
State of the Youth Report, June 2007

City of Vaughan

Steven Xu

STATE OF THE YOUTH REPORT, JUNE 2007

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *State of the Youth Report* is a summative review of the most pertinent issues affecting the youth generation in the City of Vaughan. The issues presented in this report are reflective of the opinions of the youth regarding items that fall under municipal jurisdiction.

The purpose of this report is to iterate, where appropriate and applicable, opinions, analysis, and anecdotal evidence from the youth perspective as they pertain to 8 municipal issues.

The information presented in this report has been collected through a variety of means: secondary school visits, personal experience, research, and peer consultation.

2 METHODOLOGY

The information presented in the *State of the Youth Report* is derived from several major sources.

2.1 SECONDARY SCHOOL VISITS

The office of the Vaughan Youth City Councillor has existed since February 2006.

The first Youth City Councillor, Mark Anthony Frisoli (February-June 2006) conducted visits to five Vaughan secondary schools: Vaughan SS, Maple HS, Emily Carr SS, Woodbridge College, and Father Bressani CHS.

The second Youth City Councillor, Steven Xu (February-June 2007) revisited Vaughan SS and Maple HS, met with the students of Westmount CI, Stephen Lewis SS, St. Elizabeth CHS, St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, and established productive correspondence with Thornhill SS.

2.1.1 LECTURES

In nearly all of the above mentioned schools, the Vaughan Youth City Councillor has lectured and conducted question-and-answer periods with classes or student groups (e.g., student council). Youth City Councillor Steven Xu (February-June 2007) delivered lectures ranging from 40 minutes to 75 minutes in length covering a variety of themes: civic engagement, civic responsibility, current municipal projects and developments, recreational/cultural/employment/volunteer/activism opportunities, the structure of municipal government, the municipal decision-making process, and the position of the Youth City Councillor itself. The lectures have culminated in question-and-answer sessions with much overall success.

2.1.2 LUNCH-PERIOD CANVASSING

In many schools, it was determined that, supplementary to the lectures, a convenient and appropriate manner to reach out to the general student population at the secondary schools visited would be to canvass the students during lunch periods. The canvassing time per school ranged from 80 minutes to 150 minutes.

During the canvassing periods, qualitative data was gathered and steered the Youth City Councillor towards seeking quantitative support. A voluntary Secondary Needs Assessment Survey was distributed among and collected from students during the periods, and information gathered included the following items:

- Whether students would be willing to purchase an annual youth membership (\$13.50);
- Whether and when students would like to see new programming within the schools;
- Whether students were familiar with existing programming; and

- Whether students had any other suggestions to supplement the delivery of services.

2.2 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The fact that the Youth City Councillor is a secondary school student provides the position a unique insight into the interactions among youth and between youth and society.

The Youth City Councillor interacts with secondary school peers on a daily basis and can represent a diverse array of youth perspectives. In addition, the Youth City Councillor will often take advantage of the same municipal services and will often use them in the same manner as the general youth population. By participating in services such as public transit, recreational facilities, libraries, cultural facilities, and schools, the Youth City Councillor can provide an otherwise silent perspective.

2.3 RESEARCH

The Youth City Councillor is able to conduct regular correspondence with respective youth representative bodies in nearby municipalities such as the Town of Richmond Hill, and the Town of Markham.

On top of demand analysis conducted to the students, the correspondence allows for comparative analysis between the City of Vaughan and other municipalities.

In addition, the current extent of services offered by the City of Vaughan can be adjudged on an immobile standard through the youth lens.

2.4 PEER CONSULTATION

The Youth City Councillor communicates actively with student officials in the secondary school system. Productive and fruitful conversations have taken place between with student council bodies, student council presidents, student trustees, and other student leaders.

2.4.1 STUDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS

At most of the schools, the Youth City Councillor arranged to make a presentation to the student council. At the meetings, ideas contained within Steven Xu's *Youth Feedback Initiative* were discussed, and action plan guidelines were formed. In addition, student council members were asked for feedback from their students' perspective regarding municipal services.

