

Ready, Resilient and Resourceful Committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 18, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: COVID-19 BUSINESS REINTEGRATION PLAN

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful (RRR) Committee information regarding the City's response to COVID-19 with respect to the Business Reintegration Plan. This report provides the RRR Committee with an overview of the business reintegration plan, the phased-in approach, information regarding current work from home productivity and an overview of how COVID-19 has impacted the City's thinking and considerations for the future of work.

Report Highlights

An overview of the Business Reintegration Plan and Implementation Framework including:

- The continuation of staff working from home, where operationally feasible, during the pandemic.
- A comprehensive approach to a safe, cautious, and phased approach to return staff who are currently working from home to the workplace, when it is safe to do so.
- A summary of activities to assess and implement reintegration actions / requirements while leveraging successes in increased productivity and efficiencies realized during the pandemic.
- An overview on how management is ensuring service delivery and productivity for staff who are working from home/remotely.
- An overview of the key benefits and the challenges of staff working from home / remotely.

A summary of research and studies that the City is considering in its approach for the future of the workplace in a post COVID-19 environment; to ensure the City is leveraging its learnings during its response to the pandemic and continues to ensure the City is positioned as a progressive employer and an employer of choice.

Recommendations

1. That the COVID-19 Business Reintegration Plan 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 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. 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, its second meeting was held on September 29, 2020 and a third meeting was held on March 10, 2021. Each RRR Committee has documented the progress made by the City throughout its response to the pandemic.

This report provides the RRR Committee with information regarding the COVID-19 Business Reintegration Plan (BRP), including:

- An overview of the BRP Plan and Implementation Framework.
- A summary of activities that are underway to assess and implement reintegration actions and requirements.
- Information regarding productivity for those functions which are being delivered remotely or in a work from home environment.
- A summary of research and studies that the City is considering in its approach for the future of the workplace in a post COVID-19 environment; to ensure the City is leveraging its learnings during its response to the pandemic and continues to ensure the City is positioned as a progressive employer and an employer of choice.

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*](#)
- [*Mass Vaccination Clinic Update*](#)
- [*UPDATE ON CITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19*](#)

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 a 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 a 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 continues to facilitate these efforts by disseminating information from York Region and Public Health Ontario through our own communications channels.

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve and vaccinations are provided, the City continues to take a cautious, measured and evidence-based approach to its decisions. Although a definitive date has not been set for a return to the workplace for those staff that are working remotely or working from home, the City has continued to make preparations including the development of the Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) and the BRP Implementation Framework. The BRP will be activated once it is safe for staff to return to the workplace. The following provides an overview of the BRP and its implementation requirements.

Please refer to Attachment #1 for the detailed Business Reintegration Plan.

BUSINESS REINTEGRATION PLAN

On March 17, 2020, the City declared a state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, many staff have continued to report for work in City facilities each day due to the essential and critical nature of their work; however, where operationally feasible, many staff were reassigned to home-based work and have remained operational and productive while working from home.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the City has taken a disciplined, responsible and measured approach to closing - and gradually reopening - City facilities and amenities. The decisions to keep select facilities closed is important to ensuring we protect the health and safety of citizens and staff.

The following facilities remain closed to the public and have limited staff on premises:

- Vaughan City Hall
- Joint Operations Centre
- City Playhouse Theatre
- Community Centres (when under restrictions by provincial orders)
- Vaughan Animal Shelter (except by appointment, for adoption purposes only)
- Vaughan Public Libraries (when under restrictions by provincial orders)

Currently, over 700 staff are working from home or remotely. Although a definitive date has not been set, the Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) has been developed to support the cautious and gradual return to work of these staff when it is safe to do so.

The BRP has been developed and is supported collectively by members of the City's Emergency Management Team and Joint Health and Safety Committees, in consultation with documentation from public health agencies and safe work associations. This Plan is in conjunction with the City's Health and Safety program and Health & Safety Directive for Worksite Visits During COVID-19.

