

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

7 DESIGN REVIEW PANEL: PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION
FILE 25.5.1
ALL WARDS

- 1) That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Commissioner of Planning and Director of Development Planning, dated January 14, 2014, be approved; and
- 2) That members of the Design Review Panel be informed that Council views their advisory work as key to improving the quality of architectural design in the City of Vaughan and that Council appreciates their efforts in this regard.

The Commissioner of Planning and Director of Development Planning in consultation with the Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works and the Commissioner of Community Services recommend:

1. THAT the Design Review Panel BE APPROVED as a component of the City's development approvals process on a permanent basis in accordance with the "*Design Review Panel Terms of Reference and Protocol*" appended to this report as Attachment #1.
2. THAT the Design Review Panel process includes public capital projects with significant public realm impacts in accordance with the "*Public Capital Project Thresholds*" appended to this report as Attachment #2.
3. THAT City Departments and external public agencies that conduct capital projects, include early consultation with the Design Review Panel as part of undertaking those projects.

The Design Review Panel (DRP) contributes to the goals and objectives within *Green Directions Vaughan*, the City's Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan, specifically:

Goal 1: To significantly reduce our use of natural resources and the amount of waste we generate.

Objective 1.3: “To support enhanced standards of stormwater management at the City and work with others to care for Vaughan’s watersheds”

Goal 2: To ensure sustainable development and redevelopment.

Objective 2.2: “To develop Vaughan as a City with maximum greenspace and an urban form that supports our expected population growth”

Objective 2.3: “To create a City with sustainable built form”

Goal 3: To ensure that getting around in Vaughan is easy and has a low environmental impact.
Objective 3.1: "To develop and sustain a network of sidewalks, paths and trails that supports all modes of non-vehicular transportation"

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 2

Objective 3.2: “To develop and sustain a network of roads that supports efficient and accessible public and private transit”

Goal 4: To create a vibrant community for citizens, businesses and visitors.

Objective 4.1: “To foster a city with strong social cohesion, an engaging arts scene, and a clear sense of its culture and heritage”

Objective 4.2: “To ensure that the City of Vaughan attracts businesses and investment that will result in well-paying jobs for Vaughan citizens, a sustainable tax base, and continuing prosperity into the 21st century”

Goal 5: To be a leader on sustainability issues.

Objective 5.1: “To share sustainable best practices and ideas between and among municipal staff and the community”

Objective 5.2: “To continue the City’s role in advocacy and information sharing on environmental issues”

Economic Impact

There is no additional funding required as a result of the recommendations from this report. The DRP jury members provide their time on a volunteer basis, however, funding is necessary for administrative support, materials and travelling expenses of the panel members. The long term yearly funding associated with the administration of the DRP is funded through development charges and has been included in the City of Vaughan’s 2013 Development Charge Background Study. The Development Planning Department’s Council approved 2013 Capital Budget includes funding for years 2013 to 2016. However, a Capital Budget request will be required to be made for 2017 and beyond. The additional consultation for public projects including Capital Environmental Assessments (EAs) may require additional funding from the Committee to be determined on a project to project basis.

Communications Plan

A DRP web-page has been added to the City of Vaughan public web-site, outlining its purpose, meeting protocol, meeting schedule, appointment of members, and meeting minutes. Details of each meeting, including agenda and meeting location, is advertised on the City’s web-site in advance of each meeting.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee of the Whole with an evaluation of the City’s Design Review Panel (DRP) Pilot Project, and recommendations respecting its continuation beyond the 2-year pilot period.

Background and Analysis

The initial meeting of the DRP was on October 27, 2011. An interim staff report on the “Design Review Panel Pilot Project” was presented to the Committee of the Whole meeting of February 5, 2013 (Item 9, Report No. 5). This report was subsequently adopted by Council on February 19, 2013, thereby providing the following direction to Staff:

“That staff report back at the end of the 2 year pilot period with recommendations on the feasibility to incorporate the Design Review Panel into the City’s development approvals process on a permanent basis.”