2.4.2 STUDENT PRESIDENT/TRUSTEE CONSULTATION

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In preparation for this report, the Youth City Councillor has conducted detailed discussions with certain individuals:

- **Kristine Soufian, Student Trustee, York Catholic District School Board**
- **Kimberly Hart, Student Trustee, York Region District School Board**
- **Novel Rahman, President, Student Council, Vaughan Secondary School**
- **Sarina Isenberg, President, Board of Student Senators, Thornhill Secondary School**
- **Amanda Cupido, Prime Minister, Student Council, St. Elizabeth Catholic High School**

3 NOTE TO THE READER

The intent of this report is to examine several key issues in the City of Vaughan from a point-of-view that often gets dismissed, the youth perspective. In order to do so with the greatest level of efficiency, this report is organized in a common structure.

Eight integral issues have been identified and the main section of the *State of the Youth Report* treats the issues distinctly.

Each issue is broken down into three categories:

1. Background information and support;
2. Analysis and opinions; and
3. Action plan.

The action plan predominantly treats the actions of the Youth City Councillor. However, certain recommendations are made affecting the City staff and council. These recommendations may be received for information purposes, and at council's discretion, certain items may be referred for further investigation and shortlisted for change.

The Youth City Councillor and the Vaughan Youth Cabinet both hold copious amounts of data and information well beyond the scope of what can be presented in this report. The above bodies may be sought should further information or elaboration be required.

4 THE ISSUES

The issues, presented in no particular order, are selected amongst the ideas that incited the most feedback from the youth in Vaughan. The eight issues presented in this report represent the eight primary ways in which the youth interact (or do not interact, as the case may be) with the municipal infrastructure.

4.1 YOUTH REPRESENTATION

Youth representation symbolizes the new symbiotic interaction between the governing bodies and the youth generation. Increasingly frequently, youth are stepping up in their communities and in their schools to represent their peers. Consequently, the idea of youth representation extends beyond the symbolic realm into a very consequential realistic realm. Having youth step up not only improves the quality of life for young people now but also builds upon the existing infrastructure to prepare for a more prosperous future.

Note that 4.1 Youth Representation and 4.2 Communication are very similar, but differ in that 4.1 focuses on the relationship between the City and key student leaders while 4.2 focuses on the relationship between the City and the general youth population.

4.1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fear of the figures survey of youth opinions conducted earlier this year advised that no significant changes regarding the main operation of our community centres. There has been a historically low level of turnout for youth organizations like the current Vaughan Youth Cabinet.

The current Vaughan Youth Cabinet is in the beginnings of its second term in existence. In its first year last year, the Vaughan Youth Cabinet ran a leadership conference, hosted an awards night, arranged a large youth and technology focus group, and conducted a needs assessment procedure for the youth in Vaughan. Students in several schools across Vaughan reported their familiarity with the Vaughan Youth Cabinet experience and their desire for the Vaughan Youth Cabinet to reassert themselves in the schools. There was nearly universal consensus among peer consultants that, had the Vaughan Youth Cabinet approached them and their peers earlier on in the year and with greater strength, they would have taken full advantage of the opportunity.

Despite the low level of enthusiasm exhibited by the youth at the community and municipal levels, most secondary schools report a vibrant student leadership movement. Novel Rahman, the student council president at Vaughan SS, points to a number of regional conferences such as the Fusion conference, the CAYRE conference, the York Region Police Guns and Gang Violence conference, and the OSSSA conference, all of which were well-attended by Vaughan students.

York Region District School Board student trustee Kimberly Hart makes the particular observation that student leadership is not divided among the entire student body according to each individual's passion. Instead, in each school, leadership is focused within a very limited niche of motivated students. She suggests that the best approach to assemble a similar core group would be to appeal to those leadership niches within each school or before they form.

One of the highlights of the *Youth Feedback Initiative*, crafted by Steven Xu, is the project of establishing an intramural liaison. The goal of this plan is for each secondary school to have one student representative who will act as a key liaison between the students and the City, reporting to the Vaughan Youth City Councillor and the Vaughan Youth Cabinet.

