

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, November 9, 2021

WARD(S): 4

TITLE: VMC EAST BLOCK NORTH PUBLIC ART PLAN UPDATE

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide an update on the status of the VMC East Block North Public Art Plan to develop Public Art on private land located at the south-west corner of Jane Street and Portage Parkway in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre ("VMC"), following Council approval of the site development application on May 14, 2019.

Report Highlights

- Vaughan is a creative urban city committed to integrating art into its public realm – a city where Public Art is accessible to all people and valued as a placemaking catalyst for conveying Vaughan's unique identity and economic vitality.
- On June 7, 2016, Council approved the Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program and the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework.
- Recommendations 16 and 19 of the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework are to support the urban design objectives for the VMC, enhance the pedestrian experience, to create memorable environments and enhance wayfinding; and to establish a strong place identity which embodies the values and aspirations of the VMC; and is in keeping with Site 6: Gateways – to create iconic gateway artworks that are strong identifiers for the VMC.
- The art commissioning process will curate a short list of relevant artists for SmartCentres' consideration as finalists, who will be invited to develop design concepts for SmartCentres' final art selection for the prominent gateway installation.

Report Highlights Continued

- As part of their Section 37 Density Bonusing Agreement and contribution to the City for the additional density and building height, the Owner has provided to the City a \$650,000 Letter of Credit towards an onsite gateway feature installation proposed at the corner of Jane Street and Portage Parkway.
- On September 30, 2021, the VMC East Block North Public Art Plan was presented to the Vaughan Design Review Panel, which currently serves as the City's interim Public Art Advisory Committee providing input on site and artist commissioning processes; and the Panel conveyed their support for the direction of the Plan.

Recommendations

1. That this report be received for information.

Background

Vaughan is a creative urban city committed to integrating art into its public realm – a city where Public Art is accessible to all people and valued as a placemaking catalyst for conveying Vaughan's unique identity and economic vitality. The role and value of Public Art as a vital vehicle for transforming the VMC through the creative use of art and design strategies recurs as a fundamental theme in a number of Council endorsed documents, including: the VMC Secondary Plan, VMC Streetscape and Open Space Plan, VMC Urban Design Guidelines, Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program and VMC Culture and Public Art Framework.

On June 7, 2016, Item 6, Report No. 26, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), was adopted without amendment by Council, which included recommendations that staff work with the development community on advancing the integration of Public Art into development proposals where possible or appropriate; and that staff pursue and seek partnerships for integrating Public Art installations within the Mobility Hub as viable placemaking opportunities.

As part of their Section 37 Density Bonusing Agreement and contribution to the City for the additional density and building height, the Owner has provided to the City, a \$650,000 Letter of Credit towards an onsite gateway feature installation proposed at the corner of Jane Street and Portage Parkway in the VMC. The Public Art Plan outlines the framework for the commissioning of the art and the collaboration of the lead artist to create the gateway feature installation. Upon finalizing the Public Art Plan, the Owner will enter into a Community Benefit Agreement with the City that includes the Public Art component. The Owner will own and maintain the Public Art.

Dedicated advocates of the role Public Art plays in placemaking in the VMC streetscape, as demonstrated by their recently unveiled and well-received ArtWalk mural installation and PXL Gallery, SmartCentres continues their commitment to enhancing public experiences in their East Block North Public Art Plan. The Plan proposes to create a prominent onsite gateway feature at the North East corner of the East Block development site, identified as a strategic location for a public art installation.

SmartCentres hired LNDMRK to serve as Public Art consultant to develop the Public Art Plan and manage its implementation. The art commissioning process will involve the Public Art consultant shortlisting a curated list of relevant artists for SmartCentres' consideration as finalists, who will be invited to develop design concepts for SmartCentres' final selection. The artist developing the preferred design concept will be commissioned to create the gateway art installation. The City of Vaughan's Senior Art Curator and Planner will serve as a curatorial advisor throughout the process.

Preliminary creative concepts for this gateway feature contemplate developing an installation comprising multiple sculptural pieces scattered across the proposed location versus capitalizing on the monumental impact of one large iconic sculpture. The final design concept will be sensitive to complementing the urban design context at the same time as prioritizing the public experience.

Conforming to the guiding principles identified in the Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program and the recommendations outlined in the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework, SmartCentres' Public Art Plan is subject to on-going evaluation by staff and the Vaughan Design Review Panel for its appropriateness for display in the public realm. City staff will continue to liaise with SmartCentres and their Public Art consultant to facilitate the execution of their Public Art Plan.

Public Art Project Schedule:

- August 23, 2021 – VMC East block North Public Art Plan submitted to City of Vaughan
- September 30, 2021 – Design Review Panel Presentation and Assessment
- November 9, 2021 – Committee of the Whole Report
- Q4 2021 – Public Art Agreement
- Q4 2021 – Artist Brief and Contract
- Q2/Q3 2022 – Artist Design Concept
- 2023 – Design Development/Fabrication/Artwork Installation

Previous Reports/Authority

[Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program \(June 2016\)](#)

[VMC Culture & Public Art Framework \(September 2015\)](#)

[Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of May 14, 2019 \(Item 2, Report 17 of the Committee of the Whole for OP.18.018 and Z.18.30 and DA.18.074\)](#)

Analysis and Options

Realizing the vision of the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework

The realization of the VMC's vision as a vibrant downtown with exciting activities, social capital and cultural events is predicated on collective efforts in creating a sense of 'place'. Culture and Public Art initiatives contribute to that sense of place, by creating memories and experiences that draw people to use and frequent the VMC on a 24/7 basis versus just passing through the space.

