

## VMC Sub-committee Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, June 8, 2021

**WARD:** 4

**TITLE:** VMC SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE – PHASE 2 APPROACH

**FROM:**

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

**ACTION:** FOR INFORMATION

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### **Purpose**

To provide an overview of the approach that will be explored in the development of land use options through Phase 2 of the VMC Secondary Plan (VMCSP) Update.

### **Report Highlights**

- At the March 2, 2021 VMC Sub-committee meeting, the consulting team for the VMCSP Update provided an overview of preliminary findings from the Phase 1 - Background Study Report and highlighted that the VMCSP area needs to be recalibrated with a balance of land uses and supporting social infrastructure to account for significant development pressures.
- Phase 1 - Background and Issues is now concluded with the completion of the study's first Public Open House which was held virtually from February 25 to March 25, 2021.
- Preliminary land use options to be developed through Phase 2 will take into account the key messages and concerns that have been identified by members of the public, stakeholder groups and the consulting team, namely; the continued exceedance of the average density of development proposals; lack of services and infrastructure to support this growing population at such an unprecedented pace; the imbalanced variety of uses proposed; and the lack of variety in housing and building types, tenure and unit sizes.
- The VMCSP Update will be a nuanced recalibration exercise, not a departure from the original plan. The Update will be an opportunity to adjust elements of the plan that need to be refined to rebalance delivery of a complete community into the future to achieve Council's vision for the downtown.

## **Recommendation**

1. That this report be received for information.

## **Background**

The VMCSPP Update commenced in August 2020 and is being undertaken by VMC Program staff, in consultation with the successful consultant team of Gladki Planning Associates, with Ken Greenberg, dTAH, and Urban Metrics.

Since Vaughan and York Region Council approval of the original VMCSPP in 2010 and 2012 respectively, the VMC area has undergone significant physical changes. Delivery of the first development and infrastructure projects has advanced the vision of creating the City's downtown, including the establishment of the Mobility Hub and several residential, office, and mixed-use buildings and public spaces.

Through this initial phase of development, Vaughan's skyline has been dramatically transforming as buildings continue to reach greater heights, setting new benchmarks for the Region. With the increased building height comes increased density, both of which are significantly above what was originally contemplated in the VMC Secondary Plan. This scale of development has implications for build-out of the downtown.

Due to the rapid growth in the VMC and recent changes to municipal and regional legislation, the City initiated an update to the existing VMCSPP to ensure that the planning framework is still relevant to realize Council's vision for a vibrant downtown. The update to the VMCSPP will result in a revised secondary plan that supports the City's downtown as a complete community to 2051 and beyond.

The VMCSPP Update will be conducted over 5 phases. Phase 1 of the VMCSPP Update is now concluded, and the findings that resulted through the initial background review, stakeholder consultation and public engagement will inform the development of land use options to be explored through the next phase of work. The approach to development of these land use options will be described below in the Analysis and Options.

The VMCSPP Update is being coordinated with the concurrent projects including the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan, VMC Transportation Master Plan Update, and the VMC Functional Servicing Strategy Report. The findings of these related studies will inform the update to the VMCSPP.

## **Previous Reports/Authority**

[VMC Secondary Plan Update – Phase 1](#)

## **Analysis and Options**

### **Recap of Phase 1 Findings**

At the March 2, 2021 VMC Sub-committee, the VMCSPP team presented preliminary findings based on Phase 1 work and conveyed several key messages, including:

- Development is proceeding at a greater intensity than anticipated in the 2010 Secondary Plan and the Plan needs to be recalibrated to account for development pressures
- Development interest is creating a different balance of uses than envisaged in the original VMC Secondary Plan
- Recent residential developments in the VMC feature, particularly in the Neighbourhood Precinct, considerably higher than planned building heights and densities, therefore the hierarchy of heights and densities in the VMC will need to be carefully planned
- To ensure that the VMC emerges as an inclusive community, the provision of a wider variety of housing types and tenures, unit sizes and affordable rental and ownership models will be critical
- Planning and provision of community services and facilities needs to ensure development does not outpace supporting infrastructure

Development interest in the VMC has been more intense than anticipated. The average density of projects continues to exceed those planned in the current VMCSPP, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of municipal services and social infrastructure.

Based on the Background Study Report, the uplift in development proposals represents an approximate average rate of 1.6 times the as-of-right permissions. Furthermore, proposed developments and approvals to date are heavily weighted towards residential uses in the form of high-rise condominiums, predominantly consisting of 1 and 2-bedroom units. While the pace of office development in the VMC is generally in line with the VMCSPP projections, with retail trending slightly below targets as a critical mass of residents and employees materialize, it is in the residential category where development interest is greater than planned. This development trend presents a dramatic future possibility of the VMC building out as more of a bedroom community, raising concern that achievement of a dynamic mixed-use downtown with adequate supporting infrastructure may be at risk. A balance of uses, variety housing types and tenures, unit sizes and building types, including the provision of services are critical to achieving a complete downtown community that is vibrant and diverse.

