

VMC Sub-committee Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 8, 2021

WARD: 4

TITLE: VMC MARKETING UPDATE 2021

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide an update on VMC marketing and business development activities delivered since the May 2020 VMC Subcommittee meeting.

Report Highlights

- With pandemic restrictions ongoing, Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) continues to deliver a VMC marketing program that targets business and real estate professionals with the goal of supporting the landowners' efforts to secure large anchor tenants to catalyze the development of new office buildings.
- Since we are still unable to connect with the target audience in-person, we have invested more in advertising and paid editorials than previous years. However, virtual events continue to be an important tactic for connecting with the target audience, as well as content marketing, and arts and cultural programming.
- The outcomes of the marketing program suggest that the future of Downtown Vaughan remains bright.

Recommendation

1. That Economic and Cultural Development staff continue to provide ongoing updates on the marketing, business development and cultural activities in the VMC.

Background

Since the May 2020 VMC Subcommittee meeting, Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) has been building on and delivering its marketing and business development program for the VMC.

ECD's role in VMC business development continues to be branding and awareness-building among top-level corporate executives, corporate real estate executives, commercial realtors and brokers, and site selection professionals. This approach supports the landowners' efforts to secure large anchor tenants to catalyze the development of new office buildings.

Citizens continue to be engaged through activations and City communications channels.

With pandemic restrictions ongoing, we continue to promote where possible and assess the impact of COVID-19 on the office real estate market. Programs and tactics have been adjusted based on our findings and in alignment with the City's Covid-19 response.

Previous Reports/Authority

May 2020: [VMC Marketing Update](#).

June 2019: [Vaughan Metropolitan Centre \(VMC\) Marketing Update](#).

March 2019: [VMC Marketing Update](#).

Analysis and Options

The following marketing and business development tactics are intended to drive awareness of the VMC as an attractive major commercial office and retail location choice in the Greater Toronto Area marketplace. We are targeting GTA companies with office needs that are expanding as our primary target market. The VMC is well-positioned to attract major office users looking to consolidate or expand their presence within the GTA (as was the case for our current anchor tenants, KPMG and PwC). Where funds and opportunities allow, we also promote the VMC to other domestic and international markets.

Advertising and paid editorials

Since we are still unable to connect with the target audience in-person, we have invested more in advertising and paid editorials than previous years:

- National Post and InnovatingCanada.ca Advertorial –PwC Canada and Mayor Bevilacqua contributed quotes to an advertorial that highlighted how suburban communities, especially transit-oriented nodes like the VMC, are well-positioned

to keep and attract office tenants in the shift to hybrid workplace models. The half-page advertorial was placed in the print edition of the National Post (March 18, 2021) and online at InnovatingCanada.ca.

- REX Ads and sponsored content – The Real Estate News Exchange (REX) is Canada's premier online news service for the real estate industry. We purchased website and newsletter ads and a sponsored article that will be published in June.
- CoreNet Canadian Chapter Newsletter Ads – This newsletter is delivered weekly to corporate real estate executives who manage the real estate assets of large corporations. We purchased a 'Product Feature', which has an image and a text block where we can expand on the VMC's value proposition.
- Urban Toronto sponsored article – Urban Toronto is Toronto's premier website focused on condos, architecture, urban development and real estate. We purchased and informed a custom article on the evolving planning principles guiding the surging growth of the VMC.

