

# Ready, Resilient and Resourceful Committee Report

---

**DATE:** Wednesday, March 10, 2021

**WARD(S):** ALL

**TITLE: UPDATE ON CITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**FROM:**

Jim Harnum, City Manager

**ACTION:** FOR INFORMATION

---

## **Purpose**

To provide the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful (RRR) Committee with updated information regarding the City's response to COVID-19. Information provided includes an overview of key actions taken in response to COVID-19 since the September 2020 report to the RRR Committee. This includes a summary of COVID-19 related provincial orders and enforcement activities by the City; a summary of the impact to services; and an overview of the activities of the Emergency Planning Program and the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). As it has been approximately one year since the beginning of the pandemic, this report also provides a chronological summary of key events since March 2020.

## **Report Highlights**

- The Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Roadmap provides the key objectives and framework for the City's response, mitigation, and recovery related to the COVID-19 emergency.
- All Portfolios and departments have been working diligently to effectively respond to the COVID-19 emergency and have ensured the protection of staff, the public and the delivery of quality public services while city building continues.
- This report provides an overview of key actions taken in response to COVID-19 including a summary of COVID-19 related provincial orders and enforcement activities by the City and a summary of the impact to services.
- This report also provides a chronological summary of key events since March 2020.
- An overview of the activities of the Emergency Planning Program and the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

## **Recommendations**

1. That the Update on the City's Response to COVID-19 report be received.

## **Background**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. From the onset, the City of Vaughan closely monitored the evolving situation and initiated numerous measures to ensure the safety of residents and City staff. Throughout the pandemic, the City has ensured that quality services are delivered for families, businesses and all citizens.

The Ready, Resilient and Resourceful (RRR) Committee of Council has been established as part of the City's ongoing COVID-19 response effort. The RRR Committee provides the governance structure to ensure that all members of Council are informed and kept up to date with the decisions made throughout the emergency response to the pandemic. The first meeting of the committee was held on June 23, 2020 and its second meeting was held on September 29, 2020.

The City has developed the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Roadmap which provides the key objectives and framework for the City's response, mitigation, and recovery related to the COVID-19 emergency.

This report provides the RRR Committee with information regarding:

- a summary of COVID-19 related provincial orders and the enforcement activities undertaken by the City;
- a summary of the impact to City services since the September 2020 report to the RRR Committee;
- a chronological summary of key events since March 2020 (attachment #1);
- an overview of the activities of the Emergency Planning Program and the Emergency Operations Centre (attachment #2).

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

- [\*A Framework for Reopening our Province\*](#)
- [\*A Framework for Reopening our Province – Stage 2\*](#)
- [\*A Framework for Reopening our Province – Stage 3\*](#)
- [\*COVID-19: The City of Vaughan\*](#)
- [\*City of Vaughan Media Releases\*](#)
- [\*York Region COVID-19\*](#)

- [Public Health Ontario COVID-19](#)
  - [Government of Canada COVID-19](#)
  - [World Health Organization COVID-19](#)
  - [Extract from Council Meeting – June 29, 2020 - Update on City's Response to COVID-19 – Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee Report \(June 23, 2020\)](#)
  - [Extract from Council Meeting – June 29, 2020 - COVID-19 Update – Emergency Operations Centre Response \(June 23, 2020\), Ready, Resilient and Resourceful Committee Report](#)
- 
- [UPDATE ON CITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID19](#)
  - [Attachment 1 - Next 90 Days - COVID-19 Second Interim Report](#)
  - [Attachment 2 - Innovations and Process Improvements Update](#)
  - [Attachment 3 – Reintegration Package Final](#)

## **Analysis**

The City of Vaughan continues to effectively respond to the COVID-19 crisis and the vast majority of our business objectives are intact and on target. Where change is required, we have taken a disciplined and evidence-based approach to modify where required and evolve to meet the changing needs of the organization, our citizens, our business sectors and our communities; yet still be able to meet our strategic priorities for the term of Council.

The City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) remains partially activated at level three since March 13, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual on-line meetings continue to be held with the City's EOC team, the COVID-19 EOC Task Forces and regional and provincial stakeholders. The EOC will continue to operate at level three as long as the City is operating under a declared state of emergency.

Throughout the pandemic, the City of Vaughan has supported the collective and integrated pandemic response of the Regional Municipality of York and the York Regional Medical Officer of Health, as well as Public Health Ontario and the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Pandemic response communications ensure information is effectively communicated to the public; and the City of Vaughan facilitated these efforts by disseminating information from York Region and Public Health Ontario through our own communications channels.

The City of Vaughan continues to provide public messaging to assist our residents to understand how to adhere to prevention measures in the form of bylaws, orders, and restrictions put in place locally, regionally, provincially and federally in order to control the spread of disease and reduce COVID-19 related illness and death.

From late February into early March of 2020, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) reviewed and established business continuity plans which outline the manner and means by which each department would minimize the impact of the pandemic on its provision of essential services. Implementing business continuity plans ensured that critical public services remained accessible, both to internal stakeholders as well as the public. The City of Vaughan monitored the societal disruption and ensured the continuity and recovery of critical services and where possible, enacted programming and initiatives to minimize adverse economic impact and supported an efficient and effective use of resources during response and recovery.

Since the September 29, 2020 update provided to Council at the Ready, Resilient, and Resourceful Committee, staff have completed the following key actions:

- continued tracking of key data indicators that assist with response, any resurgences, as well as forecasting and preparing for recovery;
- continued development and preparations of reopening plans for City facilities and amenities, as required;
- continued acquisition of personal protective equipment;
- continued distribution of cloth masks to City staff;
- continued construction of mitigating measures such as plexiglass barriers in facilities that have essential workers onsite;
- received \$6.15 million of phase 1 funding under the Federal Government's Safe Restart Agreement;
- supported implementation of the patios program to allow existing restaurants to use their parking stalls and/or the sidewalk and curb lane fronting their restaurant for patio purposes;
- supported the "Keeping Vaughan Clean" beautification initiative;
- supported the migration of in-person services to digital platforms or alternative methods such as curbside pick-up;
- supported initiatives to mitigate the financial impact of COVID-19 on businesses, citizens, charities and not-for-profits;
- continued to monitor and plan for other risks occurring during the pandemic such as weather-related incidents/events; and
- conducted research of responses on a global scale to identify best practices and anticipate risks for planning for the possible next wave of the pandemic.

**Attachment #1** provides a chronology of key activities and events for the last year.

**Attachment #2** provides an interim action report from the EOC.

## **PROVINCIAL ORDERS AND ENFORCEMENT**

On March 17, 2020, the Province announced a state of emergency under the *Emergency Measures and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA). Through this, the Province introduced a series of Orders prohibiting or restricting business activity with the aim of reducing the spread of the virus.

Over the course of the summer 2020 and into the early fall 2020, the number of new cases decreased significantly, prompting the Province to ease restrictions. Orders under the EMCPA were transitioned into the *Reopening Ontario Act* (ROA). As the second wave of the COVID-19 began, the Province introduced a phased system for regulating activity, with the greater restrictions limited to areas meeting specific transmission and case-load thresholds. Although York Region, was initially not identified as a shutdown-tier area, it soon joined key “hot” areas of Toronto and Peel Region in the shutdown.

COVID-10 case numbers began to reach new highs in November and December 2020. On December 26, 2020 the Province re-introduced the EMCPA and announced a province-wide lockdown; this was followed by the issuance of a Stay-at-Home Order, prohibiting movement, other than that considered essential, outside one’s residence. Since then, the number of cases has experienced a consistent decrease, once again prompting the Province to consider an easing of regulations in February 2021.

From an enforcement standpoint, COVID-19 has meant a significant increase in case file volumes. Since March 2020, staff have initiated over 20,400 COVID-related case files and issued 135 charges, with a face value of over \$100,000. Included in these statistics was an initiative focused on business activity in late November 2020 and through the holiday season that itself resulted in over 2,800 case files and 87 charges.

## **SERVICE IMPACTS AND ACTIONS**

Throughout the response to COVID-19, the City has taken a disciplined, responsible and measured approach and portfolios have worked diligently to implement precautionary measures to protect citizens and staff from COVID-19. That same approach is guiding decision-making about closures and reopening facilities and amenities. Although several City buildings remain closed and some programs have been impacted, city building has not slowed down.

Essential services remain intact and continue uninterrupted, including fire and emergency response, waste collection, water/wastewater services, by-law and enforcement services and the Access Vaughan contact centre.

Many virtual programs have been introduced - through online, teleconference or modified in-person methods - which offer an efficient, streamlined and safe experience for residents.

The decision to close or reopen facilities and amenities is informed by a risk model developed by the City with public safety always being the priority. The risk model uses Vaughan-specific data and reflects guidance issued by York Region Public Health and the provincial government, such as the ongoing extension of province-wide emergency orders and the announcement enabling York Region to enter Stage 2 effective June 21, 2020; Stage 3 of the reopening framework on July 24, 2020; the province-wide lockdown effective December 26, 2020; stay-at-home order effective January 14, 2021; and gradual reopenings in February 2021.

Council continues to be provided with regular weekly update memos from each department outlining key activities and results. The following provides a summary of the key actions to maintain quality public services while protecting the safety of our staff and citizens, to-date.

## **Corporate and Strategic Communications**

As the global COVID-19 pandemic persists, the City of Vaughan continues to keep citizens informed about reopenings, closures and precautionary measures in place. The Corporate and Strategic Communications (CSC) department employs a variety of communications methods including Public Service Announcements, eNewsletters, social media, website content, mailers, links to various provincial and federal websites and resources, and much more. That is in addition to extensive internal communications efforts to ensure staff are well informed.

CSC also works closely with all levels of government to respond to COVID-19 and assists in providing information on the different roles of municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments during an emergency.