4.1.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

The contrast between the relatively low level of interest in community events and the high level of interest in some school events emphasizes a key point about the youth demographic. Youth are more than prepared to dedicate endless time and energy into community events, but only if two preliminary conditions are first fulfilled:

1. They must be aware of the opportunity; and
2. The opportunity must be intrinsically appealing.

Both conditions may be satisfied through an educational process. Communication may be made to school officials to make the students aware of opportunities at the Vaughan Youth Cabinet or application cycles of the Youth City Councillor. Similarly, a strategic approach to iterate to students the important ways in which municipal government affects their everyday lives may attract more individuals to municipal service.

Student Trustee Kimberly Hart's observation suggests that the best way to identify and attract a core group of student leaders for the purposes of a Vaughan Youth Cabinet would be to appeal through guidance councillors and administrators in schools across the City to ask to be referred to such students. The best times to do this would be at the conclusion of one school year (May-June) or at the beginning of another (September).

The intramural liaison is a crucial step in increasing the communication efforts between the City and the students. Relating particularly to the concept of Youth Representation, the intramural liaison acts as a representative in itself, and the position can be a portal for encouraging other student leaders to get involved on the community level.

Most student councils congregate two to three weeks before the beginning of school. That period of time represents an ideal opportunity for individuals from the City of Vaughan to establish contact and to plan for the subsequent year.

4.1.3 ACTION PLAN

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Whereas, across all schools and consultants, there was a uniting belief that the outlets for youth representation should step up and play a more visible role in students' lives today;

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That the Youth City Councillor place as a key priority the introduction and maintenance of an effective city-to-student communication system;
2. That the Youth City Councillor and members of the Vaughan Youth Cabinet collaborate to formulate a publicity effort that will hit the students at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year; and
3. That the former Youth City Councillor, Steven Xu, work with newly-elected student council bodies to the greatest possible extent over the course of the summer to plan correspondence and establish contacts for the upcoming school year.

4.2 COMMUNICATION

The effectiveness of democratic rule is based on the line of communication between the policy-makers and the polity. Unique in democracy is the fact that the polity plays an active role in informing the policy-makers and thus the policies. Consequently, the effectiveness of the city is directly correlated to the effectiveness of the communication with the population. This communication section covers strictly the ability for the Youth City Councillor to engage the appropriate parties in effective communication and to establish an effective collaborative infrastructure between the City and the students.

4.2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2006, the City of Vaughan took the initiative to introduce the Vaughan Youth City Councillor, a position unique in Canada. The youth of Vaughan gained the foundations for a political voice. The first steps have been taken.

It is the ultimate goal of the office of the Vaughan Youth City Councillor to establish an increasingly effective line of communication between the youth generation and the City of Vaughan. Such a system works towards a cycle of participation. The youth, aware of their voice in the political system, will actively engage in it, speaking up and voting when they come of age. In addition, the politicians, aware of the concerns and needs of the youth generation, will cater to those needs and thus improve society.

Since the Youth City Councillor is not only a unique position but also a new one, there are very little existing social infrastructure and network connections supporting the role. The first two Youth City Councillors have started the project of defining and revising the Youth City Councillor's communication strategy, and work on it will continue throughout the existence of the position.

The crux of the Youth City Councillor position is the length of each term. In a five-month-long term, little can be accomplished if too much attention must be paid to

establishing the communication infrastructure. The term of Steven Xu is a case in point. Of the five months, the first month was dedicated to orientation, media addresses, interviews, and brainstorming. The second and third months were dedicated to formulating ideas into action plans and carrying the action plans through the approvals process. The latter part of the third month and the early part of the fourth month were dedicated to making contact with the 11 secondary schools in Vaughan to make arrangements to speak to student council, the students, or the administrations. The Youth City Councillor has no access to support staff to process administrative work during the visits, so once the visits began, arranging other visits consumed most of the in-office times, and there was no time left to conduct any meaningful follow-up. By that time, it was so late in the school year that change would have to wait until the beginning of the next school year in September to take action.