Events

Events continue to be an important tactic for connecting with the target audience. All were delivered virtually this year:

- ULI Vaughan Rising Webinar (October 2020) – ULI Toronto is a non-profit real estate and land development organization. They invited us to develop a webinar about the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre's ongoing momentum despite the pandemic. It featured Mayor Bevilacqua as the keynote speaker and a panel discussion that included the Mayor, Christina Bruce from the VMC Program and Mary-Frances Turney from York Region Rapid Transit Corporation.
- NAIOP REX Awards (October 2020) – The REX Awards are the most prestigious standards of achievement within the commercial real estate development industry. As an event sponsor, we received brand visibility before, during and after the event; and the opportunity to present the Office Development award.
- Urban Economy Forum (October 2020) -- The Urban Economy Forum brings together a global network of city leaders, urban development organizations, financial institutes, and academics to learn and exchange best practices on urban economy and finance solutions for city management. The VMC was featured as a case study during the 'Urban Transformation: Shifting Paradigms in Urbanism' session. Christina Bruce delivered a presentation and Michelle Samson co-moderated the session.
- CoreNet REMmy Awards (November 2020) - The REMmy Awards recognize leadership excellence, innovation, sustainable design, and social responsibility in corporate real estate and workplace management. As an event sponsor, we

received brand visibility before and during the event and the opportunity to present the CSR Leadership Award.

- Presidents of Enterprising Organizations (PEO) Conference (November 2020) – PEO is an executive leadership organization based in Canada. For 2020, PEO expanded the guest list for their conference by partnering with two US-based executive organizations: Allied Executives and Inc. CEO Project. As an event sponsor, we received brand visibility before, during and after the event; a booth in the Platinum Partner Lounge; advertising placements in their podcasts; and exclusive sponsorship of an episode of The Way Forward Webcast.
- The Way Forward Webcast with Mitch Goldhar (February 2021) – PEO provided further value for our sponsorship money by selecting a VMC-based guest for an episode of The Way Forward Webcast: Mitchell Goldhar from SmartCentres REIT. The VMC was promoted at the beginning of the presentation, which was delivered live and posted to YouTube afterward.
- LandPRO and Post-Conference Webinar (March 2021) – LandPRO is the premier “how-to” conference for land, condo, real estate and development professionals in the Greater Toronto Area and throughout Ontario. As an event sponsor, we received brand visibility before, during and after the event; and the opportunity to contribute to a post-conference webinar. We delivered a 10 minute ‘VMC Development Update’ presentation.

Content marketing

In addition to our advertising and event program, we also promote the VMC by developing content for City of Vaughan channels and supporting the creation of content for external channels.

- VMC microsite – In December 2020 we re-launched the VMC microsite. Changes included a redesign of all graphic elements to align with the new visual identity launched in May 2020; redesign of the Studies and Plans and Media Centre pages; improvements to the site’s navigation, functionality and search engine optimization; and a refresh of the content.
- 360 Degree Virtual Tour – Also in December 2020, we re-launched this tour with the new visual identity and a complete update of the opening scene in Transit Square. It now shows the many developments that have been completed or advanced since the scene was originally filmed in 2018.
- Full Build Out Rendering – To further our ability to convey the vision of the VMC, we commissioned a rendering showing an aerial view of the VMC at full build out. Previously we relied on developer renderings that only showed parts of the VMC or individual developments.
- VMC Flyer – Updated the design and content of this two-page flyer.

- New photography – We have continued to expand and update the photography collection, a key marketing resource that supports all of our marketing and communications efforts.
- Up & Coming Neighbourhoods: Vaughan Metropolitan Centre – We partnered with Toronto Global to support a VMC profile video by realtor Raymond Wong.
- Celebrate Vaughan Magazine – Worked with Corporate and Strategic Communications (CSC) to develop an article on the VMC’s continued growth and investment.
- The VMC episodes of the Vaughan Rising Podcast continue to be relevant and a valuable resource for those interested in deep learning on the VMC.
- Corporate and Strategic Communications regularly produces communications products about the VMC, including media products, social media posts, City Update eNewsletters and Council eNewsletters. They also seek earned media through media pitches.

Arts and cultural programming

ECD continues to host and support a variety of activations in the VMC to engage office workers, commuters, and residents and build a sense of place in the VMC.

