

Enhancing Community Plans

Ideas for Action / Synthesis Document

DRAFT DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

The following document provides a synthesis of the various 'ideas for action' derived from the City's review of its community planning process. The material is divided into four themes, matching those used in the research process. These are:

- I. Balancing - Global, regional, city-wide and neighbourhood perspectives
- II. Engaging - Deeper, more diverse involvement
- III. Responding to development pressures and demand for amenities
- IV. Streamlining the Community Plan process

These themes are explored in turn - with the most prominent recommended actions clustered under sub-headings.

Methods

The review of the Community Planning process involved three facets of work:

1. Literature and case study review
2. Focus groups with participants in the Mt. Pleasant Community Plan and planning experts who had been involved in Local Area planning processes
3. A stakeholder workshop (held on May 7, 2011)

Items (1) and (2) were conducted by HB Lanarc, a consulting firm with well-recognized expertise in neighbourhood-scale planning activities. The stakeholder workshop featured the involvement of approximately 60 neighbourhood groups, Vision Implementation Committees, city-wide non-profits, City of Vancouver Advisory bodies, the academic community and regional agencies (Translink and Vancouver Coastal Health).

Materials from these various processes are available on the City's website at vancouver.ca/nextplans.

Synthesizing Ideas

The various data sources yielded a considerable number of ideas. The actions contained herein reflect a synthesis and aggregation of ideas derived from various research sources. Not every specific idea (or supporting example) that was generated is reflected here. The intent of the document is to record the essence of the ideas.

The result of this synthesis is a condensed overview of actions that the City can use to revise its community planning process. The 'boiling down' of ideas has meant that in some instances there is overlap between the four themes (e.g. in an engagement idea that can also streamline the overall Community Plan process). In these cases, ideas

may appear in multiple places within the document. For the sake of brevity some, but not all, of this overlap has been reduced.

It should also be noted that the multiple sources for ideas has meant that some recommended actions may appear to be inconsistent with one-another. This inconsistency has been left as it appears - and illustrate the fact that are differing approaches to enhancing the process that need to be taken into account as the City prepares to launch the next generation of Community Plans.

Incorporating Recommended Actions

As part of the process of enhancing community plans, the City will review the various recommendations and will work to incorporate as many of these as possible. Some of the factors that will guide the process of adoption are:

- Concurrence with existing Council and City-wide priorities;
- Concurrence with the 'policy hierarchy' (i.e. does the idea recognize the existing structure of policies within the City or does it propose an alternative?);
- Financial considerations and Council approved resourcing for the Community Plan program (i.e. is the idea cost-effective - in terms of raw dollars as well as staff time?);
- Authority and jurisdictional considerations (i.e. does the idea work within the context of the Vancouver Charter; does it support the structure of Council authority and decision-making)
- Enhancing the current process (i.e. does the idea builds on the positive outcomes of recent Community Planning work in Mt. Pleasant).

Next Steps

The City will be assessing the material contained herein and using it as the basis of a 'report out' on the May 7 workshop (to be held in July 2011). Where feasible, the Ideas for Action will also be incorporated into the following 'next steps' of the process:

- I. A revised "Generic" Terms of Reference (to accompany a report to City Council on the Community Plan Process);
- II. Revised timelines and staff work-planning for approved community plans (a total of three new plans are being recommended as part of the aforementioned report to Council);
- III. Revised Terms of Reference(s) for Community Liaison Groups and Working Groups associated with approved community plans;
- IV. Revised communications and outreach programs, capacity building activities and events associated with approved community plans;
- V. Improvements to development and amenity planning that will bring Local Area stakeholders together earlier in the process;

The Ideas document will also serve as a reference for other areas of work associated with approved Community Plans - and provide guidance for enhancements for throughout the planning process.

The City role in Community Planning

Community planning comes in many shapes and forms. As the City of Vancouver proceeds with its next community plans it will be doing so with a view to enhancing the strengths of its existing process and attending to areas of shortfall in current practice. In this respect, the following actions and ideas should be viewed as mechanisms to enhance a collaborative process - the City will work with stakeholders within and outside a given neighbourhood to facilitate the creation of a balanced, inclusive process - but a process that is also undertaken at the behest of, and approved by City Council.

