

NEIGHBOURHOOD P L A N N I N G

.....
Getting Started



Other Reports in this series:

Planning Nanaimo: An Examination of Recent Neighbourhood Planning Processes
in Nanaimo, British Columbia

Current Practices in Neighbourhood Planning: An Examination of Current Practices
in Neighbourhood Planning in British Columbia,
Western Canada and the United States

Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Issue-Based Plans

Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Comprehensive Plans

Produced for the City of Nanaimo

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NEIGHBOUR WORKS

PLANNING CONSULTANTS

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OVERVIEW

Over the 2004/2005 academic year, an innovative partnership was struck between the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia and the City of Nanaimo. During this time, NeighbourWorks, a group of five second-year planning students in the Masters in Planning program, worked to create a new framework for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo.

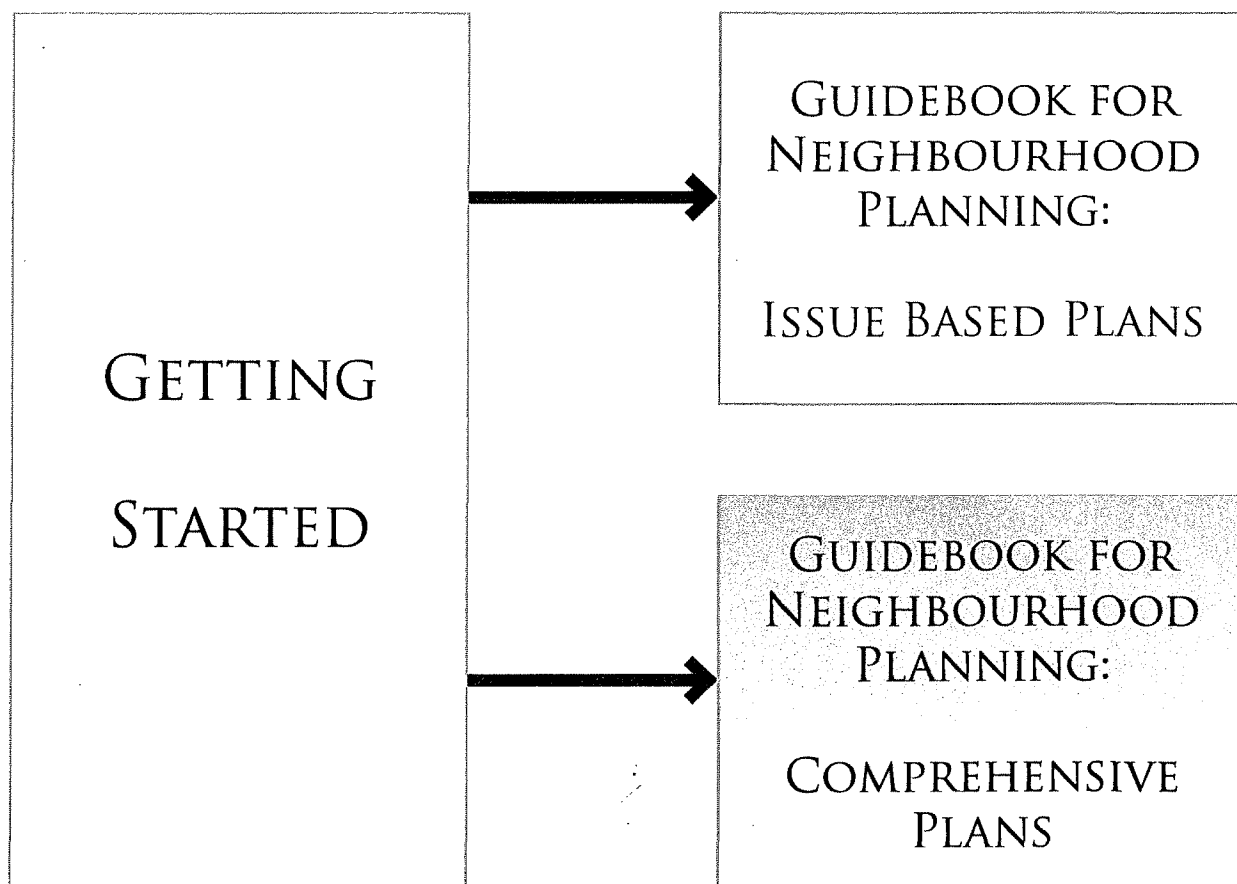
The new framework for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo draws on the existing neighbourhood planning process, but seeks to strengthen it through a number of innovative additions. These additions include a city-wide neighbourhood needs assessment, an issue-based plan option, a substantial planning education component, and greater flexibility combined with helpful troubleshooting tips.

The new framework for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo is described in three companion documents: *Getting Started*, *Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Issue-Based Plans*, and *Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Comprehensive Plans*.