Public Art plays many roles in the urban context. As outlined in the City-Wide Public Art Program, some of its key roles include:

- Placemaking - creating and enhancing public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being
- Gateway Marker - an entrance feature that signifies a boundary and assists with wayfinding
- Landmark - an easily recognized feature in the cityscape that contributes to placemaking and orientation
- Local Focal Point - a centre for activity or attention
- Wayfinding - visuals used to convey location and directions
- Interpretation - a work of art that illuminates the character or history of its context
- Functional Element - a work of art that also serves a utilitarian purpose
- Activation and Animation - a work of art that energizes a space, can be interacted with and/or can move independently

In keeping with the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework recommendation of prioritizing artistic gateways for placemaking purposes - the North East corner of the East Block development site was identified as a strategic location for a Public Art installation in consultation with the City of Vaughan during the development application process. The location of this art installation was considered within the holistic design of this phase of development as a primary gateway to the VMC. Importantly, the location provides significant pedestrian and vehicular visibility.



The Vaughan Design Review Panel is supportive of the direction adopted for this Public Art Plan, anchored by the focus of developing an iconic gateway feature. The Panel shared insightful feedback for consideration in the eventual design concept and development related to the scale, pedestrian movement, location, lighting and seasonal positioning of the resulting artwork to best complement the landscape, architecture and public space, and to help foster memorable viewing experiences. Taking these constructive recommendations into consideration, it will be at the discretion of the creative team if the Public Art will comprise a single work or multiple works positioned within the one location proposed within the Plan or be distributed across both the North West and North East entrance locations as an option proposed by the Panel.

The Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program is supported by the vision of the VMC Secondary Plan which informs the provision of “public art as an important element of the VMC’s public realm, adding culture, beauty and interest to streetscapes (Policy 4.4.8, VMC Secondary Plan). Recommendations 16 and 19 of the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework are to support the urban design objectives for the VMC, enhance the pedestrian experience, to create memorable environments and enhance wayfinding; and to establish a strong place identity which embodies the values and aspirations of the VMC; and is in keeping with Site 6: Gateways – to create iconic gateway artworks that are strong identifiers for the VMC.

This Public Art Plan contributes to public awareness of the role and value of Public Art and Vaughan's City-Wide Public Art Program in placemaking and City building as a catalyst for shaping the City's authentic urban character and economic vitality in a key priority area for Public Art in the VMC. It reinforces the expansive movement of Public Art that is beginning to populate downtown Vaughan, designed to captivate the interest of a diverse viewing audience travelling through the public realm of the VMC at the same time as setting the stage for creative, high profile Public Art opportunities for emerging and established Vaughan and GTA visual artists.

Financial Impact

The development of the City-Wide Public Art Program provides the framework for acquiring public art from development projects through Section 37 policies, deriving community benefits for the City which would otherwise be unachievable through property taxation. There are no economic impacts resulting from this report, as this project is fully offset by Section 37 funding and owned and maintained by the Owner. A \$650,000 Letter of Credit has been posted to secure the works.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Region's policy for Economic Vitality recognizes culture as an important element in making the Region a place to work, live and play. Vibrant and healthy communities will attract and retain a skilled labour force.

The policies for An Urbanizing Region direct Regional Centres to recognize the importance of creating a sense of place and high-quality open spaces "that include meeting places and urban squares that incorporate art, culture and heritage" (s. 5.3.7).

The Region also sets the requirements for Regional Centre secondary plans to include policies addressing the need for public art to be incorporated into major Regional and City buildings and to encourage the inclusion of public art in significant private sector developments.

Conclusion

The VMC East Block North Public Art Plan for developing a prominent onsite gateway feature at the North East corner of the East Block development site, identified as a strategic location for a public art installation in the VMC aligns with the principles identified in the Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program and the recommendations outlined in the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework. It aligns with the urban design objectives for the VMC, to enhance the pedestrian experience, create memorable environments and enhance wayfinding; and establish a strong place identity which embodies the values and aspirations of the VMC. Supported by staff and the Vaughan

Design Review Panel, the Plan complements the development site and advances placemaking aspirations for the VMC by laying the groundwork for realizing a significant contemporary Public Art installation that creatively animates the uniqueness of the existing urban design context through an iconic gateway feature and meaningful identifier for the VMC.

Conforming to the guiding principles identified in the Vaughan City-Wide Public Art Program and the recommendations outlined in the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework, SmartCentres' Public Art Plan is subject to on-going evaluation by staff and the recommendations of the Vaughan Design Review Panel for its appropriateness for display in the public realm. City staff will continue to liaise with SmartCentres and their Public Art consultant to facilitate the execution of their Public Art Plan.

For more information, please contact: Sharon Gaum-Kuchar, Senior Art Curator and Planner, extension 8088

Attachments

1. VMC East Block North Public Art Plan

Prepared by

Sharon Gaum-Kuchar, Senior Art Curator and Planner, ext. 8088
Gaston Soucy, Project Manager – Planning, VMC, etc. 8266

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager