

## CITY OF VAUGHAN

### **EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 17, 2013**

Item 1, Report No. 38, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on September 17, 2013.

#### **1 DYNAMIC ELECTRONIC SIGNS AT CITY FACILITIES**

The Committee of the Whole (Working Session) recommends:

- 1) That staff report back on Options 1, 3 and 4 outlined in the following report of the Executive Director, Office of the City Manager, dated September 10, 2013, including information on potential revenues, impacts on the Sign By-law, on-going maintenance, utility costs and appropriate locations;
- 2) That the following report of the Executive Director, Office of the City Manager, dated September 10, 2013, be received; and
- 3) That Communication C2, presentation material, entitled "*Dynamic Electronic Signs at City Facilities*", be received.

#### **Recommendation**

The Executive Director in consultation with the Interim City Manager recommends:

1. THAT the report and any deputations be received for information; and
2. THAT Council provide direction to Staff as to next steps.

#### **Contribution to Sustainability**

Green Directions Vaughan embraces a Sustainability First principle and states that sustainability means we make decisions and take actions that ensure a healthy environment, vibrant communities and economic vitality for current and future generations. Finding and/or improving opportunities to communicate with our residents about programs, services and issues allows them to be better informed and more engaged which results in greater understanding, collaboration and action.

#### **Economic Impact**

There are no economic impacts associated with receiving this report. However if Council endorses one of the four options presented in the report, each option has the following approximate costs:

Option 1: City Owned and Operated	\$650,000
Option 2: Private Sector Owned and Operated	\$20,000
Option 3: Combination Ownership and Operation	\$20,000
Option 4: City Owned and Operated Pilot Project	\$695,000 (YR1: \$120,000/YR2: \$575,000)

The potential costs included in this report are approximations only. Option (1) will require a 2014 capital budget submission to fund the project in the amount shown. Option (4) will require two capital budget submissions – \$120,000 for the pilot project and an additional \$575,000 to fully fund the program if the pilot is deemed successful. If the City chooses to pursue one of the third party arrangements outlined in option (2) or (3), the City, pursuant to its Purchasing By-law, will have to publically procure for a third party owner and/or operator for the electronic signage. Also, the installation of any signs will need to conform to all city and E.S.A. standards with the installer being responsible for all stakeouts and permits.

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#### **Communications Plan**

A communications plan is not required.

#### **Purpose**

To provide information regarding Civic Electronic (Dynamic) Signs as requested by the Member' Resolution adopted by Council on April 23, 2013 [Item 30, Report 14 of the Committee of the Whole]. In order for the City to continue to expand its approaches to communication and engagement with its residents, new ideas need to be considered. This report will provide Council with the information it will need to make an informed decision on whether the costs for establishing a network of electronic signage across the City is viable.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

##### **About Digital Billboard Technology: Digital technology is changing the delivery of information**

On billboards, digital technology produces static images which are changed via computer (typically every six or eight seconds), providing a non-manual way to change billboard "copy." Digital billboards do not scroll, flash, or feature motion pictures.

Electronic billboards offer advantages, giving the City a greater versatility and flexibility in reaching its residents. Messages can be changed quickly, including multiple times in one day.

Print and broadcast news media use digital billboards to deliver headlines, weather updates, and programming information. Law enforcement and other public safety officials use digital billboards to reach mass audiences quickly. The image of a missing person or emergency information can be displayed in minutes.

To control digital billboards, brightness levels on signs are equipped with light sensors, which measure the amount of light available in the surrounding environment. In the brightest sun, the billboard is at its brightest to provide the necessary contrast to let the billboard be legible. At night, the billboard is much dimmer to adjust to surrounding light conditions. The billboards use the minimum amount of light necessary to provide legible copy.

##### **Public Perception**

##### **Independent Research Finds Digital Signs Provide An Important Community Service**

In 2008, Arbitron, the media research firm, conducted a research project: "What does the public think of digital billboards". In the first study of its kind, the Arbitron researchers found people are aware of and positively inclined toward this technology.

The Arbitron study focused on the metro area of Cleveland, OH, where digital billboards have been operating since 2005. Through telephone surveys, researchers found "the vast majority of commuters (four out of five) feel the digital signs provide an important community service." More than half of the commuters polled had noticed digital billboards in the past month. The vast majority of those commuters remembered at least one ad running on the boards. Eight out of ten people said digital billboards help the community with emergency information, while the majority said they were attractive.