I. BALANCING - Global, regional, city-wide and neighbourhood perspectives

Clarify the various issues that need to be attended to in the planning process and how they connect with the policy hierarchy.

- Better clarify and communicate the policy hierarchy - and clarify that neighbourhood plans must not conflict with city-wide policy. Neighbourhoods need to understand when local policy can be over-ridden by city-wide or regional policy.
- Mandate that neighbourhood plans must not conflict with City policy.
- Better communicate Council priorities (these should be more than just a party platform).
- Assess and develop the capacity of the neighbourhood to address specific global, regional city-wide and neighbourhood policy issues. Provide some latitude for how neighbourhoods can respond to these issues

Create a strong collaborative framework between stakeholders working on different 'scales of issue.'

- Enhance relationships and partnerships between different jurisdictions and communities. Where appropriate forge new relationships. Include other levels of government, regional (Translink, VCH), City departments, but also other stakeholders: organizations, job providers property-owners, renters, etc.
- Ensure City staff have a strong understanding of provincial, regional, city-wide and local challenges and that City departments are sharing information (on collaborations, etc.) to enable this.
- Create an accessible directory, guide, inventory of policy - organized by theme and government responsible for the policy - showing key contacts.
- City staff: form an interdepartmental working group to inform and guide the neighbourhood planning process. Consider more planning teams.

Facilitate the creation of a global/local ("glocal") perspective.

- Establish a city priorities perspective (covering affordable housing, jobs, reduced auto usage...)
- Educate the public [on] the interrelatedness of policies (regional, city) and how they could apply at the neighbourhood level.
- Explore the notion of 'equity' between different neighbourhoods and consider an explicit statement that outlines (a) how a given Local Area "fits" within the city and (b) how responsibility for addressing city-wide goals will be shared among neighbourhoods.
- Consider having a dedicated staff member to connect regional, city-wide and neighbourhood challenges.
- Take an integrative (not segmented) approach to planning processes. Focus on inter-relatedness of issues.

Ensure that plans speak to a wide array of issues.

- Include jobs, economy, retail, health, environment, heritage, social policy, sustainability... and other themes identified elsewhere. Make sure that key elements of city-wide policy are up to date to direct Local Area plans
- Focus on the creation of 'complete' neighbourhoods - plan so that sustainable work/live/play is possible within boundaries.

Use appropriate benchmarks and metrics to monitor change.

- Establish benchmarks and targets for responding to key policy questions - including affordable housing, food security and non-automotive travel. Identify city-wide targets and metrics that can be scaled to the neighbourhood level.
- Identify targets that are negotiable, non-negotiable
- Use a mix of 'carrots and sticks' to achieve key policy ends.
- Identify targets that are negotiable/non-negotiable.
- Ensure that the Terms of Reference defines success.

II. ENGAGING - deeper and more diverse involvement

Use a variety of tools and techniques to get to residents 'where they are'. Ensure a high standard for engagement.

- Utilize a broader array of notification, outreach and engagement techniques. Get to residents where they are. Have a higher 'minimum' for outreach. Consider establishing an out-reach target table - to assist in getting to hard-to-reach populations.
- Identify and remove barriers to participation. Consider honoraria
- Utilize well-known community leaders or celebrities to act as ice-breakers, connecting City with community.
- Better message and market the community plan process so that it resonates with people's lived experience of their neighbourhood
- Ensure the process has rigour, but is also fun (GCAT is a good example).
- Streamline anonymous feedback - make it easy
- Ensure meeting and open-house venues are safe, accessible for all participants
- Better identify who's participating in the process. Consider obtaining baseline data on participants and analyse it. (Be more transparent about whether the process focuses on privileged segments of the community).

Ensure engagement practices are modified for different communities active in a neighbourhood - based on considerations such as ethnocultural background, income, age and gender.

