

Community Planning 101 - Backgrounder

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY PLAN?

Community Plans are policy documents that provide guidance and direction on a variety of topics, including land-use, urban design, housing, transportation, parks and public spaces, social planning, cultural infrastructure, heritage features and community facilities.

As such, Community Plans knit together a range of city-wide policies into a comprehensive planning program, while responding to the unique characteristics of a given neighbourhood. Community Plans provide a statement of intent to facilitate positive change and development in a neighbourhood over approximately 20-30 years. This doesn't mean community plans are carved in stone - any good plan needs to be able to respond to emerging issues - but it does mean that they provide a robust framework for mid-to-long-term activities within a neighbourhood.



Who gets involved in Community Plan work? Lots of different stakeholders. The most recent Community Plan saw participation from neighbourhood groups, non-profits covering a wide range of issues, schools, service agencies, the business community, developers and the public-at-large.

This backgrounder sketches out key elements of the history and rationale behind the Community Plan process in Vancouver, as well as guiding principles and process steps that were used for the most recent Community Plan (Mt. Pleasant).

COMMUNITY PLANS - HISTORY

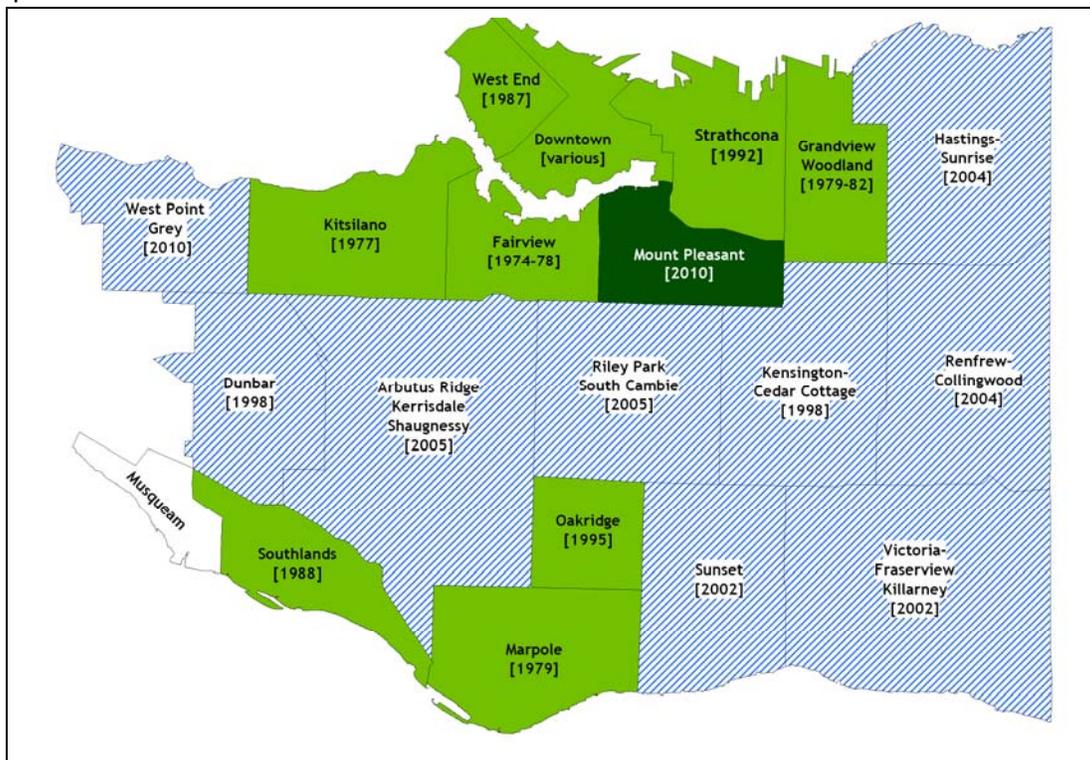
In the mid 1970s, in response to various growth and development pressures across the City, Council approved the creation of a program of **Local Area Planning (LAP)**. These plans were undertaken in a number of neighbourhoods, but not all. The plans that were produced were comprehensive and often quite detailed, but took considerable time and resources to produce (up to five years in some cases). The last LAP initiative was completed in the early 1990s.

