

VMC Sub-committee Report

DATE: Wednesday, May 27, 2020

WARD(S): 4

TITLE: VMC MARKETING UPDATE

FROM: Mary Reali, Acting City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

This report provides an update on VMC marketing and business development activities delivered since the June 2019 VMC Subcommittee meeting.

Report Highlights

- Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) continues to primarily target business and real estate professionals with the goal of supporting the landowners' efforts to secure large anchor tenants to catalyze the development of new office buildings.
- Since March 2020, we are promoting where possible and assessing the impact of COVID-19 on office development projects and the office real estate market. Programs and tactics will be adjusted based on our findings in alignment with the City's COVID-19 response.
- The VMC has been profiled at targeted business and real estate events such as the Presidents of Enterprising Organizations Leadership Conference, the CoreNet REmmy Awards, and LandPRO.
- Business and real estate events and arts and culture programming planned for 2020 may be altered, postponed, or cancelled due to COVID-19.
- The VMC is being profiled through paid and earned media opportunities, social media, the Vaughan Rising Podcast, LinkedIn, the VMC 360 Degree Tour, and the VMC microsite.

Recommendation

1. THAT Economic and Cultural Development staff continue to provide ongoing updates on the marketing, business development and cultural activities in the VMC.

Background

Since the June 2019 VMC Subcommittee meeting, Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) has been building on and delivering its marketing and business development program for the VMC.

ECD continues to primarily target top-level corporate executives, corporate real estate executives, commercial realtors and brokers, and site selection professionals with the goal of supporting the landowners' efforts to secure large anchor tenants to catalyze the development of new office buildings.

Citizens continue to be engaged through activations and City communications channels.

Since March 2020, we are promoting where possible and assessing the impact of COVID-19 on office development projects and the office real estate market. Programs and tactics will be adjusted based on our findings in alignment with the City's Covid-19 response.

Previous Reports/Authority

March 2019: [VMC Marketing Update](#).

June 2019: [Vaughan Metropolitan Centre \(VMC\) Marketing Update](#).

Analysis and Options

The following marketing and business development tactics are intended to drive awareness of the VMC as an attractive major commercial office and retail location choice in the Greater Toronto Area marketplace.

New VMC identity mark

A new VMC identity mark was [approved by Council](#) in January 2020 as part of a new family of identity marks for economic development and tourism. The bold design will help Vaughan stand out from peers by being distinct, authentic, memorable, co-created, and supportive of placemaking.

The new identity marks launch in May 2020, alongside a new economic development website which includes high level content about the VMC and links to the VMC

microsite. The marks will be used in all new marketing products and existing ones as they are replaced.

Events have been an important pillar in the VMC marketing program. Since June 2019, ECD has profiled the VMC at the following:

- RealTrends Conference (September 2019) – Conference attended by 280 Canadian real estate leaders and executives who embrace the importance of being informed and keeping ahead of the curve. VMC was profiled to attendees and 3,500 more via RealTrends brochures mailed to the national market of the commercial real estate sector.
- Mayor’s Golf Classic (September 2019) – Annual Charity Golf Classic attended by 144 golfers. An ECD tent was stationed at one of the holes where ECD staff engaged many of the golfers with the VMC 360 Degree Tour and conversations about the VMC.
- Mayor’s Lunar Gala (September 2019) – Charity event inspired by the Chinese Moon Festival. A seating area and gallery of VMC photos were set up in the reception area to inform and engage guests.
- Schulich Perspectives Lecture (October 2019) – Fundraiser attended by 290 staff, alumni, and partners of the Schulich Real Estate & Infrastructure program featuring Mitch Goldhar as the keynote. ECD sponsored the event to leverage and support SmartCentres’ messaging about their developments in the VMC.
- PEO Leadership Conference (November 2019) – The marquee event of the Presidents of Enterprising Organizations network attended by 200 business executives. ECD sponsored to build awareness and relationships with these executives.
- CoreNet REmmy Awards Gala (November 2019) – Awards gala that recognizes outstanding achievement in corporate real estate and workplace management. ECD’s sponsorship provided podium time and a presentation of VMC photos and information on the main screens throughout the dinner.
- Mayor’s Luncheon (February 2020) – The Mayor’s annual State of the City address attended by 800 business leaders. ECD set up a display to raise awareness about the VMC.
- FEO Conference (February 2020) – The annual conference for Festivals and Events Ontario, attended by 250 festival and event professionals. ECD supported the Recreation department with a display area and 360 Degree Tour at the “We the York” Host Reception.
- LandPRO (March 2020) – Ontario’s largest land conference, attended by 1,000 land, condo, real estate and development professionals. ECD exhibited to raise awareness of the VMC and the latest developments.

The following events are planned for 2020, but may be further altered, postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- NAIOP REX Awards (POSTPONED) – NAIOP’s annual Real Estate Excellence awards attended by approximately 500 members of the Greater Toronto commercial real estate development community. As the ‘Blue Carpet’ sponsor, ECD will set up a Vaughan-branded photo backdrop and a gallery of VMC photos in the reception area.
- Urban Economy Forum (October 2020) – An international conference focused on helping cities achieve sustainable urban economy and implement the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Participation details TBD.
- CoreNet REmmy Awards Gala (November 2020) – Awards gala that recognizes outstanding achievement in corporate real estate and workplace management. ECD’s sponsorship will include podium time and a presentation of VMC photos and information on the main screens throughout the dinner.