The following provides an overview of the types and quantity of communications products distributed throughout the pandemic, from March 13, 2020 to January 3, 2021:

- CSC has issued more than 2,533 COVID-19-related products to date, including 304 public service announcements, 65 news releases and 48 communications from the Mayor (statements and keynote addresses).
- More than 4,000 social media posts have been shared across the City's corporate Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts and have averaged approximately 2.5 million impressions.
- Up-to-date information for residents has been an important aspect of COVID-19 communications, and more than 406 City Update eNewsletters have been issued. A City Hall Connects hard-copy newsletter was also mailed to all Vaughan residents in April, with another one scheduled for Q1 2021.
- The dedicated [vaughan.ca/COVID19](http://vaughan.ca/COVID19) webpage has received more than 140,000 page visits, while the [vaughan.ca/news](http://vaughan.ca/news) page has garnered more than 8,600 page visits.
- Vaughan.ca website page visits: more than 278,000
- A large amount of graphic design, photography and videography collateral has been generated by the CSC team to support all of the ongoing COVID-19 communication efforts. More than 4,700 different marketing and creative pieces have been produced. These include special signage and displays, City of Vaughan digital signs, digital billboards (RCC), web graphics, social media graphics, advertising pieces and videos.
- More than 642 communications have been provided to Mayor and Members of Council, ensuring relevant, accurate and up-to-date content and messaging is

available to share with constituents. These Council communications consist of more than 532 Council Communication Packages, in addition to Communication Update emails and Council Constituent responses.

- More than 181 Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) communications, including memos and letters to provincial Ministry offices on behalf of the Mayor, have been issued. This includes a daily IGR update to Council.
- Communicating with staff has been an integral component of the department's COVID-19 efforts. More than 82 staff communications to all staff and People Leaders have been issued. These include all-staff emails from CSC and the City Manager's Office and a dedicated internal COVID-19 webpage with up-to-date information for staff.

CSC's efforts have generated more than 609 COVID-19-related (Vaughan focused) media products generated from news outlets (news articles, radio and television interviews). As well, the department's social media outreach has averaged approximately 2.5 million impressions. For context, impressions are the number of times social media content is displayed on a social media platform. The City's corporate sites have been popular places for residents to get information, resulting in a significant increase in followers. In March 2020, the City had approximately 43,000 followers on its four platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn). As of January 22, 2021, that number had risen to 55,500 – an increase of 12,500.

The area of focus of external outreach has been broad, ranging from facility closings/gradual reopenings and proper disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE), to support programs implemented for residents and business and new online services.

CSC's efforts are consistent with the 2018 Citizen Satisfaction Survey results, which says that the public would like the information in the form of hard-copy and digital communications. The preferred ways of contact are: newsletters and brochures sent through the mail (58 per cent); eNewsletters sent via email from the City (58 per cent); the City website (53 per cent); and signage, such as digital signs or road-side signs (51 per cent).

The use of online platforms for the facilitation of fulsome public engagement and consultation remain an important part of our city-building efforts during the global pandemic. New online community engagement tools are also being utilized to carryout consultation activities related to the new and ongoing projects across Portfolios.

As the pandemic evolves, communications at the City of Vaughan will continue to evolve with it. CSC remains focused on providing Service Excellence to all stakeholders



– both external and internal – by ensuring they are equipped with the information they need, when they need it.

## **Economic and Cultural Development**

The City of Vaughan remains committed to working with all levels of government to support entrepreneurs and small-business owners, and to maintain the competitiveness of the local economy during the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. Small business remains the backbone of Vaughan's economy. While the global COVID-19 pandemic persists, the City of Vaughan continues to take action to help local businesses recover from the unintended consequences of the virus. The city has responded to the global COVID-pandemic with programming, education, and regulatory measures through the Vaughan Business Action Plan and the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan. A variety of resources and relief programs continue to be successfully utilized by businesses throughout the community - including frontline services via telephone, teleconference or online.

ECD is continuously assessing its services and adapting to the global COVID-19 pandemic to best serve the Vaughan Business Community. The global pandemic is reshaping and reinforcing local economic development's value proposition. Service is based on three value propositions:

1. Continued close strategic alignment with partner departments like Bylaw and Finance that allows ECD to not only provide timely and accurate information, but also enact regulatory changes to support businesses.
2. That Business Advisory Services, including education and outreach, are key in providing local businesses with the information, connections, and strategies they need to succeed.

That local economic intelligence can help businesses, governments, and support organizations to make decisions on operations to help them pivot by identifying trends and opportunities.

COVID-19's second wave has lead to renewed lockdowns and restrictions on business. The impact on the economy is still being assessed.

The Province of Ontario's second lockdown, beginning in the late fall 2020, and most recently being adjusted on January 14, 2021 has had the following impact on Vaughan's business community:

- Approximately 37 per cent of total businesses (up from 28% in the advancement of York Region to the Province's grey zone restrictions) would be negatively affected to varying degrees by the restrictions (e.g. from business closures to curbside pick-up restrictions, etc.). These businesses are primarily from the following industry sectors:

- Retail Trade;
- Construction;
- Accommodation and Food Services;
- Other Services (i.e. Hair Care and Esthetic Services, etc.);
- Educational Services; and
- Arts, Entertainment and Recreation.
- Affected businesses contribute approximately 33 per cent to Vaughan's total employment (up from 21percent).
- Approximately 6 percent of total businesses would be expected to temporarily close or cease regular business operations. These businesses contribute approx. 5 per cent to Vaughan's total employment.

In response, the City of Vaughan's Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) Department continues to deliver the Vaughan Business Resilience Plan. The plan provides both direct response services and ongoing resilience projects.

To help our economy during the pandemic, Economic and Cultural Development (ECD), inclusive of the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC), has been proactive in assisting Vaughan's business community, reaching thousands of businesses with programs, marketing, and advisory support.

Response measures include:

- Provide free consultation services and advice to local businesses
  - ECD has resolved more than 3,000 inquiries from businesses and delivered nearly 750 in-depth consultations
- Provide information to businesses
  - Created a COVID-19 business resource page with all government programs and information at [vaughanbusiness.ca/COVID](http://vaughanbusiness.ca/COVID), accessed by more than 56,000 people since launch.
- Delivered Training
  - ECD has hosted more than 9,000 participants at webinars covering various topics of business resilience

Resilience Project examples:

- Help main street and small businesses pivot
  - The Digital Boost program trained more the 300 businesses to adopt online tools in their business
- Help the hospitality industry
  - Deployed Regional Relief and Recovery Fund resources from the Tourism Industry of Ontario to offer programs to frontline workers and keep Vaughan top of mind for future travel plans
- Help manufacturing and supply chain

- o Work with York Region, the City of Markham and the City of Richmond Hill to conduct a supply chain study to understand weak points in supply chain and build resilience for future crises

## **Office of Transformation and Strategy**

In April 2020, in partnership with the Emergency Management team and the EOC, the Office of Transformation and Strategy established a COVID-19 Data and Analytics team, and a Lessons Learned/After Action Report team. The COVID-19 Data and Analytics Team created a Dashboard that facilitates access to all COVID case count data for Vaughan, the province and Canada wide. This dashboard has provided insightful information to the organization to assist in decision making during these unprecedented times. The COVID Data and Analytics team has issued over 480 EOC Data Reports with over 50 data sets.

The Lessons Learned/After Action Report (LLAAR) Team has documented events, activities and decisions which are very important to the continuous improvement opportunities from any emergency events we manage. The team developed a framework for information collection regarding the elements that will be required for the eventual post event report that will need to be provided to the Province and Council. The LLAAR Team has also facilitated meetings and discussions across the organization regarding impacts to business operations, how COVID-19 has presented opportunities for changes in the way we do business, and in documenting over 160 innovations and process improvements since the onset of the pandemic. Through the LLAAR over 300 staff interviews and 750 staff survey responses have been analyzed.

During the pandemic, the Office of Transformation and Strategy has continued to fulfil its mandate to support an integrated approach to business transformation including the establishment of the Enterprise Project and Change Management Office (EPCMO); developing and delivering project and change management training virtually across the organization; supporting a culture of innovation and continuous improvement, and overseeing enterprise level reporting for key strategic priorities and service excellence initiatives. Over 50 Enterprise Project and Change Management tools/templates have been developed and over 100 staff have received training. In addition, training and tools have been provided in Lean process improvements with over 200 staff who have received training.

The OTS has updated and streamlined the business case process to ensure effective governance is in place to examine and scrutinize projects before they move into the budget process. In addition, OTS has implemented a new corporate business planning process (Objectives and Key Results – OKRs) to support priority setting and strategic

alignment of resources and has completed the second year (2020) review and progress report of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES AND CITY SOLICITOR**

Public consultation remains an important part of the planning and city-building process. While Vaughan City Hall remains closed in response to COVID-19, the Office of the City Clerk in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Information Officer has ensured continued public participation via electronic-participation to Committee of the Whole and Council meetings including making a live electronic deputation via teleconference, telephone or written communication during the meeting. Members of the public can connect through their phone, personal computer, smartphone or tablet.

The Office of the City Clerk has successfully held 125 electronic meetings for Committees and Council since the COVID-19 Emergency (including special meetings, Committee of the Whole, Council, Committee of Adjustment, Task Forces, Sub Committees and Advisory Committees).

A separate report was brought to Committee of the Whole on amending the Procedural Bylaw to make electronic meetings a permanent option.

The majority of services are being provided without interruption and will continue to do so. Key services include:

- The Office of the City Clerk has launched public engagement for the ward boundary review.
- Curbside marriage licenses continue to be issued. A total of 305 marriage licenses have been issued so far through this method. In our satisfaction survey, 93.55% expressed they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with our curbside marriage license service.
- The Committee of Adjustment is now virtually commissioning their applications, allowing for a complete e-submission process.
- The Legal Services department is introducing a Legal Document Management System (LDMS). The LDMS will position Legal Services to become a paperless office, which will allow for seamless adoption of permanent work from home deployments as part of our new normal.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

### Access Vaughan

The City has seen a 13% increase in call volume to Access Vaughan compared to last year. Most notable is an approximately 110% increase in email volume compared to last year. Trending inquiries are related to property taxes, general by-law information, waste as it relates to the blue and green bin exchange program and outdoor skate registration.

- 198,218 Calls since March 13, 2020 (beginning of pandemic)
- 16,539 Emails since March 13, 2020 (beginning of pandemic)
- 65% resolution rate with single point of contact
- Recent spikes attributed to: mailout of the 2021 Interim Tax Bills, announcements of COVID related restrictions and reopening, the purchase and / or exchange of blue bins and green bins and outdoor skate registration.