Shortly thereafter, City Council embarked on a comprehensive planning initiative called **CityPlan**. It was the first comprehensive city-wide planning initiative since the original Bartholemew Plan in 1928. *CityPlan: Directions for Vancouver* was approved

in 1995 and affirmed Vancouver as “a city of neighbourhoods.” Through CityPlan, Vancouver residents and City Council agreed on these directions for the city’s future:

- Strengthen neighbourhood centres
- Improve safety and ensure appropriate community services
- Reduce reliance on the car
- Improving environmental sustainability
- Increase the variety and affordability of housing
- Define neighbourhood character
- Diversify parks and public places
- Involve people in decisions affecting their neighbourhood

As part of this process, it was recognized that CityPlan could only be truly effective if it were ‘scaled’ to the neighbourhood level. In 1997, the **Community Visions Program** was launched - and targeted at single-family neighbourhoods that hadn’t yet had a Local Area Plan. The program involved communities working with City staff to create their visions for the future, based on CityPlan directions and community needs and aspirations. The last Community Vision - West Point Grey - was completed in September 2010.



As the last few Community Vision documents were being completed, the City also began to review the former Local Area Plan neighbourhoods - some of which had plans that were now several decades old. A new program of **Community Plans** was devised that would take the comprehensiveness of the LAP approach and blend it with the efficiencies of the Visions program (e.g. logistics, workshops formats and materials multicultural outreach strategies). After reviewing the LAP neighbourhoods, Mt. Pleasant was selected to pilot this new program. The Mt. Pleasant Community Plan was completed in November 2010.

:: For more on the different types of neighbourhood plans see the Glossary section.

THE NEXT COMMUNITY PLANS

Rationale for selecting Next Community Plan neighbourhoods

In 2005, the original LAP communities were reviewed for potential Community Plan updates. At the time, staff set out a process to determine objective criteria that would assist in determining the relative need for a Community Plan among these areas.

Over 100 representatives from these nine communities were invited to participate in workshops to assist staff to develop the criteria and indicators that would help rank these communities in order of planning need. Based on this work, Mount Pleasant was recommended as the first area for planning.

In Fall 2010, staff worked with community representatives to review and update the criteria and indicators that were developed in 2005. Five communities remained under consideration to receive one of the next Community Plans in this round: Fairview, Grandview-Woodland, Kitsilano, Marpole and the West End. Three areas (Downtown, Oakridge and Southlands) are currently not being considered for updated Community Plans in this round - either because they've received significant planning attention through other processes (e.g. Cambie Corridor, Central Area planning work), or because provincial policy constrains the extent of neighbourhood planning that is possible (e.g. much of Southlands is part of the Agricultural Land Reserve).

:: [Read the November 2010 Summary Report on Next Community Plan Selection](#)

THE CHALLENGE(S)

In November 2010, City Council directed City staff to report back on the implications of doing up to three plans at once. At the same time, this is an opportunity to look at the community planning process itself and consider areas where it could be improved. Some of the key challenges being considered are:

- How can we better balance City-wide policy (not to mention global and regional issues) with neighbourhood perspectives?
- Are there ways to improve public engagement throughout the process?
- Can we better manage development pressures and address demand for local amenities?
- Are there ways to do community planning more efficiently?

The upcoming workshop provides an opportunity for a wide-ranging discussion about how community planning can be more effective for all participants.

So why do residents get involved with the Community Planning Process?

There are lots of reasons why people become engaged with Community Planning work. Here are some of the things we've heard over the last few years:

I love my neighbourhood.

Because I want a better park for my kids to play in...

I'm afraid of losing the nice old buildings that exist...

Because we need to do a better job of dealing with environmental issues.

I want to make sure City Hall knows about my concerns.

I want to see a new community centre with housing and other services.

I like the opportunity to meet my neighbours and to work on making our community better.

