

2 Community Consultation Summary

Extensive community consultation has been undertaken with the residents and business community in the City of Vaughan, through the Vaughan 20/20 process, which included the Vaughan Employment Sectors Strategy (ESS). Overall, the ESS process included six consultation sessions with participation from 94 individuals. That input through the ESS, played a major role in the development of the Economic Development Strategy.

The Economic Development Strategy attempted to place another layer of public consultation on the strategic planning process, in order to provide the project team with an understanding of the perspectives of the local business community leaders, and the area's economic development issues. As part of this, initial targeted consultation took place with members of the Vaughan Tourism Advisory Committee through a short focus group run by the project team. From that, a targeted approach based on wider industry sector involvement was undertaken.

The project team conducted a series of telephone interviews with key stakeholders based on a broad initial consultation list consisting of approximately 100 potential interviewees, representing businesses from each industrial sector in the city, as well as prominent business, industry, and community organizations. From that list, 26 people took part in the process. The stakeholders interviewed included:

- Ajay Mehra, Can-Ar Coach
- Al Wilson, York Region Workforce Planning Board
- Anastasia Vogt, Vaughan Healthcare Foundation
- Andy Manahan, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance
- Ben Leung, Vaughan Chinese Business Association
- Connie Febraro, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
- Dawna Gugliemi, Chair, Kleinburg BIA

- Deborah Bonk, President & CEO, Vaughan Chamber of Commerce
- Eddy Burrello, Deloitte
- Ernie Longo, CN
- Gil Small, Vaughan Mills
- Jason Racco, Rentex Realty
- Jim Hobbs, previously working for York Region, exporting.
- Joan Sax, Opera York, Vaughan Arts Advisory Committee
- John Porco, Unico Foods
- Lou Valeriat, Jeld Wen Windows and Doors
- Lucky, Astra Sportsplex
- Mark Falbo, Mircom Technologies
- Mark Jones, Vaughan Holiday Inn Express
- Noor Din, Human Endeavours
- Peter Ross, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
- Rick Galbraith, The Global Group
- Rob Bourke, Atria Networks
- Sam Florio, Cara
- Steven DelDuca, Carpenters Union, Central Ontario
- Walter Buzzeli, Sanyo Canada

The following provides a summary of the responses received. All responses have been aggregated to preserve the anonymity of the individual.

1. What are the principal strengths/assets of Vaughan and the surrounding region?

The majority of respondents indicated that strengths/assets of Vaughan can be summarized as follows: transportation infrastructure, entrepreneurial mindset and skill of labour market, and land available for development.

Transportation was the number one item listed by participants and related to the central location within the GTA, driving/commuting distance (to and from Vaughan as well as the Pearson International Airport), and proximity of Highways 400, 404, and 407. Due to Vaughan's central location, critical mass of services, diversity of services, and affluence of population were listed as major strengths. CN and CP Rail were also listed in terms of a transportation strength of Vaughan as the city is home to CN's largest marshalling yard-trains come in from the east, south, west and are broken up by cars and reorganized to head to their final destinations.

Entrepreneurial mindset and skill of labour market was a major strength articulated by participants and included responses such as the diverse workforce, low unemployment, high education, strong entrepreneurial spirit, "open for business attitude", and affluent/well skilled workers,

Land availability was a major strength included in participant responses and included the availability of good commercial land, future expansion, and available land for economic growth. Parking was indicated to be an asset, as it is not an issue to find parking in Vaughan as compared to other parts of the GTA. Other responses included:

- Strong ability to attract talent
- Strong population growth
- Safe and clean environment
- Mix of housing supports different life stages, however some felt that Vaughan was close to affordable living areas, but was not very affordable itself.
- Tourism is a major attraction (i.e. Wonderland, Kleinburg, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, etc).
- Strong support from Council – new businesses do not have to fight bureaucracy.

- The greenbelt and social services makes it an attractive place to live.

2. What are the competitive advantages for:

a. Business or a specific sector?

Participants indicated a range of competitive advantages for business and specific sectors. They include availability of multiple business locations throughout the city, accessibility due to location, access to the GTA, low tax rate in comparison to other GTA communities, industrial/commercial savings, upcoming subway expansion, and a growing recreation industry. Transportation seemed to be the linkage that every participant articulated. Other comments included:

- We are a headquarters for many building companies where much of the building in the GTA is happening
- Kleinburg – in terms of tourist attraction.
- Ability to attract higher profile tourism

b. For the region?