Among younger demographics, digital billboards have an even bigger impact. The Arbitron study found 60 percent of those 18-34 found digital billboards to be attractive, while 86 percent agreed digital billboards help the community with emergency information. Nearly one in five viewers

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discussed an ad seen on a digital billboard with other people. The study found that 83 percent of all respondents can recall at least one advertisement on a digital billboard and 65 percent of viewers can recall at least two ads. Furthermore, 77 percent of 18-34 year olds said digital billboards are a 'cool' way to advertise, according to the study.

#### **Local Research Concludes Digital Signs Would Be Effective**

Although not requested, Staff undertook an online survey [ATTACHMENT 1] of residents with the purpose of gauging perception and appropriateness of electronic digital signs at City facilities.

The electronic survey was created using Surveymonkey.com. It was advertised on the City's website through a homepage banner with a link to the survey. An e-Bulletin linking to the survey was distributed to approximately 8,400 of the City's e-newsletter subscribers. In addition, the survey also went to the Recreation and Culture department's client database of more than 6,500 registered emails.

Although the online survey is not projectable to the entire population of Vaughan (statistically valid) it is extremely useful for understanding how people perceive electronic signs - much like a focus group. The questions in the survey were:

1. Overall how would you rate the way that the City of Vaughan keeps you informed about City?
2. In your opinion, it is important that you receive timely information about which of the following topics:
3. Would it be beneficial to you if City updates were advertised on outdoor electronic / digital signs located throughout the city?
4. Would the placement of outdoor electronic/digital signs at all community centres and City facilities enhance the delivery of City information?
5. What is your overall impression of outdoor electronic/digital signs?
6. In addition to City information, would it be beneficial to you if the outdoor electronic/digital signs also included advertisements from businesses in and around the community?
7. How often do you use your community centre?
8. Please indicate your gender
9. Please indicate the range which includes your age
10. What community do you live in?

The results came back very positive about the use of Electronic signs as a communication initiative. In total, 81 percent of the responses to question three – *"Would it be beneficial to you if City updates were advertised on outdoor electronic/digital signs located throughout the city?"* responded – Yes. Furthermore, 77 percent of residents thought that electronic signs would enhance the City's communication efforts as responded to in question four.

However, when asked in question six, *"In addition to City information, would it be beneficial to you if the outdoor electronic/digital signs also included advertisements from businesses in and around the community?"* The residents expressed (66 percent) that allowing advertising would not be a welcome aspect to this communication initiative.

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The survey also had an open field for additional comments. The more than 150 additional comments were reviewed and were grouped into themes- Positive, Negative, Aesthetic, Cost, and Neutral. Grouping the comments into themes allowed staff to put a percentage total to each group. Below is the total percentage of comments for each theme with an example.

An example of each themed comment –

Positive: (48 percent)

*"It would be nice to be made aware of project updates such as when the new hospital will be started, etc. I can likely look that up online...but to have the info readily available on a digital board would be handy and easier. Thanks"*

Negative: (13 percent)

*"There is enough signage out there distracting from safety."*

Aesthetic: (3 percent)

*"While I find that this type of signage can be informative, these signs must be well placed so as not to be a distraction to drivers in traffic. Maybe they should be placed in the parking areas of community centres and libraries."*

Cost: (13 percent)

*"Same thing happened with Catholic Schools in Vaughan, needed outdoor signs. Quit spending tax dollars on signs outside of building. Reduce our Taxes (property tax) if you have enough money. I should not be paying for signs on community centres with my hard earned money. It is an unnecessary waste"*

Neutral: (22 percent)

*"We don't drive by a community centre regularly due to the location of our home. Electronic signs would be beneficial to those only driving by on a regular basis or in a more central location."*

#### **Costs and Installation – Options Exist**

Staff contacted various sign companies in the Greater Toronto Area to better understand the costs associated with erecting electronic digital signs at all ten (10) Community Centres and potentially at other City facilities that might be deemed appropriate in the future. The anticipated cost to install digital monument signs at all 10 Community Centres is approximately \$650,000.

