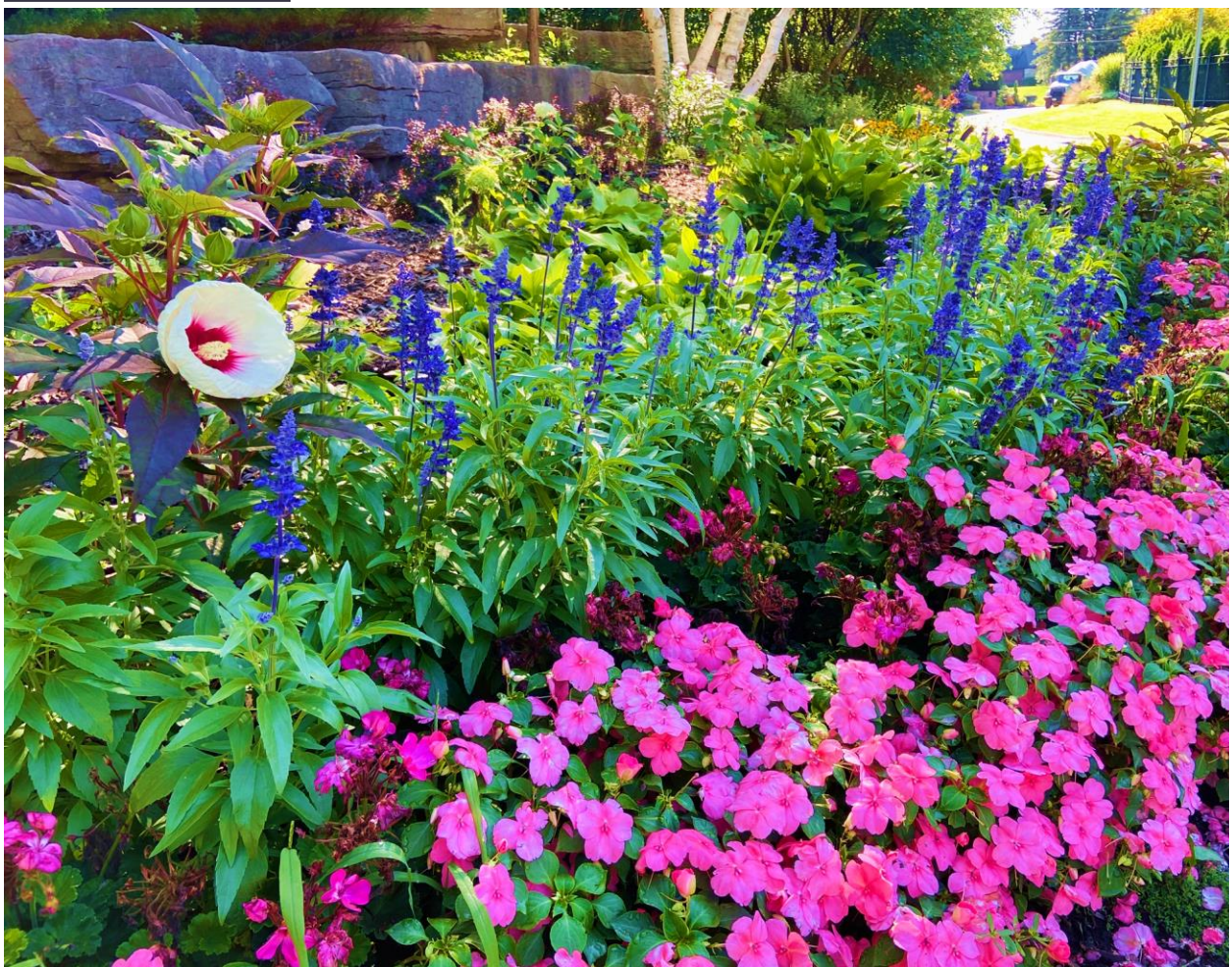


# Beautification 2.0

A Beautiful Experience; continued.



**SEPTEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup> 2021**

**CITY OF VAUGHAN**

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# Beautification 2.0

A Beautiful Experience; continued.

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# Introduction

The City defines beautification as the process of making visual improvements to Vaughan through the placement of flowers, ornamental grasses, trees and shrubs in beds, planters and hanging baskets.

The City of Vaughan's current Beautification Strategy was created and approved in 2016 and implemented in 2017. The strategy provides guidance on where and how the City should focus its beautification efforts. The strategy includes a classification system with four service levels – Premium, Enhanced, Standard and Basic – and describes how these service levels are applied to flower beds, planters and hanging baskets throughout the city. The strategy also provides guidance on which plants the City should use and standards for how often plantings will be maintained.

The City undertook a comprehensive review of its Beautification Strategy to be certain it continues to meet the community's needs. This review and reassessment contributed to a renewed the strategy from 2016 by gathering feedback on service levels across the city.

A comprehensive review of the operation and strategy has been ongoing since the collection of inventories started in 2019, with a more granular lens with the revamping of this strategy. The review identified several opportunities for improvement.

The objective of this report is to refresh the original plan that was created and approved in 2016 and address opportunities for clarification, address needs of citizens and to plan for the future of the more than 550 flower planters, 750 hanging baskets 800 shrub beds and over 400 planting beds maintained by the City.

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# Background

The 2017 Beautification Strategy set out two main objectives, which have been fulfilled by horticulture operations.

1. To outline a general strategy for the beautification of the City of Vaughan

The strategy addressed shortcomings and outlined a general beautification framework that features four (4) classifications (Basic, Standard, Enhanced and Premium). These classifications are associated with a specific composition of plant materials, as well as a specific level of service.

2. To outline beautification plans for the Canada 150th Anniversary celebration

There was six (6) proposed sites that have received enhanced beautification. Staff have outlined efforts with service groups and other City of Vaughan departments to foster community ownership of these 150th Anniversary sites.

Since the initial implementation, significant improvements have been made to streamline service delivery and help sustain service levels.

## Advancements Achieved

The following sections detail the significant advancements made to improve operational efficiency, create cost savings, improve quality all in the effort and contribution to service excellence.

### Data-Informed Decisions

Data collection efforts made significant strides toward evidence-based service delivery improvements. Over 2,200 horticulture assets have been captured detailing GPS locations, measurements of the planting and shrub beds, asset type, classifications, and condition assessment. Figure 1 translates this data into a visual inventory of horticultural displays across the City.