Productivity improvements will include agents working remotely for the foreseeable future.

The project to implement an omni-channel integrated counter service approach at Vaughan City Hall is underway. This includes virtual services as well as a new approach to in-person services once City buildings re-open to the public.

### By-law and Compliance, Licensing & Permit Services

On March 18, 2020, By-law and Compliance, Licensing & Permit Services (BCLPS) established and chaired the Regional COVID-19 Enforcement Task Force. A cross jurisdictional team represented by the enforcement divisions of each municipality within York Region, York Region Public Health (YRPH), York Regional Police (YRP), Toronto Conservation Authority, Alcohol & Gaming Commission of Ontario and the Ministry of Labour, Training & Skills Development (MLTSD). The team continues to meet to discuss emerging issues, identify solutions, engaging in joint initiatives aimed at public health and wellness, ensuring consistency in approaches, application and enforcement methods and ensuring effective communications and information sharing within the team.

#### ***Enforcement Services Division:***

By-law officers continue to patrol and respond to calls on a priority basis. Priority remains on public safety matters, enforcing provincial orders and regulations, the City's Emergency Measures By-law and the regulation of the use of local parks and open spaces in Vaughan.

On July 9, 2020 York Region Council endorsed a recommendation from the York Region Medical Officer of Health, instructing owners of enclosed public spaces to have a policy mandating customers, visitors and employees to wear a mask or face covering. This requirement came into effect on Friday, July 17, 2020. By-law Officers continue to respond to related calls, inspect local businesses for compliance and coordinate efforts with Public Health officials as needed; focusing primarily on education with direct enforcement actions employed if necessary.

Despite a brief reprieve during the summer and into the early fall, on December 26, 2020, York Region was put into full COVID-19 lockdown. BCLPS redeployed the Property Standards Unit to full COVID-19 duties to manage the expected surge in service requests around the festive season and into the New Year.

In mid-January 2021, BCLPS along with business partners from YRPH, YRP, MLSDT, York region and other municipalities participated in a Region-wide weekend blitz of big box stores resulting in a number of charges laid for COVID and lockdown infractions.

In late January and early February 2021, the City of Vaughan reopened outdoor amenities with enhanced COVID-19 protocols that included an aggressive patrol and inspection campaign designed to ensure compliance with best practices to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

***Policy & Business Planning Division:***

Outward facing public and client services (e.g. licensing and permits) transitioned to an electronic format to allow for service continuance with minimal disruption. This included but was not limited to Administrative Monetary Penalty disputes and first attendance matters, handled by telephone.

On June 18, 2020 in support of local business operators, the necessary temporary by-laws were initiated to allow for local eating establishments and banquet halls to temporarily expand or establish additional outdoor patios, while maintaining physical distancing and adhering to all related health guidelines. This was the first directive issued by the Mayor and Members of Council under the City's Emergency Measures By-law. Nearly 100 businesses participated in the program, which was curtailed in December 2020 when the Province announced lockdown restrictions and restricted eating establishments to take-out, delivery and drive-through service.

Event, filming and lottery permits continued to be assessed and processed on a case-by-case basis, with a number of drive-through events being granted through December 2020. However, since lockdown restrictions no more permits have been granted.

Following the declared emergency, business license renewals were afforded a 180-day deferral of renewal fees. The deferral concluded on August 31, 2020. Reminder notices

were sent to all licensed businesses accordingly however, increasingly more restrictive regulations throughout the autumn have prevented many businesses from operating, either fully or in part, and the number of business license renewals has not seen a significant recovery.

Online payments of administrative monetary penalties, such as parking tickets, can be made at [PayVaughanTicket.com](https://payvaughanticket.com). Citizens can arrange an alternative method of payment or schedule a dispute appointment by calling Access Vaughan, and scheduled disputes are being conducted over the phone. Starting in mid-January 2021, the City began offering virtual hearings to address a backlog of screening appeals.

***Vaughan Animal Services Division:***

Vaughan Animal Services continues to serve Vaughan, Richmond Hill and the Township of King communities. Vaughan Animal Services Officers continually serve the communities through regular patrols and response to service calls accordingly. The Vaughan Animal Services Shelter remains closed, with limited access for adoption and pet recovery services by appointment only.

## **Recreation Services**

The City of Vaughan's Recreation Services (RS) department continues to take a disciplined, responsible and measured approach to gradually reopening community centres and providing programs, including in-person camps and fitness programs, indoor/outdoor fitness classes and virtual programming. The decision to reopen facilities continues to be informed by a risk model developed by the City with public safety always being the priority. The risk model uses Vaughan-specific data and reflects guidance issued by York Region Public Health and the Provincial government.

***Virtual Programing:***

RS continues to livestream popular recreation programs for all ages, abilities, and interests. This includes virtual fitness classes, which are posted six times a week on the RS YouTube channel, with more than 1,500 views of a single workout video. In October 2020, RS introduced Zoom fitness classes, free to Vaughan Fitness members, that are livestreamed with Vaughan Fitness instructors for live interaction and feedback. Most recently launched Vaughan FITbreaks, daily 5-minute exercises that add a short burst of physical activity aimed to re-energize the body and mind.

Additional programming includes cooking, dance, musical theatre, health and wellness, science and technology, plus educational series for preschoolers and individuals with special needs. Programs were promoted on @recvaughan Instagram (ads and behind

the scenes footage) and the platform saw steady growth of approximately 600 new followers and made more than 450,000 impressions for that time period.

Virtual recreational programming continued with a Fall and Winter series, including virtual P.A. Day programs and themed Halloween and December Break programs. Through these programs, participants could cook cultural dishes, crochet a blanket, build a website or a robot; act, dance and sing; take a jab at karate and boxercise; destress doing yoga; learn to write speeches or compete in family game night. Plus, educational series for preschoolers and individuals with special needs.

RS hosted a one-day livestreaming social media event on December 12, 2020 to provide residents a sneak peek into a sample of upcoming virtual recreation programs. Instructors demonstrated six 30-minute real-time demos on @recvaughan Instagram Live and Recreation Vaughan Facebook Live. Activities included play-based learning, crafting an alien, sweating to the golden oldies, bodyweight workouts, and singing and dancing in a winter wonderland.

#### ***Fitness Centres:***

Virtual fitness classes are livestreamed via Zoom, free to Vaughan Fitness Members. Free, full-length fitness classes were streamed Monday through Saturday at 10 a.m. on recvaughan YouTube. The channel saw over 300 new subscribers in the last two months of 2020 with more than 9,000 fitness video views and a total watch time of over 1,500 hours.

Fitness centres reopened August 10, 2020 with strict measures in place to protect all users and staff, including pre-registered workout sessions, controlled access, and limited capacity. York Region entered modified Stage 2 on October 19, 2020 and as a result closed fitness centres for in-person workouts. In response to the fitness centre closures, RS re-introduced the Fitness Equipment Loaner Program. On November 3, 2020 the Province of Ontario announced updates on restrictions for communities affected by COVID-19 and under this new framework, York Region moved to the "Orange – Restrict" level as of November 7, 2020 allowing gyms (among other businesses) to reopen with additional protective measures. Under this level, although restrictions for fitness centres were lifted and extended, RS made the decision to keep the fitness centres closed in response to the rising COVID cases in Vaughan. Fitness centres remained closed under the provincial lockdown provisions.

#### ***Pools:***

As part of the City of Vaughan's disciplined, responsible and measured approach to reopening facilities in response to COVID-19, the City took a staggered approach to reopening pools beginning September 8, 2020. Recreational and length swimming including Aquafitness classes were available to members. These facilities and activities were available with a reduced capacity and required pre-registration.



Enhanced daily cleaning and disinfection of high-traffic areas and high-traffic surfaces was implemented, including in changerooms. Access to changerooms were limited and users are encouraged to come as prepared as possible to swim. Lockers and showers remained closed.

On December 14, 2020 York Region entered the Grey-Lockdown level, which resulted in the closure of pools which remained closed during the provincial lockdown provisions.

***Arenas:***

Arenas reopened for permit use only in September 2020. Permits were staggered to allow for 30-minute cleaning and disinfecting between user groups.

On October 19, 2020 the Province of Ontario announced modified Stage 2 restrictions for the City of Vaughan and all of York Region for 28 days. As a result, City of Vaughan arenas remained open by permit only, however, the number of people on the ice at one time was limited to 10 with no spectators. Team sports were limited to training sessions only (no games or scrimmages). During that time Recreation Services provided a promotional rate for residents only.

The Province announced updates on restrictions for communities affected by COVID-19 on November 3, 2020 which moved York Region to the "Orange – Restrict" level as of November 7, 2020. Under this level, restrictions to the maximum participants allowed within arenas were lifted and extended, however Recreation Services continued with the same measures identified in October 2020, which carried through the announcement that followed on November 16, 2020 whereby York Region entered into the Control-Red level.

On December 14, 2020 York Region entered the Grey-Lockdown level, which resulted in the closure of indoor arenas which remained closed under the provincial lockdown provisions.

***Indoor Permits:***

All indoor permits remained closed under the provincial lockdown provisions, with the exception of a few organizations that are permitted to operate under social service exemptions listed within the regulations.

The City continues to work with our Community Service Organizations to prepare for a safe return and ensure all club specific protocols and guidelines are aligned with provincial regulations.

**Events:**

Many events continued virtually, including the annual Volunteer Recognition Awards Ceremony that was livestreamed on November 25, 2020. For the first time, the Vaughan Celebrates Concerts in the Park series took place virtually throughout October and November 2020 and included performances by Epic Eagles, Queen Flash, All Journey, Chart Toppers Tour and Beach Party Boys.

Events such as, Vaughan Culture Days (delivered by Economic and Cultural Development) reached an audience of more than 50,000 viewers. The Christmas Tree Lighting, Menorah Lighting ceremonies and Winterfest also continued virtually. People from multiple cities and countries around the world watched online from the comfort of their own homes.