Most schools that serve Vaughan residents have student media outlets. Vaughan Secondary School has its own student radio station, RAV FM; many schools like Stephen Lewis SS and Maple HS are in the process of creating a student newsletter. St. Elizabeth CHS has its school newspaper, the *St. Elizabeth Times*, which recently won the second place award in the Toronto Star High School Newspaper Awards for Best Volunteer Newspaper. Thornhill Secondary School too has a school newspaper, the *Eye of the Tiger*, which recently won the first place award in the same category.

A notable aspect of the *Youth Feedback Initiative*, crafted by Steven Xu, is the establishment of a regular update sent to the intramural liaisons in Vaughan secondary schools. The update would be compiled by the Youth City Councillor, and its contents may include the following:

- Highlights of pertinent existing programs;
- Prominent advertisements of new programs;
- Postings of municipally-sponsored student employment opportunities;
- Links to prominent youth-run and youth-targeted events; and
- An unbiased point-form summary of the political events in the area.

The contents of the regular updates would be concise and informative and could be shared via the announcements or as a visual bulletin. The regular updates would be a demographic-specific, youth version of the current City Page.

4.2.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

Due to the structure of the school system, a Youth City Councillor's term cannot be extended beyond five months under the current terms of reference. Since the time is limited, it is imperative that the productive and progressive time be maximized and that redundant tasks be resolved beforehand and minimized.

Therefore, it is the top priority to establish working mechanisms atop those that already exist so that the Youth City Councillor can allocate the maximum amount of time to the implementation of the plans.

Communication for the Youth City Councillor exists on two entirely distinct levels. First is the communication with City officials. Second is the communication with school officials and the students. Steps need to be taken to make for easier, faster, and more effective exchanges.

The most important communication to the City conducted by the Youth City Councillor is the formulation, review, and approval of the Youth City Councillor's action plans.

There are a number of routine activities conducted by every Youth City Councillor, namely the conduction of secondary school visits and acquisition of quantitative and qualitative data from the students. If every Youth City Councillor were to reformulate the action plan, time will have been inefficiently utilized. In order to expedite the process, it may be advisable to create one action plan governing the visits and have it apply to each successive Youth City Councillor.

Although the idea would require each successive Youth City Councillor to take on a different and rapidly evolving role, it is the only path to achieve significant progress considering the current challenges regarding term length and continuity.

The second level of communication, that involving the students and the schools, is significantly more difficult to achieve considering the number of individuals involved and the relatively short periods for which students serve on student council.

However, similar to the philosophy applied to City correspondence, in order to move forward, correspondence tasks that would otherwise need to be performed term after term should be addressed together at once.

The Youth City Councillor must seek the guidance of officials at all ends with the goal of setting a schedule of regular visits without the need to undertake a tedious logistical process before each one.

Ideally, the Youth City Councillor would be able to convey information through an annual presentation to the student body. Under the advice of numerous student councils as well as the peer consultants, the advice would be supplemented by regular updates delivered from the City of Vaughan to a student liaison within each school.

The presence of youth media outlets in secondary schools across the City of Vaughan represents an avenue to communicate with students at the grassroots level. The City of Vaughan may look into sponsorship or advertisement deals with the media outlets in the 2007-2008 school year. As well as promoting and supporting student excellence, such a deal could allow for information to be conveyed directly to the students.

4.2.3 ACTION PLAN

Whereas the establishment of a more expedient system of communication with both the City, the students, and the Youth City Councillor is imperative to maximize the amount of work that can be accomplished within a five-month term;

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That the City look into the formulation and approval of a common Youth City Councillor communications plan including but not limited to class lectures, secondary school visits, student liaisons, and student council meetings, authorizing such actions throughout all Youth City Councillor terms;
2. That the City formally defer the issue of the Youth City Councillor and respective publicity efforts to the City School Board Liaison Committee for direction in arranging the secondary school visits; and
3. That the City explore opportunities for sponsorship or advertisement agreements with student media outlets.

