

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 19, 2016

Item 2, Report No. 34, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on October 19, 2016.

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HIGHWAY 7 STREET BANNER PROGRAM

The Committee of the Whole recommends approval of the recommendation contained in the following report of the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management and the Senior Manager of Economic Development, dated October 5, 2016:

Recommendation

The City Clerk, on behalf of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Sub-Committee, forwards the following recommendation from its meeting of September 22, 2016 (Item 1, Report No.4) for Council's consideration:

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Sub-Committee recommends:

1. That Council authorize staff to partner with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation for the purposes of designing, manufacturing and installing street banners along Highway 7 in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC); and
2. That Council authorize the City Clerk to execute a Memorandum of Understanding / Agreement between the City of Vaughan and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation for the Highway 7 Street Banner program.

Report of the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management and the Senior Manager of Economic Development dated September 22, 2016

Recommendation

The Deputy City Manager of Planning and Growth Management and the Senior Manager of Economic Development, in consultation with the Chief Corporate Initiatives and Intergovernmental Relations, Director of Development Planning, Director of Transportation Services, Parks and Forestry Operations and Manager of Urban Design and Cultural Heritage, recommend:

1. That Council authorize staff to partner with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation for the purposes of designing, manufacturing and installing street banners along Highway 7 in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC); and
2. That Council authorize the City Clerk to execute a Memorandum of Understanding / Agreement between the City of Vaughan and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation for the Highway 7 Street Banner program.

Contribution to Sustainability

Green Directions Vaughan embraces a *Sustainability First* principle and states that sustainability means the City shall make decisions and take actions that ensure a healthy environment, vibrant communities and economic vitality for current and future generations. Wayfinding and signage programs contribute to the identity and image of the VMC, as a vibrant downtown that attracts residents and business investment.

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Economic Impact

There is no economic impact associated with the approval of this report. City staff will undertake the design and installation of the banners with existing staff resources. The Friends of the Greenbelt are committed to covering the full manufacturing or production costs of all banners to be installed on Highway 7.

Communications Plan

City staff will work with the Foundation to seek opportunities to co-operatively promote its joint banner program. Staff has advised the Region of York and York Region Transit that street banners will be installed along the 3.5 kilometre stretch of Highway 7 that falls within the VMC.

Key Messages:

1. In partnership with York Region, the City has invested in streetscape enhancements along Highway 7, including enhanced street tree plantings, street furniture, custom pavement installations, pedestrian lighting, and signage bracket arms.
2. The VMC currently lacks any identity or wayfinding signage.
3. Consistent signage would serve to enhance public awareness of the VMC, while fulfilling wayfinding functions.
4. Banner signage developed in partnership with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation is consistent with what differentiates the VMC apart from other downtowns – the only downtown in the Greater Toronto Area that has a large natural heritage and open space system at its core, creating an intersection between the urban environment and Greenbelt.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to partner with the Friends of the Greenbelt for the purposes of designing, manufacturing and installing street banners along Highway 7 in the VMC.

Background – Analysis and Options

The VMC Secondary Plan articulates a vision for the downtown that incorporates the following principles: pedestrian-friendly, walkable public realm, transit supportive development, beautiful private and public interfaces, economic vitality and environmental sustainability. Consistent with and building upon the VMC Secondary Plan, the VMC Streetscape and Open Space Plan further articulates landscape strategies and design guidelines for creating high quality, publicly-accessible pedestrian circulation, social and recreational spaces.

Council adopted the report “*City-Wide Public Art Program*” (Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report No. 26, Item 6) at the June 7th, 2016 Council meeting. With the adoption of this report, Council also approved the VMC Culture and Public Art Framework, an implementation plan which sets out a suite of actions and initiatives aimed at creating a sense of place for the VMC that attracts new residents and business investments to the downtown. In addition to public art, community and cultural engagements required to activate the VMC, streetscape and wayfinding measures also contribute to the identity of the VMC.

These three documents provide the vision and policy framework to shape the City's new downtown. The time has come for the realization of this vision, especially as the Mobility Hub and Edgeley Pond and Park – the two priority areas within the VMC – are starting to take shape with transit infrastructure, residences, office towers and community spaces under construction or substantially complete.

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The extensive work that the City has undertaken in placemaking and city-building through these studies aligns and complements the Greenbelt Plan: promoting social, economic and environmental sustainability through thoughtful resource use; integration of urban and natural spaces to create linkages that raise the awareness of natural heritage and cultural systems as the backbone of human settlement; and a foundation for social and economic development.

Leveraging partnerships to offset the costs of projects

The VMC Cultural and Public Art Framework recognizes that the number and scope of activities, initiatives and activation projects that can or will be undertaken is subject to budgetary constraints, as well as construction phasing and landowners' interests. Thus, when the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation approached City staff for our interest in their Lamp Banner Signage initiative, it presented an opportunity to achieve signage and wayfinding objectives in the VMC and deliver on one of the early quick-wins identified through the study.

The Foundation first approached City staff in 2013. While initially interested in heritage areas as potential locations for the banner program, the Foundation became intrigued with the VMC as a new approach to message out the Greenbelt within an urban setting. Staff provided the Foundation with a briefing on the development and construction activity, and the City's public realm infrastructure.

A Draft Proposal (Attachment 1) from the Foundation was received, confirming that it was prepared to provide up to 120 banners, at no cost to the City, in exchange for the City covering installation and maintenance services. The partnership proposes that the Foundation would have 50 percent of the banners branded for the Greenbelt with the remainder being allocated to the City and Region. The Foundation would work co-operatively with the City to co-brand the banners to achieve the objectives of both organizations.