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 3

Accordingly, this report, together with the “Design Review Panel Terms of Reference and Protocol”, and “Public Capital Project Thresholds”, which are appended to this report as Attachments #1 and #2, have been prepared in response to this direction.

What is a Design Review Panel ?

Generally Design Review Panels (DRPs) are comprised of volunteer design professionals, including architects, landscape architects, urban designers and planners. They provide professional, objective advice aimed at improving matters of design that affect the public realm, which includes buildings, streets, parks and open spaces. In doing so, DRPs can help raise standards of development, encourage designers to avoid compromising on quality, and help make new development compatible with its surroundings. As such, the design review process is a powerful addition to the development approvals process. In recognition of this, DRPs have become increasingly common in Ontario cities in recent years and are now used by the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Mississauga, Hamilton, Brampton, Kitchener, London, Oshawa, and Waterloo. A DRP is currently being considered by the City of Markham.

A Design Review Panel for the City of Vaughan

On October 27, 2011, the City of Vaughan's DRP was initiated as a 2 year Pilot Project. The DRP was set up as an advisory body to City staff, and does not have statutory decision-making powers. The Panel reviews both private development and high profile public capital projects, and provides design advice to Staff for consideration relating to these proposals. Advice is based on publicly approved design criteria, such as the urban design policies in the City's Official Plan and approved Secondary Plans. For private development applications, the Panel's advice is incorporated into planning reports related to an application for consideration by City Council. Design advice for public projects, including new Parks in the City's designated intensification areas is provided to the lead City Department or external public agency, and City Planning Staff, which is used to further advance that project's design.

The process of design review takes place as an additional stream of consultation within the existing framework and timeframe of development review. Procedures for the DRP were developed through an analysis of best practices and were further refined throughout the 2 year pilot project period.

The feasibility of incorporating the DRP within the development assessment process on a permanent basis can be determined through evaluation of the key goals of the Pilot Project, and an analysis of comments received during stakeholder consultations with representation from the Development and Design Industry who have participated during the 2 year Pilot Period.

Evaluation of Design Review Panel Pilot Project Goals

The goals of the DRP Pilot Project were outlined in the Terms of Reference presented in a Staff report to the Committee of the Whole meeting of September 13, 2011, and subsequently adopted by Council on September 27, 2011. An evaluation of the key goals from this report is as follows:

a) Ensure Design Excellence in New Buildings and Public Spaces

City Planning Staff has observed that of the 42 projects shown on Attachment #3 of this report that have been reviewed since the inception of the DRP Pilot Project, the jury panel felt that 19 (45%) of these projects were of sufficient quality that they could proceed without major changes being required to them. However, the panel identified areas of concern with the remaining 23 (55%) of the projects, which they felt were significant enough to require a major redesign of the project. Planning Staff is of the opinion that the

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 4

DRP Pilot Project initiative has been successful in securing the submission of better designs within the City's urban intensification areas. The results confirm that the City's DRP Pilot Project is sending a clear message to the development community about the City of Vaughan's commitment for design excellence in the public realm.

b) Supports Creative Design Within a Regulatory Framework

The DRP Pilot Project has been successful in achieving design creativity, variety and quality within the emerging built form, by stressing the importance of quality construction and finishing materials in addition to creativity when evaluating a development application. This is specifically emphasized when individual development applications are evaluated in accordance with the specific Urban Design policies for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and other urban intensification areas such as the Steeles Avenue West Corridor, Yonge Street Corridor, Carrville District Centre, Centre Street, and Highway 7 Corridor, as well as, the City's four designated Heritage Districts.

c) Develop and Test Procedures and Protocol

Operating the DRP in a pilot format has provided Staff with sufficient flexibility to test a variety of meeting procedures and protocol. The DRP Terms of Reference and Protocol shown on Attachment #1, includes refinements that are identified in the next two sections of the report that were made in response to recent post-pilot feedback from stakeholder consultations and Staff observations. Planning Staff is satisfied that the process has been sufficiently tested and refined to the degree that it can now be successfully integrated into the approvals system on a permanent basis.