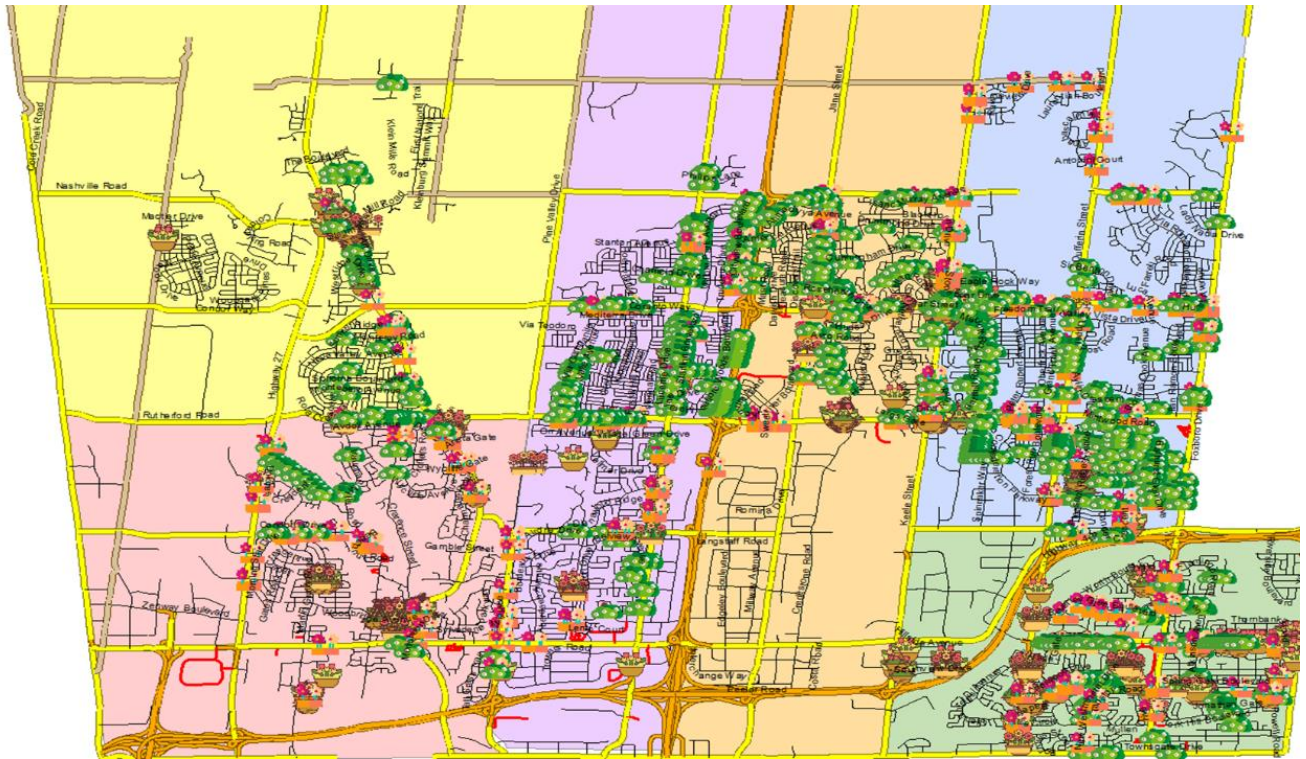


Figure 1: GIS map of Horticulture Assets

This activity was instrumental in equalizing the distribution of maintenance, moving from a 4-zone to 6-zone model (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). This resulted in an equal distribution of horticulture resources and staff, and a 43% reduction in assets per zones moving from 571 assets per area to 325.

