

Sister City Update: Vaughan & Grand Rapids

IGR Subcommittee – April 13, 2026

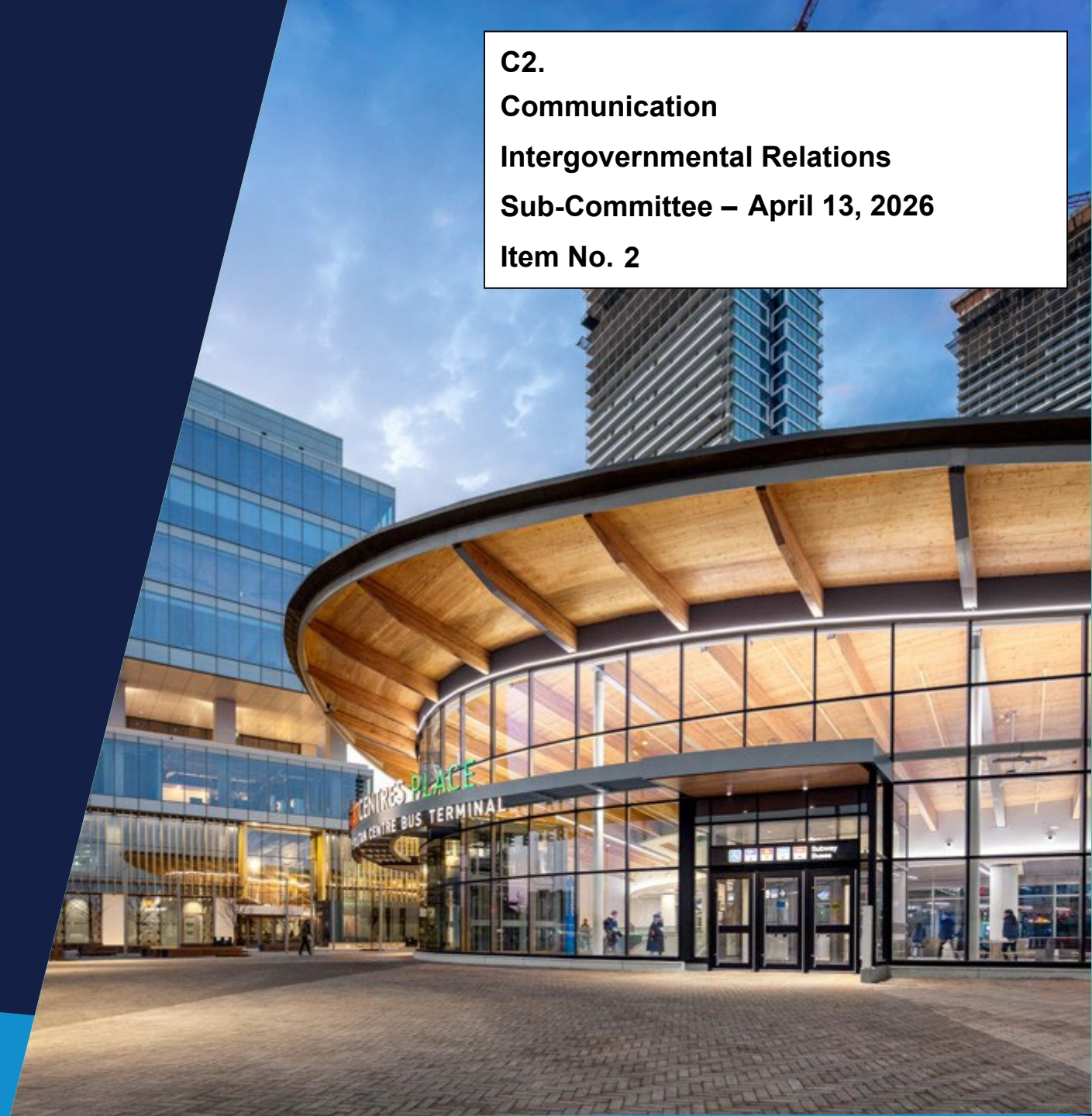
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Communication

Intergovernmental Relations

Sub-Committee – April 13, 2026

Item No. 2



Agenda

- **Strategic Context**
- **Why Grand Rapids**
- **Strategic Alignment with Vaughan**
- **Engagement Highlights**
- **What This Partnership Enables**
- **Similar Examples**
- **Progress and Next Steps**

Strategic Context

A Gateway Economy to the U.S. Great Lakes Region

- The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Region represents an \$8 Trillion economic corridor
- Vaughan is strategically positioned within this integrated North American supply chain
- Economic Development priority: build a sustainable and structured pathway to a major economic corridor by:
 - Diversifying export markets
 - Strengthening supply chain integration
 - Expanding cross-border collaboration for local businesses



Why Grand Rapids?