Most participants indicated their response to this question above, however some responses not already discussed included the transportation industry with regards to small machine metal fabrication, and light manufacturing to drive employment, as well as the high number of young people in the region. Vaughan has good rail service to efficiently move bulk goods, as well as a growing sports industry (Adidas sports complex being developed).

3. Where do opportunities exist in terms of economic development in Vaughan?

Expanded health services (such as long term care and other complimentary services), industrial land and buildings need a fresher

look (i.e. Keele & Hwy 7), improvement in engineering and technical expertise availability, educational facilities available, downtown development, tourism growth, economic development in terms of social integration and employable skill sets (especially for new comers), and regional partnerships are all comments articulated by participants. Other opportunities suggested:

- US Market
- Better environment for construction companies
- Creativity/Cultural industries
- Prestigious commercial/office space can be expanded
- Sell the subway and the benefits it brings to the community.
- Health cluster (Medical supply companies)
- Food industry
- Promote the diversity of Vaughan

4. What barriers/gaps/challenges exist in reaching these economic opportunities? (i.e. services, suppliers or sources of support)

A wide range of responses were shared with regards to barriers/challenges/gaps that exist. Several common challenges surfaced and included these responses:

- **Capacity of City Council:** Lack of political will and creativity, inability to see creative vision, city needs to be able to work with their residents.
- **New technologies:** Green technology is an opportunity and a challenge-how can it be done cost effectively? New green policies do not consider cost implications, and use ambiguous language. There is a mindset for traditional buildings/construction.
- **Perception of the city:** Political scene could hinder perceptions and future development.

- **Transportation accessibility within the city:** The city is growing, and the growth is outpacing the infrastructure (i.e. roads), congestion is becoming more of a problem, as new immigrants settle and accept lower wages they must use public transit, which is expensive and not widely accessible, city is not transit-friendly.
- **Bureaucratic policies:** Government support/funding, timing of approvals for development, more regional coordination can help reduce time needed for regulatory building permits,
- **Investment:** Little investment by the City to date, need to invest in terms of to tourism partnerships,
- **Culture:** Not a lot of multicultural options, city cultural festival too expensive (\$100/ticket), villages were amalgamated together so politically they are joined but culturally they are very different, Federal immigration policies makes it difficult for new immigrants to get visas.
- **Real Estate:** Residential and commercial prices are too high, availability of land along the 400 (prime exposure for companies). The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre could be an attractive location.

Other unique responses included:

- No disadvantages, no competition for Vaughan. The City can become like Toronto in years to come.
- Diversity in terms of emphasis on larger companies, not a lot of big 'anchor' companies
- Need to define Vaughan as a city center
- Identity of residents-how they refer to 'where they are from'. Is it Vaughan, or the individual community, i.e. Maple.
- Information sharing/outreach to businesses-need to get back to the basics.

5. What kinds of initiatives should be undertaken by the City to connect existing assets and sectors of activity in

Vaughan to provide spin-off and retention opportunities to assist the existing business base?

Participants had a number of very strong opinions towards the initiatives that should be undertaken by the City. It was articulated that the following should be addressed by the City:

- New City centre (Vaughan Metropolitan Centre) is centrally located and the new subway station presents a good opportunity to showcase local cultural and artistic capacity; the City should ensure all development is respectful of all the communities in Vaughan
- Hospital development should be reflective of growth before it happens
- Promotion- benefits to working and living in Vaughan, of city opportunities, to attract family physicians,
- Find two or three pillars/brands that Vaughan can be known for
- Tap into Green Energy Act-meet with landowners and PowerStream to power the Enterprise Zone by green power.
- Convene a city-wide economic summit that brings together business and community leaders
- Collaborate with others to develop a regional plan, can't be a spectator and expect to win-we are nowhere right now. Communication means a lot.
- Provide incentives to help attract companies (i.e. tax abatements for land development).
- Office space-need more of it; a moratorium on office tower taxes for first 5 years of construction would allow the developer time to succeed.
- Improvement of public transit
- Work with businesses rather than have them go through the 'red tape'. Consider them as an asset. Understand their needs and work with them. Business visitation program would be useful.

- Employment: focus on self-employment, hiring from within the community, equal opportunity.
- Stadium-Vaughan needs something like the Rogers Center in Toronto that brings people to an event. An amphitheatre would be useful for large outdoor events.
- Vision seems to be reactive rather than proactive.
- The City should engage in recycling program for the commercial market.