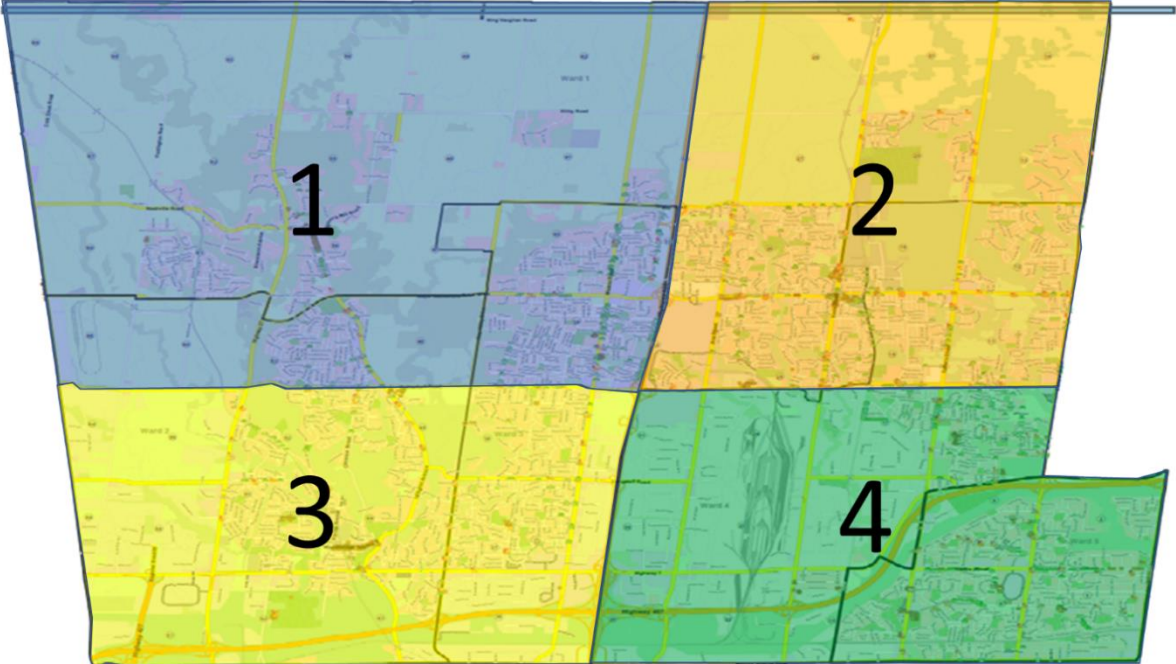


Figure 2: Old 4 Area Maintenance Zones

This assignment allowed for improvements in cultural practices which will promote health and longevity to horticultural material. All this was done with existing horticulture resources and staffing levels. Furthermore, the process involved team members in this decision-making; dedicated maintenance zones provided staff with opportunities to familiarize with the needs of the area and foster a sense of ownership.

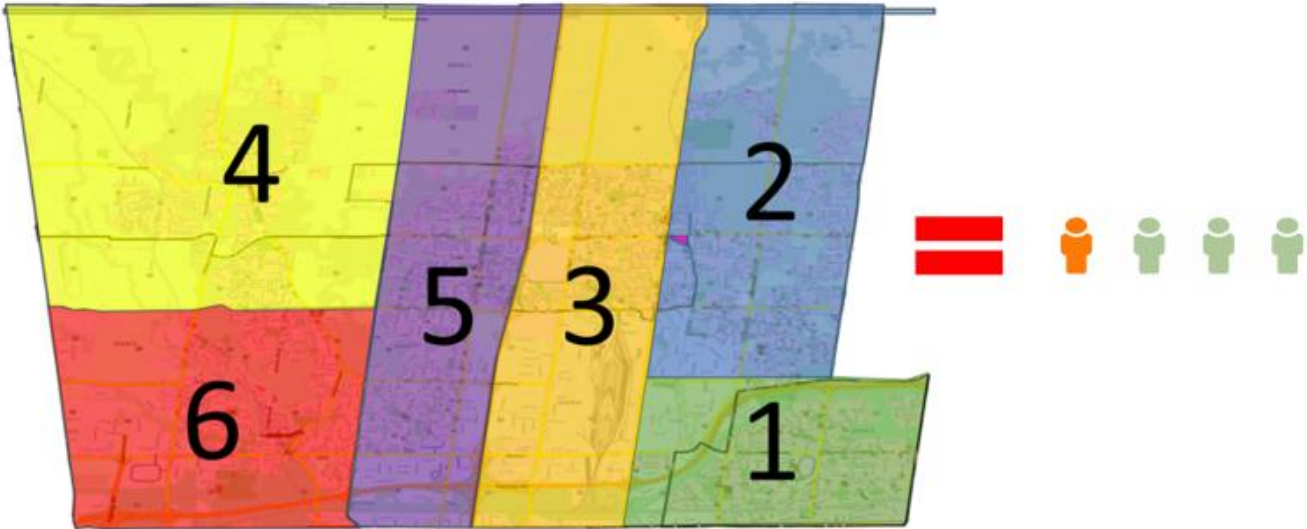


Figure 2: New 2020 Maintenance Zones

### Perennial Cultural Practices

Horticulture has benefited from the use of perennials in planter centerpieces by overwintering in the greenhouse. Through dividing, splitting, budding, and propagating, these materials are doubled over three (3) years, realizing a cost avoidance of \$10,000 of material per year. Transforming annual flower displays to a perennial-based flower bed will provide a significant return on investment.

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## Reservoir Planters



The implementation of reservoir planters in 2020 created significant operational efficiencies, by cutting watering efforts in half, while standardizing horticulture assets across the City.

