

# Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan Update

Phase 3 Public Engagement Summary

December 2023



DOWNTOWN

**vaughan**

METROPOLITAN CENTRE

# Overview

## VMC SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) is the City of Vaughan’s downtown core, transforming into a transit-oriented community with unique residential, office, and mixed use areas, linked by a network of parks, public squares, open spaces, and a street grid for all types of transportation, including walking, driving, and cycling.

Due to rapid growth in the VMC and recent changes to provincial legislation and regional policy, the City initiated an update to the existing VMC Secondary Plan and retained a multi-disciplinary team led by Gladki Planning Associates, supported by DTAH, Greenberg Consultants, and Parcel Economics.

Work is being aligned and coordinated in conjunction with parallel studies being undertaken in the VMC, City of Vaughan, and York Region. Ultimately, this update will result in a revised secondary plan that supports the City’s downtown as a complete community to 2051 and beyond.

## PHASE 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

The VMC Secondary Plan Update is a multi-year project with five phases:

1. Background and Issues
2. Options
3. Recommendations
4. Draft Secondary Plan
5. Final Implementation

Phase 3 - Recommend a Preferred Approach, focused on developing the preferred option to present a recommended plan and framework for the VMC. The preferred option is based on the vision and principles established as part of Phase 1 and feedback received through Phase 2. The goal of the preferred option is to create a vibrant, diverse, thriving downtown and central business district (CBD), through a

balanced and complete community.

The objectives for this phase of engagement were to:

- Introduce the preferred option to stakeholders and the public;
- Utilize a variety of engagement initiatives, including poster distribution, online engagement and landowner and community meetings to engage a diverse group of community members and stakeholders;
- Demonstrate how key messages from engagement initiatives in Phases 1 and 2 have been included in preferred option; and
- Gather feedback from the public and stakeholders on land use, density, retail, and civic facilities in the recommended plan and framework.

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Public consultation activities in Phase 3 consisted of an in-person open house, comment forms and digital forums on the “Have Your Say Vaughan” webpage. Activities were advertised on the City of Vaughan’s social media channels and posters were distributed in public spaces around the VMC. The feedback from the engagement activities will inform the draft Secondary Plan as part of Phase 4 of the project.

This document summarizes public feedback received during Phase 3.

# Open House

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2023**

The in-person open house was held at the David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community on Thursday, September 14, 2023. **38 people** registered for the meeting and **50 people** attended, representing a variety of people who have an interest in the VMC.

The in-person open house consisted of two segments and a presentation. The meeting began with a one-hour open house segment with information boards (see figure 1). City staff and project team members were available at the boards and discussed the preferred option with community members (see figure 2). The first open house segment was followed by a 30-minute presentation on the preferred option delivered by Gladki Planning Associates (See figure 3). Following the presentation, community members were invited to visit the information boards and ask City staff and project team members further questions and share thoughts.

Paper comment forms were available during the open house and **3** community members completed forms. People were asked to submit feedback, comments, and questions about **land use, density, retail, and civic facilities** identified in the preferred option.



**Figure 1:** Community members viewing the information boards at the open house held at the David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community.



**Figure 2:** City staff and consultant team discussing the preferred option with community members.



**Figure 3:** Andrew Davidge, Gladki Planning Associates, presented the preferred option to community members.

# Online Engagement

SEPTEMBER 14 - 27, 2023

## Online Forum “Have Your Say Vaughan”

An online forum was launched on “Have Your Say Vaughan” for community members to share their feedback on the preferred option (see figure 4). The online forum was advertised across the City’s social media networks (see figure 5). The following questions were asked in the online forum discussion boards to generate conversation among participants:

- What do you think of the land-use designation identified as the preferred option? (2 responses submitted)
- What do you think of the mixed-use non-residential requirement identified as the preferred option? (0 responses submitted)
- What do you think of the maximum density identified as the preferred option? (0 responses submitted)
- What do you think of the retail identified as the preferred option? (1 response submitted)
- What do you think of the civic facilities identified in the preferred option? (1 response submitted)

Over **161** community members viewed the project’s Have Your Say landing page **1,847** times and accessed the project’s online forum **171** times. **4** contributors actively engaged on the discussion boards. Contributors left **4** comments on the civic facilities and land use discussion boards. Overall, **32** community members visited the land use discussion board, **24** people visited the mixed use discussion board, **18** people visited the civic facilities discussion board, **17** people visited the retail discussion board, and **14** people visited the density discussion board.