We need better shops so we don't have to drive elsewhere for stuff.

Because I like things just the way they are.

MT. PLEASANT COMMUNITY PLANNING PRINCIPLES

In developing Terms of Reference for the Mt. Pleasant Community Plan, City staff worked to identify a series of principles that would help to guide the process. In total, 10 process-related principles were identified:

- (1) Provide a variety of ways for the range of residents, property owners, community service groups, and businesses to participate in creating and reviewing proposals; and ensure that the opinions of both those in the directly affected area and those in the wider community are sought.
- (2) Engage the broad public with a special focus on income, multicultural, and tenure diversity. Recognize the varying physical and economic conditions, levels of organization, ethnic and demographic makeup of different neighbourhoods.
- (3) Build or enhance community capacity through the planning process, and ensure the process seeks common ground and reflects the feelings of the broad community.
- (4) Balance the 'rights' and 'uniqueness' of the community with its responsibility as part of the City and Region. New plans and policies should strive to be consistent with city-wide plans (e.g., CityPlan, Homeless Action Plan), policies (e.g. heritage, social and affordable housing), and initiatives (e.g., EcoDensity, Rental Housing Study, and Project Civil City).
- (5) Focus planning attention toward current priority issues while also taking a longer term, comprehensive approach to updating Mount Pleasant's past plans.
- (6) Undertake planning work at the same time as taking action on pressing social issues. This will help to create a strong sense of purpose for community engagement by allowing people to address current needs while also looking toward the future. It will also make efficient use of community participation time, and optimize the use of staff time.
- (7) Meet the approved program staff, time, and budget limits, and deliver a range of products.
- (8) Recognize Council is ultimately responsible for approval of proposed physical improvements, zoning changes (or rezoning policy), guidelines, capital spending, and policy plans.
- (9) Recognize the City's limited mandate and resources to address social issues and that support from other levels of government and community partners is needed to address social development needs.
- (10) Ensure that City Council, before making decisions, is made aware of the range of community opinion, technical information, and any other necessary information.

Are there any other important principles to add?

GLOSSARY

Over the last few decades, the City of Vancouver has developed a number of different neighbourhood-scale planning programs. These are:

Community Plan - The most recent approach to neighbourhood-scale planning. Community Plans combine features of both Community Visions and the old Local Area Planning processes, addressing issues ranging from community-wide concerns about traffic, safety, and street level issues to sub area plans relating to changes in land use, shopping area issues, and improvements to the public realm. At the same time, they also coordinate both short-term and some on-going actions throughout the planning process, such as support for pressing social issues. (*Example:* Mt. Pleasant “Cycle Back” transitional housing, training and re-employment program; neighbourhood service directory in pocket format for homeless individuals.)