6. How do you think the outside public perceives Vaughan?

A majority of participants indicated that they felt that the outside public perceives Vaughan negatively. These issues can be summarized as negative perceptions of city council and administration, and lack of knowledge of the city from outsiders. Comments included:

- "City Above Toronto" slogan: Some reported it is quite aggressive, others reported that this slogan has helped create brand recognition for Vaughan.
- Scandals in the City create negative perception. Need to stop coming across as unprofessional
- City Council/administration needs to clean up their external image; need more credibility.
- People may think that the City is controlled by a handful of land developers.
- Many people do not know where Vaughan is-they might just think it is Toronto. Tourists know Wonderland, and the shopping centers, or a suburb or Toronto.
- Known as a 'rich' community.
- Known as an 'Italian' community.

A very small number of participants felt that Vaughan had a positive perception amongst outsiders. Their responses suggested

outsiders perceived Vaughan as a great place to live and has a strong budgeting process. One respondent felt that Vaughan was perceived as a 'home of the entrepreneur'.

• **What about local resident perception?**

Responses were mixed with regards to local resident perception. Strong social networks, strong pride in city, ease of accessibility, and safe community were responses articulated from people with positive perceptions. It was also felt that people within the community are passionate about their quality of life, as well as being in a prime location for transportation accessibility.

Negative internal perceptions included transportation problems, growth negatively affecting quality of life, and embarrassment of negative perceptions that surrounding communities have of Vaughan. There is also concern that businesses will question the trust, and respect of leadership in the community.

Many respondents felt that while there was a predominantly negative perception of the city, the image is changing, and is starting to be seen as more multicultural place with a high quality of life.

7. The City anticipates the population to grow to 418,000 by 2031. How do you feel about this growth and will it be sustainable? What needs to happen to accommodate the growth?

A majority of responses indicated that in order for this projected growth to be sustainable, strong planning by the City would be a necessity. The majority of respondents were excited about this growth as long as proper planning measures were taken. Responses included:

- Support growth within the urban boundary and the idea of a Metro Centre
- Front line issues exist in terms of infrastructure, medical, and social services.
- Transportation improvements-mass transportation, traffic congestion during rush hour, light rail, and gridlock needs to be addressed. Public transit accessibility needs to be improved.
- As city grows, quality of life will be an issue. Can I work/play in Vaughan?
- A plan and vision needs to be set early-start laying the groundwork now because we are already behind on some things (transit).
- Housing-affordable housing, more types of housing, community living (diversity, isolation, multicultural communities). Should maintain infrastructure at a pace relevant to industrial and residential development (need a more coordinated effort).
- Need higher density housing along transit routes and major roads, while maintaining the quality of life, but not the sprawl.

8. What characteristics of Vaughan would attract:
a. a skilled, creative professional to re-locate to the area?

A restored reputation, low crime and good schools, good work environment, easy commuting, existing growing community, competitive wage rates, community that is open for business, strong downtown core, streamlining process for getting people in and out of the city, culture in the community, vibrancy, live/work availability in community, and good amenities are all responses articulated by participants. Other responses included:

- City should offer upgraded internet for free

- Job fairs-bring a package based on education, amenities, internet, upgrading infrastructure, internet connectivity (remains an issue).
- Knowing there is a Canadian Art Gallery
- Life stage – attracting people will depend on their demographic (Young, singles may not find there is enough entertainment in Vaughan, but families may find Vaughan very attractive).

b. a tourist to visit Vaughan?

Characteristics that would attract a tourist to Vaughan included uniqueness of attractions, number of major attractions, and visiting friends and relatives (VFR). Specific references to tourist activities included Canada's Wonderland, Bass Pro Shops, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, festivals (Binder Twine, Woodbridge Festival), Kortright Centre, Reptilia, etc. Authentic cuisine was also indicated to be a draw for tourists. One respondent felt there was a niche in manufacturing tourists-those who travel to Vaughan to visit furniture manufacturers and while they are there eat, stay in a hotel, and do other shopping. Many respondents felt that Vaughan did not have a lot of characteristics that would attract a tourist to visit. Comments included:

- Vaughan lacks amenities and attractions that stand out
- Challenge is trying to get tourists to leave downtown Toronto-need more attractions in the downtown core
- The City needs get behind these activities [festivals] and support them
- The City has always relied on the industry stakeholders self-promoting. City needs a program to support and market the opportunities.
- A landmark is needed to drive people to Vaughan.
- There is really not a lot except for Wonderland.

c. Corporate Headquarters?