The following events are planned for 2021, but may be altered, postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Italian Contemporary Film Festival (ICFF) Architettura and Design (June/July 2021) – Screenings and reception for international and local industrial designers, architects and developers.
- Music in the Square (July-August 2021) – Music performances in Transit Square through the summer with each performance representing a different cultural genre: Chinese Pop, Classical music, Gypsy guitarists, Latin dance and music, Indigenous music.
- Vaughan Film Festival (September 2021) – Drive-in event showcasing local and international films.
- Next Stop Music and Food Festival (September 2021) – Two-day event featuring top headline performers, local and national breweries, and local and national chefs.
- Culture Days (September 24-October 24, 2021) – Family friendly, pet friendly, music, art activations, indigenous events scheduled throughout the month.
- Halloween Night of Lights (October 2021) – Drive-through immersive experience featuring more than 1,000,000 animated LED lights.
- Winter Wonderful (November 2021) – Ice sculptures and holiday season music.
- Holiday Night of Lights (November 2021) -- Drive-through immersive experience featuring more than 1,000,000 animated LED lights.

Outcomes

These tactics have created buzz for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, introducing Vaughan's emerging downtown to some and keeping it top-of-mind for those already familiar.

Since May 2020, they have resulted in:

- A reach of more than 1.2 million members of the business community and general public through the National Post and Innovating Canada.ca campaign.
- More than 290,000 impressions on the RENX sponsored article.
- More than 111,000 impressions on the RENX website and newsletter (Aug 2020 to March 2021).
- More than 22,000 impressions in the CoreNet Canadian Chapter Newsletter (Jan to April 2021).
- A top viewed article on Urban Toronto for November 2020 with 4,894 views, 13,938 social media impressions and 831 social media engagements.
- Exposure to 3,455 event attendees around the world.
- Positive media coverage in the Toronto Sun and Hamilton Spectator after the ULI Vaughan Rising Webinar. The success of the event inspired ULI Toronto to host similar webinars with other GTA mayors.
- Recognition of the VMC as a best practice for suburban intensification by the Urban Land Institute and United Nations.
- More than 50,000 microsite pageviews.
- 1,100 views of the new VMC 360 Degree Virtual Tour (2020).
- 3,600 views of the previous VMC 360 Degree Virtual Tour (2019).
- 1,400 views of YouTube videos by external partners.
- 1,100 podcast episode downloads.

In the same period, Corporate and Strategic Communications has issued the following communications regarding the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Approximately:

- 14 media products (i.e. public service announcements, news releases, Mayor's statements). The media products are a combination of products where the VMC is the main topic and also where the VMC is mentioned.
- 57 social posts.
- 14 City Update eNewsletters.
- 14 media pitches.
- 14 Council eNewsletters.

Financial Impact

The business development and marketing activities highlighted in this report are funded from the Economic and Cultural Development Department's operating budget.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Successful profiling and buildout of the VMC is beneficial to our infrastructure funding and operating partners (Toronto Transit Commission, York Region, Government of Ontario, Government of Canada, Toronto Region Conservation Authority) as it drives usage of these projects and shows return on investment. The Region is regularly engaged by ECD.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has created much uncertainty for the office real estate market and for our VMC marketing program. However, our research suggested that a slowdown in office transactions would be temporary and that suburban, transit-oriented nodes would be resilient; so we changed our tactics to follow public health guidance but continued with a fulsome marketing program.

The outcomes shared above indicate that interest remains high in the VMC. VMC landowners continue to invest in new developments, further suggesting that the future of Downtown Vaughan remains bright.

For the remainder of 2021, we will be reinforcing our strongest tactics, expanding into new advertising and activation opportunities, and seeking earned media opportunities.

For more information, please contact: Raphael Costa, Director, Economic and Cultural Development.

Attachments

None

Prepared by

Michelle Samson, Economic Development Officer, michelle.samson@vaughan.ca

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Harnum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Harnum, City Manager

Reviewed by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Harnum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Harnum, City Manager