The City's Business Reintegration Plan (BRP) will continue to evolve as more information becomes available from the Province and Public Health with regards to

COVID-19. The framework for this Plan entails a high-level consistent approach to how staff are reintegrated back into City facilities, including those staff who have continued to work on site.

As staff continue to uphold and advance “healthy” municipal buildings while facing new and unprecedented challenges, the BRP helps to prepare for the eventual return of staff to the workplace. For those who continue to operate out of City facilities due to job requirements, extensive measures have been taken, including enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, physical distancing, and engineering interventions.

A sub-committee of the City’s COVID-19 Emergency Operations Committee has developed the BRP and its implementation framework for the “return to work” and reintegration of staff for the Corporation.

In collaboration and consultation with all departments across the City, the Facility Management department, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, and the Office of Transformation and Strategy are leading the implementation requirements of the BRP to help support and shape the transition to the new “normal” workplace for City staff and guide the Corporation to best prepare for the return of employees, while ensuring the transition is both safe and efficient.

Facility Management has done extensive work on the physical building and engineering interventions such as cleaning and disinfecting, floor markings, security access, signage, HVAC, HEPA filtration, maintaining appropriate humidity levels in facilities, implementing touchless technology; and a review of processes and procedures, including a review of initiatives already completed and those planned.

The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer has led the “people” component of this initiative and will continue to provide guidance, policies, procedures and applicable forms, i.e., staff contact tracker; the development of QAs for staff; orientation and training sessions; toolkit for people leaders and quick reference guide for staff – pre-reintegration and what to expect on the first day back into the workplace.

The Office of Transformation and Strategy is providing critical project management and change management supports, facilitating corporate-wide consultations, providing research and assessments to assist in the implementation requirements.

In consultation with Corporate and Strategic Communications, a comprehensive communication plan will support the various phases of the reintegration plan to promote the return-to-work components, strategic measures and implementation timelines. Corporate and Strategic Communications has taken the lead in developing key messaging; tactics; guidance in terms of the communication flow for staff; visuals for a consistent corporate identity; and will be instrumental in the communication from the City Manager to staff.

The BRP – which provides for a gradual, phased approach to reopening – covers key areas of action with consideration given to business models and any associated modifications, customer service and experience (citizens and businesses), provincial and regional directives, as well as Corporate policies (Alternate Work Arrangements), including but not limited to:

- Staff Management;
- Case Management;
- Safety and Physical Distancing;
- Cleaning & Disinfection (including indoor environment enhancements); and,
- Education & Communication.

As staff carefully continue to monitor the evolving pandemic, ongoing impacts and provincial and regional directives, the return of staff is still anticipated to be months away. Public health strategies, jurisdictional scans, developing industry guidelines and best practices have and will continue to provide insight and direction. Where possible staff will continue to work remotely and reintegration to the workplace will not proceed in the immediate future as the situation remains fluid and continues to evolve.

Vital to a successful return of staff to the workplace and for those staff that have continued to work at City Hall, Joint Operations Centre, works yards, and fire halls, is the introduction and enhancement of associated policies, strategies and measures that allow employees to view the workplace as a carefully managed operation – a safe, healthy and welcoming environment and not one of potential risk to their health and well-being.

The various protocols set out in the BRP constitute the required actions based on various guidance provided by the 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 Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer - Health and Safety division and Facility Management department. As the COVID-19 situation evolves the City will review and update this Plan accordingly.

The City has developed the BRP to commence the reopening of City facilities to City staff and eventually, the citizens of the City of Vaughan, when it is safe to do so. One key component of the City of Vaughan's response plan is a start-up process of shared practices for guidance to protect employees and ensure their health and well-being are cared for during COVID-19. The BRP provides specific guidance that departments shall use to develop recovery plans that address and consider requirements for their respective area or service. Each category provides clear guidance on:

- the requirements for active screening when coming to work;
- maximum number of staff permitted in work locations;
- guidance on scheduling;

- guidance on personal protective equipment (PPE);
- cleaning and disinfecting;
- physical distancing practices;
- case management response to positive or suspected cases.

