

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SMART CITY INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT INCLUSION AND
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FROM:

Michael Genova, Deputy City Manager, Strategic Initiatives

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To inform Council on upcoming smart city projects to advance inclusion and community outreach goals in 2025 and 2026.

Report Highlights

- The City of Vaughan is committed to fostering an accessible and inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. As technology continues to evolve, municipalities have an opportunity to harness emerging technologies to improve accessibility, enhance service delivery, and foster greater community participation.
- The City has taken many steps to advance accessibility, equity and inclusion. Building on these efforts, City staff have identified a unique opportunity to leverage existing funding to deploy smart city solutions to support the City's accessibility and inclusion goals.
- Economic Development staff, in partnership with the Inclusion and Community Outreach office will be supporting three initiatives: Website Accessibility Enhancement, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and GoodMaps Pilot Expansion, and Hyper-Local Interactive Digital Signs.
- In February 2025, staff briefed the Vaughan Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on these three initiatives, including project goals, next steps, and timelines for pilot or implementation.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council receives this report for information.

Background

The City of Vaughan is committed to fostering an accessible and inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. As technology continues to evolve, municipalities have an opportunity to harness emerging technologies to improve accessibility, enhance service delivery, and foster greater community participation.

Over 54,000 people in Vaughan, which is more than one-fifth of the city's population, have disabilities, according to the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). Vaughan has the highest amount of people with disabilities among the nine municipalities in York Region. The 2022 CSD found that 27% of the Canadian population over the age of 15 have disabilities.

Technology has the potential to break down barriers and create more inclusive communities by expanding access to services, information and opportunities. Since the implementation of the Council-approved Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan 2022-2026, Addressing Anti-Black Racism Action Plan 2024-2031, and the 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, the City has taken many steps to advance accessibility, equity and inclusion. Building on these efforts, staff has identified a unique opportunity to leverage existing funding to deploy smart city solutions in support of the City's accessibility and inclusion goals.

The funds from the 2024 Budget, initially set aside for developing a mobile app, will now be redirected to support three initiatives focused on improving equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

The 2024 Budget allocated funds to Economic Development's Smart City unit to support the development of a mobile app for residents. However, the new City of Vaughan website has improved the mobile user experience of vaughan.ca and there is no longer a need for a mobile app.

Economic Development staff, in partnership with the Inclusion and Community Outreach business unit will be supporting three initiatives: Website Accessibility Enhancement, CNIB and GoodMaps Pilot Expansion, and Hyper-Local Interactive Digital Signs.

These initiatives aim to enhance equity, address accessibility gaps, foster inclusion and modernize communications. These projects also align Council-approved plans and with the 2018-2022 Smart City Task Force recommendations. As Vaughan continues to be a Smart City leader, deploying these initiatives will further establish the City as a regional innovator, setting a benchmark for other municipalities.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027](#), Community of the Whole (1), October 31, 2023

[Multi-Year Accessibility Planning: Stakeholder Engagement Report \(Attachment 2\)](#), Community of the Whole (1), October 31, 2023

[Enhancing Independent Indoor Navigation for People with Vision-related Disabilities in City Facilities](#), Committee of the Whole (2), March 19, 2024

Analysis and Options

In February 2025, staff briefed the Vaughan Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on these three initiatives, including project goals, next steps, and timelines for pilot or implementation.

During the presentation, Economic Development staff, in partnership with the Inclusion and Community Outreach business unit, briefed the AAC on the goals, next steps, and timelines for pursuing each of these initiatives. Each initiative aims to enhance equity, accessibility, and inclusion in Vaughan's facilities and communications.

Project selection criteria included:

- Alignment with Council-approved plans and the 2018-2022 Smart City Task Force recommendations.
- A strong business case for advancing Vaughan's position as a smart and inclusive city by:
 - Improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities;
 - Modernizing communication networks and service delivery; and
 - Fostering economic opportunities through local advertising and business promotion.
- Proven implementation and use by other leading cities.
- The opportunity for Vaughan to be the first in the Greater Toronto Area to demonstrate leadership by integrating the solution.
- Low-risk, low-cost, and low-complexity to implement the solution within the 2022-2026 Term of Council.

2025-2026 Initiatives

1. Website Accessibility Audit

The first initiative focuses on conducting an accessibility audit to ensure Vaughan's website complies with accessibility standards and laws. Content is regularly checked to ensure it complies with World Wide Web Consortium – Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA standards at minimum, and the City is working towards WCAG 2.2.

This initiative aims to create an inclusive digital experience for residents, businesses, and visitors, including individuals with disabilities. The assessment is currently in progress, with recommendations and an implementation framework expected by Q2 2025. Implementation, carried out by various stakeholder departments, will continue through 2026. The Inclusion and Community Outreach business unit is leading this effort.

2. CNIB and GoodMaps Pilot Expansion

The second initiative involves the expansion of the CNIB and GoodMaps indoor wayfinding pilot, which has now been implemented at Vaughan City Hall and selected Vaughan Public Libraries and community centres. This project aims to remove physical and informational barriers for individuals with vision loss by providing step-by-step navigation in City facilities. The expanded pilot would allow the City to test this technology in additional City facilities, including community centres and libraries.

Expanding this initiative offers greater independence for these people with vision-related disabilities. The proposed timeline for this project is to add additional facilities in 2026, led by the Inclusion and Community Outreach business unit.

3. Hyper-Local Interactive Digital Signs

The third initiative proposes expanding the City's communication network through the installation of interactive kiosks in key locations in Vaughan. These kiosks will display information about local services, cultural events, and hyper-local advertisements that support diverse businesses. The first phase of this project could target main street areas in Kleinburg, Woodbridge, and the VMC, before expanding to Thornhill and Yonge-Steeles.

By enabling the communication that engages and supports specific communities in Vaughan, this project will enhance inclusivity, promote economic growth, and modernize Vaughan's main streets. This initiative would be co-led by the Smart City unit, the Inclusion and Community Outreach business unit, and Communication, Marketing, and Engagement department's Strategic Engagement business unit.

Financial Impact

Funding for these initiatives will be sourced from the existing approved capital budget of \$350,020.

Operational Impact

The proposed projects were identified in consultation with the City's Inclusion and Community outreach business unit to maximize accessibility benefits to the community. All initiatives will be procured through Procurement Services.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Staff will share this initiative with our regional partners and neighbouring municipalities to foster knowledge-sharing, promote alignment of regional accessibility initiatives, and strengthen collective impact.

Conclusion

These initiatives collectively address key priorities for the City's Smart City, Inclusion and Community Outreach, and Strategic Engagement units, advancing Vaughan's position as a smart and inclusive city.

Economic Development will collaborate with Inclusion and Community Outreach and Strategic Engagement to procure vendors and implement these initiatives.

For more information, please contact: Raphael Costa, Director, Economic Development, Ext. 8891

Attachments

N/A

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