- *Getting Started* lays the groundwork for a fresh start for neighbourhood planning. The primary work in this phase, the neighbourhood needs assessment, provides the foundation from which to pursue neighbourhood planning in a more strategic manner. The final product from this phase is an identification of neighbourhood issues, a ranked list of neighbourhoods, and identification of plan type for meeting neighbourhood needs.
- The *Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Issue-Based Plans* describes the issue-based plan option. When a neighbourhood identifies as a priority a single issue, or small number of related issues, the most appropriate neighbourhood planning model is the issue-based plan, which targets only the challenges presented and develops creative short-, mid-, and long-term solutions. Issue-based plans offer a more focused approach to neighbourhood planning, and their shorter time frames lend themselves to action.
- The *Guidebook For Neighbourhood Planning: Comprehensive Plans* describes the comprehensive plan option. The comprehensive planning process is appropriate where a wide array of issues exist. The comprehensive plan provides the framework for land-use decisions at the local level, but is also inclusive of all sectors of the neighbourhood, keeping in mind the social, economic, geographic, cultural, and political realities of the community.

Lessons learned from research done at an earlier stage of the project guided the development of the new neighbourhood planning framework. Background research conducted on recent neighbourhood planning practices in Nanaimo, as well as practices in other cities in British Columbia, Western Canada and the United States, revealed five elements that are necessary for successful neighbourhood planning processes.¹ These five components are referred to as the 5 Cs, and include: Common Vision, Clear Expectations, Collaboration, Communication, and Commitment.

With the 5 Cs as the guide, NeighbourWorks has designed a new framework that strengthens vital relationships between City Council, City staff and community members through the planning process.

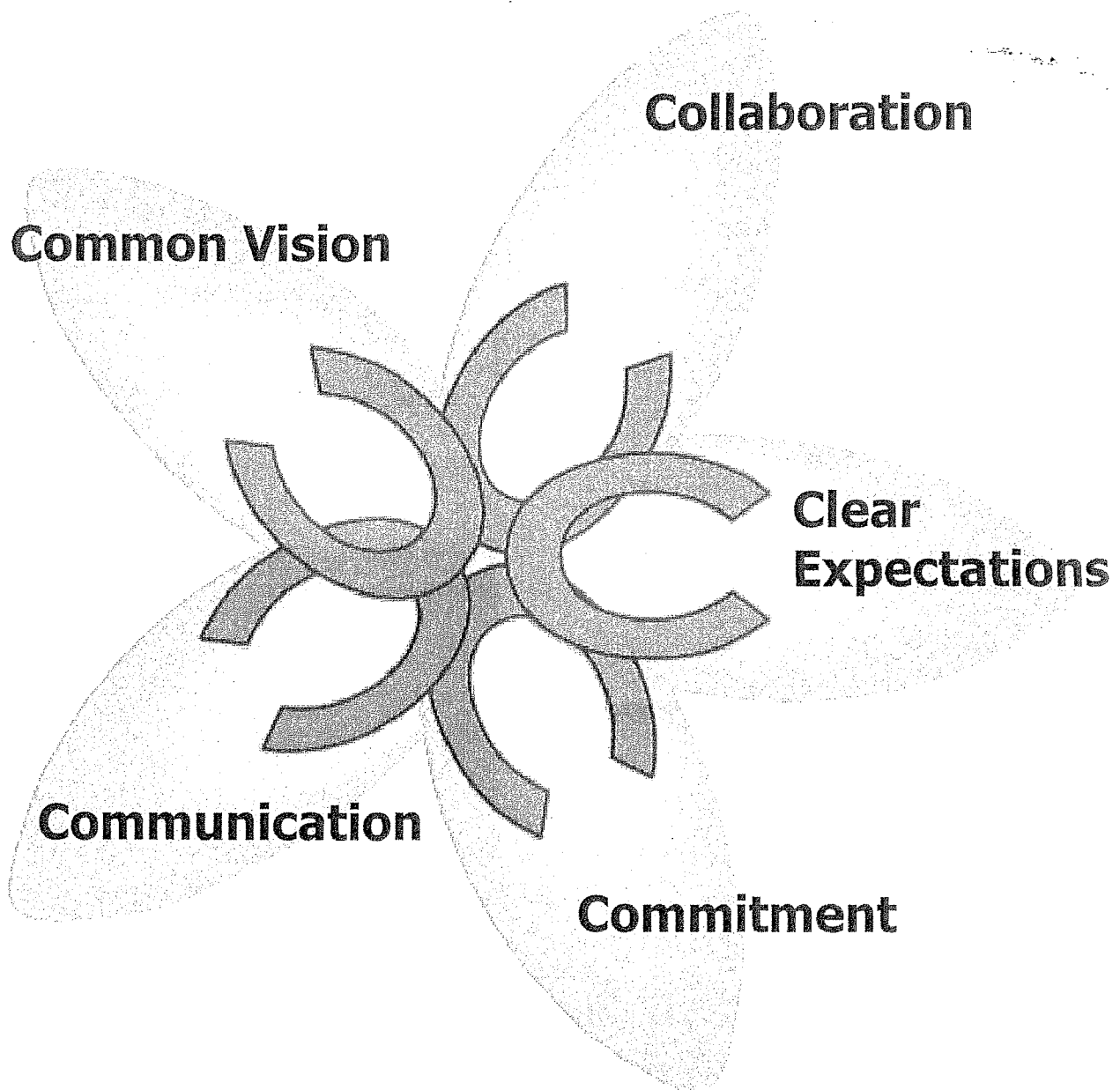


Neighbourhood Planning A New Framework

¹ See background documents: *Planning Nanaimo: An assessment of recent neighbourhood planning practices in Nanaimo, British Columbia* and *Current Practices in Neighbourhood Planning: An examination of neighbourhood planning practices in British Columbia, Western Canada and the United States*.

