

# Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan Update

Phase 2 Public Engagement Summary

June 2022



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.

## PROJECT PHASES AND CONSULTATION

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

A Public and Stakeholder Engagement Plan is guiding consultation to ensure diverse groups are involved throughout the project. Dedicated touchpoints at regular intervals will ensure work is continuously informed by their important perspectives.

Phase 2 focused on developing two different land use options. The land use options that were presented demonstrated the different ways the VMC could evolve over time based on different variables that include land use, building typologies, retail distribution and the allocation of community amenities, such as parks and civic facilities. The land use options evolved from the vision and principles established as part of Phase 1 of the project.

The objectives for this phase of engagement were to:

- introduce the options to stakeholders and the public;
- utilize a variety of engagement initiatives, including digital marketing, 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 Phase 1 have been included in potential land use options; and
- gather feedback from the public and stakeholders on opportunities and constraints for each option.

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

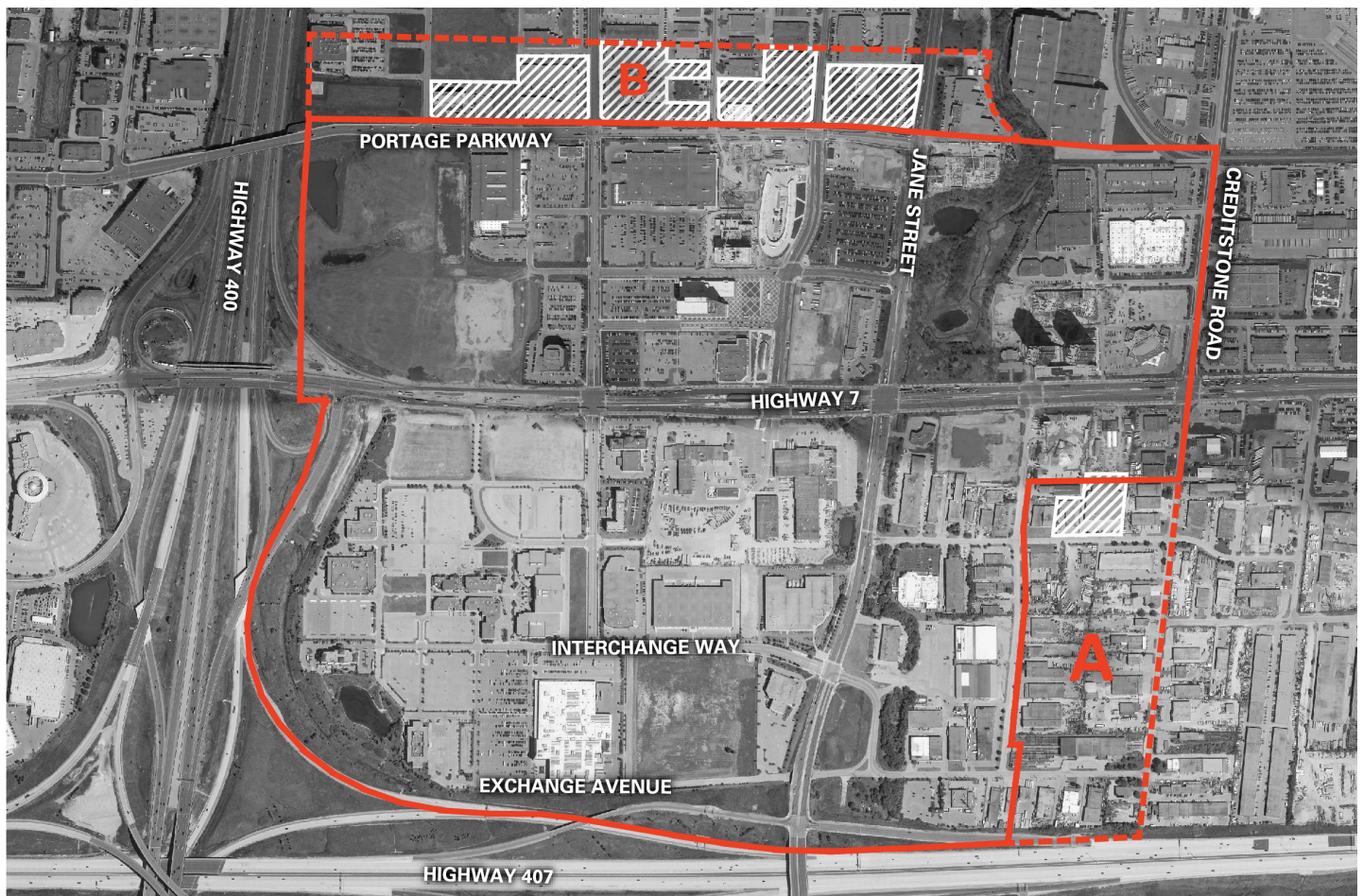
Public consultation activities in Phase 2 included an online form on “Have Your Say Vaughan” and a virtual community meeting. Activities were advertised on the City of Vaughan’s social media channels. The feedback from the engagement activities will inform the next phase of work, which includes developing recommendations for a preferred option and framework for the VMC Secondary Plan Update.

