

VMC Sub-committee Report



DATE: Tuesday, March 2, 2021

WARD: 4

TITLE: VMC SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE – PHASE 1

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on the status of the VMC Secondary Plan Update - Phase 1 and seek Council's endorsement on the geographic limits of the potential expansion boundary areas through the VMC Secondary Plan Update.

Report Highlights

- The average density of development projects continues to increase with new applications, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of social and hard infrastructure.
- As a result of this growth, a number of studies have been initiated and coordinated to ensure the downtown continues to develop as a balanced community that is transit supportive and pedestrian friendly, with a vibrant sense of place, a high-quality public realm, and environmentally sustainable design approaches.
- The City in August 2020, initiated an update to the existing VMC Secondary Plan to address new provincial legislation and regional policies and to confirm the framework is still relevant, while considering the nature of existing, approved and proposed development in the VMC.
- The scope of the Phase 1 - Background and Issues includes a review of existing policies, initiatives, developments, studies and background reports; understanding the VMC's opportunities and challenges; and consultation with landowners, stakeholders, and the public.
- Staff recommend study area limits for both the potential boundary expansion areas to be explored in Phase 2, as shown on Attachments 1 and 2.

Recommendations

1. That the VMC Sub-Committee:
 - a. endorse the geographic limits of Study Area A related to the potential eastern boundary expansion as contained in Attachment 1; and
 - b. endorse the geographic limits of Study Area B related to the potential northern boundary expansion as contained in Attachment 2;
2. That staff report to a future VMC Sub-Committee Meeting with land use options related to Study Areas A and B to determine their appropriateness for inclusion in the VMC Secondary Plan area; and
3. That the above recommendations be forwarded for Council's approval.

Background

To achieve the critical mass of a downtown and meet the density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare established in the Province's *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (2006), the VMC Secondary Plan established a population target of approximately 17,000 residents and 6,500 jobs by 2031 for the portion of the VMC identified as an Urban Growth Centre. The population target for the larger VMC area, including the Urban Growth Centre, is 25,000 residents and 11,500 jobs by 2031. As reported in Item 2 of the November 10, 2020 VMC Sub-Committee meeting, these targets are anticipated to be met and exceeded based on the development pipeline.

Due to rapid growth in the VMC and recent changes to municipal and regional legislation and policies, the City initiated an update to the existing VMC Secondary Plan (VMC SP) in August 2020. The successful consulting team for this study consists of Gladki Planning Associates with Ken Greenberg, dTAH, and Urban Metrics.

The existing VMC SP provides a strong policy foundation that initiated the development of Vaughan's emerging downtown. The City has been successful in working with landowners to create the first phase of the downtown build-out. Updates to the VMC SP policy framework and land use plan must continue to recognize the VMC as the City's priority intensification area and emerging downtown, while ensuring the area continues to develop as a complete community. With the introduction of Bill 197, a Community Benefits Charge (CBC) will replace Section 37 following adoption of a CBC By-law. The VMC SP update will also review this regulatory change to ensure that the VMC is able to fund community services to serve the growing downtown population.

The update will include a Community Services & Facilities analysis and implementation plan to assess the amount and types of facilities and community services needed to support the VMC and density and population targets as mandated by the Region and the

Province. The impact of COVID-19 on city building will also be assessed through the VMC SP Update.

Potential boundary expansions are also being considered to incorporate additional lands into the VMC Secondary Plan area and will explore land use options, which will likely include opportunities for new parkland, informed by findings of the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports relating to the VMC SP Update can be found at the following links:

[VMC Development Activity Update – November 10, 2020](#)

[VMC Studies Update November 2020](#)

[VMC Studies Update May 2020](#)

[VMC Development Activity Update – March 5, 2019](#)

[VMC Implementation Plan and Priority Infrastructure Project Update March 2019](#)

[VMC Development Activity Update – April 10, 2018](#)

[VMC Term of Council Priorities and Implementation Update April 2018](#)

Analysis and Options

The VMC SP Update is being conducted over 5 phases:

Phase 1: Background and Issues

Phase 2: Prepare / Develop Options

Phase 3: Elaborate a Preferred Framework

Phase 4: Draft Secondary Plan

Phase 5: Final Implementation of Secondary Plan Update

The VMC SP Update is currently in its first phase. The scope of the VMC SP Update - Phase 1 Background and Issues includes a review of existing policies, initiatives, developments, studies and background reports; defines an understanding of the VMC's opportunities and challenges; and outlines a consultation strategy to obtain input and feedback from technical experts, landowners, stakeholders, and the public to inform the SP Update.