Other virtual memorable moments included commemorating the naming of the Jean Augustine Complex on October 25, 2020, the Jean Augustine District Park and the Official Presentation of the Key to the City to the Honourable Jean Augustine including closing off the year with the Order of Vaughan Ceremony (delivered by the Office of the City Clerk), the City's highest honour presented to four remarkable individuals for their pivotal role in shaping the community.

Vaughan held the annual Toy Drive 2020 in support of the CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish. Residents were able to drop off toys to all local community centres, fire stations and resource libraries across the city. The Toy Drive 2020 collected a record-breaking 18,000 toys this year and nearly \$15,000 in donations of gift cards and cheques, which included a \$10,000 donation from the Spirit of Generosity initiative.

On February 7, 2021 RS hosted its first ever virtual Winterfest headlined by Tyler Shaw and performances by Doo Doo the Clown, Roberta Battaglia, Miss Persona and others.

Combined, all events were enjoyed by thousands of viewers, from hundreds of cities and countries around the world.

**Outdoor Amenities:**

Vaughan opened its five outdoor rinks on December 2, 2020 on a first-come, first-serve basis. Prominent signage, perimeter fencing, security and staff presence were implemented to ensure public safety. On January 14, 2021 the City closed its skating rinks in response to the Province's Stay-at-Home Order and in response to rising cases of the virus and people crowding in these spaces while not following public health guidelines around physical distancing and mask usage.

Outdoor rinks reopened on February 1, 2021 with enhanced safety measures, including an online registration system with RS new PerfectMind software, limited capacity, increased staff and security presence, additional benches and mats to ensure physical

distancing, and a mandatory mask zone. The addition of two natural ice rinks opened February 11, 2021 with the same safety measures in place.

On February 4, 2021 RS launched a new Snowshoe Loaner Program, to make it easier to explore the great outdoors. The snowshoe loaner program is free for residents (a \$50 security deposit is required upon booking) and bookings can be made online with the City's new online registration system, PerfectMind. Snowshoes are loaned on a weekly basis for four days from Thursday to Sunday and include one set of snowshoes per person, while quantities last. Following an online booking, residents will be contacted by Recreation Services' staff within 24 hours to co-ordinate a contactless, curbside pickup time and the completion of a mandatory waiver. All equipment comes prepackaged and has been individually inspected, cleaned, and disinfected.

## **Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service**

The Emergency Planning program has monitored the spread of the virus across the globe and provided the Emergency Management Team with updates and statistical data. The program continues to liaise with emergency management and public health personnel at the region, province, neighbouring communities and community stakeholders to share information. As part of its response to the pandemic, VFRS:

- Will continue to monitor and procure PPE on a continuous basis.
- Continue self-assessment activities for those entering the workplace.
- Continue contact tracing logs.
- Expand and utilize a virtual training platform where possible.
- Modify public education and outreach efforts – providing virtual options where possible.
- Follow the Ontario Fire Marshal communique – altering how fire drills are performed.

Firefighters attended 191 structure fires in 2020, which accounted for 1.9% of the incidents respond to. Almost 5.2% of the calls were classified as minor fire/pre-fire conditions, as opposed to the bulk of our emergency response, which were medical calls (49%). VFRS COVID-19 safety protocols are aligned with Ministry of Health and best practice in the industry.

The Fire education and inspection program have adapted to meet community needs during the pandemic through the implementation a virtual fire inspection program for vulnerable occupancies and recorded and released a series of short videos for Fire Prevention Week. The virtual inspection program enables retirement homes, nursing homes, and other care facilities to have their annual fire drills and inspections witnessed

and completed by an inspector working remotely through a two-way live video feed using Facetime or MS Teams.

The theme for Fire Prevention Week was “Serve up Fire Safety in the Kitchen”. Seven videos were released through social media and included: a kitchen fire in the training tower, fire extinguisher use, the danger of using water on a grease fire, a toaster fire, a stove top fire, cooking safety tips while learning to make a pizza, and a message from Toronto Maple Leafs’ star Mitch Marner on smoke alarms.

VFRS is continually looking at the precautions that are in place to ensure the safety of our staff as the provincial COVID-19 numbers continue to increase. Items reviewed included:

- Medical response directives which were previously released in March.
- Visitor logbooks to assist in contact tracing and tracking in each workplace including paramedics entering a VFRS station.

York University in collaboration with VFRS performed research for Emergency Incidents during COVID-19

A series of articles have been written for the Vaughan citizen highlighting COVID-19 safety protocols, and how to prevent COVID-19 fatigue.

### ***Emergency Planning:***

The primary focus of the division is the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. As the pandemic situation stabilized, routine program elements that were suspended since March 13, 2020 have been reactivated. Work has been initiated on addressing the recommendations from the first interim action report and the Grid Ex V after action report. Simultaneously with the COVID-19 activities, ongoing monitoring and notification to City personnel of other possible threats to the community continues.

### ***Mandatory Program Elements:***

The hazard identification risk assessment review and the critical infrastructure review has been completed. The community emergency management coordinators have the requisite training outlined by Emergency Management Ontario.

- *Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)*

The EOC dashboard program has been migrated to a new platform and tested by selected members of the emergency management team. The new version, Incident Point went live in October 2020.

- *Staff Training*

Within 2020, three different training sessions were provided in emergency management systems for 50 staff. Training for over 200 members of the Emergency Management

Team was provided virtually on the Incident Point software in late October and early November.

- *Public Education*

Traditional in-person public education initiatives have shifted to virtual platforms. Up until the onset of COVID-19, the program participated in two events, conducted two workshops for 129 people and distributed over 20,365 pieces of literature. Since the onset of COVID-19, Corporate and Strategic Communications has issued over 1,100 communications of which many qualify as public education information. The COVID-19 website received 66,581 visits which can be counted as public awareness.

- *Annual Emergency Exercise*

An amendment was made to Ontario Regulation 380/04 under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) for the requirement for municipalities to conduct an annual emergency exercise in 2020. The amendment took into account the emergency response activities in the Municipal Emergency Control Groups that have been engaged in as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The province has informally acknowledged that compliance has been achieved.

## **CORPORATE SERVICES**

Since the City declared a state of emergency on March 17, 2020, the majority of Corporate Services and Finance staff (OCHRO, OCIO, Office of the CFO, Financial Planning and Development Finance, Financial Services and Procurement Services) have been working remotely, where possible, without disruption to the provision of services.

### **Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer**

Our people are our most important asset and we have proven to be a City of exceptionally skilled, resilient and dedicated staff during these unprecedented times. In support of our employees, all decisions have embodied our key values as an organization of *Respect, Accountability and Dedication*. Our focus is steadfast in ensuring that the health and well-being of our employees and citizens remains our top priority.

Throughout the City's response to COVID-19, we have made critical and at times difficult decisions. As COVID-19 became a reality for Ontario and the City of Vaughan, we expeditiously closed the City's community centres and libraries and then subsequently closed all our facilities to the public.

Staff who could effectively work from home were promptly sent home and have continued to work remotely with the help of technology and business process modifications. Currently, more than 50% of the City's employees continue to effectively and productively work from home.

Staff required to work on-site or in the field continue to be provided with appropriate personal protective equipment and health and safety protocols and procedures were put in place to mitigate potential exposure to COVID-19.

OCHRO staff co-authored the City's Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) and the Business Reintegration Implementation Framework. These guides will assist Departments to safely and effectively return staff back into the workplace when it is deemed safe to do so. The BRP was presented at the RRR Committee in September 2020 and is periodically updated based on scientific guidance and governmental requirements.

Effective Monday, November 16, 2020 all individuals attending a City of Vaughan facility are required to complete the online COVID-19 screening assessment before entering.

Once an individual completes the online questionnaire, they will receive a pass or fail bounce-back email response indicating whether they can enter a City facility and their supervisor or direct-report manager will receive the same email notification.

The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer coordinated the City's efforts with respect to staffing impacts, with approximately 1100 employees temporarily laid off in April 2020. Since then more than 75% of Recreation Services seasonal contracts have ended and a significant number of employees were recalled:

- 380 Recreation employees were reinstated by the end of Q3 2020;
- 111 Crossing Guards were hired/rehired for the 2020/2021 school term;
- 106 VPL staff were reinstated/returned from DEL/LOA in 2020.

As a result of the Recreation Services organizational restructuring in June 2020, 30 unionized employees were laid off and given options under the applicable collective agreements and employment legislation. A majority of the employees elected to maintain employment with the City and were placed in other positions through exercising their bumping rights or were placed into vacant positions for which they were qualified.

Since the provincial orders for lockdowns in York Region, the following staff have been impacted:

- 100 part time non-union Recreation Services fitness employees were laid off as a result of the October 2020 modified stage 2 restrictions;
- 217 part time non-union Recreation Services aquatics employees were laid off as a result of the December 2020 lockdown;
- 14 full time Recreation Services employees (CUPE) were redeployed to assist with the outdoor ice rinks in January 2021;
- 101 part time non-union Recreation Services employees have been reinstated/ returned from temporary lay-off to assist with the outdoor ice rinks since the beginning of 2021.

In addition to the items above, the following are key action items since September 2020:

- Bi-weekly *HR Making Connections* newsletters continue to be developed and distributed to all staff. The newsletters share key information and resources with a focus on employee wellness. Over 20 editions have been shared to date and the feedback from employees has been very positive.
- In response to the mandatory active COVID-19 screening required under Ontario regulation O. Reg 364/20, the City of Vaughan developed and rolled out a new Health and Safety Directive and an online active COVID-19 screening tool. This tool was further updated January 21, 2021 to include an updated list of symptoms and questions stipulated by the Province.
- Staff continue to regularly monitor and communicate the rapid changes to employment legislation under both the Federal and Provincial legislative frameworks, such as the Employment Standards Act amendments to legislative leaves (e.g. changes to Declared Emergency Leave and the introduction of the Infectious Disease Emergencies Leave - IDEL) and other legislative requirements.
- There have been regular updates to the COVID-19 Q&A's to provide corporate direction and guidance to staff and leaders. For example, direction with respect to out of Province work and instructions for staff for those who undergo testing for COVID-19 were recently added.
- The Senior Leadership Team-Executive continues to work with Corporate and Strategic Communications on messaging to all staff to remind them of our COVID-related Health & Safety protocols.