The BRP is based on a phased approach:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Up to 30% maximum person load at designated city facilities	Up to 50% maximum person load at designated city facilities	“New Normal” TBD – person load at all facilities
Designated facilities include City Hall and Joint Operations Centre	Designated facilities will include those listed in Phase 1 with addition of any new facilities where limited public admittance will occur	All action items noted in Phase 1 and 2 are to be initiated with additional items
Up to 30%	Up to 50%	“New Normal” TBD

In all phases of staff reintegration, working from home will remain an option. Phase One: Up to 30% maximum person load at designated City facilities – no public admittance. Designated facilities include City Hall, Joint Operations Centre. Phase One allows for a maximum of up to 30% of City staff permitted into the workplace. This limit is based on the safest estimate that would allow staff to safely enter the workplace, navigate pathways, enter their departments, washrooms and other common areas (cafeteria, walkways, washrooms) without conflicting with the 6 feet physical distance guideline and where hygiene/disinfectant practices can be effectively implemented and maintained where common areas are used.

Phase Two: Up to 50% maximum person load at designated City facilities – limited public admittance. Designated facilities will include those listed in phase one with the addition of any new facilities where limited public admittance will occur. All action items noted in phase one are to be initiated with the addition of items, such as, but not limited to: limited restriction of public shared areas; continued restricted use of meeting rooms; consideration of opening certain services to the public; and food services area safety. The actions noted in this phase may be adjusted based on guidance from local, provincial and federal public health agencies.

Phase Three: “New normal” TBD or higher person load at all facilities - all action items noted in phase one and two are to be initiated with the addition of actions to be dependent on guidance from local, provincial and federal public health agencies. It is anticipated that the “new normal” will optimize a hybrid approach of on-site and remote/work from home arrangements to ensure continued distancing, work-life flexibility and utilization of workspaces.

BRP IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

In addition to the BRP, an Implementation Framework has been developed to outline the City of Vaughan’s guiding principles that support the process of returning City staff to “new normal” business operations following the COVID-19 pandemic while ensuring the health and safety of our workforce. A BRP Working Group was established with the overall responsibility to develop, facilitate, and implement the City of Vaughan’s pandemic reopening strategy. Key objectives focus on protecting physical health, supporting emotional well-being, and enabling business continuity.

Key Objectives		
Protect Physical Health	Support Emotional Well-being	Enable Business Continuity
➤ Address the immediate physical challenges COVID-19 presents in the workplace.	➤ Provide flexibility, adequate notice, and support resources to our workforce.	➤ Create a phased approach to return operations back to “new normal”.

In addition, the response plan is guided by the following key initiatives – People, Infrastructure, and Communications.

People

Decisions around gradually returning staff into the workplace will continue to be informed by public health advice, provincial directives and Vaughan specific data.

- Develop procedures and protocols to ensure health and safety is a top priority, ensuring compliance and legal standards.
- Ensure administrative controls – workforce assessment, planning and implementation; self-assessment screening; contact tracing.
- Provide employee education and training.
- Provide available employee well-being resources, ensuring flexibility and adaptability.

Infrastructure

Ensure engineering and physical infrastructure controls:

- Workstation assessments to ensure physical distancing measures are implemented.
- HVAC controls.
- Restricted entry/exit access points.
- Ensure proper protocols for safety, protection and cleaning.
- Ensure appropriate supplies for cleaning and disinfecting are available.
- Ensure the appropriate infrastructural barrier(s) are installed, where required.

- Manage the risk from shipping and receiving supplies and material.

Communications

Manage all COVID-19 pandemic related communications:

- Ensure all visual aids (e.g., notices and signage) are posted in common areas; monitoring for changes.
- Support readiness efforts on the City's Business Reintegration Plan.
- Communicate any changes regarding procedures and protocols.