Identified by Ontario Agent General in Chicago as a priority partner due to strong alignment with City of Vaughan:

- Diverse economy anchored in healthcare, automotive, and advanced manufacturing.
- Commitment to Public Art, culture, DEI, and tourism
- Strong food processing cluster
- Innovative housing strategy supporting livable and buildable communities
- Strong public/private partnership framework
- Geographic proximity resulting in efficient cross-border collaboration
- No existing Canadian sister-city relationship



Why Grand Rapids

A Globally Connected City:

- Medical Mile Cluster : Life sciences and MedTech hub with strong focus on R&D, medical school, and hospital linkages (Health and Research Cluster)
- The Grand Rapids Smart Zone (Innovation and Commercialization)
- The Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center-West (MTCC)
- Global Integration – the Right Place
- International airport and logistics access
- Home to major employers such as Steelcase, Bissel and Meijer



Strategic alignment with Vaughan

Direct Alignment Areas:

- Life Sciences and MedTech
 - Medical Mile cluster and Vaughan Health Care Precinct (VHCP)
- Advanced Manufacturing
 - MTCC and Vaughan Metropolitan Center (VMC)
- City Building and Placemaking
 - Grand Rapids infrastructure investments and initiatives and Vaughan Metropolitan Center and downtown core (VMC)
- Culture and Inclusion
 - Public art and cultural strategy alignment
 - Grand Rapids Amphitheater, Van Andel Arena and ArtPrize and Vaughan's vision for the Cultural and Performing Arts Center, and ARTonBOXES.



Engagement Highlights: Key Activities to Date

Spring 2024 : The City of Vaughan and the City of Grand Rapids were identified as potential partners by Ontario's Agent-General and the City of Grand Rapids Sister City International.

Summer/fall 2024: Initial meetings were held between staff in Grand Rapids and Vaughan. Grand Rapids Sister Cities International formed a local Vaughan Inquiry Committee and initiated preliminary conversations with the City of Vaughan's Economic Development department

April 2025: Vaughan hosted a staff delegation led by Grand Rapids' City Manager, Mark Washington. City Manager Zoran Postic and City Manager Washington met to discuss city-building priorities.



Engagement Highlights: Key Activities to Date

- ▶ **June 2025:** Council adopted an international plan of activities that included the continued work towards a partnership.
- ▶ **June 2025:** A delegation from Vaughan, led by Deputy City Manager, Strategic Initiatives, Michael Genova, visited Grand Rapids.
- ▶ **July 2025:** Mayor Steven Del Duca and Mayor David LaGrand met at the City of Vaughan.
- ▶ **October 2025:** Vaughan's Intergovernmental Relations Sub-Committee received an update on Grand Rapids.



Engagement Highlights: Key Activities to Date

- ▶ **January 27, 2026:** Grand Rapids Sister Cities International's leadership presented an overview of next steps to the City Commission in Grand Rapids
- ▶ **February 10, 2026:** Deputy City Manager Genova presented to the City Commission and the Mayor in Grand Rapids Council, followed by the Commission's vote in favour of expanding the Sister City program to the City of Vaughan, adding Vaughan as the seventh sister city of Grand Rapids and the first in Canada.

Partnership is fully endorsed by the Grand Rapids Commission



Economic and Cultural Collaboration: What this partnership enables

▶ Economic Outcomes

- The creation of a Grand Rapids-Vaughan economic gateway program.
- Business to business cross border missions and collaboration opportunities

▶ Cultural Outcomes

- Public art initiatives: Public art celebrations, including a future ARTonBOXES (Vaughan) activation and an on the SLATE exhibition, celebrating the partnership.
- Talent exchanges

▶ Municipal collaboration :

- Joint working groups to work towards a workplan
- Sector-specific partnerships
- Cross-border learning in city building



Why this framework works : Similar examples

- ▶ Kingston, Ontario, and Syracuse, New York
- ▶ Barrie, Ontario, and Saginaw, Michigan
- ▶ Toronto, Ontario, and Chicago, Illinois
- ▶ Quebec City, Quebec, and Albany, New York
- ▶ Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan



Next Steps:

Formalize a Cultural and Economic Partnership with Grand Rapids:

- ▶ Following approval of the partnership with Vaughan by Grand Rapids' Council, a staff delegation from Grand Rapids is joining the April 14, 2026, Committee of the Whole (2) meeting to provide support for the future partnership.
- ▶ Proceed with official signing ceremony on May 7 2026, pending the approval of the report by Vaughan Council.
- ▶ Staff to draft and finalize a joint workplan following the official ceremony.

Establishing this partnership positions Vaughan within a high value cross-border economic corridor, strengthens supply chain integration, export growth and long-term regional competitiveness.



Thank you!

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