

VMC Sub-committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, March 2, 2021

WARD: 4

TITLE: VMC PARKS AND WAYFINDING MASTER PLAN UPDATE

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide an update on the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan (PWMP), its progress and implementation, and how it contributes to the creation of a complete community in the VMC.

Report Highlights

- The findings of the Assessment Report, the first deliverable of the VMC PWMP, provided the City with valuable insight into demographics, service levels, and benchmarks to guide the timely provision of parkland in the VMC and made clear that active parkland and social infrastructure are critical priorities for the VMC.
- Efforts are being undertaken to maintain a balance between current population density trends and available hard and soft infrastructure, including community services and parks and open spaces.
- The VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan has advanced and has prepared multiple scenarios for the development of parks and open space in the VMC, informed by findings from the previously completed Assessment Report and input from the public, staff, and stakeholders.

Report Highlights (continued)

- The concurrent VMC plans and studies, including the VMC PWMP, VMC Secondary Plan Update, and the VMC Transportation Master Plan Update, inform each other and will be closely coordinated to ensure their collective contribution to the Term of Council Strategic Priority of City Building to “Develop the VMC as a complete community, with emphasis on cultural development”.
- Staff will ensure every study undergoes a robust and strategically coordinated public consultation process to optimize input.

Recommendation

1. That this report be received for information.

Background

The VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan (VMC PWMP) was initiated in May 2020 with the successful proponent, Janet Rosenberg & Studio. As previously reported, the consultant has completed their background research and assessment of the parks and open space in the VMC and environs, culminating in their draft Assessment Report considered by the VMC Sub-committee in November 2020.

The challenges of COVID-19 have made clear how vital parks are to our citizens, especially in high-density communities that have little private open space. The intent of the VMC PWMP is to prepare a master plan and implementation strategy to facilitate the timely development of parks and open space for VMC residents, commuters and visitors, as outlined in the VMC Secondary Plan and envisioned in supportive placemaking studies, together with the development of a public realm wayfinding strategy that can be implemented to achieve a legible and cohesive public realm.

The findings of the Assessment Report, the first deliverable of the VMC PWMP, provided the City with valuable insight into demographics, service levels, and benchmarks to guide the timely provision of parkland in the VMC and inform the next phases of the study. Highlights of the assessment include:

- Active parkland and social infrastructure are critical priorities for the VMC
- Existing parks and open spaces within the VMC, or immediately adjacent to it, may be explored for potential expansion and/or improvements to service the new downtown’s population
- The VMC is uniquely situated among three significant greenways that run along the Humber River, Black Creek, and the West Don River. These greenways are

linked by the hydro corridor running south of Highway 407, where a future extension of the Vaughan Super Trail is proposed. If this trail system is combined with a safe and accessible connection across Highway 407 for pedestrians and cyclists, it will provide VMC residents with access to many kilometers of trails, parks, and green spaces

- The area south of Highway 407 also contains two large parcels of publicly owned lands where active parkland could be located: a 40-hectare parcel west and south of the Highway 407 TTC Station and the 12.8-hectare north parcel of Black Creek Pioneer Village.

The VMC PWMP is being coordinated with the concurrent updates of the VMC Secondary Plan, VMC Transportation Master Plan, and the VMC Functional Servicing Strategy Report.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports relating to the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan can be found at the following links:

[VMC Studies Update November 2020](#)

[VMC Studies Update May 2020](#)

Analysis and Options

The VMC PWMP has significantly advanced its next phase and has developed parks and open space scenarios based on the following draft design principles:

- The 20 hectares of parkland outlined in the VMC Secondary Plan (2010) may not be adequate to support the future VMC population, given current development trends. Additional parkland and facilities should be met by providing parks that are either in the VMC or conveniently accessible by walking or cycling.
- Environmental Open Space in the VMC should be designed to maximize its use for passive recreation. Stormwater infrastructure and natural heritage features should be designed in accordance with this principle.
- While parks and open space must be designed serve their immediate neighborhoods, all parks and open space within the VMC must be conveniently and safely accessible from any part of the VMC. Roads should not function as barriers to a connected VMC.
- Outdoor facilities should reflect the unique needs and demographic of a dense urban population.