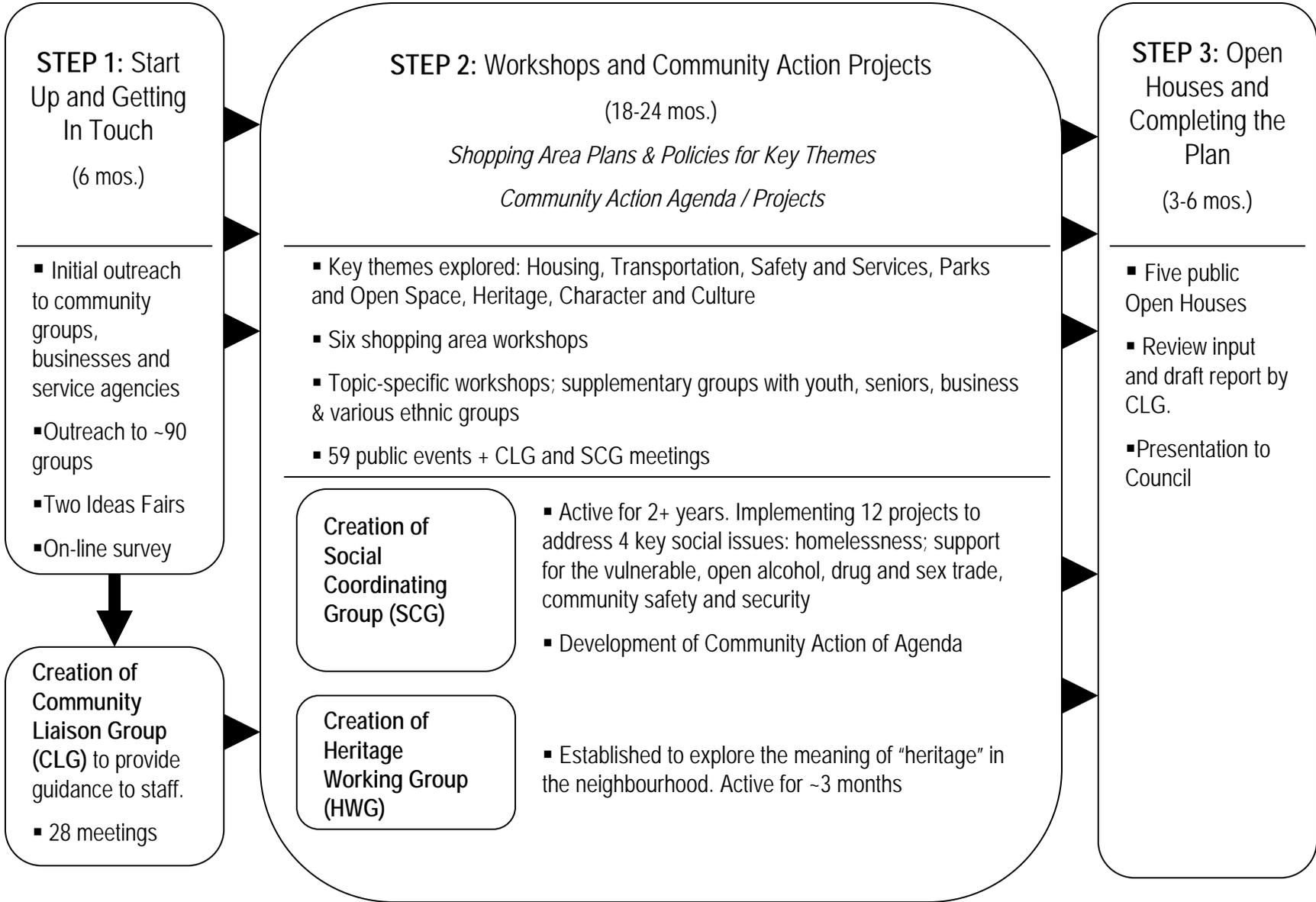
Community Vision - Visions set directions for neighbourhoods, providing some guidance for city and community actions but most often identifying priorities for further work - e.g. housing plans, new zoning, etc. Visions do not provide the level of detail that has often been contained in other community planning programs. (Examples: Arbutus-Kerrisdale-Shaughnessy, West Point Grey).

The Vision Implementation Program, established in 1999, worked collaboratively with City departments, outside agencies and Vision communities to implement a broad range of Community Vision Directions, including the creation of Neighbourhood Centres. In recent years the program has focused on implementation activities in new Vision areas.

Neighbourhood Centres Plan - Neighbourhood Centre Plans are undertaken within Community Vision areas, building upon the “vision” and going further into specific policy around housing, local shopping streets and the public realm. The key products of the Neighbourhood Centres Program are Housing and Public Realm Plans for each centre (which could include new zoning), developed in consultation with the community through working groups, open houses. (*Examples:* Norquay, Knight & Kingsway).

Local Area Plan - First developed in the late 1970s, Local Area plans were initially co-funded by the Federal government, enabling longer processes with extended staff support. They involved comprehensive land-use and transportation planning activities that took up to six years to produce for a given neighbourhood. (*Examples:* Grandview-Woodland, Kitsilano, Strathcona).

SAMPLE PROCESS COMPONENTS – BASED ON MT. PLEASANT COMMUNITY PLAN



THIRTY SIX MONTHS...

