

## VMC Sub-committee Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, March 2, 2021

**WARD:** 4

**TITLE:** PHASE II - DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE IN THE VMC

**FROM:**

Jim Harnum, City Manager

**ACTION:** FOR INFORMATION

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### **Purpose**

To provide an update on the next stage of implementation for the future development of a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC).

### **Report Highlights**

- Cultural hubs are amenities that create community, social and economic benefits including city building and placemaking; investment attraction; job creation; tourism attraction; academic and social innovations; and civic pride.
- A strong planning context and framework exists to support the development of a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.
- The Phase I - Feasibility Study concluded that market demand and community need is evident to support a cultural hub in Vaughan's downtown given the critical mass of high-order transit and highway infrastructure, open spaces, and ongoing population, business and employment growth in the VMC.
- An RFP is being developed for a Phase II - Site Selection and Development scope of work to build on the findings of Phase I and inform the ongoing VMC Secondary Plan Update, which is expected to be released in April 2021.

### **Recommendation**

1. That this report be received for information.

## **Background**

In 2018, the City of Vaughan commissioned Hariri Pontarini Architects, AMS Planning and Research, and FDA to conduct a Phase I Feasibility Study for a Cultural Arts Centre in the VMC. The Study assessed market demand, community need supported by extensive engagement, best-practices, development concepts, management and operating models, and financial analysis.

Agenda Item 2 of the December 4, 2019 VMC Sub-committee meeting contained the findings of the Phase 1 work and concluded that market demand and community need is evident to support a cultural hub in Vaughan's downtown, given the critical mass of high-order transit and highway infrastructure, open spaces, and ongoing population, business and employment growth in the VMC.

In order to continue momentum on the project, Council directed staff to advance the next implementation phase of work focused on site selection, refinement of planning and urban design matters, exploration of senior government funding, and detailed business planning (i.e., governance, management operations, programming, capital and operating budget). Council further directed staff to include a site-specific Cultural Arts Centre designation in the VMC Secondary Plan Update to ensure land-use planning, site selection, urban design, cultural and economic planning policy and other matters are determined for future development.

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

Previous reports relating to the VMC Cultural Arts Centre can be found at the following links:

[Feasibility Study for a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre – December 4, 2019](#)  
[VMC Culture and Public Art Framework](#)

## **Analysis and Options**

**A strong planning context and framework exists to support the development of a Cultural Arts Centre in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.**

The vision for a rich cultural base in the VMC is well articulated in planning, policy and placemaking documents, recognizing that civic and cultural facilities, and other destinations, will attract people from across the City and Region, and generate economic impacts for businesses in the VMC, city-wide and across the Greater Toronto Area.

The VMC Secondary Plan recognizes that “successful downtowns have a strong identity, sense of place and civic attractions. To these ends, it is an objective of this plan to establish civic uses and spaces in the VMC that serve residents from across the City and to realize a high quality of development and public realm initiatives. To reinforce the VMC’s and the city’s identity, the plan anticipates one or more major civic facilities, including a landmark cultural facility”. The Plan further notes that cultural facilities may be developed as a catalyst for broader development and to establish an identity and civic role for the VMC.

The VMC Culture and Public Art Framework and the Economic Development and Employment Sectors Study build on the VMC Secondary Plan policy structure, envisioning the downtown as a top destination for cultural entertainment in the GTA, where state-of-the-art facilities and spaces provide a vast range of experiences for all users.

The VMC Secondary Plan Update - Phase 1 findings, reported as Agenda Item 1 of the March 2, 2021 VMC Sub-committee meeting, identifies that the next phase of the VMC build-out should focus on creating more destinations. The creation of a hub of cultural and arts-based institutions, facilities and installations has been identified as an offer with great potential to draw people to the VMC.