- Involve children in planning process - educate about the importance of involvement, get teachers and PACs involved.
- Involve high school youth in project - and not just the ones who perform well academically. (Partner with the VSB)
- Engage seniors in a way that is accessible

- Break down language barrier. Have funded (or even volunteer) interpreters and translation and consider multilingual outreach workers. Hold meetings in people's native tongues.
- Work with organizations who serve vulnerable populations, or communities that can otherwise be overlooked, to ensure that they are brought into process.
- Connect different segments of the community (e.g. linguistic groups) in integrative sessions to enable cross-pollination of ideas and perspectives.

Ensure that residents have all the information they need to participate in a timely fashion

- Pre-plan engagement: provide "Planning 101" and ongoing community development support to help community to get ready for the plan process.
- Make sure that community planning participants are able to access relevant materials so that they can participate in the process in a meaningful way
- Provide basic information (and 'process-to-date' info) at each session so that new people who come into the process can get up to speed quickly.
- Build community members planning literacy. Undertake capacity building and education vis-à-vis use of pro-formas, case studies, previous LAPs, professionals, workshops, etc.
- Make the information user-friendly, but be more direct, specific and quantitative (where possible). Cut to the chase.
- Stay open to input that comes later in the process.
- Allow more time before Council reports for review and comment. Information should go to community before Council.
- Set up a program that allows neighbourhoods to be linked by a computer network, able to access City databases, email and file management systems.

Be clear about scope of project

- Ensure clarity on what community is being engaged on - what can and can't happen (scope, jurisdiction, etc.)
- Ensure a "place" for un-related issues (parking lot)
- Identify negotiables and non-negotiables - areas of certainty and flexibility.
- Be clear that as the process progresses, certain issues will be dealt with through other mechanisms.

Ensure that the process of engagement supports two-way dialogue

- Foster a two-way engagement process - information and dialogue on regional and global issues. Use this to support a learning society.
- Have dialogue in neighbourhoods - and be sure to tap into local expertise.

Continue to utilize the Community Liaison Group (CLG) model employed in the Mt. Pleasant process and supplement it with other theme-based working groups

- Community Liaison Group: Ensure that CLG members commit to an education process to learn fundamentals of neighbourhood planning.

- Enhance and clarify the CLG's roles and responsibilities - be clear that the role of the CLG is not to lead development of the plan. Ensure that new and returning CLG members are clear about their roles and responsibilities before the meetings start.
- Invite and possibly resource a core group to help set CLG agendas
- Target specific types of individuals or skills for the CLG. Include city-wide, development/landowner and resident/business interests in CLG.
- Streamline CLG procedures: adopt good procedural rules (from previous processes).

Use creative visualization techniques to undertake research and help residents imagine change

- Utilize asset-mapping process to inventory unique features of the community.
- Interactive mapping for people to engage.
- Map and visualize existing data - based on state of information.
- Ensure trade-offs of options are presented (i.e. show the considerations that need to be weighed in decision-making).

Make better use of participants' time and strengths

- Be more strategic about using people's time. Reconsider the number of meetings that are needed for different parts of the planning process.
- Some issues can be quick 'yes' or 'no' votes.
- Consider more thematically-linked working groups versus an over-arching committee

Plan for effective, transparent decision-making and conflict resolution

- Ensure clear decision-making at every step of the planning process - and use decision-making methods and frameworks that support this
- Train planners in conflict resolution techniques - but allow for some venting!
- Train community members in facilitation techniques. Empower them to help with process. Consider set up a non-profit organization that can support community members and the overall process - via leadership training, community organizing, technical planning skills
- Establish a larger role for community groups as part of the decision-making process.
- Include a "minority report" that reflects perspectives of the minority of people who don't concur with major directions.
- Identify key controversial topics ahead of time and prepare a presentation anticipating concerns.
- Use more quantitative input methods to enable faster data analysis and reporting - and to improve transparency about the balance of participant opinion.

Consider having a stronger City 'presence' in the neighbourhood

- Create and staff local planning offices and enable an on-going liaison with the community. Have a specific location in the community as "home" of the planning process.
- Ensure one senior planner assigned to neighbourhood, a point of contact - some one responsible for managing the neighbourhood portfolio
- Consider having community outreach workers liaising between City and community.