In 2017, the horticulture department invested into 750 reservoir hanging baskets which provided several benefits - a standardized hanging basket across the city, a significant reduction in operational cost associated with water, and a mitigation against overwatering which promoted healthier plant material. Unfortunately, because staff still needed to attend the planters these baskets are typically paired with, the expected savings were not realized.

In 2020, reservoirs planters were adopted and paired with our 750 hanging baskets; this cut watering efforts in half. The savings realized in 2020 were clouded by the reduced operation due to COVID-19 but is expected to show on-going cost avoidance of approximately \$110,000. This effort was then redirected into our operations to address growth and short falls in maintenance and cultural practices.

These planters also created the standardization and equity across the City. Feedback from residents supported the change towards these standardized planters.

## Grow with Vaughan Sponsorship Program

In 2020, the Municipal Partnership Office (MPO) in collaboration with Parks Forestry Horticulture Operations (PFHO) developed a program to offer support, targeted engagement, and community investment opportunities at a low-cost for local businesses through a horticulture sponsorship program.

The program provides the opportunity for local businesses to build brand awareness in a targeted community, along with positive



brand association, by contributing to the quality of life and beautification of Vaughan neighbourhoods.

The program also created a revenue stream for horticulture operations to help offset maintenance costs. This funding helps support the growing operations which has historically had difficulties finding funding.

## Analysis

Given the successes of the initial beautification strategy and ongoing improvements; timing was opportune for a thorough review/ refresh of this strategy to ensure that it continues to align with Terms of Council and meets the needs of our citizens.

The renewed strategy was informed by learnings from the Grow with Vaughan Sponsorship program, operational analysis of horticulture operations, historical call data from residents, and a municipal scan of our neighboring colleagues.

## Traffic Count

To understand where sponsorship is best suited, daily traffic counts were collected. This identified that outer blocks along major arteries see a daily average traffic count of ~15,000 to over 40,000 per day, while those assets inside City block see significantly less. Knowing this allows us to better understand where beautification will make the most impact.

## Performance Against Service Levels

Operational improvements have contributed to achieving and surpassing service levels despite growth pressures; however, resident expectations continue to exceed current service levels.

| Classification | Weeding       |                     | Pruning and Mulching |                     |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                | Service Level | Performance         | Service Level        | Performance         |
| Premium        | 6/ season     | ✓ Exceed            | Every Year           | ✓ Meet              |
| Enhanced       | 3/ season     | ✓ Exceed            | Every 2 years        | ✓ Meet              |
| Standard       | 2/ season     | ✓ Exceed            | Every 2 years        | ✓ Meet              |
| Basic          | 1/ season     | ✗ Below: On request | Every 3 years        | ✗ Below: On request |



# Resident Inquiries

In the spring and summer, residents will call in to inquire about the horticulture program and ask for additional service; most common requests are surrounding increase maintenance or materials.

To help provide a better understanding of the service timelines related to horticulture, Figure 4 below, was developed and will be advertised to help communicate expectations of when work is to take place. An example is the number of calls received after the Victoria Day weekend regarding the schedule of planting of summer annuals. The timeline provided shows the 4-week planting effort required to get 750 Hanging Baskets hung, 550 Annual Planters planted and over 65,000 annuals planted in beds.

Figure 5 illustrates complaint data over the past 3 years (2018 to 2020). Overall, the data suggests that there is a discrepancy on service expectation, particularly on entry features annual plantings and weeding maintenance service levels and mirrors that of the results in the Public Engagement Survey