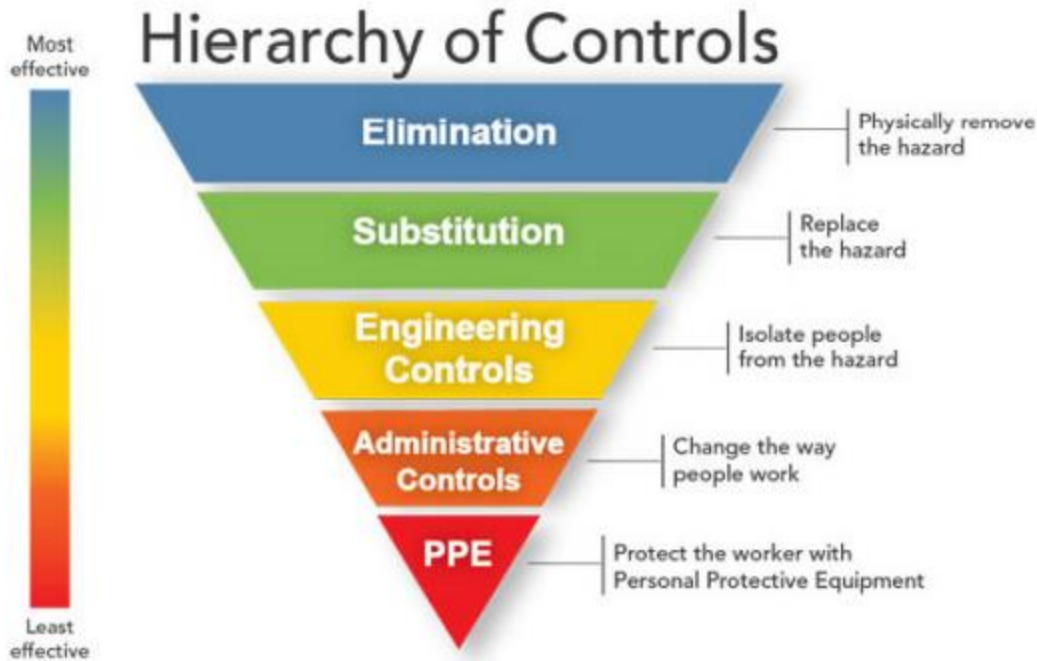
Key Messages

- Where staff have been successfully working from home since the beginning of the pandemic, and where operationally feasible, they are to continue to do so.
- Where due to any government regulation restriction, such as age, compromised health situation, staff are to continue to work from home.
- Where operationally required to report for work in Phase I, department heads are responsible for ensuring that staffing levels do not exceed 30% per City facility.
- Where departments need to exceed the 30% allocation, special consideration will be provided with guidance from the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer and the Facility Management department.

Health & Safety Hierarchy of Controls

The City has a multi-level process to minimize and reduce staff exposure to hazards using well-established health and safety principles found in the Hierarchy of Controls. The process is a sequence of controls ordered by priority and in decreasing effectiveness. This involves:

- Removing risk by having staff work remotely, where operationally feasible;
- Creating barriers between staff and potential causes of COVID-19, such as distancing, increased sanitization and restricting the use of meeting rooms and common spaces for staff at City facilities, among other measures;
- Mandating the use of PPE and updating staff directives accordingly to the evolving nature of COVID-19.



STAFFING ANALYSIS

During the current preparation stage of the BRP, work has commenced to conduct a staffing analysis of the over 700 staff who are currently working from home or remotely. Meetings and consultations have been held with every department management to review the current work from home/remote arrangements and to determine what staff would need to return to the workplace in the phased approach of the BRP.

For business areas where work from home/remote continues to be feasible, management have provided an assessment of what positions can continue to work from home during Phase One (up to 30% staff load on site) and Phase Two (up to 50% staff load on site).

This assessment by management has indicated that approximately 558 of the current positions working from home/remotely can continue to do so the majority of the time (3 - 5 days per week) and approximately 224 positions can continue to work from home on a partial basis (1 - 3 days per week). This assessment assures our ability to proceed with a slow, gradual and cautious approach to reintegration while providing the opportunity to leverage a longer-term alternative work arrangement approach for the organization.