This document summarizes public feedback received during Phase 2.

## STUDY AREA

The VMC is bounded by Highway 407 to the south, Highway 400 to the west, Portage Parkway to the north, and Creditstone and Maplecrete Roads to the east. This project will also review and analyze **potential expansions to the VMC boundary**, which takes into consideration employment

lands to the north of Portage Parkway and east of Maplecrete Road to Creditstone Road. The current Secondary Plan boundaries and possible expansion areas are shown in Figure 1.



### LEGEND

- VMC Boundary
- - - Boundary Expansion Areas
- ▨ Approved Employment Conversion Areas

Figure 1 Vaughan Metropolitan Centre study area and potential expansion areas



## OPTIONS

Options 1 and 2 are briefly summarized below to provide context to the feedback received during Phase 2. For more detailed information on each of the options visit the VM CSP Update [study page](#) on the City of Vaughan website.

### Option 1

Option 1 would maintain the permitted intensity of development allowed in the current Secondary Plan and would recalibrate to achieve built form variety and adequate social infrastructure.

What does this mean?

- Option 1 would allow office development in much of the VMC, but require it as a part of new development in a limited area.
- Retail in Option 1 would be extended into the VMC’s neighbourhoods.
- Civic facilities in Option 1 would be concentrated along Millway Avenue.

Figure 2: Option 1 Land Use



### Option 2

Option 2 would recalibrate to achieve a balance of uses and deliver a true central business district.

What does this mean?

- Density permissions in Option 2 would be increased in exchange for significant office development.
- Retail in Option 2 would be concentrated along Millway Avenue and Highway 7.
- Civic facilities in Option 2 would be dispersed across the VMC.

Figure 3: Option 2 Land Use





# Virtual Community Meeting

**TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2022**

A live, virtual community meeting was held using the Zoom platform to seek feedback from citizens and stakeholders on the two options for the VMC. **68 people** registered for the meeting and **40 people** attended the meeting, representing a variety of people who have an interest in the VMC( as seen in figure 4). The meeting was advertised across the City’s social media networks, including Instagram and Twitter.

A presentation on the two options was delivered by Gladki Planning Associates. The presentation was followed by break-out room discussions. Participants were invited to comment on **land use, retail, and civic facilities**. The following questions were asked in the break-out rooms to generate conversation among participants:

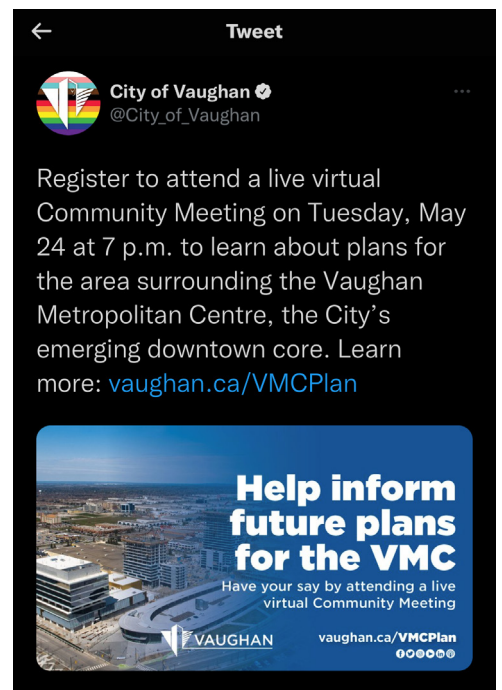
- To what degree should office development be required in the VMC?
- Where should retail be located within the VMC?
- What types of retail would you like to see in the VMC to promote vibrancy and convenience?
- Where should civic facilities be located in the VMC?
- Is it important to have a cultural destination in the VMC?
- What should the VMC look like in the future?