The criteria used when speaking with a sign company was based on the sign – typically in a "Monument-Style" that can be viewed by people entering and exiting the facility or driving on the street. Effective sizing was also an important factor as it is critical in that the sign should not overwhelm those that may be walking but can be seen clearly from a passing vehicle. Effective sizing of the monument structure should be approximately 10'W x 16'H and the display should be no less than 50 3/8"H x 113 3/8"W ( 4 ft x 9 ft). An example of one concept is attached. [ATTACHMENT 2]

Messaging on each digital/electronic board would be undertaken from a central location, it is recommended that Corporate Communications would be the owner of the messaging as it directly relates to City communications. In addition, the pricing includes the software and staff training to fully implement.

The example image is designed to illustrate a modern architectural "Tree" (highlighting Vaughan's priority to greenspace and livability) to the monument structure.

#### **Option 1: City Owned and Operated**

The cost of implementing this option would be approximately \$650,000 for 10 signs. The City

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would work with an independent sign company to construct and install the monument sign(s). The City would have 100% of the time associated with the electronic digital boards.

#### **Option 2: Private Sector Owned and Operated**

The cost to the City of implementing this option would be approximately \$20,000. The costs are associated with the underground electrical needed for the monument sign. The City would have a negotiated percentage of the time associated with the electronic digital boards. For example if the message timing was set at :10 seconds per message (six per minute) the City would require a minimum of 1 :10 second message every minute. In addition, messaging would be sent to the private sector operator who would be responsible for all content.

#### **Option 3: Combination Ownership and Operation**

The cost to the City of implementing this option would be approximately \$20,000. The costs are associated with the underground electrical needed for the monument sign. The City would maintain 100% of the time associated with the electronic digital boards and maintain full content. However, the private sector company would require in exchange an ability to convert its current traditional outdoor sign locations across the City to a 100 percent digital presence.

#### **Option 4: City Owned and Operated Pilot Project**

The cost of implementing this option would be approximately \$695,000 if the pilot project was deemed successful and implemented across the other sites in year (2) . The approximate cost for Year 1 is \$120,000 and in Year 2: \$575,000. The City would work with an independent sign company to construct and install electronic/digital signs at two Community Centres. The pilot project timeframe could be (1) year in duration at which time residents in those immediate areas would be surveyed as to positive/negative effects, aesthetics and types of information that is most useful. The City would have 100% of the time associated with the electronic digital boards. Furthermore, during the course of the pilot project, staff could assess the pro's and cons of any financial opportunities that these signs might possess in relation to Corporate Sponsorship.

#### **Conforming to the Current Sign By-Law**

The current sign by-law does not allow digital/electronic signs. Therefore, Council will need to determine the extent that electronic digital signs are permitted in the new sign by-law if the private sector options are considered. It is anticipated that the sign by-law will be coming to a Committee of the Whole working session in October, 2013.

#### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

#### **Regional Implications**

Option 1, 3 or 4 would maintain full City ownership and content of the signs at the City's Community Centres that are located on Regional roads. Therefore, a by-law regulating signs on regional roads does not apply to any sign placed by or under the direction of the federal or provincial government, a municipality, the Region, a public utility or a transit authority, or any other sign prescribed by statute.( THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK - BILL NO. 74 - BY-LAW NO. R-1232-2000-074).

Where the proposed signs about a Regional Road, the proposed locations must be approved by the York Regional Engineering Department. (This applies to the location of the signs only.)

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**Conclusion**

In order for the City to continue to expand its approaches to communication and engagement with its residents, new ideas need to be considered. Electronic/Digital signs can be one of the most cost effective methods of communication for the City on an on-going basis after initial installation costs. Messaging can range from community events, road construction/maintenance updates, city building initiatives to emergency preparedness or action to name but a few. One single communication medium, such as e-newsletters, social media, traditional magazine/newspaper print, and broadcast will not achieve the level of communication that the residents desire nor the level of communication that the City wishes to have. However, the potential costs included in this Report are approximations only. The City is required, pursuant to its Purchasing By-law, to publically procure for a third party owner and/or operator for the electronic signage if the City chooses to pursue one of the third party arrangements outlined in the options herein. The addition of electronic/digital signage would be a positive addition to the 'tools' that would assist Council in keeping the residents of Vaughan informed of current events and issues.

**Attachments**

Attachment 1: Outdoor Electronic/Digital Signs Survey  
Attachment 2: LED Digital Sign Concepts

**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.)