4.3 RECREATION AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

The City of Vaughan Department of Recreation and Culture facilitates a vast array of both public and privately delivered services. Its breadth spans many interest groups and many diverse demographics. In order to improve the expansive system in place, the current programming facilitated by the Department of Recreation and Culture can be continuously developed to better suit the needs of the youth generation.

4.3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Vaughan currently publishes a bi-annual Recreation Guide including an extensive amount of information regarding recreation opportunities. The activities open to youth include the youth room, youth drop-in sports, youth registered programs, park and community facilities, recreational and instructional swimming and skating, and league sports through private organizations.

Currently, youth can purchase an annual youth membership valid for one school year for \$13.50. The youth membership enables students to drop into designated youth rooms during preset times erected at four community centres across Vaughan. The youth rooms contain entertainment devices including but not limited to billiards, table tennis, various parlour games, and television sets. In addition, the youth membership provides access to drop-in basketball three of the community centres across Vaughan.

There is a much greater breadth of drop-in sports programs open to adults 18 years of age or older, with a variety of sports including volleyball, table tennis, and floor hockey. Youth are unable to access these programs de jure.

When asked whether they were aware of the activities offered at the local community centre, an overwhelming majority of students responded with a “somewhat” or “no.”

Novel Rahman (Vaughan SS) indicates that community centres appear to be too sport-centric to many students. He reports to have received complaints regarding the absence of cultural programs, study sessions, or peer tutoring at the community centres. The perspective is echoed among students in all areas of Vaughan. There was a substantial interest in movie nights and music nights in the community centres.

Survey data was collected from several schools requesting students to indicate the kinds of activities they preferred and when they preferred them. The survey data will be compiled in the near future.

The availability of community facilities such as gyms and meeting rooms is very limited in all community centres, so there is little room to slot in a new youth-oriented activity.

It is very common, especially during warm months, to see pick-up sports in the parks on evenings and weekend afternoons. Activities vary by location and range from basketball to baseball to soccer. The sporting activities are concentrated in the well-lit parks.

Certainly community facilities have been commended by students for their symbiosis with other aspects of student life. Particularly, Vellore Village Community Centre is not only located adjacent to St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, but also contains a skate park. Kristine Soufian (YCDSB) comments that the Vellore model is an excellent one to which to adhere, as the proximity of community facilities allows and encourages students to associate and to enjoy the community after school hours.

4.3.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

All of the peer consultants express the idea that youth cannot be appeal to through indirect media. The number of youth who would retain the guide and refer to it on a regular basis is very limited. The peer consultants believe that the most effective way to reach to the youth generation about recreation opportunities is through direct contact, either by visiting the youth personally or by appealing to those with whom the youth do engage directly. In particular, Kristine Soufian (YCDSB) points to a particular case in which City officials visited St. Joan of Arc CHS personally to publicize the local youth activities. The subsequent week, attendance at the community centre dramatically increased. Community recreational programs are ones whose participants are consistent week-to-week. Accordingly, just one visit can encourage a student to stick with a particular program.

A number of youth have pointed out that the youth membership is not offered on a calendar year basis (365 days from the date of purchase) but rather at a flat rate for the school year, and that the regulation has deterred students from purchasing the membership part way through the year.

Many students, including Amanda Cupido (St. Elizabeth CHS) have recommended that, in order to increase awareness of recreational programs, flyers could be distributed to the main office or posted in the school or on an appropriate bulletin board with the permission of the school administration. Currently, many schools have bus schedules available for pickup in the main office. It may be appropriate to add copies a quick reference sheet for a neighbouring community centre for students to store.

Since drop-in sports are available only for basketball and only at three community centres, youth who are interested in sports are neglected. Since there are few openings to introduce new drop-in programming slots, age restrictions should be reconsidered

on the existing programs. In addition, any new drop-in allocations should run experimentally as a 14+ or 12+ age range.

One course of action that has been considered in the past and should be reconsidered at this point is the concept of extended hours at community centres. Due to a relative freedom of schedule, youth are able, and sometimes prefer, to participate in community centre activities later at night. Extending the open hours for the community centres may allow for more youth to participate in activities without impeding existing programming.