- Parks and open space in or adjacent to the VMC should be programmed according to a hierarchy that recognizes the frequency and importance of use to ensure that facilities are appropriately located.
- The VMC Secondary Plan vision for a north-south 'urban spine' along Millway Avenue is important and should be reflected in the VMC parks and open space system.
- The organization of Edgeley Pond and Park, particularly the integration of Active Parkland and Environmental Open Space, responds well to the VMC's planning principles and should be continued along Black Creek south of Highway 7.
- Public Squares, POPS, Mews and Flex Streets should be located and programmed to supplement parks by providing facilities, connections and 'green' features that best address gaps in the VMC's parks and open space system.
- A safe and convenient pedestrian and cycling connection should be made south to an extension of the Vaughan Super Trail in the Hydro Corridor south of the VMC. This would provide VMC residents with access to many kilometers of trails, parks, and open space.
- Low-impact stormwater management facilities should be incorporated into the design of all parks and opens spaces in the VMC.

The master plan scenarios, a summary of which will be presented to the VMC Subcommittee, incorporate a detailed facility fit study. The tasks informing these scenarios include:

- A demographic analysis of the VMC
- A study of park facility requirements based on projected populations and demographics
- A study of facilities that fit within the parkland defined in the VMC Secondary Plan (2010)
- A study of potential additional parkland available within the VMC boundaries
- A study of parkland potential in close proximity to the VMC and its capacity to absorb facilities and its potential effect on service levels

The scenarios derived from these tasks include the following:

- Intensifying park facility distribution within the existing parkland defined in the VMC Secondary Plan (2010), including adding a small amount of parkland
- Expanding south to create new parkland south of Highway 407 and west of the 407 subway station

- Expanding north to create new parkland in the elbow of the Black Creek north of Portage, effectively enlarging Edgeley Pond and Park, and potentially other sites
- Expanding east to create new parkland between Maplecrete and Creditstone

These scenarios, which can be implemented over time in a measured response to development, will provide the City with options for service level delivery, and ultimately create a diverse, multi-functional, and seamlessly interconnected parks and open space network.

In addition to the master plan scenarios, the consultant is has begun the signage and wayfinding design process. The study has defined an area encompassing the mobility hub, part of Edgeley Pond and Park, and Strata Park for the initial wayfinding design exercise. This area was chosen because it includes most of the types of parks and public realm spaces likely to require signage across the VMC.

The findings of the VMC PWMP will inform the Community Services & Facilities study to be completed as part of the VMC Secondary Plan Update.

The study is targeted for completion in Q4 2021.

An Innovative and Coordinated Consultation Plan is Being Undertaken

Current consultation methods are focusing on virtual connections and will be evaluated over time. The initial VMC PWMP survey received over 500 responses, both online and through hard copies. Current and future phases of the project will continue to use online surveys and will also utilize online focus groups, idea boards, and other virtual engagement tools.

Phase two of the consultation plan will commence in March, 2021 with a virtual focus group with members of the public, followed by gathering feedback online on the proposed VMC Parks and Open Space scenarios. A presentation video and interactive engagement tool will be available to the public for an extended period.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from this report.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Collaboration continues with regional stakeholders which is an important factor in realizing the success of the VMC. Certain options developed through the VMC PWMP will require coordination with regional stakeholders and external agencies to determine their feasibility and advance the study.

Conclusion

Building a downtown is an ambitious goal. The average density of development projects continues to increase with new applications, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of community services. Active parkland and social infrastructure are critical priorities for the VMC.

The VMC PWMP is moving toward a preferred scenario for the VMC's parks and open spaces, vetted by public and stakeholder input, and coordinated with concurrent VMC studies. The study will ultimately contribute to downtown's continuing development as a complete and 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 VMC team continues to collaborate across internal departments and with residents, landowners, and other stakeholders to deliver a complete community.

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

Attachments

N/A

Prepared by

Cory Gray, Project Manager, Parks Development, VMC, Ext. 8579
Gaston Soucy, Project Manager, Urban Design, VMC, Ext. 8266
Gerardo Paez Alonso, Manager, Parks & Strategic Initiatives, VMC, Ext. 8195
Amy Roots, Senior Manager, Planning & Urban Design, VMC, Ext. 8035
Christina Bruce, Director, VMC Program, Ext. 8231

Approved by



Mauro Peverini,
Acting Chief Planning Official

Reviewed by



Jim Harnum, City Manager