A cultural arts centre could stimulate more than \$100 million in economic activity related to one-time construction, and on an annual basis has the potential to inject over \$2.5 million directly in the local and regional economy. Indirect and induced impacts, such as spending in the supply chain, hospitality sector and retail trades represent additional benefits for businesses, jobs, and households in the VMC, city-wide, and in the Greater Toronto Area. The development of a cultural hub in the VMC supports the community Vision, Key Priorities and Themes outlined in the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan, creating a cultural legacy for Vaughan and serving as a driver for economic growth, city building and creating an active, safe, and diverse community.

Feedback from the public and City of Vaughan leading developers suggest there is an appetite for investment in both facilities and other resources to support the continued evolution of Vaughan’s creative industries. Demand for programming clearly aligns with a flexible approach to animating space in the VMC through not just fine arts and traditional performances, but through a range of new, distinctive programs and services that celebrate Vaughan, reinforce the City’s unique brand, and position the City to continue its remarkable growth trajectory.

**In order to continue momentum on the project, Council directed staff to advance the next implementation phase of work**

The Phase II - Site Selection and Development will build on the findings of the Phase I final report and deliver on Council's direction that staff advance implementation and business planning for a Performing and Cultural Arts Centre in the VMC as a key priority for the downtown. Staff are working with Procurement Services to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Phase II of the project which will include a review and update of the operational models developed through the Phase I work, reflecting any lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, along with a facilitated consultation process with VMC landowners and impacted stakeholders that results in the final selection of a site and partnership model through a transparent evaluation process.

The findings and recommendations of the Phase II - Site Selection and Development will assist the City in addressing the following relevant issues:

- mandate of the performing arts centre
- governance model
- business operating model
- operating budget and capital budget forecast for the first five years
- size of facility, number of seats, land requirement and building size
- site selection
- economic and community impact
- partnership and funding opportunities.

The result of the Phase II recommendations will provide direction on a scaled approach to implementing priorities, policy framework, strategies, structures, timeline, and funding/operational requirements essential to enhancing Vaughan's cultural sector, with benchmarks to measure success. The findings of the Phase II final report will be integrated into the ongoing VMC Secondary Plan Update as policy updates. Staff will include a provision to study the inclusion of a site-specific Cultural Arts Centre designation, one that does not exist today, as part of the scope of work.

The final report will provide recommendation for the selection of a site location and operating model for the cultural arts centre which supports the key priorities outlined in the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework.

**Next Steps**

The RFP is expected to be released through the City's Bids and Tenders portal in April 2021 and the duration of the study is anticipated to extend through Q4 2021.

The Phase II study will be led by Economic and Cultural Development, in close partnership with the VMC Program team.

### **Financial Impact**

There is no financial impact resulting from this report as Council has previously approved that \$100,000 be allocated to this project from Capital Project DP-9555-17 VMC - Consultation Services to support the implementation of key findings and a decision-making framework from the Cultural Arts Centre Feasibility Study.

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

The potential development of a cultural hub may have implications for York Region's Centres and Corridors and its Economic Development Action Plan. Copies of this report and subsequent work plans will be communicated to York Region Planning and Economic Strategy, the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, York Region Arts Council, VMC stakeholders and landowners.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, Vaughan has employed community and civic spaces to foster, incubate and host creative and cultural activities. Community centres, libraries, heritage properties and Vaughan City Hall have supplemented as venues for cultural incubation, innovation, program delivery and demonstration, including exhibitions, studio, and performance spaces. Cultural uses have competed, and at times, conflicted with recreation and local community uses for limited space.

As the downtown matures with a growing population and employment base, and to leverage public transit and infrastructure investments made by various levels of government and the private sector, the time has come for a concerted and dedicated effort to establish a creative hub. To advance the planning of a cultural and performing arts centre in the VMC, an RFP is being developed for a Phase II - Site Selection and Development scope of work to build on the findings of Phase I and inform the ongoing VMC Secondary Plan Update, which is expected to be released in April 2021.

**For more information**, please contact: Mirella Tersigni, Creative and Cultural Officer, extension 8459

### **Attachments**

None

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