The introduction of music nights or movie nights is difficult to enact due to space restrictions and uncertainty in demand. Although there is an obvious, widespread interest in such programs, it would be exceedingly burdening for such an event to be coordinated by City staff. In order to accommodate the demand, an advisable course of action may be to make available community centre facilities to school clubs or student councils seeking to organize events, and to publicize the availability.

4.3.3 ACTION PLAN

Whereas recreation and cultural development is an important aspect in community living by encouraging civic engagement, physical activity, and socialization;

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report*, June 2007 recommends as follows:

1. That the Youth City Councillor work with the Department of Recreation and Culture to incorporate recreational opportunities into communiqués sent to schools and student liaisons;
2. That the Youth City Councillor work with the Department of Recreation and Culture to find potential time openings to slot drop-in sports and cultural events;
3. That the City explore the possibility of having the Department of Recreation and Culture and City Council jointly reassess the possibility of leaving community centres open later to provide youth with times for drop-in sports and cultural events; and
4. That the Department of Recreation and Culture investigate the issue of the logistical limitations of the annual youth memberships.

4.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Ontario Secondary School curriculum mandates that all students complete forty hours of community involvement as a prerequisite for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. This portion of the report examines how students achieve their hours, how many students go beyond the curriculum requirements, and what steps the City may take to benefit both the students and the community.

4.4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Currently, in both the YCDSB and the YRDSB, students must complete forty hours of community service on their own time during their secondary school careers. There are several common locations at which students seek to fulfill their volunteer hour requirements:

- Hospitals
- Retirement homes
- Food banks
- School activities (several schools do not acknowledge student involvement in school activities for volunteer hours)

Peer consultants such as Sarina Isenberg, president of the Board of Student Senators at Thornhill Secondary School, place between 50-75% of students as ones who shun volunteer opportunities as soon as they have fulfilled the Ministry of Education requirement. The remaining 25-50% represents those who typically go well above and beyond the required number of hours.

When asked whether students serve their hours at public community events, all of the peer consultants responded in the negative. Many student council presidents conceded that the school and its students are completely ignorant of community events such as the 2007 Woodbridge Quasquicentennial, the annual Maplefest, or the annual Thornhill Village Parade celebrations. The consultants attributed the lack of awareness to a lack of permeation of City events into the school culture.

4.4.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

Amanda Cupido, the student council prime minister at St. Elizabeth CHS, notes that students have been the most receptive to events which may offer many hours at once. She points out as an example large volunteer commitments across two days – one day preparation, one day event – which grant in the vicinity of 20 hours over two days would be very well received by students. She comments that the publicity regarding these volunteer opportunities merely needs to be in place.

4.4.3 ACTION PLAN

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That City Council receive this section for information purposes.

4.5 PUBLIC TRANSIT

Due to a drastic reduction in the levels of school bus service to secondary school students in 2007-2008, an impending legislation that seeks to reduce the number of secondary school drivers in 2007, and the perpetual increases to service area, frequency, and speed offered by the York Region Transit/VIVA system, the next few years may see a drastic increase in the number of students taking public transportation around Vaughan.

4.5.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The York Region Transit/VIVA system consists of an extensive network stretching across commuter and residential roads in the City of Vaughan and the rest of York Region. Investing more money per capita and per rider than nearly all other comparable systems, the YRT/VIVA network offers a level of service to places whose ridership densities may have similar levels in other municipalities.

Students who do commute on YRT/VIVA typically do so out of necessity. The proportion of students who take the bus regularly ranges dramatically from practically zero in some schools to 25% in others.

Although students during the Youth City Councillor lectures expressed a very enthusiastic interest in YRT/VIVA developments, students generally have very few qualms about the service.

Ironically, despite many students reliance on the system, all of the peer consultants agreed that rapid transit is generally a non-issue. Students who take rapid transit are typically satisfied with the service. Students who do not take rapid transit are indifferent about the service.

It is a credit to the YRT/VIVA system that there were no dire problems voiced by the students; nevertheless, there were several perpetual issues raised.