TOUCHSTONE: the 5 Cs

The 5 Cs are the foundation that guide the planning process outlined in this guidebook. They serve as a reminder of the critical role good relationships play in creating successful planning processes. When the 5 Cs work together, interdependently, they create a climate where planning practices can flourish. The 5 Cs include: **Common Vision, Clear Expectations, Collaboration, Communication, and Commitment.**





Common Vision provides a clear and common understanding of the purpose and function of neighbourhood planning. Everyone who has a stake in neighbourhood planning must arrive at a common understanding of what neighbourhood planning can accomplish, what is within the mandate of a neighbourhood plan, and how a neighbourhood plan can meet the goals of each participant.



Clear Expectations are important when defining the roles and responsibilities of those involved in neighbourhood planning. It is important that expectations are clearly understood and shared by all participants in order to avoid confusion or frustration as the planning unfolds.



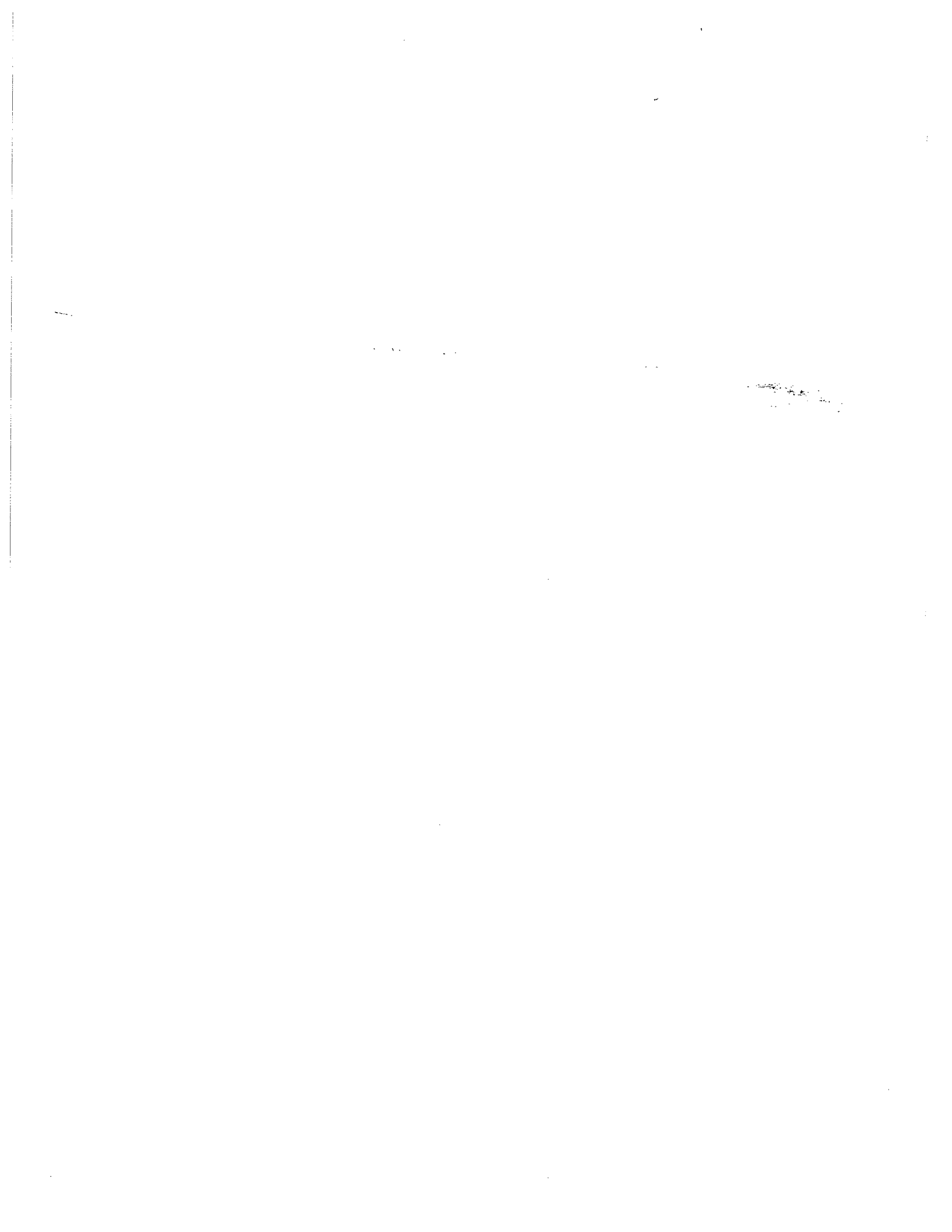
Commitment makes things happen. City Council shows commitment by providing the financial and staffing resources to create neighbourhood plans; residents commit their time, energy and skills to the planning process; and staff work to ensure that the plan they help to create is supported through ongoing monitoring and implementation strategies.