Highlights from the break-out rooms are summarized below. Detailed comments from the break-out rooms can be found in the following section. Comments have been edited for clarity.

Figure 4: What is Your Interest in the VMC?

n=18 responses

- I own a business in or near VMC
- I am (or represent) a developer or landowner in VMC
- I live or want to live in VMC
- I work in or near VMC;
- I am interested in learning how the VMC will become Vaughan's downtown



## Land Use

Given the intensity of residential development in the VMC, there should be a **focus on the development of other uses, particularly retail and offices**, to ensure that the VMC is something **more than a commuter community**. Community members shared that office development would help attract more retail to the area, and that retail would be well used by employees in new office developments.

## Retail

In downtown areas, retail should be everywhere and would help balance out other uses, such as residential. **Walkable** access to retail was identified as an important priority. There was a preference to have **retail in pedestrian-friendly areas**, and spilling onto the green spaces. There was consensus that **Highway 7 would not be an ideal** place to have retail because it is not a good place to be a pedestrian due to the wide roadway and heavy volume of traffic.

## Civic Facilities

Some community members thought it was preferable to have integrated and concentrated facilities due to the Canadian climate and to accommodate families with children. Other community members were okay with more dispersed facilities because it may motivate people to move through parks and open space to get to facilities. There was consensus that **civic facilities needed to be easy to access**. Some community members expressed that office and retail development are a more pressing concern.

## Miscellaneous

Community members shared a concern that currently the VMC is not tailored to family living. There is a desire for a **variety of building types** that are **family friendly** and for **more schools**. Additionally, traffic congestion was a concern shared among community members.

"Retail needs to be in walking distance in all four quadrants"

"There needs to be places for entertainment"

"Having a concentration of office space will benefit the VMC"

"Congestion is my biggest concern"

"I am excited about increasing density in the VMC and having a downtown"

"We need to prioritize the building of schools"

## LAND USE

- “Concern that if there is a lot of high-rise development, it will become a **commuter area and not a community.**”
- “As a resident, I would like to see a **variety of uses.**”
- “I support the idea of a **balanced** master planned community, however, there needs to be significant financial incentives to build something other than residential.”
- “Unfortunately, the area is still very car dependent which makes it difficult to predict what will work.”
- I am **excited about increasing the density** in the VMC and having a downtown.”
- “Important to **balance need for development and ensuring that there is enough parks, schools, and family-oriented housing.**”
- “**Parks need to be centrally located**, otherwise people will not visit them.”
- “I am concerned that industrial employment areas will interface with schools.”
- “I think that there is big benefit to having a **concentration of office space in the VMC.**”
- “Preference to have parks located towards the centre of the VMC with employment/commercial closer to the industrial zones, for examples on the north side of Portage Pkwy.”
- “I prefer option 2 because of the **dispersion of parks.**”
- “**Increasing the office space will help reduce traffic** because people won’t have to travel to and from other areas.”
- “I would like to have a **mix of development in the VMC.**”

## RETAIL

- “As a resident, I think that **Highway 7 is too busy for retail.** While there is a lot going on there which can be great, it can be difficult to get around.”
- “Most people do not live in walking distance to Highway 7. The Study Team should consider having additional, **dispersed areas to have retail.** This will be attractive for people looking to move to the area.”
- “There needs to be **places to entertain.** Retail needs to be in **walking distance** in all four quadrants.”
- “Millway as a central place for retail is appealing.”
- “Preference is for retail that you can walk to and is localized rather than dispersed. **Millway could have a mix of uses.**”
- “Highway 7 is a freeway and is not a good place for retail. It would be better to have retail areas proximal and **spilling into open space and parks.**”
- “Besides grocery stores it would not make sense for other kinds of retail to be located there [Highway 7] because it is not walkable at all.”
- “I would prefer to have **retail that you can walk to** and is localized rather than dispersed.”
- “Option 2 is more attractive and would provide more **balance between driving and walking.** Right now, people only see the VMC as a place to drive through.”
- “**Expand the retail** on to smaller roads and **establish pedestrian only streets for retail** so people do not need to worry about car traffic.”
- “Retail should be dispersed throughout the VMC, however, **Highway 7 would not be an ideal location for lots of retail because it is difficult to park there and it is not pedestrian friendly.**”



## CIVIC FACILITIES

- “Civic Facilities do not necessarily need to be close for me. Employment and retail are the priority.”
- “Access to these facilities needs to be **quick and easy, especially with kids**. More information on the demographics of the VMC is required to decide what kinds of facilities would be needed and where it would be best to have them located.”
- “Civic facilities should include parking.”
- “Given the weather in Canada, it would be best to have **concentrated and integrated** civic facilities.”