"Buzz" in Vaughan right now, real estate options (cost, proximity to Toronto, Transit), transportation accessibility were responses suggested by participants as to why Vaughan would attract corporate headquarters. Other responses included:

- Big tech companies don't want to come here. Manufacturing and retail and consumer products will but not high tech. They go to Markham and Richmond Hill
- Honda announced they were moving to Richmond Hill-what were they asking for? What made them move across the street? The political people are doing their homework and talking to industry.
- Green Vision-there is an emphasis on environmental citizenship, but could still be improved.
- Growing city-corporations can build and design their offices the way the want them to be-they do not have to move into a building that was leased out previously.

d. Advanced manufacturing?

Much of the responses for this sector were similar to above, and included green Enterprise Zone to attract green/renewable companies, competitive costs (tax abatements, etc), land available for development, transportation accessibility (highway, rail, and air). It was reported that rooftop solar panels are currently being manufactured (50%) in Vaughan and has attracted a lot of attention. In keeping with the green vision, it was suggested that Vaughan would be an ideal location for a major solar panel manufacturing facility.

e. Building products industry?

The majority of respondents felt that there were many similarities between characteristics that would attract the building products industry, and other sectors. These include rail and highway system, cluster of skilled contractors and companies, location-transportation routes, and concentration of builders in the region. Vaughan has a large supply of tradespeople, and is close to the large builders and where building is happening (Greater Toronto Area & Hamilton)

f. Transportation, logistics, warehousing, and distribution companies?

Strong rail and highway linkages, central location, lot availability, and ability to move products, and availability of land were items articulated by participants. Vaughan has a good supply of appropriate buildings required for this industry.

9. What industry sectors (for example tourism, agriculture, manufacturing etc) should Vaughan focus on to attract new economic growth?

Industry sectors that Vaughan should focus on to attract new economic growth included manufacturing (light/medium intensity), technical/ICT related activities, tech companies, advanced manufacturing (water technology/conveyance, plastics), healthcare, tourism, culture, and agriculture. Specific responses included:

- For a well rounded community they should all be emphasized. To emphasize just one would put the city at a disadvantage in the industry were to fail.
- Vaughan needs to think about new types of industry that are more sustainable.
- A decision needs to be made on the industry that should be promoted. Pick any one, it doesn't really matter, but build that cluster. Without a cluster you don't win.

- Grassroots economic development-self sustaining, such as small businesses development.
- City needs to be attractive to York University. If I was Vaughan I would be doing whatever I could to interest York to Vaughan. Partnerships should be explored-may not need to be a conventional educational institution

10. What do you think of the local training opportunities in Vaughan?

Many participants were not aware of many local training opportunities that existed but felt that it was important for the community to have training availability. The City does not have its own college or university, and this was seen by many participants as a major weakness. This question can be summarized in terms of availability, and programming. Specific responses included:

- The Carpenters Union has two of the largest training centres in Canada, however the problems is physical accessibility. Transit will help bring more people to access training. Union is interested in green building training. Precision construction is needed, so training is key.
- Carpenters Union Local 27 in Woodbridge offers a training facility that focuses on homebuilding trades and opportunities to re-skill people in other areas of the economy if there is a slow-down.
- Hospitality, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing are sectors that would benefit from post secondary training programs.
- York University nearby is an asset-community college branch would be a great thing. Sheridan or Humber with a local campus would help.
- HydroOne has a training centre 10 minutes form Vaughan.
- Should not compete in manufacturing programs, but software, computer science, website construction/design, and robotics could be key programs for the region.

- Should partner with local institutions that offer construction technology programs (Durham College).
- There is no 'one place' that will help people start up their own business.
- A hospitality program would do well in Vaughan.
- Offering a University program that ties into the new hospital development would be excellent. Need continuous improvement to the education in the region so that productivity and workforce skills can be improved. Training is very important for diversity, employers needed to understand international cultures so they understand their employees.
- City needs to look at local need and develop local initiatives.
- A grass-roots organization exists within Vaughan that includes a board from various sectors and analyzes local labour market conditions and makes recommendations to the Ministry about local opportunities and assists employers with employee gaps, and identifying local solutions.
- Tool and die makers, engineers, draftsmen, and other trades. Attract a satellite campus with these programs.

Other Responses:

- Would like to see a good strategy put in place
- Weddings and meetings: Convention centre is needed. Hotels would need to be able to keep up with accommodating people from convention centre.
- We need to look at the inventory we have and develop a strategy to use what we have and then determine what needs to be done.