning, Development Finance, Building Standards, and Business Licensing processes predictably, collaboratively, and quickly.

Report Highlights

- Economic Development, in partnership with Planning, Growth Management and Housing Delivery, and Finance, received funding through the 2025 budget to launch a multi-year pilot program to support strategic investments with a development application concierge program. This is in part as a response to trends in Ontario and Vaughan.
- An economic development investment concierge program provides “white glove” service through the various municipal offices to investors behind development projects that meet selected criteria as high-priority investments.
- Vaughan is competing with other municipalities as a site for investment. Many of these competitors provide a concierge service for high-value strategic investments.
- To implement a concierge program as outlined above, Economic Development, in partnership with Planning, Growth Management and Housing Delivery, and Finance, received funding through the 2025 budget to launch a multi-year pilot program to support strategic investments with a development application concierge program.
- To launch Vaughan’s investment concierge program as a transparent and equitable service offering for investors, staff are seeking Council endorsement of:
 - (1) the application approval criteria, and
 - (2) the program delivery model.
 - The recommended set of criteria was developed in consultation with local, regional, and provincial stakeholders and the local business community.
 - The proposed program delivery framework follows a case management model that empowers a case manager/concierge to manage a client's service delivery cycle through the municipality from start to finish.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council endorse the proposed concierge program evaluation criteria and service delivery model as outlined in this report; and
2. THAT Council delegate authority to the City Manager (or designate) to accept applicants in the proposed program based on the Council-endorsed evaluation criteria and in consultation with the Deputy City Managers of Planning, Growth Management and Housing Delivery, Corporate Services, City Treasurer, and Chief Financial Officer, and Strategic Initiatives, and to execute, renew, amend, or terminate any necessary participant agreements, in a form satisfactory to Legal Services; and
3. THAT Council delegate authority to the City Manager (or designate) to negotiate, execute, amend, renew and terminate Memoranda of Understanding with external agencies to assist with the delivery of the proposed program in consultation with the Deputy City Managers of Planning, Growth Management

- and Housing Delivery, Corporate Services, City Treasurer, and Chief Financial Officer, and Strategic Initiatives, in a form satisfactory to Legal Services; and
4. THAT staff provide annual reports on the program to future Committees of the Whole.

Background

Economic Development, in partnership with Planning, Growth Management and Housing Delivery, and Finance, received funding through the 2025 budget to launch a multi-year pilot program to support strategic investments with a development application concierge program. This is in part as a response to trends in Ontario and Vaughan.

The investment concierge program pilot program was proposed and approved to address competition from other municipalities and emerging opportunities in Ontario's economic development.

The Province of Ontario has become aggressive in attracting new investments into the province in strategic sectors like automotive and health. Provincial agencies like Invest Ontario and the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade (MEDJCT), as well as Toronto Global, have increased sales activity abroad, leading to more inquiries for local municipalities. For example, Vaughan's open investment pipeline has grown to roughly sixty leads seeking space in the GTA.

In addition, Vaughan's established and emerging sectors are seeing increasingly mixed-use and complex development proposals that can benefit from efficient inter-departmental collaboration. Economic Development is seeing a trend of increased requests for support through these processes, identifying the need for clear expectations and an equitable and transparent framework for additional support.

An economic development investment concierge program provides "white glove" service through the various municipal offices to investors behind development projects that meet selected criteria as high-priority investments.

For the applicant, a concierge program provides:

- Enhanced business advisory through a project team that, at the outset of the project, can help investors identify opportunities to streamline and enhance their projects. These can include:
 - Grants and other business development opportunities through Economic Development.

- Identification of opportunities to maximize savings through Development Finance.
- Reducing errors in development applications and noting potential points of contention with external agencies through Development Planning.
- Considering relevant building code restrictions through Building Standards
- Supporting business licensing through Bylaw and Licensing.
- Predictability and clarity of the City-led processes by providing a “Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting” that clearly outlines the stages the application must pass with the responsibilities and deliverables listed for the relevant city departments and the applicant.
- A dedicated concierge to facilitate applications through the Roadmap to Ribbon-cutting and across departments that will provide:
 - Easy access to the City and collaborative support across departments.
 - A consistent point of contact (“concierge”) with a complete history of the strategic investment from application to ribbon-cutting.
 - Support for department-specific subject matter experts and file managers who are supporting the investment through their processes.

For the City, a concierge program is a key service offering to promote to prospective investors.

Vaughan is competing with other municipalities as a site for investment. Many of these competitors provide a concierge service for high-value strategic investments.

A municipal concierge program is in line with economic development best practices and is currently in place in most surrounding municipalities. These programs help position municipalities as investment-ready and investment-friendly and improve a city’s reputation as a destination for investment.

Investment concierge programs are in place in various Greater Toronto Area (GTA) municipalities. Table 1 summarizes which development processes these programs assist applicants with and how they have been implemented.

Municipality and Program	Development Applications	Building Permit Applications	Team Composition
Toronto – Gold Star	x	x	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One (1) Economic Development staff liaising with other City divisions

Richmond Hill – Approvals Plus	x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development (team lead) • Development Planning (team lead) • Other internal departments as needed
Halton Hills – Concierge Program	x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting Chief Administrative Officer • Expeditor and Business • Development Portfolio Manager • Commissioner of Planning and Development • Commissioner of Transportation and Public Works • Director of Development Review • Director of Planning Policy • Director of Development Engineering • Director of Strategic Initiatives
Town of Kawartha Lakes – Development Concierge Program	x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development (team lead) • Large Developments and Urban Design (Planning officers) • Development Planning • Chief Building Official • Development Engineering
Town of Whitby – Concierge Program	x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development • Planning • Building • Sustainability • Engineering • Fire • External agencies (Region of Durham, Elexicon, Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority)
City of Barrie – Employment Development Concierge Program	x	x	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Development Officer (team lead) • Development Services • Building • Communications • Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Policy & Analysis • Supervisor of Growth Management

City of Windsor – Investment Support Program	x	x	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development (team lead) Other internal departments as needed
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Figure 1 Jurisdictional Scan Summary

Previous Reports/Authority

[Vaughan Economic Development Action Plan](#), Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report, April 10, 2024.

[Site Selectors’ Guild Conference 2024 - Review](#), Committee of the Whole (2) Report, May 14, 2024.

Analysis and Options

To launch Vaughan’s investment concierge program as a transparent and equitable service offering for investors, staff are seeking Council endorsement of: (1) the application approval criteria, and (2) the program delivery model.

1. Program Criteria

Staff are recommending that applicants with high-impact new commercial, industrial, or office developments, large additions, or major renovations must meet at least two of the following six criteria to be eligible for the investment concierge program:

- Industrial projects exceeding 9,000 square meters (roughly 100,000 sq. ft).
- Retail projects of at least 2,500 square meters (roughly 30,000 sq. ft.) in Vaughan’s growth and intensification areas identified in the Official Plan or by a Secondary Plan (e.g., grocery stores).
- Office projects exceeding 4,600 square meters (roughly 50,000 sq. ft.) to match York Region Office incentives thresholds.
- Projects contributing to the retention or creation of more than 150 new jobs, or 40 new jobs in the Professional and Scientific Sector or in the Skilled Trades. This is in line with both Provincial density targets and economic development best practices.
- Projects with a capital investment of at least \$30 million (to match thresholds for investment incentives from partner organizations).
- High-profile or globally recognized companies presenting significant potential to enhance Vaughan’s reputation as determined by the City Manager in

consultation with the Deputy City Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Director, Economic Development, or designates.

Please note that applications in the following may be given additional consideration for inclusion in the program over and above the six criteria: high-priority projects as identified by sectors in the city's Economic Development Action Plan, or in the activities of strategic partners including York Region, Toronto Global, Invest Ontario, Invest Canada or the Federal Trade Commissioners Service.