Background Study Report

The Phase 1 Background Study Report takes stock of existing development pressures in the study area through a survey of completed, approved, and proposed developments and analyzes the evolution of the VMC to-date through the lens of population and employment, land use, built form, public realm and street design, housing, community services and facilities, and parks and open spaces.

Key Messages

The City of Vaughan has achieved a great deal in creating a downtown in the VMC, guided by the 2010 Secondary Plan. The SP Update will refresh this blueprint, continuing the original Plan's trajectory recalibrated for emerging conditions and addressing challenges to achieving the plan's complete vision. Through the review and synthesis of background information, including existing policies, initiatives and developments, the following key highlights and messages were concluded:

- Development is proceeding at a greater intensity than anticipated in the 2010 Secondary Plan and the Plan needs to be recalibrated to account for development pressures
- Development interest is creating a different balance of uses than envisaged in the 2010 VMC Secondary Plan
- Recent developments in the VMC feature considerably higher than planned building heights and densities, therefore the hierarchy of heights and densities in the VMC will need to be carefully planned.

Key Findings

Finding a Balance of Uses

Development interest in the VMC is far greater than anticipated in the 2010 Secondary Plan and heavily weighted to residential uses. Employment uses, retail and commercial services are also important parts of a complete community. Careful thought must be given to what needs to be done to continue to achieve a balance of uses in Vaughan's downtown.

The arrival of the subway and its connection to other higher order transit has given the VMC a marked competitive advantage relative to other office-attracting centres in the region. The work of the VMC SP update should aim to strengthen the downtown's Central Business District, building on the success of the City to date in realizing office development and attracting high profile anchor tenants. The pursuit of this ambition will have to be undertaken considering the potential changes to the office market related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next phase of the VMC build-out should also focus on creating more destinations. As Vaughan's downtown, the VMC should be a focal point for the city, drawing people to the area for multiple reasons; to work, to access unique retail and entertainment offerings, to experience a dynamic and attractive urban environment, to enjoy arts and culture, and to access public facilities and services. The creation of a hub of cultural and arts-based institutions, facilities and installations has been identified as an opportunity with great potential to draw people to the VMC. Item 3 of the March 2, 2021 VMC Sub Committee

Meeting outlines next steps to advance Phase 2 of the Feasibility Study for a Cultural Arts Centre in the VMC.

Serving the Population with Public Amenities and an Attractive Public Realm

The Secondary Plan needs to evaluate the new opportunities presented by future development interest while staying true to its vision of creating a place of exceptional quality and contributing to an outstanding quality of life for those that experience it.

The provision of parks and community facilities included in the 2010 Secondary Plan was calibrated to a much smaller anticipated population. This provision needs to be re-evaluated to reflect new development projections. The ability to adequately provide these amenities in the VMC may lead to measures that tie new growth to the provision of these amenities. Planning for community services and facilities needs to ensure development does not outpace supporting infrastructure, and parks planning needs to reflect new demographic projections, characteristics, and densities.

The Background Study Report noted that initial phases of development in the VMC, particularly around the subway station and transit terminal, demonstrate a conscientious approach to creating an attractive and engaging built environment through building orientation and animation, and the inclusion of public spaces and investments in the quality of the public realm. Vaughan must continue to hold development to a high standard, while itself investing in parks, open spaces, streets and public facilities to create an exceptional built environment with a strong sense of place. The City must also focus on delivering amenities that people need in their daily lives – retail, services, parks, community facilities, and even work – at a walkable scale. The next critical step in the evolution of the downtown is to create a comprehensive network, including mews and mid-block connections, for pedestrians and cyclists to move within the VMC and surrounding areas.