Where working from home/remotely has proven successful and where job functions effectively lend themselves to remote or work from home approaches, this will continue as work from home continues to be a viable option for many employees.

This analysis will be used in further business reintegration planning as management will soon begin the scheduling and seating arrangements for staff returning to the workplace once the City has determined it is safe to do so.

WORK FROM HOME PRODUCTIVITY ASSESSMENT

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 and critical services remain intact and continue uninterrupted, including fire and emergency response, waste collection, water/wastewater services, by-law and enforcement services, facility 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 staff and 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.

For staff working remotely or working from home, the Administration has ensured that staff productivity and efficiency in delivery of functions and services continues to meet expectations at the highest quality of standards.

As the Business Reintegration Plan is activated and when it is safe for staff who are currently working from home to return to the workplace it will be critical to maintain productivity levels. As Phase One of the BRP includes up to 30% of staff in the workplace and Phase Two includes up to 50% of staff in the workplace, a significant number of staff will continue to work from home and productivity levels will be maintained by ensuring appropriate supports and resources (equipment, connectivity, access to information, technology, etc.)

Management has assessed productivity and service impacts and has successfully reconciled service delivery for work from home approaches where operationally

feasible. Management's ongoing assessment of productivity will be used to make the critical decisions on scheduling staff in the workplace including seating arrangements for staff returning to the workplace once the City has determined it is safe to do so.

Ongoing productivity assessments have been conducted by all departments throughout the response to the pandemic. Critical staff required in the field continue to receive supports, PPE and safety measures and equipment to ensure their safety as well as their effectiveness. For staff working from home/remotely the following productivity measures and indicators have been utilized.

1. Processes to Manage Staff while Working from Home/Remotely

Throughout the City's response to the pandemic approximately 700 staff have been working from home (either partially or 100% of the time). Management has effectively managed staff productivity by employing a number of processes, procedures and actions to guide and support staff, including:

- Utilizing collaboration and communications tools such as MS Teams and other online applications/tools.
- Formal/informal virtual check-ins.
- Standing daily, weekly, and monthly meetings depending on type of service requirements.
- Review of work outputs and outcomes.
- Use of time logs, timesheets, docketing systems, work trackers.
- Case/file management systems to assign and track work.
- Time processing, ticketing, work orders.
- Continued training using virtual on-line tools.
- Continued managing of performance goals (utilizing Halogen).
- Continued management of department OKRs (objectives and key results).
- Regular performance discussions with staff - performance based on deliverables.
- Monitoring, tracking and regular reporting on project status and deliverables.
- Shared documents on MS Teams provide real-time updates on work completed or ongoing.
- Regular informal check-ins using MS Teams and Skype to call/connect with employees and be available to discuss any questions/issues.

2. Key Productivity Indicators and Assessments:

Every department, program, service and function provided by the City includes performance measures and key performance indicators (KPIs). These measures and

indicators include data, metrics, outputs, outcomes or results the department uses to determine it is achieving its objectives. These can be quantitative and/or qualitative.

Based on the measures and indicators, management is able to assess productivity and the achievement of desired results. The Department Head can provide information that compares year over year indicators, or levels of satisfaction, or targets met. The vast majority of departments are reporting higher than “normal” productivity and higher levels of outputs.

From a COVID-19 perspective Council continues to be provided with regular weekly update memos from each department outlining key activities and results. In addition, reports to the past three RRR Committees has included service impact information which has shown significant achievement of City objectives and over 160 innovations and process improvements to ensure high quality services continue to be delivered. The recent update to Council on the Year 2 (2020) results of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan has demonstrated continued successes in progressing with strategic initiatives despite the pandemic.

City staff have successfully managed the day-to-day objectives of the work of the City as well as the added pressures of the COVID-19 emergency environment. Many have noted that work from home arrangements have actually enabled higher levels of productivity given the benefits of work-life balance, flexible working environments, and immediate collaboration and meetings via on-line technologies. In many departments, when comparing productivity indicators of 2020 (and so far for 2021) to those in 2019, the work from home environment has created the necessary conditions to increase productivity in various key indicator measurements and effectively respond in full capacity for all COVID-19 responses and impacts.