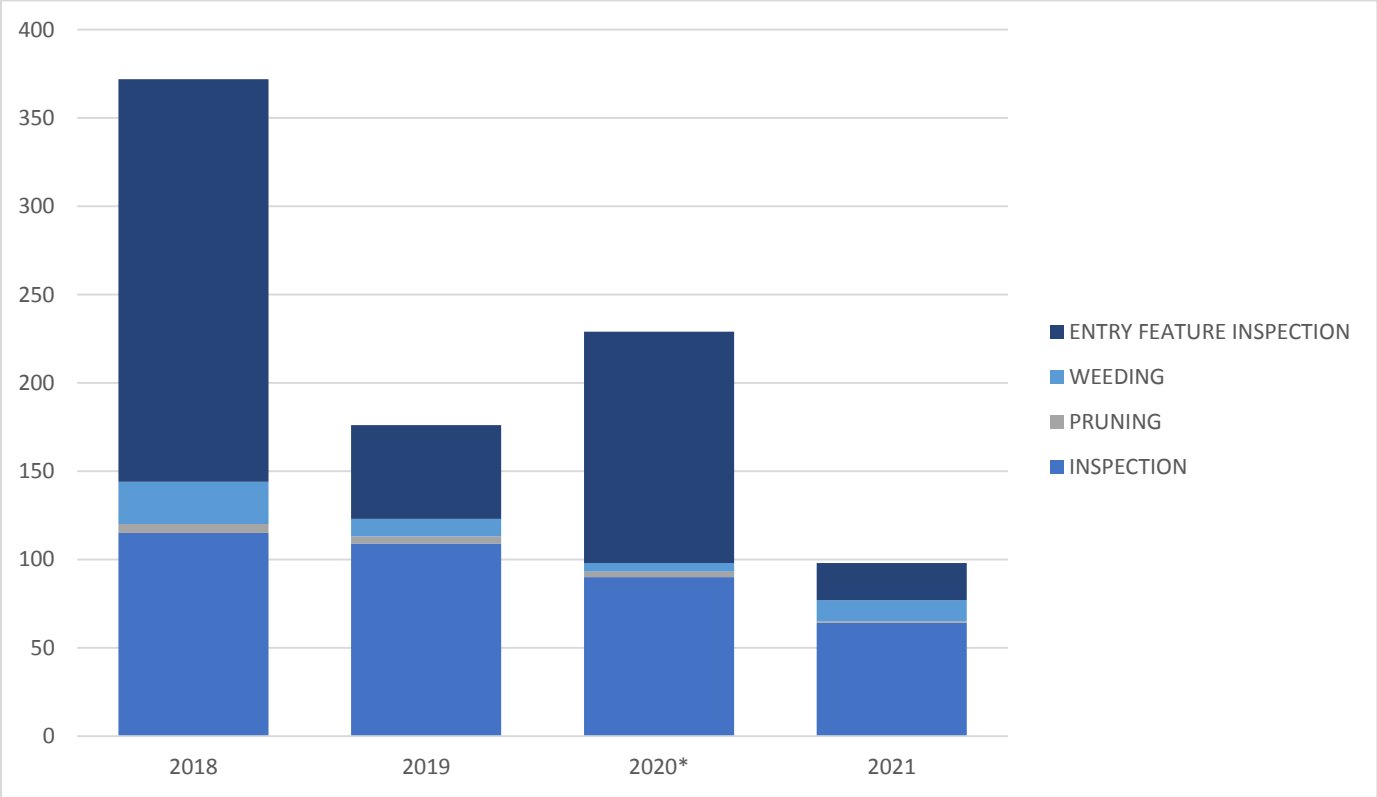


Figure 5: Complaint Data 2018 to 2020

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Call volume over the last 3 years, reveals a positive impact of the implementation of improved operational performance and a decline in call volume. While the total 2020 call volumes increase over 2019, the volume was primarily associated with COVID-19 inquires and reduced horticulture operation.

## Citizen Engagement

To supplement historical data, public input provided additional insight on perceptions and expectations on Horticulture services.