Realizing the Housing Variety Necessary for an Inclusive Community

The Secondary Plan must focus on stimulating the kinds of housing that may not be provided otherwise, including purpose-built rental, family size units and affordable housing. Key aspects of housing, in type and tenure, are unlikely to be provided if left to the market alone.

To date, development interest in the VMC is heavily focused on high-rise tower form buildings, with some interest in townhouses. Rarer is interest in mid-rise form buildings. The 2010 Secondary Plan envisaged a VMC that had areas of varying character and built form intensity. The VMC SP Update must strengthen and reinforce the policy framework to deliver on this vision and avoid an undifferentiated mass of tall buildings. With respect to housing types, approved and proposed developments have been predominantly geared towards the delivery of condominium tenure housing in the form of 1 and 2-

bedroom units. To ensure that the VMC emerges as an inclusive community, the provision of a wider variety of housing types and tenures, unit sizes and affordable rental and ownership models must be explored through the SP update.

Finally, the report stressed the importance of harnessing development interest to realize a broader vision. Development interest in the VMC is much more intense than anticipated. This development interest is the fuel that will power the realization of the City's ambitions for its downtown. However, it must be harnessed to achieve a built environment and a community that meets the public interest.

Considerations Moving forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything, in the short term at least. The nature of office-based work, working from home and retail has been especially impacted. In setting out a plan for the future, the Secondary Plan must distinguish between this immediate disruption and the long-term trends.

Another consideration moving forward is the appropriate boundary of the VMC Secondary Plan area. The vision for the VMC is a stark contrast, in terms of built form intensity and quality of place, to its surroundings, especially the low density industrial commercial areas to the north and east. The SP Update is contemplating two boundary expansions, and these must be considered in the context of the long-term plans for the relationship of the VMC to its surroundings.

Potential Boundary Expansion Areas

Staff recommend geographic study area limits for both the potential northern and eastern boundary expansion areas to be studied in Phase 2 of the VMC SP Update. As identified in Attachment 1, the potential eastern boundary expansion limit (Study Area A) extends to Creditstone Road to resolve the jog that exists in the southeastern quadrant and to normalize the limits of the Plan within the existing SP framework. The southeastern quadrant has faced implementation challenges with respect to resolving grading, access and land consolidation within its narrow extents and is underserved in terms of community infrastructure.

As identified in Attachment 2, the potential northern boundary expansion limit (Study Area B) is the depth of one typical VMC urban block, extending east of Jane Street to the Black Creek channel. The purpose of this potential expansion area is to introduce an intentional built form transition in height from the Mobility Hub to the prestige employment lands to the north, and provide an edge to the VMC boundary that is double loaded with development frontage. Currently, the VMC boundary is single loaded along the south side of Portage Parkway.

Several site-specific employment area conversions within both Study Areas A and B have been approved by Regional Council (see Attachment 3) to allow for potential redevelopment of these sites to non-employment uses. Due to proximity of these sites to the existing VMC SP boundary, their respective employment conversion approvals and ability to act as a transition between the City's downtown and adjacent employment areas, the inclusion of these sites into the potential boundary expansion study areas is appropriate to be explored as potential expansions of the VMC boundary.

In exploring the potential boundary expansion areas, several key principles should be considered that will help provide stronger transition to meet the objective upon which they are potentially being included into the plan. Both boundary expansion study areas should introduce meaningful transitions to the surrounding context and prestige employment uses, offer opportunities for much needed parkland and social infrastructure, provide appropriate buffering of uses, and consider newly approved employment conversions shown on Attachment 3. Open spaces should bookend the expansion areas to continue the existing structure of the VMC SP.

These potential expansion study area limits match the scope of work identified in the VMC SP update RFP documents and are within the contract of Gladki Planning Associates.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

A robust public and stakeholder engagement strategy has been developed in consultation with Corporate and Strategic Communications to ensure that meaningful engagement points are planned for each phase of the project. As part of the Phase 1 work, a dedicated webpage was developed to provide information and ongoing updates on the study with the friendly URL www.vaughan.ca/vmcplan.