- Additional information and supports regarding working from home was sent to staff and leaders including the requirement for all staff working remotely to complete a safety checklist for home offices.
- A comprehensive All Staff Orientation Guide was developed as well as a Re-Start Q&A's which will be shared with all staff upon the re-opening of City facilities.
- Continued discussions with HR municipal leaders across York Region and the GTA to review and compare COVID-19 impacts and responses, re-opening plans, bargaining and labour relations items.
- Developed a workplace wellness strategy, with a strong focus on mental health. The OCHRO is working with a cross-functional committee to implement the strategy and develop tools, resources, training and supports for wellness and mental health
- Drafted a succession policy and program for staff entitled "Emerging Leaders" with an associated mentorship component. The program will be rolled out in 2021 with the first successors to be placed into the City's leadership academy in Q3.
- Developed and rolled out an Action Planning Framework to assist portfolios and departments in communicating more detailed results of the 2019 Employee Engagement Survey with all staff and create associated action plans.
- Planning continues for a Workforce Management System (Time and Attendance Program).
- Launched staff virtual learning program and virtual recruitment and onboarding processes due to the COVID pandemic.
- Commenced Collective Agreement Negotiations with the CUPE Clerical and Technical (905.21) and Hourly Rated (905.20) bargaining units.
- Commenced Collective Agreement Negotiations for the Vaughan Professional Fire Fighter Association, Local 1595.
- Hired a Diversity and Inclusion Officer (DIO) in January 2021 to lead the organization's diversity and inclusion activities, provide strategic guidance and advise on policies, processes and procedures related to diversity. The DIO will also help facilitate a renewed mandate for the Human Resources department, attend meetings of the City's Senior Leadership Team and participate as a staff resource on the Diversity and Inclusion Citizen Engagement Task Force.



- Working with York Region, CUPE, and internal staff to hire support staff for the vaccination clinics in Vaughan, including redeploying staff where appropriate.
- In late 2020, the City of Vaughan was selected as a winner for the 2021 Greater Toronto's Top Employer Awards. This demonstrated that the organization exhibits and is committed to implementing workplace best-practices and forward-thinking policies. To be considered, employers are compared to other organizations within their field and are evaluated upon the following eight criteria:
  - (1) physical workplace;
  - (2) work atmosphere and social;
  - (3) health, financial and family benefits;
  - (4) vacation and time-off;
  - (5) employee communications;
  - (6) performance management;
  - (7) training and skills development; and
  - (8) community involvement.
- Those who are successful offer some the most progressive and innovative programs within the GTA. Receiving this accolade further cements that the City of Vaughan is an Employer of Choice who attracts and retains top talent and showcases the organizations commitment towards building and investing in its employees, and providing work that is challenging, motivating and rewarding. This in turn has enabled staff to deliver upon service excellence priorities set out by Council, ensuring citizen satisfaction, economic growth and continued prosperity.

The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO), in conjunction with management, CUPE and VPFPA, have focused on key responses related to communications, labour relations, safety, alternative work arrangements, recruitment, and workforce adjustments. In supporting our staff, all people leaders are receiving guidance from the OCHRO on any COVID-19 related staffing issues. The OCHRO also continues to provide bi-weekly communications to all staff and supports focusing on employee wellness.

## **Office of the Chief Information Officer**

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) continues to support and enhance remote access capabilities and work with internal departments to digitize their services.

The following services and capabilities highlight some of the major COVID-19 accomplishments.

- Continuing to support virtual committee and council meetings on Microsoft Teams platform for a better virtual experience.
- Continued to monitor infrastructure bandwidth and thresholds to support over 1,300 users working from home.
- Updated IT Acceptable Use of Technology policy to address working from home.
- Two resources (Enterprise Data Architect and GIS Systems Analyst/Project Leader) continue to support the COVID-19 Data Analytics team.
- Additional permit types were added to the City of Vaughan's permitting portal.

The City's OCIO department continues to support new COVID-19 related requests and ongoing operations to serve our citizens and businesses.

Working in conjunction with departments across the organization, various digital enhancements have been made or are in progress:

- An additional five service types were added to the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to increase services for citizens including solid waste, blue box collection, green bin collection, garbage collection and yard waste collection.
- A new digital permitting portal was launched, enabling citizens and building industry professionals to apply, track and pay for permits online.
- Through Alternative Work Arrangements and technology supports, the work of our corporation continues without disruption. Currently, more than 50 per cent of City employees continue to work from home.
- Created a COVID-19 Online Screening Form
- Launched a new Recreation Registration System (PerfectMind)
- Provided ongoing support for Corporate virtual events
- Facilitated the first virtual all staff forum and Managers Forum
- Upgraded Remote Access Tools
- Created an Online Permitting Building Standards Compliance Letter

- Transitioned 65% of desktops to mobile devices as part of the PC Replacement Program
- Assisted with virtual hearings
- Enabled additional remote call center agents
- Assisting with technical aspects of Covid-19 vaccination clinic sites
- 12 Digital strategy achievements include:
  - Permitting Portal
  - Municipal Water Back-flow Prevention
  - Audio/Visual System Upgrade in Council Chambers
  - e-Paystubs and T4 Slips
  - Citizen Relationship Management Public Works Communication Tracking
  - Service Request Portal for Environmental Services
  - Cloud Migration of Employee H Drives to OneDrive
  - Cyber Security Awareness Program
  - Short-Term Rental License Applications
  - e-Forms for IT Services and IT Service Catalogue
  - Media Management Solution
  - Transition City Payroll Services from Alectra

## **Procurement Services**

The Procurement Services team continues to support the City's service delivery needs by modernizing its business processes and leveraging technology. This includes not only online bid document payments, bids review and download of bid documents, but also on-line bid submissions for the convenience of the vendor community. The Procurement Services department has further innovated its processes to allow online internal procurement approvals, virtual site meetings using skype and sharing site videos. Online proposal evaluations, vendor interviews, consensus meetings, execution of contracts using e-signature, online vendor performance evaluation and debrief sessions have effectively transformed the procurement function into an efficient 'new' normal.

This 'new' normal has minimized the need for paper-based records, reducing paper and copying costs. In total, Procurement Services has successfully awarded 415 contracts worth \$97.5 million in fiscal 2020 to ensure delivery of council priority projects and fulfilling urgent operational requirements, including increased demand for PPEs without any business interruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiscal 2020

procurement activity represents 51 additional contract awards with an increased award value of \$5.4 million when compared to the previous fiscal year.

Although, Procurement Services was already on the path to transforming its procurement function, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to leverage technology to help the City meet its Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

On-line delivery of procurement services is now more effective and efficient with added transparency and value-add for the City and its residents. For example, the introduction of e-signatures benefits the vendor community by minimizing the inconvenience of traveling to the City offices and offers a safer work environment to staff by reducing public interaction.

## **Financial Planning and Development Finance**

Financial Planning and Development Finance (FPDF) continues to work with each City department to estimate the financial impact due to COVID-19, ensuring cash-flow and liquidity projections remain sound. External market impacts (e.g. interest rate reductions) are being closely monitored to assess the impact on City's investment portfolio, executing near-and-mid-term adjustments as required. Staff also continue to work with City departments on cost savings/deferral measures and spending restrictions to help mitigate known and anticipated revenue shortfalls.

FPDF staff have supported and will continue to support the City's efforts to lobby senior levels of government for financial support, which resulted in \$6.15 million of Phase 1 funding under the Federal Government's Safe Restart Agreement (SRA). On December 16, 2020, the Province announced Phase 2 funding allocations, of which Vaughan will receive \$2.602 million to help provide additional financial relief to support operating budgets in 2021. Funding is expected to be received in early 2021. Staff will continue to advocate for more assistance from senior levels of government in 2021.

In addition, FPDF staff are working with all departments to assess delivery and cash flow timing of all existing capital projects and proposed new projects. There will be a continued focus on managing timing of non-essential capital project spend through the balance of 2021.

In December 2020, Council approved the 2021 Budget and 2022 financial plan. The 2021 budget was approached with a mindset geared towards conservatism, flexibility, and sustainability. All initiatives were prioritized prudently with focus on legislated deliverables, business continuity and service-level stabilization. The Budget for 2021 met Council's request for a 0% property tax rate increase.

## Financial Services

The Final billing due dates for the 2020 property taxes were extended by 30 days respectively and payments were processed accordingly within those due dates. Supplementary and Omitted tax billings were also issued to brand new home buyers with due dates in November, December, and January 2021.

High call volumes continue to be experienced by Property Tax staff with respect to outstanding balances of tax accounts, concerns around payment and payment plans. A large percentage of tier two calls are still coming from Access Vaughan, as these require specific expertise/action by tax staff. There has also been a volume increase in the amount of emails forwarded by Access Vaughan as well directly by taxpayers to the Property tax area, which include many requests for Statement of Accounts.

Staff also addressed actions on canceling the W/WW rate increase and a 60-day stormwater deferral, which were brought forward to a special Council meeting for consideration. Further to this, staff have worked with Alectra regarding late payment charge waivers on utility accounts. As the billing system is tied in with water/wastewater, the City of Vaughan, as their partners agreed to waive the late payment charges for water and wastewater.

Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) data collection forms, in cooperation with Economic Development and OCIO have been developed and posted on-line for Hotels to provide essential data for the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC). This data will be used by TVC to assist in shaping the City's tourism recovery plan and monitor the continuing impact COVID-19 is having on the tourism industry. The City extended the suspension of the Municipal Accommodation Tax until September 1, 2020 and the hotels have continued remitting payments.

Additional volumes were experienced regarding the account set up and payment of Recreation Services (RS) refunds for program cancellations.

Financial Services and Procurement Services initiated a process to track all purchases and expenditures associated with the City's response efforts.

To accommodate alternative work arrangements, as staff practice social-distancing in response to the COVID-19 virus, Accounts Payable temporarily revised procedures to allow the City to continue to process payments. Where signatures were normally required for A/P processing and creating and updating vendors, approvals through email routing were allowed.