The recommended set of criteria was developed in consultation with local, regional, and provincial stakeholders and the local business community.

Staff in Economic Development worked with colleagues from York Region, Invest Ontario, Toronto Global, and Global Affairs Canada to understand investment priorities for those agencies. The set of criteria is in line with the priorities of other government agencies and allows the City of Vaughan to leverage the efforts of regional, provincial, and federal colleagues.

Staff also took lessons learned from participation in the 2024 Site Selectors Guild Conference into account when drafting criteria. These lessons were verified through conversations with the local real estate and development community.

2. Investment Concierge Program Delivery Model

The proposed program delivery framework follows a case management model that empowers a case manager/concierge to manage a client's service delivery cycle through the municipality from start to finish.

At a high level, a case management approach follows four stages to service delivery:

1. Intake

- Economic Development will work with Communications, Marketing, and Engagement to launch an application portal on vaughanbusiness.ca.
- The program will have a rolling intake.
- Economic Development staff will promote the program to prospective investors through its marketing channels and activities.
- In partnership with Development Planning, Development Finance, Building Standards, Development Engineering, and Bylaw and Licensing, Economic Development will provide recommendations to the City Manager on an as-needed basis for program acceptance.

2. Needs Assessment
 - In partnership with Development Planning, Development Finance, Building Standards, Development Engineering, and Bylaw and Licensing, Economic Development will review applications to identify the stages in the applicant's roadmap to ribbon-cutting and opportunities for enhanced service.
3. Service Planning (Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting)
 - In partnership with the investor, staff will finalize a tailored Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of the applicant, city departments, and external agencies.
4. Service Delivery, Monitoring, and Ongoing Evaluation.
 - Economic Development staff will monitor the progress of the participating investment and be responsible for facilitating the investment through the Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting in partnership with department leads, communicating with the program participant on an ongoing basis and, adjusting timelines as needed, providing ongoing updates to and coordinating internal staff.
 - Drafting annual reports and recommendations for service and program enhancement and/or improvement.

Through the 2025 budget, Economic Development has one staff person to operate the program.

The success of the program will be measured based on a variety of factors. Council will receive annual updates.

The concierge program aims to achieve the following service enhancements: enhanced business advisory to help businesses grow, predictability throughout the application process, and shorten the time between application and business opening. To achieve these outcomes, staff will measure a series of outputs, including:

- Number of qualified applications.
- The number of program participants supported to ribbon-cutting, including the number of agreed-upon roadmaps.
- Client satisfaction as measured by program exit surveys.
- Value of investments supported through the program.
- Number of new jobs and/or number of new jobs supported.

Financial Impact

None.

Operational Impact

This program is being delivered in partnership between the following portfolios:

- Strategic Initiatives (Economic Development).
- Planning, Growth Management, and Housing Delivery (Development Planning, Policy Planning and Environmental Sustainability and Building Standards).
- Infrastructure Development (Development Engineering).
- Corporate Services (Development Finance).
- Community Services (Bylaw and Licensing).

Departments outlined above will participate in project teams as program participants are accepted.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The launch of a strategic investment concierge program in Vaughan would bring the City in line with municipal economic development best practices in Ontario.

Conclusion

To support incoming investments of strategic value, staff are launching an investment concierge program. To ensure that the program is transparent and equitable, staff are seeking endorsement of the program's evaluation criteria and program delivery model.

Once approved, staff will work towards launching the program in Q2/3, 2025. This will require:

- Finalization of the Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting.
- Roles and Responsibilities of the various portfolios.
- Engagement with external agencies and finalization of Memoranda of Understanding as required.
- Finalization of the program's branding.
- Recruitment for the Concierge position.

For more information, please contact: Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development.

Attachments

1. Presentation material: "Economic Development Investment Concierge Service".
2. Appendix A. Eligibility Matrix and Comparison.

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