## Online Information and Comment Form

Comment forms were also available digitally between September 14 and September 27, 2023. **8** community members completed forms. After the in-person open house on September 14, 2023, the information boards and presentation were available online.

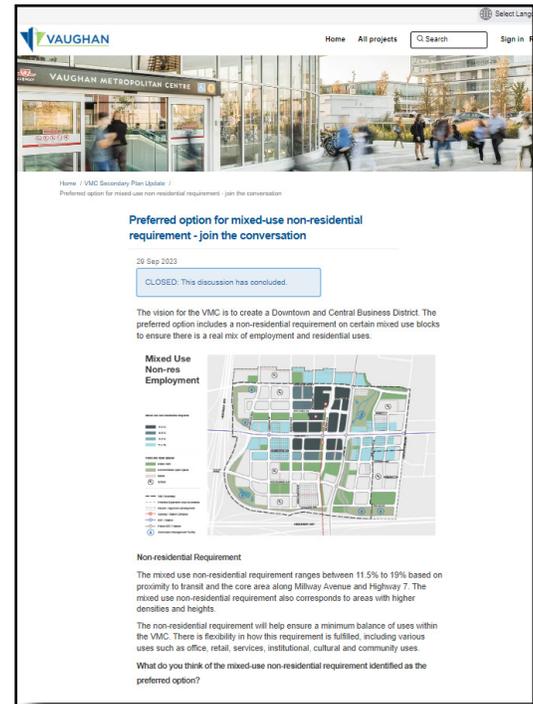


Figure 4: Forum discussion board

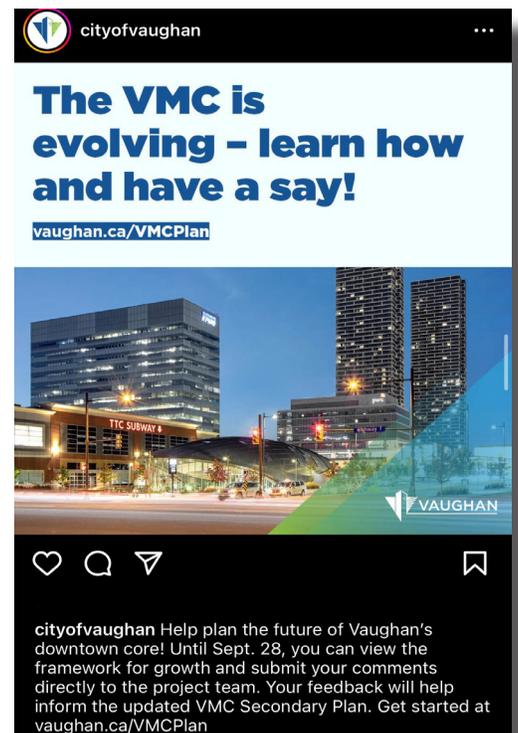


Figure 5: Instagram post

## What We Heard

Community members were asked to share their general feedback and comments on the **land use, density, retail, and civic facilities** identified in the preferred option. **11** community members completed paper and online comment forms and **4** community members contributed to the online forum. Highlights from the in-person and online engagement activities are summarized below. Detailed comments and direct quotes can be found in the following section. Comments have been edited for clarity.

### Density

A prominent and diverse skyline is important in the VMC. Some community members favour of a mix of building types and heights, and appropriate separation of tall buildings. Community members shared concerns that there are too many high rise buildings.

### Family-friendly

Some community members highlighted the importance of family-friendly housing. Community members preferred a variety of building types and unit sizes to accommodate families and young people. Some community members shared that a variety of civic facilities and outdoor amenities such as sports fields should be provided to service the area. Other community members indicated that school sites are ideal near the core and higher density areas.

### Transportation and Parking

Community members shared a concern about traffic congestion and road safety in the VMC. There is a desire for pedestrian friendly and walkable neighbourhoods with active transportation infrastructure. Some community members identified the need for visitor and commuter parking.

### Parks and Open Spaces

In residential and mixed use areas, parks and green open spaces should be located nearby and within walking distance. Community members favoured a diverse range of programming and uses in parks and open spaces.