At the same time Financial Services has successfully implemented a number of finance modernization automation initiatives, including:

- Implementation of a new tax system (TXM). The system went live in January 2021. Work to stabilize the system will continue in 2021.
- Completing the primary phase of the Payroll Transition project and are mobilizing work on future near-term enhancements to payroll administration.
- Successfully automating the Records of Employment (ROE) process enabling 1,318 ROE's to be successfully submitted to Service Canada, ensuring that employees can apply for EI without any delay.
- Streamlining the expense reimbursement process for staff. Instead of receiving a separate cheque for their reimbursement, staff will now receive their payment together with their bi-weekly pay. This new process will reduce processing time as well as cheque printing costs.

Lending support to various departments, Financial Services has also assisted in operationalizing the online Amanda portal, Curbside Marriage initiative as well as completing a cash receipts review at the Joint Operations Centre.

Financial Services continued to analyze cash flows through 2020 and can confirm that all 2020 levy payments to York Region and the four school boards were finalized and paid on time. York Region waived interest until January 1, 2021 on any portion of 2020 property tax levy payments not remitted to the region as a direct result of a local municipality's COVID-19 response.

Additional activities have included:

- Preparation of the 2019 Financial Information Return and financial statements.
- Completion of the independent Audit of the City's financial position for the year ended December 31, 2019.
- Completion of the 2019 Tangible Capital Assets.
- Completion of 2019 Year-End and 2020 Half-Year Fiscal Health Reports to Council.
- Completion of the 2020 interim audit.
- Development of the 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets, with appropriate guiding principles to ensure sound fiscal management.
- In conjunction with Human Resources, a review of the new work arrangements in Finance will be conducted to determine the impacts to the delivery of services and stakeholders (Council, clients / departments, external parties and Senior Leadership).
- Opportunities for future efficiencies, productivity improvements and savings will also be identified by reviewing the costs and benefits of any service changes, potential modifications required, and long-term sustainability under "the new normal."
- Any financial implications of decisions taken from these reviews will be incorporated into future budgets of the associated Finance departments for Council consideration.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

The Infrastructure Development portfolio – Facility Management, Infrastructure Delivery, Infrastructure Planning & Corporate Asset Management, Parks Infrastructure Planning & Development, Program Management Office and Real Estate – has undertaken numerous actions, measures, tactics and initiatives to effectively manage the COVID-19 crisis as it related to advancing infrastructure and construction projects, sustaining and enhancing municipal buildings, sites and operations, and more importantly, looking after the City of Vaughan’s most important assets, our people.

Various actions were taken to clean and disinfect at increased frequencies; reinforce health and safety protocols; complete preventative maintenance; replacement/upgrade of filters for HVAC; deep specialized disinfecting of VFRS fleet; increased building humidity levels, and fresh air circulation; as well as implementing a new disinfectant method at City facilities using electrostatic application.

Despite COVID-19, the City has managed and advanced more than 155 active capital projects and \$66 million in project activities in 2020. The continuation of key infrastructure development projects is a vital part of the City’s COVID-19 reality. These developments will be the spaces where the community will gather, live, work and play long after the pandemic has passed.

Several projects were initiated and advanced in 2020 to alleviate traffic issues and enhance active transportation throughout Vaughan. These include the Bass Pro Mills Environmental Assessment from Weston Road to Highway 400; new bike paths along Clark Avenue; the Concord GO Centre Transportation Master Plan and new North-South Road Environmental Assessment; the Huntington Road widening from Langstaff Road to Nashville Road; the Kirby Road extension from Dufferin Street to Bathurst Street; the Kirby Road Widening Environmental Assessment from Jane Street to Dufferin Street; the Teston Road Environmental Assessment west of Pine Valley Drive to Kleinburg Summit Way; and the Vaughan Transportation Plan.

The City has converted 20,000 streetlights to Light-Emitting Diode (LED) technology which will result in significant energy and cost savings; zero carbon emission retrofit has begun for Fire Station 7-1.

Projects in 2020 included the undertaking of the Garnet A. Williams Community Centre Revitalization Project; the Carrville Community Centre, Library and District Park Project; Phase 2 of North Maple Regional Park; playground, court and waterplay improvements and accessibility upgrades at numerous parks across the city; and continued maintenance work in several community centres, parks and municipal sites.

The Facility Management team has taken full advantage of imposed facility closures, to undertake more than 50 renovation projects at various City buildings – from arena refrigeration upgrades and accessibility enhancements, to life safety sprinkler replacements and roof repairs, all to sustain and enhance sites for full operation when they re-open.

Facility Management operations staff also focused on activities to prepare for the reopening of outdoor facilities swiftly and safely. These amenities - the City's 5 outdoor skating rinks, the toboggan hill at North Maple Regional Park and the off-leash dog park at 299 Racco Parkway – were temporarily closed on January 15, 2021, following the Province of Ontario's stay-at-home order and declaration of a second provincial emergency under section 7.0.1 (1) of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMPCA).

- Site preparations included:
  - Enhanced safety measures implemented at the 5 outdoor rinks.
  - Additional fencing, rubber matting and seating installed to provide proper social distancing.
  - 24-hour security added for crowd control and enforcement of safety protocols.
  - Extensive ice maintenance performed to create a safe and useable ice surface.
- Two natural ice rinks at North Thornhill Community Centre and Maple Community Centre were also opened on February 11, 2021.

The portfolio remained steadfast in its commitment to growth and recovery by advancing a variety of key projects and construction activity that will:

- support the City as a fully connected and integrated community by enhancing the road network, transit, and mobility infrastructure;
- drive developments and promote good urban design resulting in public spaces and facilities that foster community well-being and quality of life;
- encompass principles of environmental protection and sustainability as well as inclusivity; and,
- ignite economic activity and prosperity.

Critical projects such as North Maple Regional Park, Carville Community Centre, Library & District Park, Clark Avenue Bike Paths, Vaughan Transportation Plan, Land Acquisition Strategy, LED Streetlight Retrofit Program, Integrated Urban Water Master Plan, and VMC Black Creek Renewal Project, were all advanced accordingly.

Through a sub-committee of the City's COVID-19 Emergency Task Force, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer and Facility Management have led the development of a Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) to help support and shape the transition to the new "normal" workplace for City staff. To inform a comprehensive reintegration plan, the sub-committee completed the necessary background work and has developed an



extensive plan. The BRP plan will help guide the Corporation to best prepare for the return of employees, while ensuring the transition is both safe and efficient.

- The City's BRP has been developed. The various protocols set out in the BRP constitute recommendations, based on various guidance provided by Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Health Ontario, York Region Public Health, and other authorities having jurisdiction, as well as the City of Vaughan's Health and Safety division and Facility Management department. As the COVID-19 situation evolves, the City will review and update this Plan accordingly.
- The BRP comprises three start-up phases, providing clear direction to help guide the City to best prepare for the return of employees to municipal facilities. Phase One outlines seven key areas of consideration – Administrative; Cleaning and Disinfecting; Personal Protective Equipment; Workplace Layout and Methods to Follow Physical Distancing; Case Response/Management; Visitors, Contractors, Suppliers; and, Inbound Parcels/Packages Guidance.

To support continued efforts in our places/facilities, the City will continue to monitor Grant Funding opportunities through the Municipal Partnership Office, Economic & Cultural Development.

## **PLANNING AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

Planning and Growth Management (PGM) continues to move ahead with innovative and digital solutions to deliver its services and develop service specific plans. These creative solutions have changed processes and have provided an opportunity to review new ways of doing business, altering service delivery and to implement innovative and digital solutions that will forever change how we do business.

The PGM Management Team has continued to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business units and service level delivery, with a focus on protecting staff and providing them with the training and tools they need to be successful.

A new digital permitting portal was launched in May 2020, enabling citizens and building industry professionals to apply, track and pay for permits online. Enhancements were made to the portal in June 2020, providing a "one stop shop" opportunity for citizens and building industry professionals to apply for engineering grading permits online. In 2021 further enhancements are expected that will allow for additional Development Engineering processes to be available to be processed online. The permitting portal is just one example of the digital strategies that enhance the customer experience and encourage city-building opportunities. For the year ending December 31, 2020, 1,639

online building permits and 1,386 engineering permits were submitted via the permitting portal. Development of a new digital portal for the submission of planning applications also commenced and expected to be in service for 2021.

As the face of city building for the City, the PGM team is committed to facilitating the development of complete communities for existing and future citizens. Staff have been working collaboratively with industry partners to ensure planning processes and approvals continue seamlessly through the pandemic to enable "shovel ready" projects.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed city-building in Vaughan. Development activity in the VMC has already exceeded residential targets for 2031. In total, 259 applications (including VMC) representing more than \$10.6 M in development fees were received in 2020, including 95 PACs and 164 development applications. There is a 56% increase in development fees collected than the \$6.8 M from the same period last year.

In the VMC, 2,137 new residential units are now completed and occupied representing a population of 4,231. There are 392,929 ft<sup>2</sup> office area and 114,529 ft<sup>2</sup> retail space completed and occupied. While considering all VMC applications, there are currently 31,996 residential units, representing a population of 63,314 residents at various stages of approval or construction. Of these applications, 13,593 units are in the pre-application consultation phase and 5,125 units are formally submitted applications in progress to be approved by Council. The VMC Secondary Plan revision is underway to update the people and jobs growth targets to the 2051 planning horizon.

Council approved 928 units in 2020, including 112 Apartments, 410 Townhouses, 404 Singles, and 2 Semis. The total number of residential units subject to current active applications is 34,914, not including the VMC. 68 development applications representing 38 properties were considered at Public Meetings in 2020.

Building Standards issued 2,957 permits valued at over \$1.15 Billion in 2020. More than 43,315 inspection processes have also taken place in the same period, exceeding the number of inspection processes for 2019, 2018 and 2017. Inspections have not been interrupted by COVID-19. Pool permit intake has more than doubled since 2019.

New development applications are being received electronically and Pre-Application Consultation (PAC), Heritage Vaughan Committee and Design Review Panel meetings are being held with electronic participation.

There are several projects underway that will guide development for intensification areas, including the Vaughan Mills Centre and the Yonge Steeles Corridor, with a focus on safety, active transportation, and sustainability. Land use studies to guide the development of transit supportive communities continue to engage stakeholders and the community as we work towards emerging land use plans. Review of the Maple and

Kleinberg Heritage Conservation Districts also commenced in 2020 moving forward towards completion in 2021.

