

## Committee of the Whole (2) Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, April 8, 2025

**WARD(S):** ALL

**TITLE:** VAUGHAN RESTAURANT FESTIVAL – SUMMER 2025  
WINTER 2026

**FROM:**

Michael Genova, Deputy City Manager, Strategic Initiatives

**ACTION:** DECISION

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**Purpose**

In response to Mayor Steven Del Duca's and Ward 2 Councillor Adriano Volpentesta's Members' Resolution from Committee of the Whole (2), March 18, 2025, staff are seeking Council authority to deliver the Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival pilot program, consisting of two cohorts in summer 2025 and winter 2026.

**Report Highlights**

- To support the local economy and encourage residents to shop locally, Mayor Steven Del Duca and Councillor Adriano Volpentesta introduced a Members' Resolution on March 18, 2025, which requested that staff organize a pilot restaurant festival in 2025 and 2026.
- Vaughan boasts a vibrant restaurant scene, featuring over 750 dining and drinking establishments that employ more than 10,200 people.
- Vaughan's restaurants are key to the City's destination development and marketing profile.
- Jurisdictions like the City of Toronto, King City, and City of Markham support this cluster through restaurant festivals of their own.
- Based on Mayor Del Duca's and Councilor Volpentesta's Members' Resolution, staff are recommending two program sessions in summer 2025, and winter 2026.

## **Report Highlights Continued**

- The program application process and eligibility criteria are outlined in Attachment 1.
- Participating restaurants will be required to provide a fully refundable deposit in the amount of \$500 and will receive increased promotional and marketing activity led by the City of Vaughan, leading up to and throughout the program.

## **Recommendations**

1. THAT Council approves the Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival, as outlined in this report, as a pilot program to be delivered in the summer of 2025 and winter of 2026; and
2. THAT City staff report back to a future Committee of the Whole meeting after the pilot program has been completed to report on the pilot program.

## **Background**

***As part of ongoing efforts to support the local economy and encourage residents and visitors to promote local Canadian businesses, Mayor Steven Del Duca and Councillor Adriano Volpentesta introduced a Members' Resolution on March 18, 2025, which requested that staff organize a pilot restaurant festival in 2025 and 2026.***

The Members' Resolution was unanimously endorsed by Council. It calls on staff to further support local businesses in the face of threats from the U.S. to impose tariffs by delivering a prix-fixe menu restaurant festival.

***Vaughan boasts a vibrant restaurant scene, featuring over 750 dining and drinking establishments that employ more than 10,200 people.***

Restaurants contribute to various industries in Vaughan, including transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, processing and packaging, wholesale distribution, retail, and food services. They participate in our farm-to-fork agri-food and food processing sector, which employs more than 20,000 people. These establishments also contribute to Vaughan's vibrant local neighbourhoods.

***Vaughan's restaurants are key to the City's destination development and marketing profile.***

Boasting an incredible culinary scene with restaurants and dining experiences that offer flavours from around the world, the Vaughan food scene is a strong driver for

Vaughan's tourism profile. Tourism Vaughan supports this key cluster through outreach to restaurants and establishments as well as marketing campaigns.

Key initiatives to support the local restaurant industry are highlighted by:

- The VisitVaughan.ca/Dine directory.
- Ongoing blog and itinerary publications.
- Consumer-facing marketing in high-profile locations like the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC).
- Tourism Vaughan's Instagram profile with nearly 3,000 followers.

The Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival would be an important tactic that adds to this support.

***Jurisdictions like the City of Toronto, King City, and City of Markham support this cluster through restaurant festivals of their own.***

Toronto, King, and Markham are known for Summer/Winterlicious, Taste of King, and Jazzlicious, respectively. These programs have grown in popularity. They provide pre-established menus at select establishments across the participating region. Participants can enjoy premium menus at discounted rates, aiming to increase foot traffic during off-season periods.

These festivals have emerged in various locations since the launch of Winterlicious in Toronto in 2003.