3. Benefits Identified:

A number of benefits and advantages have been realized as a result of working from home:

- Increases in the vast majority of key performance indicators.
- Increased responsiveness for time sensitive requests and issues management.
- Quicker responses to clients.
- Ability to attend meetings without needing to allow time for travel.
- Improved/increased collaboration, communication, and information sharing.
- Increased empowerment and autonomy for staff.
- Positive environmental impact and reduced carbon footprint.
- Realized success with a larger talent pool reach for new hires because of WFH options.
- Reduced mileage costs for the City.

- Better work-life balance and the increased ability to balance family/personal life commitments.
- Work time start/end flexibility (being home with the kids during closures / quarantine periods, at home schooling balanced with work time flexibility in non-traditional hours).
- No commuting stress or reduced commuting.
- Reduced costs for food, office attire/clothing, travel, vehicle usage, purchase of food.

4. Challenges Identified:

Notwithstanding a significant degree of benefits and advantages, there is an equal number of challenges or disadvantages for working from home, including:

- Lack of separation between work life and personal life; difficulty in disconnecting and creating a separation of work versus home.
- Lack of in-person face to face contact with staff and clients.
- Limited social interaction; less organic interaction with team members.
- Lack of technology and internet connectivity for some staff.
- Lack of appropriate equipment for some staff; lack of access to printers/scanner if needed.
- Access to paper files and documents where processes are still highly paper-based or manual.
- Inability to juggle work personal life - interruptions from children.
- Staff dissatisfaction with their work from home environments – may not be conducive to WFH – set ups, space, privacy.
- Impact to work culture and a disconnection to the Vaughan environment.
- Ergonomic set-ups and health and safety concerns, mental health and isolation
- Privacy or safety issues for some staff.
- Virtual training of new and existing staff can be a challenge depending on the type of training.

When the City initiates the BRP and begins the reintegration of staff into the workplace, ongoing focus will be placed on balancing the benefits and challenges of working from home. A hybrid approach for the “new normal” will be integral to ongoing productivity and success in the delivery of services.

THE FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

Although productivity is very high and staff will continue to work from home as we transition safely back to the workplace, it is evident that the future of work has changed. Many organizations are looking at space, accommodations, and staff movement within facilities from a very different perspective. Given the benefits and challenges, it is

apparent that the future of the workplace will be a hybrid model of work from home, remote work, on-site work, staggered shifts and varying start and end times.

Before COVID-19, the City had already developed an Alternative Work Arrangement program which includes policy and procedures to enable a flexible, progressive work environment. Throughout the pandemic, many organizations have realized that alternative work arrangements and flexibility where operationally feasible equates to better staff satisfaction, staff engagement, as well as better operational performance and service delivery.

Following the Business Reintegration Plan Phase One and Phase Two, the organization will start to define a “new normal”. It is anticipated that the City will continue to leverage work from home approaches and the Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA) program will be fully implemented.

The AWA program recognizes that the City of Vaughan supports a flexible work culture and encourages alternative work arrangements, when practicable without compromising operational requirements and effective service delivery to its citizens and business partners. Alternative work arrangements are an employee’s privilege and not a guarantee, or entitlement. All AWA’s require the approval of an employee’s Manager or designate.

Some assumptions for the future workplace environment may include:

- Up to 50% of staff in the office workplace at any given time (approximately 450 staff at City Hall).
- Staggered staff arrivals and work hours/schedules.
- Physical distancing while in the office environment and staggered seating/workstation access (based on new floorplan spacing developed by Facility Management).
- Continue to promote WFH and AWA where operationally feasible.
- Work with staff on their preferences for AWA and WFH.
- Many staff may no longer need a designated workstation or office; instead we may “hotel” space as required.
- Limited public admittance with public in designated controlled spaces.
- Physical closure of service counters (other than City Hall 1st floor entry counter) with move to omni-channel integrated service counter through Access Vaughan with virtual services as first default.
- The City will not expend extra resources to continue to squeeze more staff into City Hall and the JOC, or purchase / lease additional office space.