### Retail and Placemaking

A vibrant public realm with retail, programming, and design elements is desired. Community members recommended elements including spaces for street festivals, green public spaces, places to sit and rest, and art installations. Community members acknowledged the importance of diverse retail for daily needs within walking distance. Some community members recommended that there should be less retail areas to improve traffic congestion. Overall, there is a desire for more mixed use areas with commercial and residential uses.



“We need places that can fit young families in bigger spaces so they can stay in the area longer.”



“Transportation inside and outside of the VMC will be a challenge.”



“Mixed use housing is the most affordable and efficient use of the space”



“There should be more green space surrounding neighbourhoods”



“Retail should be within walking distance”

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE LAND-USE DESIGNATION IDENTIFIED AS THE PREFERRED OPTION?

- “There should be **more green space** surrounding neighbourhoods. If we are making housing available to people who cannot afford single homes, giving more green space surrounding these areas is important. People should be able to step out and touch some grass without walking through **dangerous** roads and parking lots. Green spaces need to be **more accessible.**”
- “**Mixed use** and **green public spaces** such as parks/ playgrounds, trails, dog parks, picnic areas.”
- “I think land use should **always incorporate parks and environmental open spaces.** Parks and open spaces should be calm spaces for **families to gather and enjoy time outdoors.**”
- “Residential and commercial”
- “Anything that doesn’t cause more traffic.”
- “**More mixed use zoning** would be nice.”
- “High rise buildings bring more traffic **congestion** and raise safety concerns. There should be less high rise buildings but more parks. **Retail and restaurants** would make the area **safer and environmental friendly.**”
- “The land use is great.”
- “I think the plan is well laid out. However, I am curious about the **parking** situation. The City of Vaughan is highly dependent on their vehicles due to the common long-distance travel. The current parking lots are not allocated in this map. Please distinguish the location of public vehicle and bike parking. Also, when building these condos, please do not make the sidewalks with only hardware materials. **Greenspace is important!** Shade from the trees during the hotter season will keep people outdoors longer. Trees are also a natural separation from vehicular traffic which creates a **better sense of safety. Entertainment** is extremely important in the VMC. Right now, the City only has Dave and Busters as a popular entertainment hub for

friends and family. There will be no form of enjoyable entertainment in the area if it is removed. Please ensure that the VMC will be a place **where residents can live, work, and play.**”

- “I think the plan is quite thorough and takes a lot of things into consideration. I appreciate that there is a priority regarding the **importance of neighbourhoods and parks** surrounded by the **busy high-rise buildings.** These parks and neighbourhoods are a **calm** place where people can go to escape from their busy lives. I also appreciate the mindfulness of incorporating **environmental open space** to incorporate natural land.”

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE DENSITY IDENTIFIED AS THE PREFERRED OPTION?

- “**Mixed use housing** is the most affordable and efficient use of the space. There is no point in making condos that are only 500 square feet that can fit as many people as possible in them. To help with the housing crisis, we need places that can fit **young families** in bigger spaces so they can stay in the area longer. For example, making **medium sized apartment buildings.** An 8 story apartment building that is at least 1500 square feet will be more accommodating for **young professionals and families .**They can stay long-term and have a **better quality of life.** This will decrease demand for single family homes. The VMC area has enough space and time to implement [mixed use housing and medium sized apartments] and other places in the city can as well. ”
- “We don’t want **too many massive towers** with more people in an area. Roads and traffic **congestion** are already a major issue in the VMC. The Floor Space Index (FSI) of 9.0 is way too high considering the amount of roads, there’s already enough congestion on Highway 7. We need to provide incentives for people to use public transit or other forms of transportation.”
- “Keep sight lines of downtown for **taller buildings.**”
- “Less is more.”
- “The FSI of 7.5 and greater would be ideal.”

- **“Height is not good.** High rise buildings are close to existing apartments and are lowering [property] value. [High rise buildings] should be **arranged with this consideration** and not blocking each other.”
- “Reducing the resident population and retail shoppers will better to manage transportation. **Transportation is a challenge in the VMC.**”

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE RETAIL IDENTIFIED AS THE PREFERRED OPTION?