## MISCELLANEOUS

- “Planning does not work when developers have more say than the community.”
- “**Congestion is the biggest concern**, specifically driving along Highway 7.”
- “If **entertainment facilities** are located in the VMC there will need to be a **better way for people to get in and out of the area**.”
- “The **amount of traffic in the VMC is concerning**, especially given the number of condo buildings being constructed.”
- “To make the VMC more **family oriented**, it is important to prioritize the **building of schools**.”
- “The close proximity of York University on the subway is attractive to students.”
- “I would like more local transit in the area.”

# Online Engagement

**MAY 24, 2022 - JUNE 14, 2022**

An online forum was launched on “Have Your Say Vaughan” for community members to share their feedback on the two options for the VMC Secondary Plan Update. The online forum was advertised across the City’s social media networks, including on Instagram and Twitter. Community members engaged with one another using the discussion board feature, and shared their ideas on four topics:

- Office Development
- Civic Facilities
- Retail Environment
- The Future of the VMC

**Over 181** community members visited the online forum and over **20 contributors actively engaged** across the **4 discussion boards**. Contributors left over **52 comments** and **voted 27 times** on comments that they either agreed or disagreed with. A high-level summary of responses proceeds and is followed by a selection of direct quotes from the discussion boards. Comments have been edited for clarity.



## Office Development

Among those who participated in the discussion boards, there was clear consensus that office development was important to achieving a downtown in the VMC. Office development should be near transit hubs to reduce traffic, congestion, and long commutes for those living in the VMC. Participants also expressed a desire for office space that could be used for creative industries as well as “downtown-style” office space.

## Retail

As it relates to retail, Option 1 was the preference among respondents. Many of the of respondents agreed that retail needed to be easily accessed on foot and that Highway 7 would not be a good place to concentrate retail. There is a desire for pedestrian friendly retail strips that provide opportunities for local businesses and shops to open.

## Civic Facilities

Some community members favoured Option 1, while others favoured Option 2. Generally, respondents wanted the civic facilities to contribute to a “neighbourhood-feel” and shared a desire for civic facilities to be proximal to parks, open space, and libraries.

## VMC Future

Respondents used the terms family-friendly, green space, active transportation, and arts and culture to describe what they envisioned for the future of VMC. Respondants discussed their desires for a pedestrian and cycling friendly community with large park facilities.

“Jobs should be concentrated around transit hubs”

“There should be as much green space as possible”

“Active transportation paths that connect neighbourhoods”

“I want to see gallery spaces and places for creative industries”

“I would love to be able to work and live in Vaughan”

## TO WHAT DEGREE SHOULD OFFICE DEVELOPMENT BE A PRIORITY IN THE VMC?

- “Offices should be built in **mixed-use developments** rather than having smaller stand-alone buildings. I think that this is the most efficient use of resources. **Jobs should focus around transit hubs.** This will allow Vaughan to have a concentrated area that can truly be considered a **downtown.** Of course, traffic is an important aspect that the City should consider.”
- “Focus on bringing “downtown-style” office space in **close proximity to the subway station** and making VMC a true downtown. I prefer this over having a lot of residential towers where people have to commute elsewhere to work.”
- “Office space should definitely be a priority. In fact, if downtown Vaughan just becomes a bedroom-commuter city, years from now we will look back and lament how much space was wasted. **I want Vaughan to be somewhere you live, work and play.** Employment should be mixed-use. The City should also consider repurposing traditional office space into spaces that can be used to for **creative industries** such as film and music studios. Vaughan must be more than a vertical suburb where people go to sleep, it has to be a place where there is a lot of **unique retail and jobs. Balance is key for livability.**”
- “I prefer Option 2. I think that there is a lot of opportunity to have employers move their offices to Vaughan. **Reducing long commutes** would also help reduce carbon emissions in the long term.”
- “We need **new business and employment opportunities in order to sustain anticipated growth in Vaughan.** I’d love to be able to work and live in Vaughan. Additionally, I think it would be also great to **prioritize creative industries and entrepreneurship.**”



