

WHAT ARE ASSETS?

Asset mapping is a useful tool in community development. Assets are popularly recognized attributes of communities. They are considered essential for the maintenance of community life and identity and are vital for the sustainability of the economy, society and environment. They can include tangible things like sidewalks, buildings, parks, benches, trees, etc., intangible things like views or special sounds (like running water)smells, etc., social things like festivals, events or volunteer based initiatives. **Assets are what we want to keep, build upon, and sustain for future generations.**

WHAT IS ASSET MAPPING?

Asset mapping is a positive and enjoyable approach to learning about your community. It enables you to think positively about the place in which you live and work. It also challenges you to recognize how other people see and experience the same community. When people in your neighbourhood map community assets you will collect:

- **an inventory of all the good things about your neighbourhood**
- **a ranking of the most valued aspects of your neighbourhood**
- **the reasons why people place high value on assets in your neighbourhood**

Once you have this map of the valued aspects of your neighbourhood, you can collectively strategize about how **to build** on the assets **to sustain and enhance** them for future generations to enjoy. The process of asset mapping provides a critical element of community development, which is the **engagement of people in the shaping of their community.**

ASSET MAPPING: WHY BOTHER?

Residents may feel they know what is good about their neighbourhood and will ask, why bother? The main benefit of asset mapping is to get a **common view** of what is important, to affirm or broaden what you think, and to hear and appreciate the values of others. You can be fairly sure that although people may have very different backgrounds, they readily **come together** about what they see as important assets in neighbourhood life.

This coming together around common assets changes the way we think about our neighbourhoods, because it **unites people** around a positive identity and a collective cause. We stop thinking about our needs. Although we have been brought up to consider development in terms of needs, this approach to change has major limitations. Needs approaches tend to divide people and communities. Articulating needs often becomes a competitive process in many cases and often pits neighbourhoods and organizations against each other. The needs approach fragments neighbourhoods rather than combines them. Asset mapping as a process has the potential to **be inclusive** of all neighbourhood dimensions and interests. In addition, asset mapping can be a starting point for various initiatives.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD ADVANTAGE

Neighbourhood areas are diverse and have assets that vary widely across them. The various techniques of asset mapping permit the “unique features and special character” of neighbourhood places to be recognized. Asset mapping can differentiate the assets of individual groups as well as the combined community assets. Recognizing the assets that are important to different populations and interest groups is critical when **acting on** the key issue of selecting which strategies are necessary to **sustain the assets**.

Asset mapping provides the information and energy for individual and combined asset **mobilization at the neighbourhood level**. Asset mapping as a process has the potential to be inclusive of all neighbourhood dimensions, features and interests. Asset mapping can lead to **positive community development**, as neighbourhoods already know about mobilizing their assets. Identifying assets shows us the best ones to mobilize.

ASSET MAPPING SUMMARY

Here are some key points to remember about asset mapping:

- **Asset mapping is a positive approach to community development.**
- **Asset mapping combines community interests and creates “common cause.”**
- **Asset mapping is easy and fun to do.**

Asset mapping has several other advantages:

- **It is realistic:** asset mapping starts with what you have rather than with what you don't have.
- **It is a form of discovery:** there are far more assets in the neighbourhood than most people realize and this is a very positive way to start a dialogue.
- **It is inclusive:** assets can include both public, private and social assets.