Chief among them was service frequency. Schools in the Thornhill area (St. Elizabeth CHS, Thornhill SS, Vaughan SS, and Westmount CI) existed along the VIVA bus routes or high-traffic streets, and students were thus very satisfied with service levels. However, students in Woodbridge and Maple complained about the infrequency of bus service.

Another issue was that of education. Many students did not access or were unaware of the services offered by the YRT/VIVA system. Bus schedules or bulk ticket purchasing were not familiar with the students.

In addition, few secondary school students considered the double fare incurred by crossing Steeles Avenue a major issues; however, it should be noted that very few students commute in that fashion on a regular basis and that the issue is likely more serious among university students and adults.

4.5.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

The local municipality does not have jurisdiction over public transit; therefore, any analysis is reserved for the regional municipal level of government.

4.5.3 ACTION PLAN

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That City Council receive this section for information purposes.

4.6 SAFETY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

It is the job of York Regional Police to keep our streets safe. Every day presents a new challenge and everyday poses a new risk. They are the ones who risk their lives to help make our community a safe, healthy and vibrant place to live, work, and play.

4.6.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several schools have made the move to adjust class schedules from a five-period day to a four-period day, halving the time allotted for lunch in most cases. Schools reported wide success in the trial year, seeing reductions in lunchtime delinquency and disciplinary actions. In Thornhill Secondary School, during the 2006-2007 school year, the number of incidents regarding disciplinary action was reduced to two from the previous year whose figure was significantly higher.

Students feel very safe in the City of Vaughan. In recent years, the York Region Police has established a law enforcement officer liaison program, assigning one law enforcement officer to every three schools to interact with the students. In addition, the Empowering Student Partnerships program has been implemented or is in the implementation phase in secondary schools across Vaughan. The reported reception varies from school to school, but the overall relationship is neutral to positive.

4.6.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

The local municipality does not have jurisdiction over law enforcement; therefore, any analysis is reserved for the regional municipal level of government.

4.6.3 ACTION PLAN

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That City Council receive this section for information purposes.

4.7 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE

The preservation of the natural environment exists as a responsibility shared amongst governments, citizens, and organizations. This section of the report examines specifically how well the students are fulfilling their role and what the City of Vaughan can do to support their efforts.

4.7.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past 5 years, as the Greening Vaughan initiative has advanced its waste diversion goals to the broader population, individual schools have moved in a greener direction.

Many schools report having at least one environmentally-oriented student club, and the vast majority of schools report some variety of a student clean-up initiative. St. Elizabeth CHS had a program where many homeroom classes would each take several minutes off on one day during the year to collect and dispose of refuse in the woodlot adjacent to the school. Vaughan SS saw roughly 300 of its students participate in the 20-Minute Makeover program hosted by the City of Vaughan.

The success and extent of waste diversion in classrooms varies drastically from school to school. Most schools report having both a garbage receptacle and a blue box in each classroom. All schools with blue box programs report that there are initiatives where students bring their rooms' recyclable waste to an on-site central location on a weekly basis for collection. Some schools have a large quantity of recyclable waste thrown in the garbage receptacles. Other schools report that improperly disposed garbage is nearly unheard of. Novel Rahman (Vaughan SS) reports that students' recycling efforts are exemplary due in large part to the initiative of individual teachers. Amanda Cupido (St. Elizabeth CHS) reports that, three years ago, the school introduced a green box program for paper-based recyclables – plastic and metal recyclables would still go into the blue bin. She reports that the initiative has been an overwhelming success.

Conversely, some other schools have limited recycling efforts in place. Particularly, Kristine Soufian (YCDSB) brings up an example of her own school, St. Joan of Arc CHS, as one which is in the early stages of the environmental initiative adoption. The school currently has very few recycling receptacles, and the few that exist are only infrequently used. However, the school is making concerned steps in the green direction, and the City should offer its support in the positive endeavour.

Every peer consultant has expressed dissatisfaction with the waste disposal and diversion efforts in the cafeteria. In most schools, the cafeteria has only one blue box, frequently placed in an awkward location. The inaccessibility deters students from utilizing the blue box.