While development interest is the fuel that will power the realization of the City's ambitions for its downtown, it must be harnessed to achieve a built environment and a healthy community that meets the public interest. To balance the unplanned increase in residential population, increases in the capacity and provision of hard and soft infrastructure will be required to support the community, including parks, community services and facilities, transportation, and municipal servicing systems.

### **Public Consultation Feedback**

As part of the project's consultation strategy, the VMCS Update launched its first virtual Public Open House (POH) through an online engagement platform on February 25, 2021 to build on the findings of the Phase 1 survey which launched in November 2020 and to introduce the study to a broad audience and seek input from the general public and stakeholders about the issues, strengths and opportunities in the VMC.

Participants were prompted to use the digital engagement tools provided to share ideas, join the discussion, ask questions, and subscribe for project updates. The following questions were posed:

- How would you like to describe your downtown in the next 10-20 years? What do you think is missing from the VMC vision and principles?
- What features and/or amenities would make the VMC a great downtown?
- What do you like about the VMC today? Which amenities do you enjoy?
- What are the VMC's challenges? What ideas do you have for improving them?

Much of the commentary voiced by members of the public in response to the study's online POH questions and public survey echo the key messages and findings of the consultant team presented as part of the Background Study Report at the March 2<sup>nd</sup> VMC Sub-Committee meeting. Key comments included the following:

- **Housing Variety** - The VMC needs housing options that are accessible to multiple demographics. Rental properties and below-market affordable housing will balance existing residential options to ensure a diversity of residents and families call the area home
- **Local retail and dining** - There should be dining options throughout the VMC and at-grade, small-scale retail on downtown streets. The VMC should be a place for locally owned small businesses
- **Hub for arts, culture, and entertainment** - The VMC's identity should be rooted in arts, culture, and creativity. Downtown Vaughan can be an entertainment hotspot with festivals, food trucks, music venues, and outdoor events.

Employment in the VMC can also focus on creative industries including digital media, visual arts, fashion, and music

- **Built form variety and design** - Vaughan's downtown should have a variety of built form types. Community members would like to see more than just high- and low-rise buildings, and believe colourful, attractive architecture and design should push the boundaries and be held to the highest standards
- **A connected transportation network** - The VMC should have a fine-grain street network that promotes walkability and lessens dependency on cars. Dedicated YRT bus lines, protected bike lanes, and pedestrian-friendly streets will create a multi-modal downtown. There are also opportunities for transit connections to surrounding areas/communities, including, York University, and Kleinburg. Improvements can be made to pick-up/drop-off at the VMC Subway Station
- **Public spaces for building community** - The VMC should be a safe, clean, vibrant place to interact with others in parks and open spaces. There should be diverse facilities and amenities to promote recreation such as an outdoor ice rink or cricket pitch. Markets, fairs, festivals, and arts and culture venues are important ways to foster community in Vaughan

Full summaries of the Phase 1 POH and survey are appended as Attachment 1 to this report and can also be found on the VMCS Update dedicated webpage: [www.vaughan.ca/VMCPlan](http://www.vaughan.ca/VMCPlan).

### **Current and Future Projections based on Development Trends**

The VMCS Update will be exploring a number of elements when developing the preliminary land use options, including different mixes and locations of land uses and built form typologies. These options will be considered in the context of the provision of parks and open spaces, community facilities, transportation, and municipal servicing, in conjunction with work conducted by parallel studies.

To frame an informed approach to the development of options, dTAH, the urban design members of the consulting team, undertook an exercise to graphically demonstrate the implications of the current development trends reported numerically through the planning analysis and findings of the Phase 1 – Background Study Report against the original VMC Secondary Plan vision. The team developed a series of models to graphically illustrate the current development trends and communicate the compounded impact of the increased density in the downtown against the as-of-right permissions, built projects, approved developments, and new proposals.

The development trends represent a potential density of people and jobs that departs from and exceeds the assumptions upon which the original VMCSPP was developed. The number of residents in the VMC will continue to increase at a rate higher than the provision of jobs and other non-residential uses. Due to the increase in population, the provision of parkland and other community services and facilities will not be able to keep pace with the number of people that new developments generate. This scenario will lead to continued increase in the imbalance and disparity between the number of residents versus non-residential uses (including jobs in the VMC), the inability of the City to provide and secure sufficient soft services such as parks, recreational and community services to serve the growing population. With respect to housing types, approved and proposed developments have been predominantly geared towards the delivery of condominium tenure housing in the form of 1 and 2-bedroom units. To ensure that the VMC emerges as an inclusive community, the provision of a wider variety of housing types and tenures, unit sizes and affordable rental and ownership models must be emphasized as a priority through the VMCSPP Update.