The beautification survey was out to the public between April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 to April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021; advertised through various platforms of social media, local newspapers, radio, and billboards placed strategically across the City. In all, over 500 citizens visited the project page, and 381 citizens participated in the survey

From this survey, notable results included:

- There was a definite need to increase maintenance and service levels as only 10% of residents indicated being satisfied with current maintenance standards.
- Residents believed that the City should focus more beautification efforts at Entrances to neighbourhood, boulevards parallel to roadways
- Citizens want to see an increase of perennial plantings, with inclusion of pollinators
- Finally, 71% of citizens noted that they thought Grow with Vaughan is a great opportunity for small businesses and a great way to offset costs and contribute to beautification for increase service levels.

## Municipal Scan

A municipal scan was completed to understand service levels and delivery. The scan, although informative, provided some challenges as planting bed sizes and materials could not be quantified, which complicated some comparisons. Overall, while compared to our peers, Vaughan horticulture operations provides a lower level of service in several classifications. Results from a municipal scan indicate that several of Vaughan's service levels receive approximately 50% less maintenance than those surveyed.

## Maintenance Service Levels

Table: Weeding Service Levels

| <u>Classification</u> | Weeding Service Levels (per season) |         |          |               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|---------------|
|                       | Vaughan                             | Markham | Brampton | Richmond Hill |
| Premium               | 6                                   | ↑ 18    | ↑ 44     | ↑ 44          |
| Enhanced              | 3                                   | ↑ 18    | ↑ 22     | ↑ 10          |
| Standard              | 2                                   | ↑ 3     | ↑ 11     | ↑ 5           |
| Basic                 | 1                                   | 1       | ↑ 12     | On Request    |

Table: Pruning and Mulching Service Levels

| <u>Classification</u> | Pruning and Mulching Service Levels (per annum) |         |             |               |
|-----------------------|---|---------|-------------|---------------|
|                       | Vaughan   | Markham | Brampton    | Richmond Hill |
| Premium               | 1   | 1       | As Required | As Required   |
| Enhanced              | 1/2   | ↑ 1     | As Required | As Required   |
| Standard              | 1/2   | 1/2     | As Required | As Required   |
| Basic                 | 1/3   | 1/3     | As Required | As Required   |

| <u>Classification</u> | Assets  |         |          |               |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|----------|---------------|
|                       | Vaughan | Markham | Brampton | Richmond Hill |
| Total Assets          | 2515    | ↑ 2992  | ↓ 1806   | ↓ 948         |

## Recommendations

The proposed classification for the beautification of the City of Vaughan has been determined through the following guiding principles

- To honour historically significant areas as determined through council
- To ensure all communities are treated in a transparent and equitable manner
- To adopt best cultural practices

- To ensure maintenance efforts meet service expectations and remain sustainable
- To continue to grow a perennial base garden

The proposal identified will allow horticulture operations to continue providing service excellence through an equitable and standardized approach that is transparent for our Council and our Citizens, which will allow horticulture operations to meet expectations.

## Proposed Classifications

The proposed service levels are driven by data, staff knowledge and expertise, municipal benchmarking, and public engagement to provide service excellence through an equitable and standardized approach that is transparent for our Council and our Citizens.

*Table: Weeding Service Levels*

| <u>Classification</u>                      | Weeding Service Levels           |                             |                         |                               |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
|  | Current                          |                             | Proposed                |                               |
|  | Service Delivery (visits/season) | Meeting Citizen Expectation | Change in Service Level | Service Level (visits/season) |
| Significant City Sites                     | 6                                | ✓                           | ↑ Increase x2           | 12                            |
| Neighbourhood Entrances and Community Hubs | 3                                | ✗                           | ↑ Increase x2           | 6                             |
| Boulevards and Side Street                 | 1                                | ✗                           | ↑ Increase x3           | 3                             |
| Medians and Roundabouts                    | N/A                              | N/A                         | Establish Service Level | 1                             |