4.7.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

Since many schools are just starting their respective environmental organizations and initiatives, it is the appropriate time to explore the possibility of a relationship between respective officials at the City of Vaughan. They Vaughan Youth City Councillor may be able to serve as an avenue connecting interested student environmental leaders to the City.

Recycling and composting are habits, and many habits start in the schools. Therefore, it is advisable that the City of Vaughan encourage students to dispose of their waste properly and to do everything possible to facilitate the habit.

The three main reasons for which students throw recyclable items in the garbage are negligence, apathy, and confusion. Each of these issues can be combated within the schools both to reduce the amount of garbage collected and to encourage environmental responsibility among students.

Negligent or apathetic students simply cannot be bothered to take the extra steps to dispose of waste properly. The problem can be combated partially by communicating and emphasizing to teachers and the administration the importance in recycling. In addition, it may be advisable to provide more blue boxes to increase their accessibility. An increase in the number of recycling receptacles is especially important in the cafeterias, where it has been reported that such receptacles are frequently hard to find. Much waste is produced in the cafeteria, so waste diversion efforts should be concentrated in such locations.

Occasionally, students are plainly confused by their waste disposal options. Boxes and bins come in many shapes, and colours can be misleading (green boxes used for paper waste; green bins used for organic waste). It may be advisable to encourage or to provide prominent labels that can be affixed to or in the vicinity of the disposal receptacles.

4.7.3 ACTION PLAN

Whereas the facilitation of environmentally friendly activities in the youth generation produces a population of conscious and responsible world citizens;

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report*, June 2007 recommends as follows:

1. That the City formally defer this information regarding the environmental initiatives in schools to the Greening Vaughan Advisory Committee for information purposes;
2. That the City explore the possibility of having staff conduct an assessment of the current waste diversion strategies employed in schools with a focus on deficiencies in collection resources or literature;
3. That subsequent Youth City Councillors liaise with the student liaisons and school officials to establish contact with the City;

4.8 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Many students in Vaughan choose to seek their own sources of income by taking part-time or seasonal employment. This portion of the *State of the Youth Report* examines the patterns present in youth employment.

4.8.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In general, very few Grade 9 students have or seek part-time employment. However, in Grades 10, 11, and 12, the proportion is dramatically higher. Sarina Isenberg (Thornhill SS) and Novel Rahman (Vaughan SS) estimate that roughly half of senior students have either seasonal or part-time employment. The most common areas of employment are chain stores in malls and plazas as well as fast-food restaurants.

A notable exception to the student employment pattern is St. Elizabeth CHS. Student council president Amanda Cupido estimates that in Grades 10 and higher, 80-90% of

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students have some sort of employment. The aberration can be attributed largely to the presence of a mall neighbouring the school. She also comments that many students from St. Elizabeth CHS are employed by the City of Vaughan as seasonal camp supervisors or aquatic leaders.

4.8.2 ANALYSIS AND OPINIONS

There is a worrying lack of youth getting involved with meaningful employment opportunities. Although common youth employment roles such as a sales representatives, cashiers, food and stock preparers, and maintenance work do grant youth work experience and an increased level of financial independence, they fail to develop any significant personal or professional skills.

4.8.3 ACTION PLAN

Therefore, the *State of the Youth Report, June 2007* recommends as follows:

1. That City Council receive this section for information purposes.

5 CONCLUSION

The City of Vaughan is a municipality that boasts a tremendous level of service for the youth generation. With a safe, vibrant, and diverse youth population, the City's future is surely in good hands. This report could not delve deeply into multitude and depth of services the City already has it its credit – such a report could not fit in even 100 pages. As societies in the world undergo a revolution en masse from a time of youth dependency to a time of youth activism and engagement, the City of Vaughan is taking the steps necessary to be at the forefront.

The state of the youth is excellent, and through some of the considerations made in this report, Vaughan can continue to be the ideal place for young people to live, to work, to study, and to play.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Xu, Vaughan Youth City Councillor