Best Practices and Insights for the Future of the Workplace

Many studies and research papers have been conducted by various organizations and institutions which speak to the future of the workplace given the lessons learned during the pandemic and the evolution of work and the utilization of workplace environments.

These studies are indicating a hybrid model for the future of work and new and creative opportunities to utilize space. The following provides a summary of various insights from recent research and studies conducted by Cushman & Wakefield, McKinsey Co, the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, Conference Board of Canada, Human Resources Director Magazine, Vocon, Robert Half, Deloitte, etc.

- The COVID-19 pandemic induced WFH experiment has altered perspectives on work, flexibility and the office.
- The pandemic has shown that WFH and AWA are viable options for productivity and efficiency (especially for “head down” tasks – emails, report writing, research, operational tasks, administration, project update meetings, etc).
- Productivity has remained strong. Much of daily office work can be done remotely, and technology tools are more capable than they expected to support daily tasks.
- COVID- 19 accelerated three groups of consumer and business trends that are likely to persist:
 - remote work and virtual interactions,
 - e-commerce and digital transactions,
 - and deployment of automation and AI.
- Need to critically re-examine investment and costs of acquiring additional space to accommodate more staff in the traditional workplace.
- In office and remote work do have both a positive and negative impact on productivity, innovation, creativity, corporate culture, branding, employee satisfaction and retention.
- A mix of in-office and remote work options are likely to maximize employee and organizational performance.
- Employees want choice and freedom in where they work, but few want to work outside the office exclusively.
- Office workers can feel disconnected from corporate culture, and in some cases personal wellbeing has suffered, and employees feel that they’ve had fewer opportunities to learn, especially through informal mentoring.
- Lack of in-office work has a disproportionately negative impact on certain workers (e.g., young employees and new employees).
- Older workers or more seasoned workers are more comfortable in taking advantage of the benefits of WFH / remote work situations.
- In the long run, the need for humans to be social and connect with each other will be a strong influence on a migration back to office environments.
- Too much remote work can negatively impact culture. Many organizations have been able to build cultural capital over the past few years through interpersonal relationships, trust, shared history, vision buy-in and more. Organizations have leveraged this reservoir of cultural capital to help manage through change and crisis in 2020. Leaders fear, however, that capital will erode over time if people do not return to face-to-face interactions.

- The creative process is often more ephemeral, organic and less scheduled.
- Asking people to be innovative on a conference call doesn't always work, and the spontaneous social interaction that sparks an idea often happens in a fleeting interaction with a colleague a desk or two away.

Themes for the Future Workplace

The following insights on the future of the workplace are adapted from a recent report by Cushman and Wakefield and the Centre for Real Estate and Urban Analysis, George Washington University: *"New Perspective: From Pandemic to Performance (2020)"*.

The Future is a Hybrid: an increase in hybrid work, wherein employees will spend part of the week working in the office and the other part working remotely, whether in their home or in a third location. Employees who want more flexibility will see this as a way to increase staff engagement and work satisfaction.

100% Remote will be Rare: While some companies are considering allowing employees to work completely remote for as long as they would like, this model will likely be an exception. Employers that employ this model may increase their talent pool through positions that can be performed from anywhere, potentially attracting top talent from a broader geography. However, the challenges of managing and retaining those employees will require additional resources to ensure success.

Building Flexibility: Office owners will find value in offering flexible spaces to their tenants. This may include flexible office offerings for tenants to expand space on-demand, which some owners see as an opportunity. Additionally, tenants will value more flexible, communal space, as needed.

Layout Changes: Little change is happening with building layouts in the short-term beyond accommodating social distancing. However, the expectation in the long-term is for expanded communal space such as conference rooms of various sizes, huddle rooms and social areas for people to congregate—cafés, hospitality-style sitting areas, village greens and more.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Influencing Choice: While many surveys indicate employees want to work half or more of their time from home post-COVID-19, focus group participants believe this sentiment will change when more people do end up back in the office. Workers will potentially worry that their colleagues in the office are having a better experience and that they -remote workers- are "missing things and their career is suffering because of it."