III. RESPONDING to development pressures and demand for amenities

Start by gathering and sharing as much information as possible

- Balance an understanding of neighbourhood zoned capacity with development economics and market conditions.
- Early identification of where development pressures will be highest in a neighbourhood. (This should include adjacent community plans and also consideration of city as a whole.)
- Arrange capacity-building workshops to explain how development activity and decision-making takes place.
- Undertake (or update) relevant information (research, studies, inventories) on social or cultural infrastructure, retail issues, residential conditions and other items pertinent to development and amenity planning.

Facilitate dialogue on development possibilities. Bring the community and developers together as early as possible

- Widespread notification of new development is important. Utilize new and existing methods of getting the word out to enable better access, availability, visibility of information on redevelopment projects.
- Ensure residents and key groups (including Vision Implementation Committees) are aware of all planning processes in the area.
- Bridge gap between residents and developers and enable a more positive working relationship between the two. Involve stakeholders (residents, business, organizations) in the development process early on - before an application goes to Council.
- Encourage discussion and education about alternative forms of development (and schools of development) - i.e. not just podium and tower.
- Create a space for dialogue on different opinions on development
- Be transparent about the interests involved in development.
- Development industry should act as a resource in the planning process, not a participant. They should not be part of a 'neighbourhood' perspective.
- Consider co-design, charette, collaborative working models & processes to facilitate community involvement in development process.
- Ensure information provided by developers in visualizations, models, etc. is accurate.

Ensure that development is sustainable, accessible, grounded in local context

- Ensure that progressive design standards are followed to ensure universal access, sustainability, etc.
- Recycle and re-use of existing buildings should be considered first before tear down.
- Plans need to consider the life cycle of a building.
- Create a process wherein nearby/adjacent developments talk to one another - to ensure coordinated development in a community
- Look at new development as a piece of a complete community - not just an individual project.

Create a plan that 'gets out in front' of development activity

- Create up-to-date community plans to reduce instances of spot rezoning
- Ensure that the planning process is finished before allowing rezoning (except in instances supported by a rezoning policy).
- Consider reinstating third-party appeals.

Ensure the public is involved in heritage matters

- Ensure community participation in heritage preservation - through input, review and additions to heritage register.

Facilitate awareness, transparency, community engagement and good decision-making about public amenities

- Develop a priority list that is based on resident input, City standards, demographics, existing inventory of amenities, social and cultural infrastructure planning, and relevant funding and financial considerations.
- Involve residents in discussion around determining amenities. Clarify: what is an amenity, what are amenity trade-offs, cost of amenities, benefits of renovation vs. new amenities? How does the creation of rental housing fit within the portfolio of neighbourhood amenities.
- Develop a structure to engage community in understanding DCLs, CACs and their allocation.
- Involve residents in budgetary allocations and decision making around amenities. Involve community in any discussion around transferring CAC in/out of community. Where funding is a challenge, consider partnerships (e.g. senior government) or having the City 'upfront' some resources
- Ensure that the City (and the LA Plan) is flexible enough to respond to opportunities for new amenities as they arise.
- Create an annual, publicly accessible CAC report similar to the DCL report. This will facilitate balance around accountability, attribution, etc.

IV. STREAMLINING the Community Plan process

Streamlining can be achieved by a combination of improvements to existing technique, and through the introduction of new methods and processes.

Ensure a strong framework of collaboration within and between community and other stakeholders.

- Make use of local expertise to assist with the process and allow for a greater degree of community ownership.
- Ensure strong framework for collaboration is developed upfront - with City departments, community partners, regional and NPOs, universities.
- Review roles for staff, working groups, CLG. Some ideas: (1) Focus the staff role on technical analysis and less on “hand-holding” facilitation; and/or, (2) Provide staff support for community committees to lead process, produce zoning plans and access city resources; and/or (3) Let the community run their own process within prescribed guidelines; and/or, (4) empower community groups to coordinate the process. Provide funding and staff leadership in the form of a dedicated project manager/facilitator and oversight committee

Starting up the planning process

- Prioritize and focus neighbourhood planning efforts.
- Focus planning efforts on areas under stress and change, or facing specific issues or need.
- Develop a standardized process for all neighbourhoods.

Bring stakeholders together as early as possible

- Ensure that community is brought into the planning process and any development/rezoning processes early on.
- Ensure that the LAP process is well connected with other City activities (grants, policy, etc.)