The modelling exercise is an important step in framing an approach to the development of options to be explored through the Phase 2 work using informed projections of how the downtown could develop if current development trends persist without recalibration. The current development trend and trajectory, if continued, will lead to a downtown that may be at risk of vertical sprawl, creation of a dormitory community and loss of livability.

To achieve the Council's vision of the VMC becoming a complete community that is vibrant and diverse, the City must ensure that true transit-oriented developments are realized and that delivery of crucial elements necessary for good city building are well-balanced.

### **Phase 2 Approach**

The VMCSPP Update will be a nuanced recalibration exercise, not a departure from the original plan. Many elements of the original vision are strong and relevant today based on policy, legislation and city building best practices. The Update will be an opportunity to adjust elements of the plan that need to be refined to rebalance delivery of a complete community into the future.

Based on the findings of the work completed to date, preliminary options developed through the Phase 2 work will take into account the key messages and concerns that have been identified by members of the public, stakeholder groups and the professionals, namely; the continued exceedance of the average density of development proposals; lack of services and infrastructure to support this growing population; the imbalanced variety of uses proposed; and the lack of variety in housing

and building types, tenure and unit sizes. All of these elements are critical to achieving a diverse and vibrant downtown.

To address these concerns, the options for areas within the existing SP area will be developed as scenarios based on application of potential constants, or fixed elements, and variables, or flexible elements, that provide a structured framework for recalibration of the plan. Potential constants may include character areas developed through the Secondary Plan and placemaking documents, road network, density, and existing park network – though there may need to be minor amendments to some of these elements as the Update is refined. Potential variables include land use mix, height, approaches to required retail and office uses, implementation tools, built form policies, potential new schools/community centre sites and the location of the future cultural arts centre to be refined through Phase 2 of the VMC Cultural Arts Centre study. By applying certain constants and exploring variables as a structured methodology and approach, the team will be able to rebalance development interest while staying true to Council’s vision of creating a place of exceptional quality as a complete community.

Options for the potential boundary expansion areas A and B will follow more traditional land use scenario development, informed by the work of the related concurrent studies, particularly as regards parks, open spaces, and roads.

The City of Vaughan has achieved a great deal in creating a downtown in the VMC, guided by the 2010 Secondary Plan. This moment in time is an important opportunity to carefully examine what has been achieved so far and ensure that the original VMCSPP’s trajectory is recalibrated for emerging conditions and addressing challenges to achieving the plan’s complete vision.

### **Ongoing consultation**

The VMCSPP project team will continue to engage with stakeholders, including public agencies, staff, landowners, and members of the public throughout the project to seek input and feedback, and ensure alignment with the related studies including the VMC Transportation Master Plan Update, VMC Functional Servicing Strategy and the VMC Parks and Wayfinding Master Plan.

### **Financial Impact**

There is no financial impact resulting from this report.

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

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of City staff and other government agencies has been established. Public agencies including, York Region, Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority, School Boards, Ministry of Transportation,

Infrastructure Ontario, Nav Canada, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Toronto Transit Committee, Metrolinx and 407 ETR have been invited as part of this study's TAC. The options developed in Phase 2 will be reviewed in consultation with the TAC members to determine their feasibility and advance to a preferred option.

## **Conclusion**

The VMC is transforming into a vibrant, modern urban centre for residents and businesses that encompasses all amenities of an urban lifestyle. The average density of development projects continues to increase with new applications, a factor which must be balanced with measured delivery of both hard and soft services.

Based on the findings of the Phase 1 work, options developed through Phase 2 of the VMCS Update will need to take into account the key messages and comments that have been identified based on the initial downtown build-out. This includes the continued significant exceedance of the average density of development proposals, lack of services and infrastructure to support this growing population, the imbalanced variety of uses proposed and the lack of variety in housing and building types, tenure, and unit sizes.

Through Phase 2 of the study, the VMCS Update project team will generate several preliminary options which will explore different mixes and locations of uses and built form, while considering certain constants and variables that are necessary to ensure that the VMC properly achieves Council's vision. These options will be considered in terms of the provision of parks and open spaces, transportation, and municipal servicing, in conjunction with work conducted by parallel studies. A strategy will also be prepared for provision of community services and facilities.

The VMCS Update will refresh the framework, continuing the original's trajectory recalibrated for emerging conditions and addressing challenges to achieving the Plan's complete vision.

**For more information**, please contact Amy Roots, Acting Director, VMC Program, ext. 8035.

## **Attachment**

1. Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan Update – Phase 1 Public Engagement Summary.



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