Collaboration works to achieve a balance between the many parties involved in creating a neighbourhood plan: residents, staff, Council, and other interested stakeholders. Collaboration encourages a planning process that is inclusive and participatory. People are involved knowing that the information and ideas they contribute will be honoured, and that a balance will be found between all of the ideas that people bring to the table.



Communication ensures an ongoing and mutual flow of information between the neighbourhood, City staff, and Council. Good communication is built on access to information and information sharing, leading to mutual understanding amongst all participants.



INTRODUCTION

Getting Started is the first phase in the new framework for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo. NeighbourWorks developed the *Getting Started* process in order to provide a fresh start for neighbourhood planning in the City. Background research revealed the lack of a strategic approach to meeting neighbourhood needs on a city-wide basis - *Getting Started* is intended to aid Nanaimo's Community Planning Division in developing a strong, consistent approach to meeting community needs through a process of strategic planning. The rationale and basic methods are developed in this document, but an exact procedure is not described. The process will need to be finalized by the Community Planning Division before implementation.

Conducting a city-wide needs assessment is the major work in *Getting Started*. A needs assessment aids in matching the resources allocated to neighbourhood planning with the neighbourhoods that have the most pressing issues. The assessment will identify a wide range of issues, not all of which will be dealt with through neighbourhood planning. Some issues will be dealt with by other planning mechanisms, such as city-wide plans or policies, or by other city departments.

Getting Started consists of the following sections:

Planning Area Boundaries

Getting Started begins with a description of the planning area boundaries that will be used for data collection in the needs assessment, as well as in preparing some types of neighbourhood plans in the future.

Creating The SNAP Team

The next section describes creating the SNAP (Strategic Needs Assessment and Prioritization) Team, which will be responsible for completing two main tasks: a needs assessment, and making choices. The Team is intended to be representative of the Nanaimo community, and is composed of members from the Plan Nanaimo Advisory Committee, the Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network, and City Staff. The group is facilitated by the Community Planner.

Needs Assessment

This section describes the needs assessment the SNAP Team will conduct. The needs assessment will identify issues to help guide planning processes over the next five years. At this stage, issues that can be dealt with through other mechanisms, such as city-wide plans or by other city departments, will be identified. Only those issues that are to be addressed through neighbourhood planning are dealt with in the final step of *Getting Started*, and in the subsequent *Guidebooks For Neighbourhood Planning*.

Making Choices

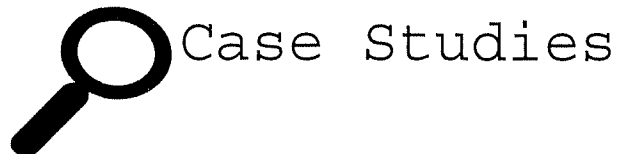
The SNAP Team will prioritize the neighbourhood planning issues identified in the needs assessment. While all issues are important, the process of ranking recognizes that not all needs can be met at the same time. The output of the setting priorities task will be a ranked list of issues and, consequently, a ranked list of neighbourhoods. The SNAP Team will match the prioritized neighbourhoods' needs to the type of planning process that is the best fit—either a comprehensive or issue-based neighbourhood plan.

It is estimated that the *Getting Started* phase will take approximately 7-9 months to complete. Once the tasks in *Getting Started* are completed, the neighbourhoods identified as needing neighbourhood plans will undergo either issue-based or comprehensive planning processes over the following five years.