## WHERE SHOULD RETAIL BE LOCATED?

- “Option 1. Highway 7 is too busy to accommodate any more retail. Highway 7 is noisy and this will not make a good retail environment. There is also not a lot of parking. Having **retail on quieter streets** would be a more pleasant experience. This will bring life and activity to otherwise quiet streets. I would like to see a combination of restaurants, cafes, and shops. Something like the shops at Don Mills.”
- “I think that **Option 2 would be a suboptimal** choice given the heavy truck traffic in the area. I’d also like to see a more concentrated area in downtown Vaughan that offers a **wide variety of restaurants and bars** - similar to Toronto’s King street. Currently the only thing close to a “restaurant hub” is the area around Vaughan Mills, but it requires a car to get to and lacks density.
- “I agree that Option 1 makes the most sense. Retail should be spread out. The City should consider widening the sidewalks along Millway, adding Bike lanes and City-owned parking garages.”
- “Option 1 would be my choice.”
- “The more local retail that there is, the more of a **unique identity** that Vaughan can pride itself on. This would also change the feel from one of a sprawling suburb.”
- “Nightlife, bars, music venues, and clubs should be in employment / commercial areas, and local shops should be in more residential. I really want to see **gallery spaces and quirky local spots**. There is nothing unique and fun to do in Vaughan, there is no real ‘centre’. There should be an **arts district**. Downtown Vaughan is supposed to be the cultural hub of the city, so let’s make sure that there is artist spaces and nightlife that reflects the many **storytellers and artists that are proud to call Vaughan home.**”
- “Highway 7 is already too busy. There should be plazas and shopping centers dispersed throughout the area for **easy access**. We also need more parking.”

- “I like the idea that retail could be readily available within a **walkable** area.”
- I’m not in favour of having retail located to Highway 7.

## WHERE SHOULD CIVIC FACILITIES BE LOCATED?

- “Option 2 is the better idea. **More park space** should be included throughout the VMC. There should be spaces in civic buildings for lookouts and places to take selfies. I think it would also be great to have **somewhere to sit and enjoy the neighbourhood**. I fear that the VMC will become a transactional place where you are in and out. I think we should try and **create something that feels more like a true neighbourhood.**”
- “While I think the intention was to have amenities and shopping near the high-rise residential developments, this is not the case and people in the downtown area still require a car. For those living in high-rise residential towers, I think that **amenities should be clumped together.**”
- “I feel civic facilities should be close to **parks and recreation.**”
- “Option 2 would be more beneficial, as the buildings will be more accessible to all residents living in the 4 quarters of the downtown area.”
- “Why have everything concentrated on one street that is already busy and does not have great parking? **I enjoy having a library and park in my neighbourhood.**”
- I like Option 1 because it appears to be closer to public transit stops. This would allow for greater **pedestrian access**. Option 2 would make it harder to access community facilities unless you have a car.

## WHAT SHOULD VMC LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

- “It would be wonderful to have facilities where **families** can go to **enjoy outdoor activities.**”
- I like the idea of a **giant park**, similar to what some other cities have. Additionally, along one, or both sides of the 400, there should be a huge **cycling / walking / active transportation path** that connects the east and west side of the 400. There should be an overpass for travel.
- I think there should be as much **green space** as possible, **free parking spaces**, and some **shops along cobblestone streets**. It would also be nice to have an arts and culture buildings. For example, an **art gallery and/or a theatre.**
- “Let’s aim to be the **most cycle and pedestrian-friendly city in Canada!** Let’s make sure new residents choose to bike to local errands and amenities over driving their cars”

## 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 the next phases to ensure work is **continuously informed** by the important perspectives of all community members.

**Phase 3** is the next stage of the project and will **recommend and present a preferred option and framework for the VMC.**

Engagement with key stakeholders, including the public and landowners, will continue; the technical analysis will be shared to gather critiques, opinions, preferences on the preferred option, and capture interests that may have been previously missed on framework for the VMC. **Stay tuned!**