The study's first survey was launched on November 18, 2020 to understand the public's sentiments on the progress of the VMC developments to-date, and what other opportunities and improvements should be explored through the VMCS Update. Results of the survey can be found on the study's dedicated webpage.

Several focused meetings were held with key stakeholders from December through February, including Councillor interviews, an external agency working session, and meetings with landowners east and west of Jane Street within the VMC.

In addition, the study's first Public Open House was launched mid-February with a pre-recorded background presentation which will run through the end of Q1 2021. Participants will be able to participate during this time period at their leisure and can provide feedback through thematic idea boards, a monitored questionnaire, or providing

comments directly to staff via email. All presentations will be housed in the study's dedicated webpage and will be refreshed with new content throughout subsequent study phases.

Next Steps

The VMC SP project team will continue to engage with stakeholders, including public agencies, staff, landowners and members of the public throughout the project to seek input and feedback, and ensure alignment with the related studies including the VMC Transportation Master Plan Update, VMC Functional Servicing Strategy and the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan. The Phase 1 Background Analysis will be used as the foundation for the work to follow, which falls into several phases:

Phase 2 – Prepare Options

The project team will generate options exploring different mixes and locations of uses and built form. These options will be considered in terms of the provision of parks and open spaces, transportation, and municipal servicing, in conjunction with work conducted by parallel studies. A strategy will also be prepared for provision of community services and facilities.

Phase 3 - Elaborate a Preferred Framework

Integrating feedback from landowners, stakeholders, and the public, the next step is to create a preferred option and framework that draws on the best parts of the development options. Further consultation will allow the preferred concept to be refined and presented as a recommendation.

Phases 4 and 5 - Create the Secondary Plan

The recommend concept will be the basis for developing a draft update to the Secondary Plan. Following additional public consultation and stakeholder engagement, the revised Secondary Plan will be presented.

The study is targeted for completion in Q2 2022.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact resulting from this report.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of City staff and other government agencies has been established. Public agencies including, York Region, Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority, School Boards, Ministry of Transportation, Infrastructure Ontario, Nav Canada, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Toronto Transit Committee, Metrolinx and 407 ETR have been invited as part of this study's TAC.

The purpose of the group is to provide specialized advice and technical input on various key aspects of the VMC SP Update.

Conclusion

The VMC is transforming into a vibrant, modern urban centre for residents and businesses that encompasses all amenities of an urban lifestyle. The average density of projects continues to significantly exceed those planned in the current VMC SP, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of community services and social infrastructure. Developments and approvals to-date are heavily weighted towards residential uses in the form of high-rise condominiums, predominantly consisting of 1 and 2-bedroom units. A balance of uses, variety housing types and tenures, unit sizes and building types are critical to achieving a complete downtown community that is vibrant and diverse.

An update to the VMC Secondary Plan has been initiated to address new provincial and regional policies and to confirm that the framework is still relevant considering the nature of existing, approved and proposed development in the VMC.

Updates to the VMC Secondary Plan policy framework will continue to recognize the VMC as the City's priority intensification area and downtown, while ensuring the area continues to develop as a complete community and support the City's strategic priorities as outlined in the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

For more information, please contact: Christina Bruce, Director, VMC Program, ext. 8231

Attachments

1. Potential eastern boundary expansion Study Area A limit.
2. Potential northern boundary expansion Study Area B limit.
3. Approved employment conversions.

Prepared by

Jessica Kwan, Senior Planner, VMC, ext. 8814

Amy Roots, Senior Manager, VMC, ext. 8035

Christina Bruce, Director, VMC Program, ext. 8231

Approved by _____

Handwritten signature of Mauro Peverini in black ink.

Mauro Peverini, Acting Chief Planning Official

Reviewed by

Handwritten signature of Jim Harnum in black ink.

Jim Harnum, City Manager