The Development Planning Department also received a national recognition being awarded the 2020 Planning Excellence Award from the Canadian Institute of Planners for Vaughan's City-Wide Urban Design Guidelines. This award recognizes exceptional planning projects that demonstrate innovation, makes a meaningful impact on the development industry, and is a roadmap to ensure we continue to build a world-class city that encompasses good urban design and public spaces that foster community well-being.

In a competition with a number of other projects, an expert panel of judges with The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) selected the City of Vaughan Kleinburg Parking Strategy Project managed by the Development Transportation Engineering group in the Development Engineering Department as the Annual Project of the Year. The purpose of the Award is to recognize a significant achievement or contribution in the field of transportation engineering and planning demonstrating excellence and innovation.

The development of places for citizens to relax and explore their local neighbourhoods and broader community is an important aspect in building complete communities. Works had commencement on the planning and design of the Block 18 District Park Master Plan, a 7.7 Hectare park site, including approximately 28.5 Hectares of greenspace. In addition, the development of a City- Wide Sports Facilities Needs Assessment Study that will help to provide the City with a decision-making framework to address local and city-wide sports facilities provisions needs as identified in the Active Together Master Plan, providing an evidence-based decision-making matrix to identify parkland needs secured through the planning and development approval process.

The core services of PGM are driven through the processes of public and stakeholder consultation and engagement. The use of online platforms for the facilitation of fulsome public engagement and consultation remain an important part of our city-building efforts during the global pandemic. The City of Vaughan has responded with innovations and process improvements to allow programs and services to be delivered virtually. New online engagement tools are also being utilized to carryout consultation activities related to the new and ongoing projects across the Portfolio.

A number of online consultations have and continue to take place with respect to the Vaughan Mills Centre Public Realm Streetscape Plan, the Parkland Dedication Guidelines, Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy, Vaughan Super Trail 100Km Concept, the Weston 7 Secondary Plan, and the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) Project. In addition, Parks Planning staff presented the Vaughan

Super Trail 100Km Concept: Multi-use trail framework at the 2020 Ontario Bike Summit, which was held virtually and had over 200 attendees.

The PGM team strives to offer diverse and accessible ways for all citizens to access pertinent information and take part in the city building process. Staff are also working to advance a number of important policy and planning studies including, the MacMillan Farm Park Master Plan, the Greenspace Strategy, the Bartley Smith Greenway Trail Feasibility Study, the Official Plan Review, and the Comprehensive Zoning By-Law.

Staff have also advanced several projects identified in the City's Climate Emergency Declaration, including completing the review of the Sustainability Performance Metrics as a multi-municipal collaboration, starting the Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Framework, and obtaining Council endorsement to seek the funding of a home energy retrofit project using the Local Improvement Charges financing tool as an important greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction effort.

The shift to a virtual environment has enabled the development of leaner business processes and to offer more services digitally. There are a number of other digital modernization projects underway that will result in future electronic service delivery and efficiencies including: the implementation of an Electronic Application Submission Portal, new cost model and fee structure and electronic circulations of new development applications to third parties.

Also reviewing electronic public engagement strategies and exploring online platforms to ensure meaningful and inclusive community engagement.

Maintaining Alternative Work Arrangements for staff and continuing virtual meetings, will need to form the basis of standard business practices when the pandemic subsides, resulting in cost and energy savings related to commuting and will reduce pollution and Greenhouse Gas emissions.

## **PUBLIC WORKS**

The Public Works team has worked diligently to maintain a clean and beautiful City. This includes street sweeping, litter pickup, boulevard maintenance, grass cutting, tree inspections and pruning, pavement marking and water and wastewater services. Adjustments have been made to some regularly scheduled summer public works operations. Services that are delayed or reduced include tree planting and maintenance, weeding and mulching, road and sidewalk repair, replacement or addition of streetlight and traffic signals, implementation of new traffic operations and road safety measures, and water trailer event bookings.

## Environmental Services

In the early days of the pandemic response, waste collection services were expanded to assist citizens who were spending more time at home while adjusting demands on collection staff. By repurposing funds allocated to weekly yard waste collection to additional Double Up Days, workload demands on the collectors decreased and funds were re-allocated to services that the public was asking for.

To further assist, a temporary program to purchase garbage tags by phone was implemented in partnership with Access Vaughan during the Summer of 2020.

With pandemic restrictions continuing into the foreseeable future, on-line access (through the Service Vaughan portal) to purchase garbage tags and arrange for blue box and green bins exchange through home delivery began in November 2020. To date more than 4,000 home deliveries have taken place. Due to the overwhelming success of the program, blue and green bin home delivery will continue beyond the pandemic, allowing staff who provided this in-person service at the Joint Operations Centre to be redeployed to other crucial tasks and duties needed by the portfolio.

With increased usage of Personal Protective Equipment such as masks and gloves, citizens began disposing these items in blue and green bins at a frequent rate. To help keep collection staff safe and these materials out of the recycling stream, a Blue and Green bin audit campaign was developed and implemented. Custom stickers were distributed through the City's Garbage and Recycling contractor, educating citizens on how to dispose of these items appropriately.

Educating citizens about solid waste collection continues to be an important aspect of the program. Several approaches have been taken throughout the pandemic ranging from personalized virtual coaching, audits and feedback provided to over 1,000 homes and, with increased oversight from staff and the collection contractor, more than 100 letters have been delivered to citizens, who need a little more encouragement.

To continue to make our people a priority through health safety and wellness, physically distancing and splitting of shifts was critical for the water and wastewater operators who provide essential services to the community. These measures ensured operators were kept safe, while reducing overtime costs and improving on-call operators work-life-balance. A second touchdown centre for the water team was also implemented in November 2020 for water operators to minimize contact among the team and avoid a possible staffing reduction. Water operations have also implemented an alternative work arrangement program with members of the team completing four 10 hour shifts per week and a late start shift (11:00 AM- 7:30 PM) from April to October to further improve citizen responsiveness. COVID-19 protocols for entering residential properties to address meter leaks have also been updated to allow entry only when severe property

damage is occurring. The team also utilized virtual and video visits where they have been able to guide citizens in temporary fixes to minor concerns, returning to the residence or business when it was necessary and safe to do so.

## **Transportation and Fleet Management Services**

In the Road Operation's winter preparedness plan, winter maintenance contractors were required to provide the City of Vaughan with a COVID-19 contingency plan outlining their plan to meet contract obligations. The plans were crucial to ensure service levels continue to be met and roads are kept safer in the event staff became sick. To date, there have been 33 winter events, with no COVID-19 related delays to the winter maintenance program.

The team also developed agreements for temporary washroom facilities to be erected at the Joint Operations Center for contracted winter maintenance staff. This eliminated the requirement for the contractor's staff to enter a City facility, keeping both internal and external employees safe. The Roads team also worked closely with York Region on preparing a Mutual Aid Agreement in the event of a staff reduction.

Building upon the successes realized through the performance-based winter maintenance program, the Roads team has implemented the use of Artificial Intelligence to assist in delivering this essential service to the community. Vaughan was the first municipality in Canada to utilize this innovative technology and it has since been adopted in many jurisdictions across the Province. In the first year, salt usage was reduced by 30 percent by using Vaughan specific data and micro-climate assessments as inputs considered with the team's expertise. Applying the right amount of salt in the right areas at the right times avoids potential environmental impacts from oversalting and has resulted in savings of more than \$400,000 to date. The implementation of this program also ensures that the City's resources are used in the most efficient way possible to help deliver on the zero percent tax rate endorsed by the Mayor and Members of Council for 2021.

With many citizens staying home at the onset of the pandemic, increased amounts of household waste and garbage were produced. This garbage and waste unintentionally made its way into the City's catch basins, parks, boulevards and woodlots. The Public Works team created the "Keeping Vaughan Clean" initiative to combat this issue and address concerns around garbage, debris and illegal dumping.

Through the initiative, the Transportation and Fleet Management Services team completed four City-wide street sweeping rotations, more than two additional rotations than has been delivered in the past two years. The street sweeping program clears garbage, debris, dirt and leaves from roadways and catch basins. The increased sweepings also resulted in an indirect savings for our Environmental Services team.

The ES team has an annual catch basin maintenance program where they perform deep cleaning of catch basins throughout the City that prevents sediment and debris from making its way into storm water management ponds. In total, over 5900kms of curb were swept with more than 13,520 tonnes of dust, dirt and debris removed from City roadways, preventing these items from entering the storm water system.

## **Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations**

As citizens continue to enjoy trails and pathways that run through various woodlots across the City, our Parks, Forestry and Horticulture team contributed to Keeping Vaughan Clean, through a Woodlot Cleaning initiative. Through the spring-cleaning blitz, over 250 commercial garbage bags of debris and litter were cleared from the City's 28 woodlots. The team will be continuing to expand this proactive program in 2021 and beyond.

With the closure of indoor amenities and citizens staying at home to do their part to reduce the spread of COVID-19, options for exercise were limited. To assist with this, the Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations team in partnership with Corporate and Strategic Communications, pushed out information and messaging encouraging the use of active walking trails across the City. Additionally, specific maps of trails that receive winter maintenance was developed to encourage safe use throughout the winter season.

As usage of parks, trails and outdoor skate rinks increased, the team facilitated the implementation of portable winterized washrooms. With Council's endorsement, the team was able to provide 36 portable washrooms stationed nearby outdoor winter activities/ amenities. With enhanced daily cleaning. The team will continue to investigate the use of these washrooms in the spring and summer months nearby seasonal activities / amenities that do not have washroom facilities available to our citizens.

In September 2020, the Parks team developed a pilot project to use wildlife friendly garbage bins and QR codes in parks throughout the City. The bins and QR codes were aimed at reducing garbage, illegal dumping and the presence of wildlife in parks, that began to increase at the start of the pandemic. With the quick scan of a code, citizens could alert staff of overflowing or full garbage bins with the use of their smart device. Additionally, the new bins were not easily accessible by wildlife and their design deterred illegal dumping typically found with traditional waste receptacles. The team has seen great success with the project and will be expanding the program in 2021.