Share learning, tap into connected intelligence

- Use of lessons learned elsewhere (in Vancouver or elsewhere) and adapt them to local neighbourhood. Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Share best practices learning with the community.
- Build on existing community work, avoid duplication of processes, services.
- Use existing community activities, events, etc. as community's entry point to the plan.
- Utilize volunteer resources to assist with LAP process
- Refine or revise previous plans rather than creating new ones.
- Complete all research at the beginning of the plan process.

Tighten scope and be clear about what's in and what's out

- Better communication and outreach, utilizing new and old techniques.
- Respond to 'big' projects coming to the neighbourhood in a timely fashion.

- Focus on what can be achieved and influenced at the local level - clearly communicate what is 'in jurisdiction' and open to discussion. Identify areas of certainty and areas of flexibility
- Allow the report to recommend both overarching policies and specific actions.
- Clarify constraints.
- Ask residents to comment on scope of plan. Priority setting: identify key issues first; note areas where neighbourhood wants no change.

Ensure that the plan responds to the different geographies of a Local Area.

- Clearly identify and reflect community boundary/ies - not just administrative boundary, but the boundaries that residents think of (mental maps). Ensure that the plan works on different scales.
- Encourage a process that enables neighbourhood collaborations, particularly for corridor/boundary issues.
- Ensure that the edges don't get left out... Consider overlapping with neighbouring plan areas.

Ensure a process that is shorter, transparent, efficient, rigorous

- Start by determining timeline and budget for plan-making areas of interest in the community (the 'must-do' topics, versus the 'nice-to-do' topics) and work backward to figure out what components it can have as a result.
- Ensure that the community planning process allows for depth. Faster process does not equal better. Nor does slower process.
- Identify the log jams for each area (policy area, neighbourhood). Do not get stuck on these.
- Focus the number of meetings and public events that are held as part of the LAP process.
- Ensure increased transparency as this will build trust, reduce conflict.
- Reduce the scope of the plan - and build scope around the most relevant and immediate issues. Consider shortening the process to 18 months to avoid burn-out, drop-out
- Integrate sub-areas and topical discussions earlier in the process.

Enable on-the-ground actions to take place during the planning process

- Ensure that the plan is a living document. ST actions for development issues, LT actions for big policy questions.
- Have on-going actions taking place while broader planning process on-going.

Look for 'economies of scale' with other on-going planning work

- Where common issues exist in multiple planning neighbourhoods, plan a response for all three at once.

Enable efficient implementation of the plan

- Task community committees with identifying top-10 list of implementation priorities - or develop an indicators matrix to prioritize Plan recommendations (to facilitate implementation).
- Ensure that the fundamental implementation mechanism is a change in zoning.
- Ensure that the draft Plan/report is vetted through City departments to ensure that it adheres to corporate policy, and clarify with the community that City staff makes final decision on budgeting and high-level policy. [*Note: City staff would present recommendations to Council on policy and budgeting matters. Council would make the decision*].
- Create an oversight body that tracks processes, plans, and implementation and compares outcomes across neighbourhoods. Consider a CLG committee sub-team (community members) or Community Council solely for the purpose of plan implementation.
- Set specific expectation for how the plan will direct future action. Be clear about what circumstances can trigger revisiting the plan.

Link the Plan to the appropriate funding mechanisms

- Ensure strong link between plan and implementation [capital] budget process.
- Fund the implementation of specific actions through capital and operating budgets; ensure that Planning staff work with other departments to allocate funding to meet neighbourhood plan priorities.
- Require residents to identify partners to commit to and fund recommendations (as a requirement for approval).
- Involve neighbourhoods in implementation by inviting participation in the annual budgeting process; consider providing an implementation budget (a "prize") to neighbourhoods completing the LAP process.

Review and evaluate the plan on a regular basis

- Once we create a plan we should stick with it. Move to action quickly otherwise people will question value of the process.
- Provide regular opportunities for neighbourhood leaders across the municipality to meet with local officials to discuss how the implementation of neighbourhood planning is going.
- Review plans as they are implemented every five years - to ensure better accountability and evaluation.