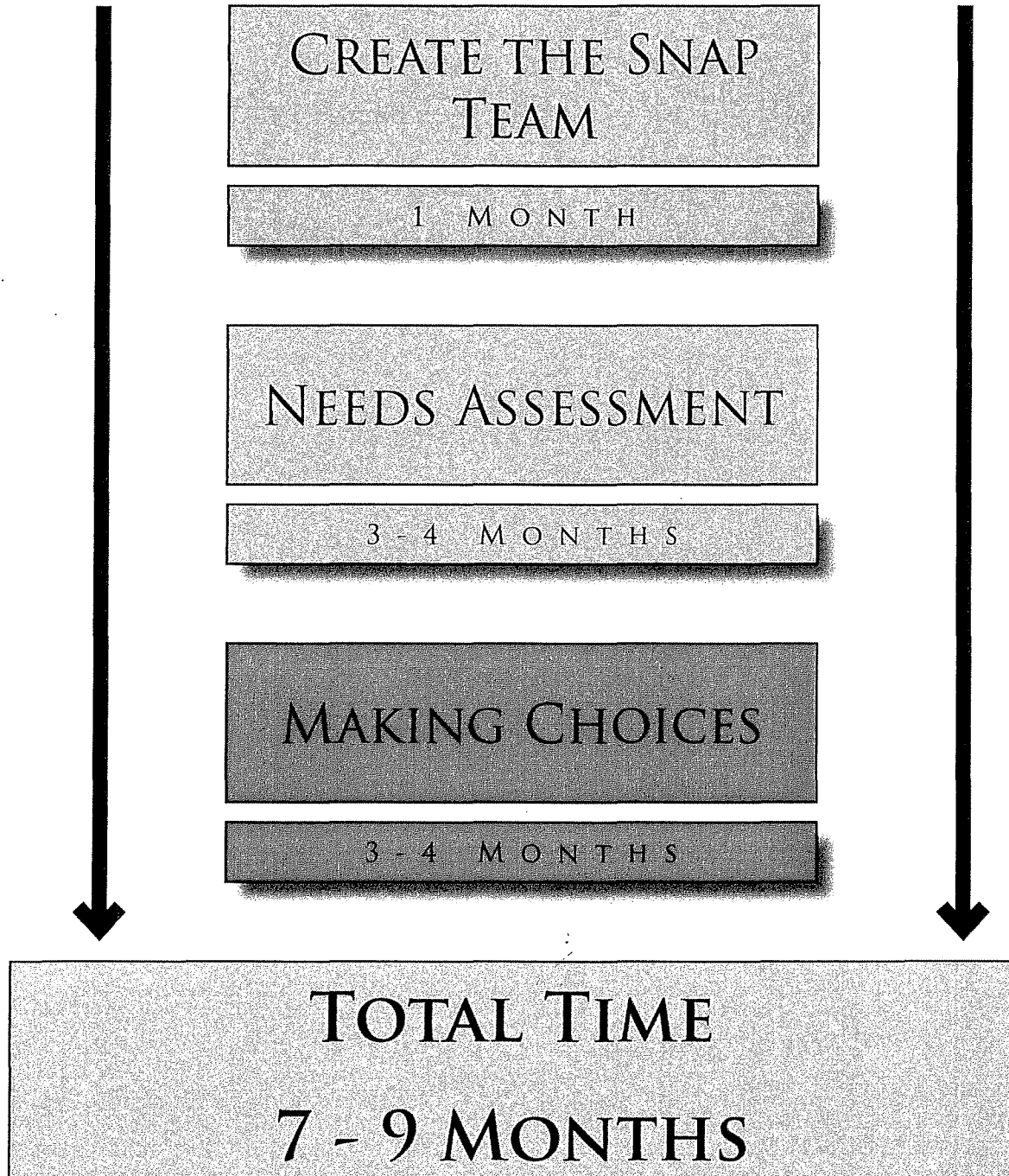
Getting Started outlines **WHY** each of the 3 phases is important, **WHAT** each of these phases may involve, **WHO** will be doing what in each phase, and **WHEN** to do each phase. But, it doesn't detail specifically **HOW** to do each phase. Instead, it is up to those involved to decide how to do each phase. To help make these decisions, a series of hints and tips, toolboxes, case studies, and reminders of the 5 Cs are provided throughout the *Guidebook*. Just look for these logos:

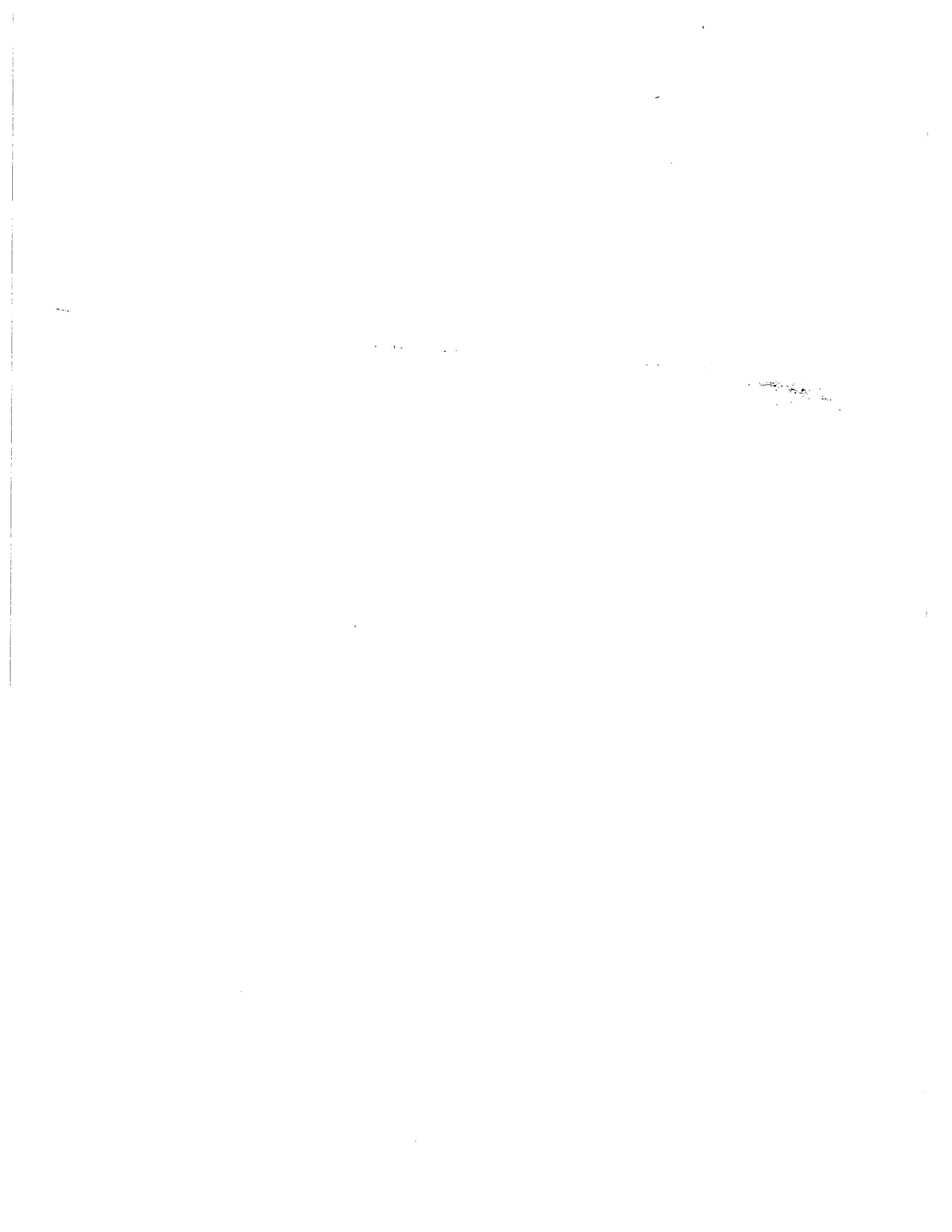


TOOLBOX



Getting Started: The Timeline





PLANNING AREA BOUNDARIES

In Nanaimo planning boundaries are currently defined in two ways: there are official Planning Area boundaries, and Neighbourhood Association boundaries. These two types of boundaries serve different purposes. Planning Area boundaries, defined by the City, assist City staff in the planning for the city as a whole. Neighbourhood Association boundaries are defined by the Neighbourhood Associations, and serve a variety of neighbourhood organization activities, including neighbourhood planning.

Before the work in *Getting Started* can begin, the geographical boundaries for neighbourhood planning will be identified. A system of clear and consistent neighbourhood boundaries across the city is critical for completing the needs assessment, and will be necessary for defining and coordinating neighbourhood plans in the future. Fortunately, a comprehensive system of boundaries already exists in Nanaimo: the Planning Area Boundaries. This system covers the entire city and coincides with census tracts, simplifying the task of data collection.



HINTS & TIPS

What is a neighbourhood boundary?

Neighbourhoods are not just simply the places where we live, they also help to define who we are as people and as members in the community. As such, neighbourhoods have a lot of personal meaning. Neighbourhood Associations have helped to fulfill many of the needs neighbourhoods have identified for themselves, and many people have strong attachments to their Associations.

Using Planning Area boundaries instead of Neighbourhood Association boundaries for addressing neighbourhood needs does not challenge or threaten Nanaimo's highly valued Neighbourhood Associations. Rather, it is recognized that Planning Area boundaries provide a strategic and effective way of collecting information and coordinating planning actions.

Understanding Different Boundaries

In the 1920's Clarence Perry first defined a neighbourhood as an area encompassed in a five-minute walking radius, roughly a 400-500 metre radius, with an elementary school at its centre. This traditional definition has expanded to include a centre that is made up of either a transit hub, shopping centre, or other community space, and is still commonly used to this day.