- “Retail looks good”
- “I think **too much retail can cause the area to become too congested.** Perhaps there should be a **moderate** amount of retail. Only having retail in required areas, not in recommended.”
- “Grocery stores, coffee shops, convenience stores and restaurants.”
- “Less is more.”
- “The existing commercial plan looks good.”
- “Retail should be within **walking distance** inside and outside the VMC.”
- “The retail plan looks great.”
- **“Affordable** grocery stores, coffee shops (not franchises), convenient stores, wine rack, barber/ hair dresser, boutiques high and low end, thrift store, dry cleaner, shoe maker, electronic repair store, local bakeries and specialty goods (gluten free, vegan, dairy free etc.), street/sidewalk vendors.”

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE CIVIC FACILITIES IDENTIFIED IN THE PREFERRED OPTION?

- “Civic facilities in the plan are good.”
- “Libraries, community centres - outdoor space, soccer fields, baseball fields, ice rink, school.”
- “Commuter parking is needed in the VMC.”
- “More civic facilities are needed in the area.”
- “Looks like a good amount of community services in the plan. If more people live in the dense areas, maybe **move the schools closer to the denser areas?**”
- **“Schools are needed close by.** Currently, there is library and YMCA but no school.”
- “The civic facilities plan looks great.”
- “The boards on display mention that elementary school sites are centrally located and away from 400 series highways. However, the city and landowners are asking the school boards to relocate S4 to the TRCA lands at the corner of 400 & 407. Are you now saying you support the S4 site as noted?”
- **“Students are one of the largest demographics that use transit and will be in and out of VMC often.** I’d like to see more public amenities, retail and commercial, and civic facilities such as: workspaces (WeWork or some type of group/individual pod); another library or incorporate a study/work space in commercial space; public washrooms; walk in clinic/ pharmacy; a movie theatre; water bottle filling stations; a service Ontario office; a post office; and religious facilities (including art is an important expression of community and diversity). There should be crossing guards on the nearby streets on the schools.”

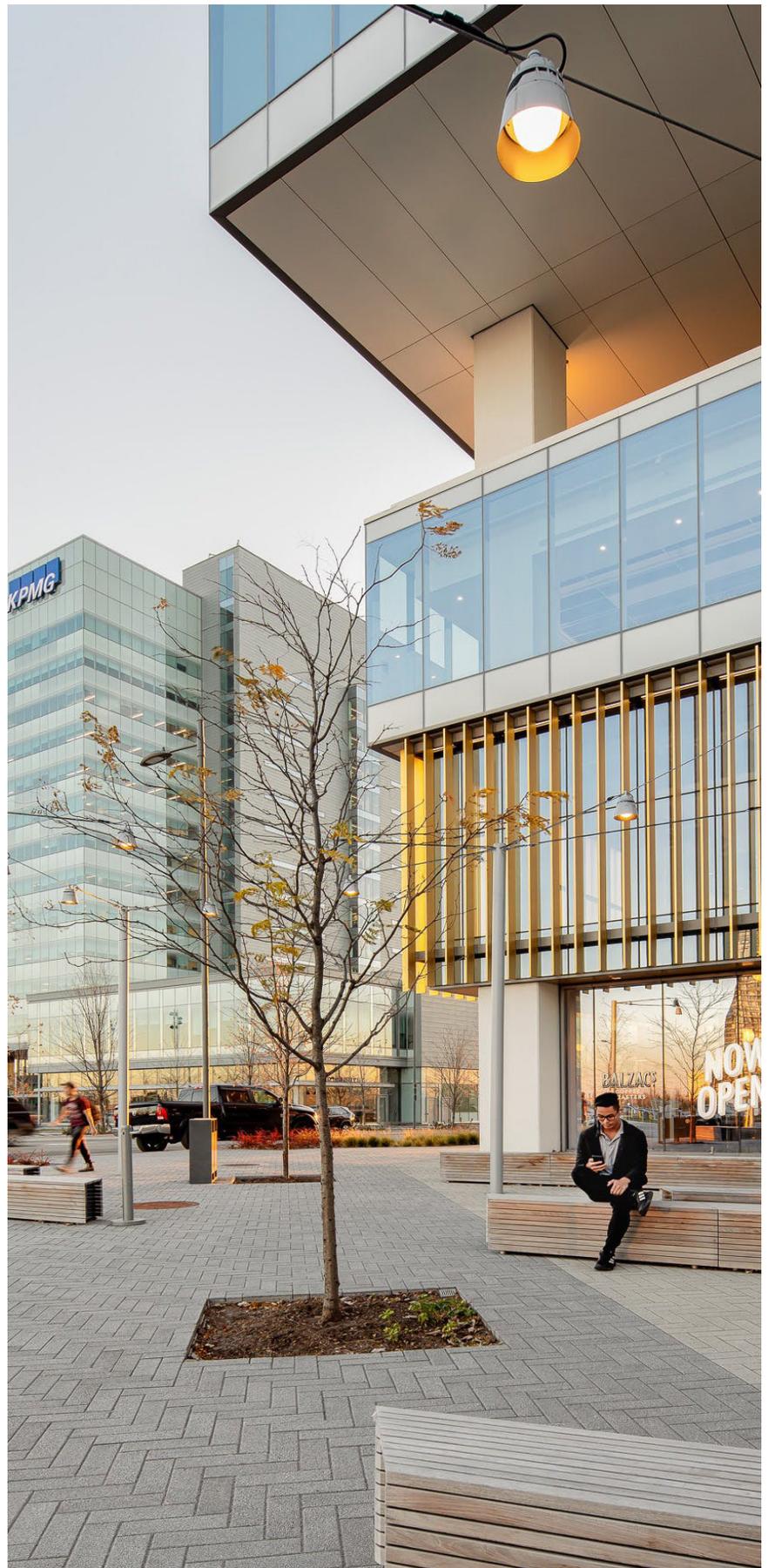
## ANYTHING ELSE WE SHOULD CONSIDER, OR YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