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

[Committee of the Whole \(2\) - Report Extract - Vaughan Restaurant Festival - Summer 2025/Winter 2026 \(March 18, 2025\)](#)

[Committee of the Whole \(2\) – Report Extract – Tourism Vaughan Action Plan – 2025 \(Feb. 11, 2025\)](#)

## **Analysis and Options**

***Based on Mayor Del Duca's and Councilor Volpentesta's Members' Resolution, staff are recommending two program sessions in summer 2025, and winter 2026.***

Economic Development is proposing the following schedule, respectively, for each of the two sessions:

- Summer 2025: **Monday, July 21 – Monday, August 4, 2025.**
- Winter 2026: **Q1 (TBD).**

***The program application process and eligibility criteria are outlined in Attachment 1.***

The summer 2025 pilot program as outlined in Attachment 1 will be delivered on the following timeline:

- **April 8, 2025:** Economic Development, through Tourism Vaughan, launches official dedicated landing page on VisitVaughan.ca where interested participants can sign up for news/updates on the program. Communications package/News Release announces program, organized and distributed by the Communications, Marketing and Engagement Department.
- **May 1, 2025:** Application form and program portal opens. The communications package is distributed by Communications, Marketing and Engagement, announcing program intake.
- **May 2 – May 15, 2025:** Marketing campaign launches to recruit participating restaurants on all city platforms.
- **May 15, 2025:** Application deadline – program intake closed.
- **May 15, 2025 – June 30, 2025:** Economic Development hosts information sessions for participating businesses to assist in planning and preparation of the program.
- **June 1, 2025:** Participants chosen and notified.
- **June 23, 2025:** Visitor-focused marketing begins on all City and Tourism channels, including via social media and out-of-home tactics (billboards, TTC/GO Train ads/etc.).
- **June 23 – July 2:** Marketing and communications continue to be disseminated across all channels to promote the program's launch.
- **July 21, 2025:** Program launch event.
- **August 4, 2025:** Program closes.

***Participating restaurants will be required to provide a fully refundable deposit in the amount of \$500 and will receive increased promotional and marketing activity led by the City of Vaughan leading up to and throughout the program.***

The primary benefit to restaurants participating in Vaughan Flavours is increased marketing. In other jurisdictions, participants are charged a fee to help offset costs. Toronto, for example, has charged anywhere from \$700 to \$1,300 to participate in the program.

Given that this is a pilot program, staff are proposing that the fee be refundable to participants of Vaughan Flavours. This is to ensure that restaurants participate in good faith throughout the program period.

By participating in Vaughan Flavours, restaurants will receive promotion through all city channels, encouraging customers to dine at their establishment during the program period. This added marketing benefit should generate future opportunities to dine at their restaurants.

### **Financial Impact**

All budget for this pilot program will be allocated from existing Economic Development and Tourism Vaughan operating funds.

### **Operational Impact**

Economic Development will work with Communications, Marketing, and Engagement to promote the Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival. Community Services will support confirmation of bylaw compliance, with Finance supporting deposit collection and refund.

### **Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

There are neighbouring municipalities and communities that have been hosting food festivals of a similar nature. The recommended delivery date of the Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival complements other festival dates.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the Members' Resolution by Mayor Del Duca and Councillor Volpentesta, Economic Development is recommending launching the Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival for summer 2025, with intake for applications opening May 1, 2025. Economic Development also recommends running a second phase of the program in winter 2026, which would directly align with the off-season of the industry and provide additional support to the Vaughan culinary scene during a time when it is most needed.

As immediate next steps, Economic Development through Tourism Vaughan and in collaboration with the Communications, Marketing and Engagement team, will begin to create promotional materials, the application document(s), marketing plans, all with a project work-back plan from the proposed summer launch date of **July 21, 2025**, and the anticipated winter 2026 program, as per the results of the initial launch program.

**For more information**, please contact: Don De Los Santos, Manager, Economic Services, ext. 8874

### **Attachments**

1. Vaughan Flavours Restaurant Festival Application Guidelines and Eligibility

### **Prepared by**

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