Table: Pruning and Mulching Service Levels

| Classification                             | Pruning and Mulching Service Levels |                             |                         |                              |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|  | Current State                       |                             | Proposed                |                              |
|  | Service Delivery (visits/ year)     | Meeting Citizen Expectation | Change in service level | Service Level (visits/ year) |
| Significant City Sites                     | 1                                   | ✓                           | No Change               | 1                            |
| Neighbourhood Entrances and Community Hubs | 1 Every 2 Years                     | ✓                           | No Change               | 1 Every 2 Years              |
| Boulevards and Side Street                 | 1 Every 2 Years                     | X                           | No change               | 1 Every 2 Years              |
| Medians and Roundabouts                    | N/A                                 | N/A                         | Establish Service Level | 1 Every 3 Years              |

By increasing the number of maintenance visits, residents can expect reduced weed growth between each visit. Other long-term benefits of more frequent weeding’s are removing the roots each time which reduces the rejuvenation of the weeds which results in less effort of each visit.

## Perennial Based Gardens

Transitioning to a perennial base garden will continue to save money, staffing resources and maintenance time while still achieving beautification across the City.

The proposed new material allotment are as follows:

| Classification                                    | Renewed Strategy   | Previous Beautification Strategy   |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Significant City Sites</b>                     | Native Trees (80mm Caliper)<br>20% Perennials and Grasses<br>70% Annuals<br>10% Shrubs | Native Trees (80mm Caliper)<br>10% Perennials and Grasses<br>90% Annuals<br>Shrubs     |
| <b>Neighbourhood Entrances and Community Hubs</b> | Native Trees (60mm Caliper)<br>60% Perennials / Grasses<br>20% Annuals<br>20% Shrubs   | Native Trees (50mm Caliper)<br>50% Perennials and Grasses<br>30% Annuals<br>20% Shrubs |
| <b>Boulevard and Side Streets</b>                 | Native Trees<br>Turf   | Street Trees<br>Sod  |
| <b>Medians and Roundabouts</b>                    | 100% Perennial Pollinators   | N/A  |

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Moving to a more resilient and robust perennial based garden will help sustain costs, reduce maintenance, increase the overall flower inventory, and promote a sustainable operation year over year.

Another benefit of perennial-based gardens was, realized in Spring/summer of 2020. Covid-19, and restriction to essential work, handcuffed beautification efforts of putting out annual flowers. A perennial based garden would relieve constraints in the event of pandemics and other failures of annual's yield; this will minimize risk and sustain beautification year over year.

## Continuation of the Grow with Vaughan Sponsorship Program

In collaboration with Municipal Partnership Office, staff see value in continuing the Grow with Vaughan Sponsorship program as presented to Council in June 2020. The sponsorship program has achieved over \$38,000 with 21 beds being sponsored by local businesses. This revenue will help offset operational costs associated to horticultural displays across the City, while contributing to beautification efforts.

As a result of the success within the first year, the Municipal Partnership Office will continue to collaborate with Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations to expand this program to other opportunities that present good opportunities to continue to build brand recognition for Vaughan's business community and help Parks offset operational costs.

## Implementation

While proposed service levels are proposed to begin year 1 of the strategy, several sites require rejuvenation to meet classification. Staff recommend rejuvenations are completed in the following phased approach:

### **Phase 1: 2022- 2025**

Neighborhood Entrances and Community Hubs  
Median and Roundabouts

### **Phase 2: 2025 - 2028**

Boulevards and Side Streets

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Phase 1 will include neighborhood entrances and community hubs to ensure that they are realigned with the new proposed classifications from 2022 to 2025. Additionally, median and roundabouts will begin implementation with pollinator plantings in 2022.

Phase 2 will include boulevards and side streets for realignment from 2025 to 2028.

This phased approach will allow horticulture operations to monitor each phase and allow room to pivot if needed to address unforeseen shortfalls, adjust operational needs and financial impact.

## Conclusion

Horticulture Operations are committed to providing service excellence. Over the past few years, operational efficiencies have increased performance, and created new revenue streams.

To continue to with growth of city building, expectations from our citizens and promote beautification across the City of Vaughan, the renewed Beautification 2.0 is proposed.