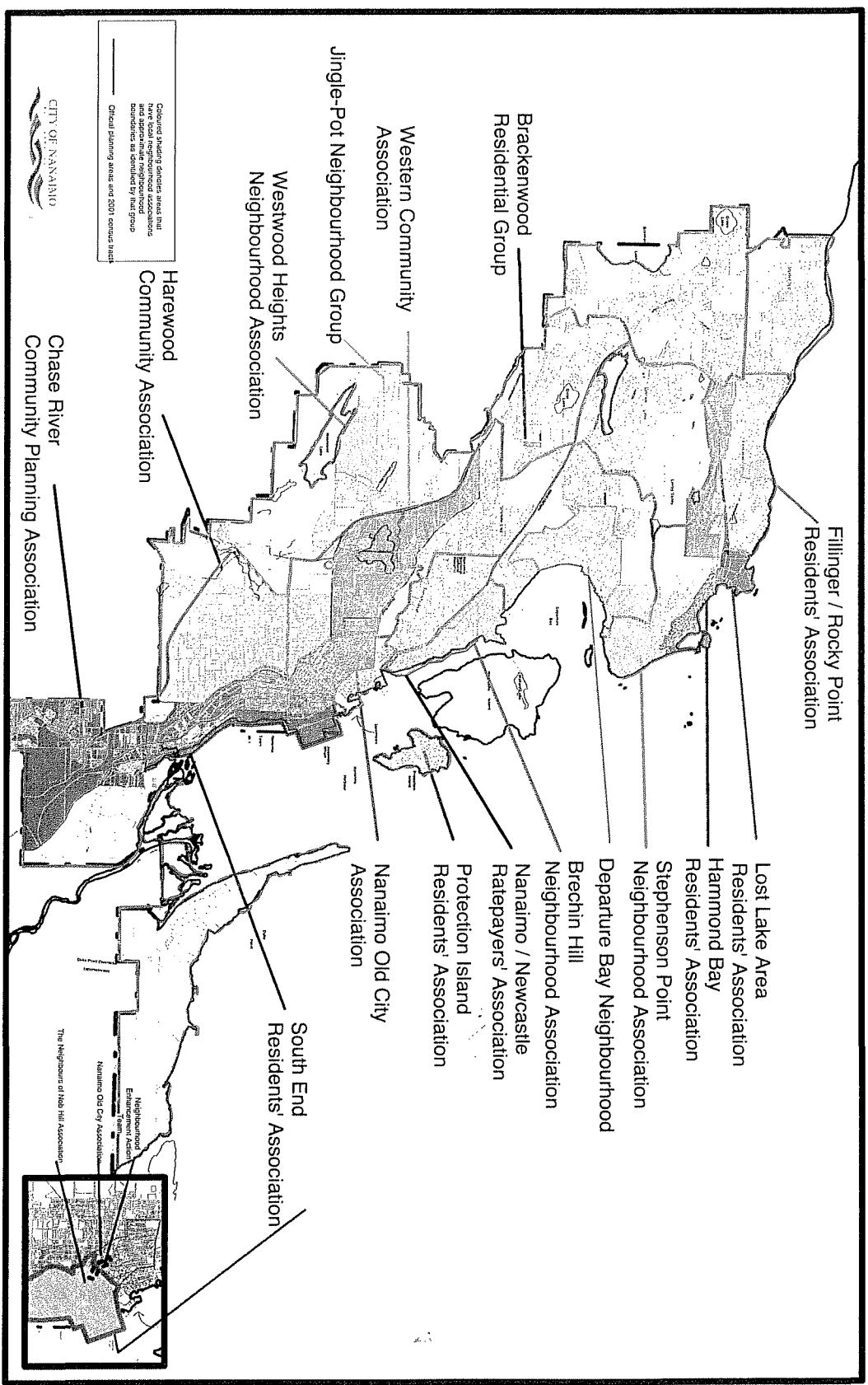
Census tracts and school catchment areas have also been used in defining neighbourhoods. Census tracts are generally made up of relatively stable areas that have a population between 2,500 to 8,000 people. These boundaries are decided by a committee of local specialists. Census tracts have the benefit of being tied to large amounts of readily available data in the form of statistics and demographics. School catchment areas are defined by the school board, and while they do fluctuate with changes to population and demographics, they are generally known and identifiable areas.

Boundaries in Nanaimo

Neighbourhoods are the building blocks for any city, and this is especially true for Nanaimo, a city made up of five mining villages. These separate communities were amalgamated into one in the 1970's, creating the City of Nanaimo. Many of Nanaimo's unique neighbourhoods have a strong sense of identity, and approximately 50% are represented by active Neighbourhood Associations. Under the existing neighbourhood planning framework, the Neighbourhood Association boundaries are used to define neighbourhood planning areas.

The existing system of neighbourhood planning boundaries in Nanaimo is insufficient for guiding future neighbourhood plans in the city. Two problems arise with relying on Neighbourhood Association boundaries when a consistent, city-wide neighbourhood planning strategy is necessary: some of the boundaries overlap one another, and only 50% of the city is represented by Neighbourhood Associations.

Nanaimo: Boundaries



Different Plans? Different Boundaries

Once the SNAP Team has finished the *Getting Started* phase, it will have identified which neighbourhoods will undergo planning processes over the next five years, and which of the two plan types will be used. Comprehensive plans will be conducted using the Planning Area boundary, and may bring more than one Area together for the purposes of the neighbourhood plan. Issue-based plans may cover only part of a Planning Area, or may overlap Planning Areas.

Comprehensive Plans: The boundary for the comprehensive plan will be larger in size than an issue-based plan. Given that comprehensive plans will be done when a number of different issues are present in an area, they will take a longer time to complete and require more financial resources. As with issue-based plans, the boundary for a comprehensive plan will be guided by the information received from the needs assessment.

Confirming the number of Planning Areas to be covered by a comprehensive plan can be done in consultation with any Neighbourhood Associations active in the area, as well as PNAC (Plan Nanaimo Advisory Committee), City Staff, and NNN (Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network).



Case Studies

Current Practices

The City of Vancouver bases their neighbourhood planning boundaries on local area boundaries that were created and used by the City. One of the reasons for using these large areas, which have populations of between 20,000 to 30,000 people, is that specialized Census data is readily available.

The City of Coquitlam and the City of Winnipeg both define the neighbourhood boundaries they use for neighbourhood planning.

The City of Minneapolis planning department in Minnesota determines neighbourhood boundaries based on natural boundaries, highways, or school catchment areas. There is no minimum or maximum population base required for neighbourhood designation.