- “I would like to push for **larger units**. A lot of these condos are very small and expensive for what they are. More units need to be in the 700-1000 square foot range. I know the city has no control over private businesses, but there should be a mandate that they have to include a minimum requirement for how many units have to be over 700 square feet. Another suggestion I have is limiting cars and roads in the area. **Making a more pedestrian friendly space will increase safety and aid in pollution reduction**. Take Yonge and Dundas square. Making larger city blocks that block cars should be increased to increase air quality and efficiency for people living in those buildings. Living so close to the subway should mean an easy commute, and making this more pedestrian friendly will encourage residents and the surrounding communities to reduce their reliance on cars, increase bike usage overall reducing traffic in this area. **Putting in more bike lanes that are SAFE and VIABLE** for the community. This means putting in place BARRIERS between the bike lane and cars so that it is **safe to commute to the subway by bike**.”
  - “Again more specific details on the **uses of the green space** and community areas. Picnics, trails, gardens, off leash dog parks are needed.”
  - “It is common for a condo development to include a small plaza (walking/ gathering space) so they can add more floors. However, much of the time, developers pave the ground and leave the space completely open, thus **missing an opportunity to create usable spaces for people in the city**. Encourage seating that people can actually relax on (backrest), add water features, create a pollinator garden, designate it as a spot for musicians, negotiate a sidewalk vendor (coffee vendor) near commercial buildings. As the population of Vaughan becomes more culturally diverse, the best way to represent all these cultures is through art and food. VMC can host international food festivals or temporary art popups. Get the creatives involved; have them create a mural, acknowledge the lands we’re on. **VMC is supposed to be a glimpse of what Vaughan can be**. Make it equitable.
- Add an employment centre, a food bank, non-for-profit organizations. Hope this sparks inspiration!”
  - “Thanks for taking my feedback. It’s nice to see the city listening to us.”
  - “**High rise buildings should be family friendly and safe for all residents**. Higher population density may raise safety concerns. Focus should be on mid rise buildings for residence or office. Also, more entertainment, parks for kids and school age children.”
  - “**My biggest concern is the amount of commuters** in the area as the population is expected to be 93k. Transportation inside and outside of VMC will be a challenge.”
  - “Parking permits for restaurants and parking safety.”

## Next Steps

Public and stakeholder feedback is vital to the success of the VMC Secondary Plan Update. The project team will continue to seek input from citizens and stakeholders during Phase 4 to ensure work is continuously informed by the important perspectives of all community members.

**Phase 4** is the next stage of the project and **a draft of an updated Secondary Plan for the VMC will be developed.** Engagement with key stakeholders, including the public and landowners, will continue; the draft Secondary Plan will be shared to gather critiques, opinions, preferences, and capture interests that may have been previously missed. Stay tuned!



Transit Square and Centre of the VMC. Source: City of Vaughan