Stakeholder Evaluation and Consultation

A comprehensive monitoring program was initiated throughout the 2 year pilot period to determine how the DRP was being received by the stakeholders in the development and design industry. Results from this initiative were generally positive and recommendations from stakeholders input are summarized as follows:

a) Survey Questionnaire of Designers, Developers and Agents

A September 2013 survey questionnaire was provided to users of the DRP process, including 13 development firms and 14 design firms to gauge the impact of the DRP upon their work program. A total of 12 surveys were returned, which was not sufficient enough to allow representative statistical analysis due to the relatively low sample size. Despite this, the survey responses were mostly positive and provided input on the presentation process, and in this regard, were useful in providing Staff with the recommendations needed to make refinements to the process by concentrating the Staff presentation to specific urban design questions and planning context only.

Based on the recommendations from the survey input, Staff has made some refinements to the Terms of Reference and Protocol appended to this report as Attachment #1. These refinements include time restrictions (1 hour and 10 minutes) allocated to each project, and restricting Staff presentation to urban design and planning context matters only, with a maximum 5 minute time allowance. These recommended changes will eliminate possible presentation duplication, and allow the necessary DRP deliberations to occur in a timely manner.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 5

b) Development and Design Industry Consultation and Evaluation

A consultation meeting was held on September 30, 2013 with the development and design industry through the BILD York Chapter (Building Industry and Land Development Association). There was good discussion between City Planning Commission Staff, and members of the development and design industry on the DRP Pilot Project process, which resulted in the general feedback from the stakeholders being largely positive.

Constructive input and recommendations from this stakeholder group has resulted in several changes to the Terms of Reference and Protocol appended to this report as Attachment #1. These revisions are specific at seeking the Panel's advice as early as possible in the development review process during the schematic design phase of a project, and improving dialogue between members of the DRP, City Staff and the proponent teams by allowing offline discussion if the proponent feels deliberations are being influenced by a misunderstanding of information.

c) Consultation with City Departments and Agencies on Public Capital Projects

The DRP reviewed two significant public capital projects over the 2 year pilot period, which included the Vaughan City Hall Resource Library and York Region Rapid Transit VIVAnext H2 Highway #7 VMC rapid transit station. Both projects were very well presented to the DRP by the respective design consultants, and resulted in constructive design advice by the Panel. The feedback received from the participating City Departments and agencies (Buildings and Facilities, Vaughan Library Board, York Region Rapid Transit and VIVAnext) was very positive, and the Design Review Panel's design advice resulted in their respective consultants making positive refinements to their designs.

However, an issue raised by Staff from the Vaughan Library Board with respect to responding to design issues raised by the DRP in later stages of the design process, once budget evaluations are finalized, can be problematic due to the negative financial impact on the approved budgets. As a result, early consultation with the DRP to obtain design input will help to avoid project delays and cost overruns. In addition, the Commissioner of Community Services has requested that any DRP consideration of Parks be limited to proposed Parks only within intensification areas.

Proposed Recommendations

Given the generally positive results of the Pilot Project, it is recommended that the DRP continue to operate as an advisory component of the City's development review process on a permanent basis. However, the Pilot Project has also shown that some refinements to the review format are necessary in order to implement this recommendation in an effective manner. These refinements and recommendations are discussed below.

a) Panel Professional Expertise

A major factor in the success of the DRP Pilot Project can be attributed to the mix of professions, and their wide range of relevant professional experience and expertise. Due to this success, Staff is proposing to retain the existing number (14), and mix of professions on the Panel. However, in response to feedback from the consultation process, Staff is also proposing to include a professional Transportation Engineer to serve on the Panel. Further details relating to Panel membership are included in the "Terms of Reference and Protocol" appended to this report as Attachment #1.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 6

b) Public Projects

Based on the positive comments received from the stakeholders for the two public projects presented to the DRP during the 2 year pilot period, it is recommended that the threshold for qualifying public capital projects be expanded to capture high profile projects, as determined by the Commissioner of Planning or his/her designate in consultation with the affected department Commissioner or external public agency, that contain a significant visual and physical impact upon the public realm. However, Parks proposed in greenfield areas, and public infrastructure projects that contain minimal long-term visual impacts to the public realm such as road construction, servicing projects, minor renovations to public buildings, park retrofits and maintenance projects are excluded from the process. Full details of proposed thresholds for qualifying public projects are outlined in Attachment #2 of this report.