Arts and Cultural Programming

ECD continues to host and support a variety of activations in the VMC to engage office workers, commuters, and residents and build a sense of place in the VMC.

The following events are planned for 2020, but may be altered, postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Inspirit Yoga and Tai Chi (May 2020) – Celebrating Asian heritage and Culture
- Italian Contemporary Film Festival (ICFF) Architettura and Design (June 2020) – Screenings and reception for international and local industrial designers, architects and developers.
- Music in the Square (July-August 2020) – Music performances in Transit Square through the summer with each performance representing a different cultural genre: Chinese Pop, Classical music, Gypsy guitarists, Latino dance and music.
- Movies in the Square – Event and details to be confirmed.
- Culture Days (September 2020) – Family friendly, pet friendly, music and artist activations.
- Next Stop Music and Food Festival (September 2020) – Two-day event featuring top headline performers, local and national breweries, and local and national chefs expected to attract 10,000 attendees per day.

Advertising, sponsored social media content, and paid editorials

Ads and paid editorial stories about the VMC were strategically placed in publications read by members of the target audience. These include:

- York Link Sponsored Content (July 2019) – Posts featuring the 360 Degree Tour and work-life balance in the VMC were amplified on York Link’s tech talent-focused Facebook and Twitter channels.
- City of Vaughan Sponsored Content (August 2019) – Posts about the Vaughan Rising Podcast were amplified on the City of Vaughan’s LinkedIn page.
- Perspective Vaughan (September 2019) - A special 24 page insert into the Globe and Mail. The VMC was featured in a two-page dedicated spread and in other stories as well.
- Globe and Mail Report on Business and LinkedIn Ads (December 2019) – ‘Emerging downtown’ teaser ads with drone footage of the VMC skyline drove traffic to the myVMC.ca microsite.
- Perspective Ontario Report (January 2020) – A report commissioned by the Government of Ontario for international businesses looking to invest, expand or relocate to Canada, specifically Ontario. Vaughan and the VMC were highlighted as an ideal location for Financial Technology companies.
https://issuu.com/perspective.ca/docs/ontario_economic_development_investment_report

Communications and earned media

Corporate and Strategic Communications (CSC) regularly posts about the VMC on the City of Vaughan social media channels. Between June 2019 and June 2020 there have been 107 posts.

CSC also seeks out and responds to earned media opportunities.

Vaughan Rising Podcast and other content marketing

ECD is also raising awareness of the VMC by creating and sharing digital content.

Season one of the Vaughan Rising Podcast had five episodes about the VMC, including interviews with Niagara University, the YMCA of Greater Toronto, and the three largest landowners (SmartCentres, QuadReal and Cortel Group). The podcast will return with a second season in Fall 2020.

VMC news, events, photos and other content is also regularly published on LinkedIn via the City of Vaughan company account and staff and Council member personal accounts. LinkedIn is the number one social media channel for business—used by 77 per cent of location advisors and corporate executives—and the number two marketing tactic recommended by US corporate executives to reach them.

The 360 Degree Tour continues to attract engagement at events and on YouTube.

VMC microsite

The myVMC.ca microsite continues to be a home base for information and news about the VMC.

A refresh was completed in September 2019 to highlight new openings, the 360 Degree Tour and other content on the home page. 'About the VMC' and Events pages were also added to the site.

Outcomes

These tactics have created buzz for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, introducing Vaughan's emerging downtown to some and keeping it top-of-mind for those already familiar.

Since June 2019, they have resulted in:

- Exposure to 3,639 event attendees.
- One-on-one connections with 62 members of the target audience.
- More than 105,000 impressions on York Link social media channels.
- More than 124,000 impressions on City of Vaughan social media channels.
- More than 70,000 impressions on ECD staff LinkedIn account.
- More than 101,000 digital advertising impressions.
- Print circulation of 366,000 copies of Perspective Vaughan and the Invest in Ontario report.
- 8,600 podcast episode downloads in more than 30 countries.
- More than 54,000 microsite page views by 9,900 users.
- 8,300 in-person and online views of the 360 Degree Tour.
- An Award of Excellence from the Economic Developers Council of Ontario for the VMC 360 Degree Tour.

Financial Impact

The business development and marketing activities highlighted in this report are funded from the Economic and Cultural Development Department's operating budget.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Successful profiling and buildout of the VMC is beneficial to our infrastructure funding

and operating partners (Toronto Transit Commission, York Region, Government of Ontario, Government of Canada, Toronto Region Conservation Authority) as it drives usage of these projects and shows return on investment. The Region is regularly engaged by ECD.

Conclusion

The outcomes shared above are a strong indicator that these activities are having an impact. Anecdotally, members of the target audience say they are impressed by the scale, speed and quality of the VMC, and that they are noticing more content about the VMC via multiple channels. Our major landowners are supportive of these activities and are regularly engaged.

For the remainder of 2020, we will be reinforcing our strongest tactics, expanding into new advertising and activation opportunities, and seeking earned media opportunities.

For more information, please contact: Michelle Samson, VMC Economic Development Officer.

Attachments

1. None

Prepared by

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