Highway 7 is the most travelled corridor in the Region

Having invested, in partnership with York Region, in enhanced-level streetscape capital improvements in the VMC, Highway 7 has enhanced public realm features, including boulevard tree plantings and planters, street furniture, custom pavement treatments, pedestrian lighting and bracket arms for banners. In 2015/2016, the City erected more than 100 street light poles, of which 63 have banner brackets and arms along Phase 1 of the Highway 7 vivaNext rapidway corridor – approximately 3.5 kilometres of roadway within the VMC.

Aside from the provincial highways, Highway 7 is the most intensively travelled road corridor within the Region. According to York Region's traffic data, in 2015 Highway 7 experienced average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes exceeding 87,000 vehicles per day at the intersection of Highway 7 and Highway 400 and 94,000 vehicles at the Highway 7 and Jane Street intersection. Additionally, it is projected that daily transit ridership in the Mobility Hub may reach 19,000 by 2019.

Given the traffic volume of Highway 7, staff recommends that the proposed banner program be installed along Highway 7 to capitalize on the public exposure and visibility to raise the profile of the new downtown. The choice of Highway 7 within the VMC has its opportunities and challenges. The design of the banners must take into account: vehicular traffic volumes, speed of travel, visual distractions, automobile and pedestrian sightlines, visual clutter and competition with other physical realm elements.

Banner Concepts - A thoughtful integration of vision, images and key messages

In light of these considerations, and for the banners to be impactful, the design of the banners

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needs to be relatively simple but inviting. A starting point for the design is the VMC wordmark “It’ll Move You” and branding message: “the Heart of Your New Downtown”, both of which convey literally and figuratively the VMC as the heart of our community, belonging to all its residents and filled with grand aspirations.

Banner design and development will be undertaken as a joint City/Foundation effort. This ensures that the project has cohesive and complementary messaging that fulfills the objectives of both organizations. The banner concepts being proposed include the following themes:

- Transit-supportive growth
- Urban/natural interface - connectivity
- Environmental sustainability – green and natural
- Building complete communities – walkable, pedestrian-friendly
- Economic vitality – working, shopping and dining locally, including local food
- Celebrating heritage, arts and culture

With Council’s approval of this report, staff will work with the Foundation on the creative concepts in preparation for a Q1 2017 launch.

Banners would be installed on Highway 7, starting from Highway 400 and moving eastward. Staff proposes that a two-phased approach be undertaken. Phase 1, taking place in 2017: installation of half of the banners as a teaser campaign in anticipation of the opening of the subway extension. In the following year, the balance of the banners would be installed, with images and text that addresses a broader vision of the VMC.

The phased approach allows the City to transition its focus from public transit investments, to a more holistic level of community building that includes the recognition of its urban and natural spaces, parks, shopping, dining, culture and entertainment. This strategic approach recognizes that transit will occupy the public psyche and media’s attention in 2017, given the planned subway and regional bus terminal openings as well as the vivaNext enhanced services on Highway 7. The later phase installation shifts focus to creating a larger sense of place, coinciding with the public realm capital infrastructure projects (e.g. Transit Square, TTC Plaza, Millway Avenue redevelopment, Edgeley Pond retrofit and the YMCA, targeted opening in 2019), and associated cultural and community activations scheduled to begin in late 2017 to early 2018.

Taking this approach, the City can extend, change-out and refresh its branded wayfinding without incurring additional costs. The public whether travelling in autos, public transit, by bike or by foot, will start to see and feel the excitement of a subway coming and improved bus transit system, cultural and community activations, and at the same time, the wayfinding re-establishes the physical context of the VMC with recognized branding and signage as the City’s new downtown.

Operations and Maintenance Considerations

Under the provisions of the agreement, Transportation Services, Parks and Forestry Operations will install and maintain the banners as a services-in-kind contribution to the partnership. Expected physical lifecycle of the banners is less than one year. The proposal for the placement of the 120 banners factors in potential banner replacement needs due to wear and tear.

Continuation of the banner program beyond 2018 is subject to funding availability from the Foundation. Notwithstanding the completion of this initiative, staff is working on additional wayfinding and signage initiatives, including but not limited to, wayfinding and signage associated with Edgeley Pond and Park and potentially a gateway sign along Highway 7.

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Relationship to Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map (2014-2018)

This report is consistent with the priorities set out in the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategy Map:

1. Facilitate the development of the VMC, and
2. Continue to cultivate an environmentally sustainable city.

Regional Implications

In addition to those banners created for the Foundation and the City, it is also proposed that the Region will have a banner at each of the VMC entry points. The proposed street banner programs will be installed on the regional right-of-ways. As such, City staff will circulate a copy of this report to the appropriate department and seek their assistance and co-operation with the installation of the banners ensuring that there are no conflicts with any other work or construction in the boulevards and roadways.

Conclusion

The VMC Culture and Public Art Framework, completed earlier in 2016, articulates a series of 'quick wins' and short-term actions to raise community awareness and engagement in the downtown. This banner initiative is the earliest tactic to put the VMC brand front and centre with local residents and visitors. The banner partnership with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation allows the City to generate excitement about the VMC while creating linkages to the Greenbelt and nearby natural heritage systems that sustain and feed the urban core and our City as a whole.

Attachment

1. Friends of the Greenbelt – Draft Proposal

Report prepared by:

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(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.)