Balancing Employee Preference with Company Goals and Costs: More so than ever, employers will need to understand employee preferences to make evidence-based investment decisions on services and amenities that impact experience and provide incentive for employees to come to the workplace.

Employees' expectations for flexibility have increased. Some companies will opt for an in-office or remote work model, without a hybrid option. However, these "either or" models will likely be the minority as most employees want the best of both worlds - to be trusted with the flexibility to work from anywhere but also have the option to work in the office as needed.

Need to consider a more distributed workforce and the options that give that workforce the flexibility to choose when and where to work. That may mean a network of workspaces within, and possibly across markets. A more distributed workforce also requires policies, procedures and technology to seamlessly support productivity, connection and wellbeing.

Focus on Multiple Work Environments, Not Just an Office: While the pandemic-induced experiment has mostly meant that workers were either in their homes or in the office, the workplace of the future will be an ecosystem of multiple options for workers. The first option may continue to be the core office where most learning, mentoring, team connection and collaboration occurs. For many workers, their home may now be a viable second option for working on a regular basis. And workers may have the flexibility to choose third options like local community hubs (e.g., coffee shops, the local library, etc.), on-demand event spaces, coworking spaces, retail spaces and suburban "spoke" offices. These third places may appeal to employees for a variety of reasons—for example, a spoke office might be more conveniently located than the core office and it might offer a better social outlet than home. Companies may need to help manage these options for their employees, even offer several "office pod" options, and provide the ability to book spaces on any given day.

Need to Manage People Space Together (and Apart): A more distributed workforce not only requires leaders and managers to trust staff to perform in a flexible office ecosystem - it puts a premium on consistent, clear communication between all levels of the organization. With more locations for employees to utilize, leaders and people managers need to more actively connect their teams, becoming very intentional about when and how they bring people together.

Optimize Tools and Technologies: Organizations will need to implement reliable technology that manages space availability, allows transparency for accessing and utilizing space, and ensures seamless connection between employees inside and outside of the office. The implementation of smart technologies to manage real-time building data and facilitate employee meetings, will be essential to ensure ongoing data and predictive analytics of both workplace use and employee experience. Lastly, change management will become an essential component of any workplace project. It is imperative to not simply look at the impact on real estate and cost savings without also managing behavior and ensuring investment in new ways of managing people to facilitate employee performance, wellbeing and engagement.

The above information and insights are important for the City's consideration as it moves toward business reintegration when it is safe to do so. Beyond COVID-19, these insights also help inform and validate the City's approach to staff engagement, work-life balance and being a progressive employer of choice for attracting and retaining our talented resources.

Financial Impact

Not Applicable

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. The City is working with all the municipalities in York Region to share information about business reintegration plans and continued work from home approaches.

Conclusion

This report provides the RRR Committee with information regarding the COVID-19 Business Reintegration Plan (BRP), including:

- The continuation of staff working from home, where operationally feasible, during the pandemic.
- A comprehensive approach to a safe, cautious, and phased approach to return staff who are currently working from home to the workplace, when it is safe to do so.
- A summary of activities to assess and implement reintegration actions / requirements while leveraging successes in increased productivity and efficiencies realized during the pandemic.
- An overview on how management is ensuring service delivery and productivity for staff who are working from home/remotely.
- An overview of the key benefits as well as the challenges of staff working from home/remotely.
- A summary of literature and studies that the City is considering in its approach for the future of the workplace in a post COVID-19 environment; to ensure the City is leveraging its learnings during its response to the pandemic and continues to ensure the City is positioned as a progressive employer and an employer of choice.

As COVID-19 persists, productivity remains high and City building continues. Where staff are working from home, they will continue to do so until it is safe to return to the workplace. While working from home/remotely, management will continue to work with their staff to ensure service delivery and productivity. 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:

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Attachments

Attachment #1: Business Reintegration Plan

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