The expansion will include the use of smart sensors that are able to detect garbage levels and optimize garbage pickup routes for staff. Lastly, the team will be including new elements to the QR codes that will provide additional information about the park to our citizens. The information may include, but not be limited to, upcoming events, maintenance schedules, and future amenity enhancements. The expansion of the program will help keep parks clean, engage citizens and increase community awareness of parks services.

The Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations team provides winter maintenance services to over 1000 km of sidewalks across the City. Continuing to improve our winter maintenance operations, the team developed a sidewalk snow clearing route optimization program in order to reduce costs, while providing continued and efficient service to the community. The program expanded regular staff availability to seven days a week and 16-hour daily coverage during weekdays. The change in schedule eliminated regular standby hours, and reduced overtime. Via the route optimization process, the newly developed routes allowed for consistent service across the City, by establishing primary routes which will be addressed first, followed by secondary routes. The program ensured that sidewalks across the City will be addressed within 48 hours of each snowfall. With many citizens utilizing our paths and trails this season, keeping sidewalks clear and safe, while minimizing costs is a great achievement by the team.

## **VAUGHAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

Resource Libraries reopened after Labour Day and when York Region moved into a modified Stage 2 and subsequently Red-Control Level, they remained so with strict safety procedures in place. The three open branches operated with a customer capacity limit of 50, at which point further customer entry was only allowed as users left. Standard safety protocols, including mask wearing, social distancing and no outside food and drink, were enforced by staff and explained to customers upon entry.

Upon announcement of York Region's move into the Province's lockdown phase on December 14, 2020, VPL moved into Modified Stage 4 of its Recovery Strategy. VPL's cautious approach has meant that the required changes only affected the three Resource Libraries that had reopened in early September. All other branches remained closed, but with curbside pickup service in place. Bathurst Clark Resource Library, Civic Centre Resource Library and Pierre Berton Resource Library remained open to the public, but with extensive modifications in place. Customers were only allowed into the area directly inside the main entrance, and there was a strict occupancy limit of 10. In this area, customers could pick up holds, use public computers for a maximum of 15 minutes or apply for a library card. Some other limited services were available with staff assistance, including photocopying and email to print.



The subsequent Provincial lockdown included regulations that defined additional restrictions and as of December 26, 2020 all locations offered touchless curbside pickup only. This migration to curbside pickup as the only option to borrowing library materials was embraced by the community, with weekly borrowing numbers ranging initially from 12,000 growing to over 17,000 items currently.

### **Borrowing and Virtual Programming**

As of the end of January 2021 over 730,000 items have been borrowed from a combination of curbside pickup (introduced May14,2020) and from Resource Libraries (open September 8 – December 14, 2020). During this time the VPL website received 1.1 million page views, and aside from the homepage its most popular destinations are the digital downloads home page (66,000 views), curbside pickup (59,000 views) and VPL @ Home (39,000 views).

Since closing on March 14, 2020, more than 7,000 customers have registered on library platforms that enable digital downloads of e-books, e-audiobooks, movies and more. Over a quarter of a million items have been borrowed from Hoopla and Overdrive – the two most popular platforms for e-books, e-audiobooks and e-videos available to customers. Hoopla experienced an almost 300% jump in borrowing once the Pandemic hit, while Overdrive borrowing has increased by 50%. 25,000 digital magazines have been borrowed by customers using RBDigital, and due to growing demand, the online magazine collection increased to over 3,700 titles in January. Use of Naxos Music Library, containing over 1.6 million streaming audio tracks of classical, jazz, world and folk music has been accessed over 1,200 times and Pressreader, which provides access to digital versions of 4,000 newspapers from 100 countries in 60 languages, has been consulted over 50,000 times.

VPL continues to offer a variety of programming for all ages, including virtual storytimes, bookclubs and guest speaker series. Nowhere is this popularity more visible than in flagship programs. The Halloween Family Party, hosted on Zoom, was joined by 60 families, with a total attendance of 160 people. Other flagship programs included a virtual author visit from Jennifer Robson and a sold-out family magic night attended by 264 people.

### **Innovation**

VPL continues to innovate in response to the pandemic. To promote public health, VPL has introduced touchless checkout, where customers were able to use self-check machines to borrow items - scanning and receiving an emailed receipt without any need to touch a screen. This method will replace interactions with staff for the significant future, which means items will no longer be passed back and forth to facilitate borrowing. The move to touchless checkout is a result of VPL's safety audit in response to COVID-19 and further highlights a commitment to staff and customer safety. The delivery of information assistance continues to evolve in response to customer needs, with the most recent achievement of note being the successful implementation of a Virtual Information Desk including live chat service, which allows customers to

directly converse with staff in real time. The response from the public has been enthusiastic.

Innovation also extends to outreach programs. VPL was the recipient of a Federal Government grant allowing for the purchase of MiFi portable wifi hotspots as part of the program 'Connecting Vaughan Seniors with Information and Loved Ones Through Technology'. These devices have been distributed to seniors' residences throughout the City with accompanying ipads or chromebooks, and provide internet access that allow our older customers to browse online as well as communicate with friends and family. VPL has also been required to replace in-person tutoring with virtual options, and this has been embraced by the public. The Brainfuse service was launched in September and has 2 components – Help Now which offers homework help, skills building, writing lab, test preparation and live tutoring and Job Now, which offers resume assistance, coaching, a test centre and live tutoring. Between September 24<sup>th</sup> and the end of the year, Help Now was used 4,395 times which included 687 live tutoring sessions, while Job Now was used 919 times which included 129 live tutoring sessions.

VPL's What's On magazine is now made available monthly in digital format and features digital links to all programs and services for ease of use. This publication is hosted on the VPL website and distributed to customers via email and social media. VPL has also developed an online Welcome Brochure that is distributed to new customers via email once they register for a library card. This brochure is also hyperlinked to introduce them to parts of the website that may be of interest to them.

While these changes are visible to customers, there are a number that are not, but which will have a significant and positive impact on staff. The requirement to adapt library services in the past six months has accelerated several process improvements and the embrace of technology within the organization. Laptops have replaced staff desktops, and more flexible work arrangements will be incorporated on an ongoing basis, with some staff working partially from home. Additionally, a greater proportion of collection funds has been allocated to digital resources, while overall spending on new acquisitions has been lowered for 2021 in response to current closures and the lower circulation this entails. These changes and others have been presented to staff in a new strategic positioning paper Advancing VPL: The New Normal and has been reviewed at staff Town Halls.

### **Staff Engagement**

As with other meetings, VPL's annual Staff Appreciation event was recreated as an online celebration attended by VPL Board Trustees to recognize the remarkable achievements of their colleagues, service date anniversary milestones and the presentation of VPL's Annual Award of Excellence. This has been a remarkably challenging year for staff, but their response and commitment has been extraordinary, and this event provided an opportunity to reflect on that.

In early December all staff attended the fourth virtual interactive staff training sessions on resiliency and positivity. At these Zoom seminars, staff learned how to reframe their experiences to encourage a more optimistic approach to problems and recognize their achievements. These staff engagement efforts are complemented by monthly virtual Town Halls and frequent Updates from the CEO.

Throughout late Summer and into the Fall, as demand for services increased, VPL recalled 65% of the 162 staff members who had been laid off. Frequent communication continues with colleagues still not back in the workplace. Recruitment of new staff has also resumed using Microsoft Teams to comply with public health recommendations. Finally, VPL has created a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee to examine all aspects of operations, staffing and the customer experience. This committee has already made significant recommendations on how VPL can create a more diverse and equitable environment for staff and customers and will continue to do so in the coming months.

## **Financial Impact**

COVID-19 had a significant financial impact in 2020. The City quickly and swiftly implemented measures such as workforce re-balancing and freeze on discretionary expenditures to mitigate the impacts. Phase 1 funding of \$6.15 million received from senior levels of government (as part of the Safe Restart Agreement) also helped mitigate pressures. Final financial results for 2020 are not yet available, but the City of Vaughan, like all municipalities in Ontario, is not permitted to end the fiscal year with an operating deficit as legislated by the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Any 2020 operating surplus or deficit will be offset using the appropriate reserve.

The 2021 Budget which was approved by Council in December 2020 included a 0% tax rate increase and factored in the forecasted financial impacts of COVID-19. These included lower own-sourced revenues, continued workforce re-balancing and reduction in discretionary expenditures. The 2021 Budget also assumed no additional support from senior levels of government. Confirmed phase 2 SRA funding of \$2.602 million was received post-2021 Budget approval, and any operating surplus from 2020 will be transferred to reserves to help mitigate unanticipated pressures not already included in the 2021 Budget.

Staff will continue to monitor the pandemic closely as it evolves and will provide regular updates to Council.

## **Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

The City of Vaughan continues to work with York Region and the York Region Public Health Unit throughout the COVID-19 emergency response.

## **Conclusion**

This report has provided the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful (RRR) Committee with updated information regarding the City's response to COVID-19. Information provided includes a summary of provincial orders and related enforcement activities; a summary of impact to City services; a chronology of key events and activities over the past year. In addition, an update is provided regarding the activities of the Emergency Planning program and the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

As COVID-19 persists, City building continues. In addition to the efforts of the City staff and members of Council to date, the City will continue to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure the effective delivery of quality public services while ensuring the safety of our staff and residents.

**For more information**, please contact:

- Jim Harnum, City Manager and Acting Deputy City Manager Planning and Growth Management
- Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer
- Wendy Law, Deputy City Manager Administrative Services and City Solicitor
- Gus Michaels, Acting Deputy City Manager, Community Services
- Zoran Postic, Deputy City Manager Public Works
- Nick Spensieri, Deputy City Manager Infrastructure Development
- Margie Singleton, Chief Executive Officer Vaughan Public Libraries

## **Attachments**

1. A Year in Review: Chronology of Events
2. COVID-19 Pandemic Response - A Year in Review January to December 2020 – Fourth Interim Report

## **Prepared by**

Kathy Kestides, Director, Office of Transformation and Strategy, ext. 8412

## **Approved by**



Jim Harnum, City Manager

## **Reviewed by**



Jim Harnum, City Manager