c) City Projects

The DRP review process will vary for City projects depending on the specific project and public process. Public projects such as transit stations or other government agency buildings subject to site plan review will typically be reviewed by DRP at least twice during the design stage of the project, while City projects not subject to the Site Plan process would be viewed only once at an early stage of the design process. In many cases, the City proceeds based on Staff comments to apply for a building permit following consultation meetings with the affected communities and the public. In these cases, the advisory input of the DRP will be provided to the Manager of Urban Design, and the Project Team within the Commission of Community Services or Commission of Engineering and Public Works for consideration at the preliminary design stage of the project, where possible. It is imperative that all efforts to obtain DRP design input early in the project design stage be achieved, in order to avoid project scheduling delays and cost overruns.

d) Development Applications

Experience from the DRP Pilot Project has shown that the design review process is most beneficial in areas that are experiencing pressure to address issues of high-rise or mixed-use development, architectural quality, built form relationship to the public realm streetscape, contextual fit, and where the challenges of integrating new urban development into established suburban neighbourhoods and heritage districts are common. Based on this information, it is recommended that the DRP focus on all development applications in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and other areas in the City where higher density development is taking place and where Secondary Plans are either in place or are being formulated.

e) Panel Membership

It is recommended that DRP members continue to serve on a voluntary unpaid basis. In lieu of remuneration, the City's Planning Commission will host an annual dinner meeting as a symbol of the City's appreciation of each Panel member's commitment. In accordance with City policies, the Panel members are reimbursed for traveling expenses while conducting Panel-related activities, such as attending monthly meetings scheduled for the last Thursday morning of each month. It is estimated that the costs associated with these recommendations are marginal, and can be accommodated in the Planning Commission's current DRP administration budget with no additional funding required.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2014

Item 7, CW Report No. 1 – Page 7

f) Monitoring

The City Planning Commission will continue to monitor the DRP process, consult with participating stakeholders, and may introduce in the future further refinements to the post-pilot format in response to feedback and suggestions from the stakeholders as the DRP process evolves. Similar to refinements made throughout the pilot period, any additional refinements would be made in consultation with the respective stakeholders, and would be introduced and adopted during regular meetings of the DRP. The proposed post-pilot DRP Terms of Reference and Protocol are outlined in Attachment #1 of this report.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with the priorities set forth in Vaughan Vision 2020, particularly “Plan and Manage Growth & Economic Well Being”.

Regional Implications

N/A

Conclusion

The Design Review Panel (DRP) Pilot Project was a proposal to test the feasibility of establishing a permanent DRP that reviews private development applications and public capital projects such as the Vaughan City Hall Resource Library and VIVAnext Highway #7 VMC rapid transit station over a period of two years. Implementing the DRP in this format provided sufficient opportunity to test the initiative, consult with and respond to stakeholder concerns, and refine the process of integration into the development application assessment process. Consultation with stakeholders has shown that the DRP review process is seen as being generally a positive addition to the development approvals process. No major objections to the process were provided by stakeholders throughout the pilot period. Subsequently, this report recommends continuation of the DRP subject to minor procedural refinements, increased expansion to provide input on major public capital projects at early stages of the planning process, and continued monitoring of the program to allow for new and emerging sustainable design initiatives in the building industry. Should the Committee concur, the recommendations in this report can be adopted.

Attachments

1. Design Review Panel Terms of Reference and Protocol
2. Public Capital Projects Thresholds
3. Design Review Panel Projects Reviewed

Report prepared by:

Rob Bayley, Manager of Urban Design, ext. 8254

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing have been forwarded to each Member of Council and a copy thereof is also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)