The City of Edmonton bases their neighbourhood boundaries along tax assessment or subdivision boundaries, which are decided by the planning department. The number of households per neighbourhood ranges from 1,000 to 18,000.

HINTS & TIPS Neighbourhood Associations

There is undoubtedly value in having Neighbourhood Associations with well defined neighbourhood boundaries. These Neighbourhood Associations foster a strong sense of community by defining their own boundaries. The City may support Neighbourhood Associations by holding neighbourhood appreciation days, engaging in community mapping exercises, or some other activity which recognizes the crucial role that Neighbourhood Associations have in making Nanaimo a great place to live.

Some possible resources include:

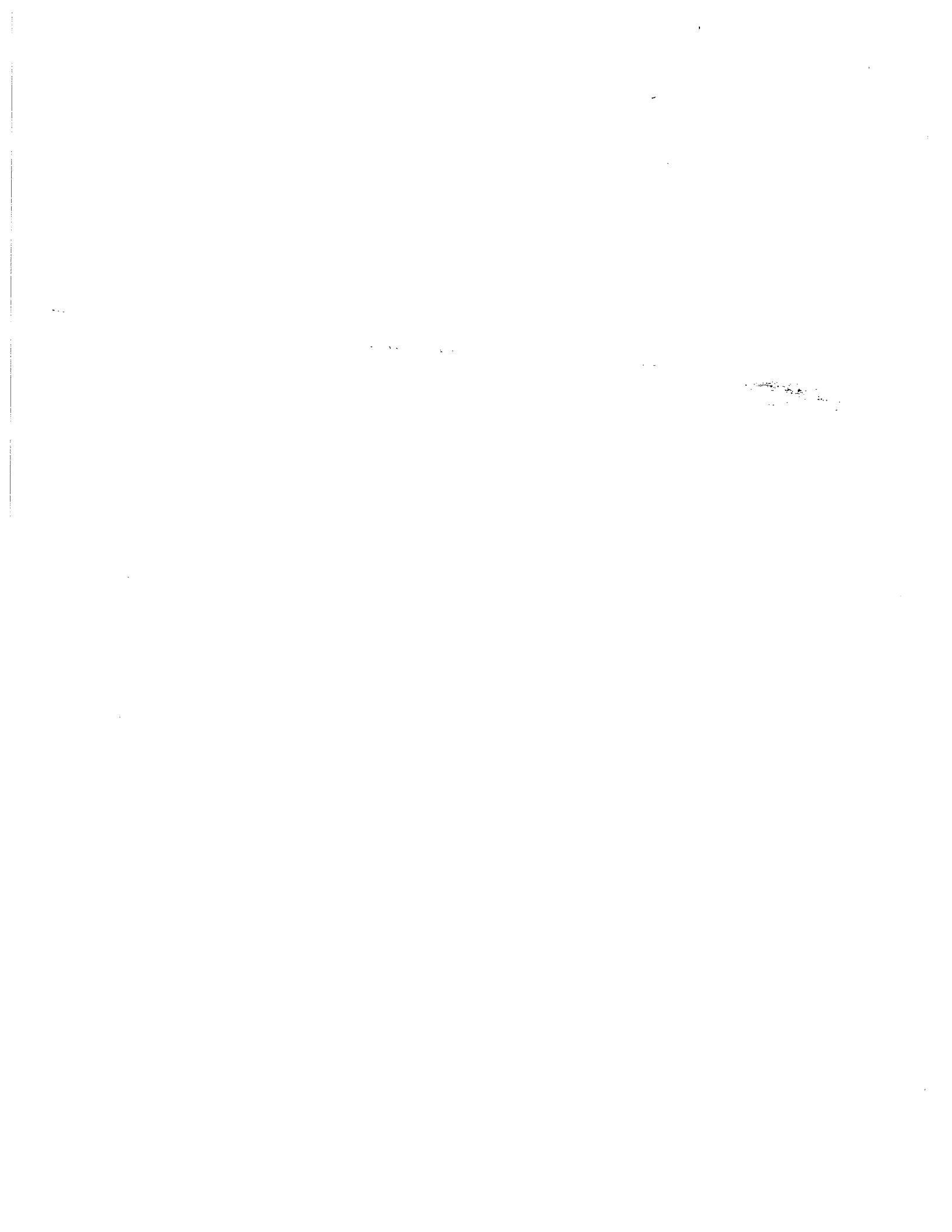
Community mapping: Common Ground Community Mapping Project is a group based out of Victoria which advocates for the use of community mapping as a way of building community awareness and engagement. It also a fun and creative process!
<http://www3.telus.net/cground/neighbourhoods.html>

Neighbourhood Appreciation Day: The City of Seattle has been celebrating neighbours and neighbourhoods since 1995. Neighbours have celebrated this day by hosting block parties, potluck dinners, open houses, award ceremonies and any number of other events they dream up.
<http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/neighborhoods/appday/>

Good Neighbour Award: A similar idea to the Neighbourhood Appreciation Day is the Good Neighbour Award. For more information check out:
<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/goodneighbour.html>

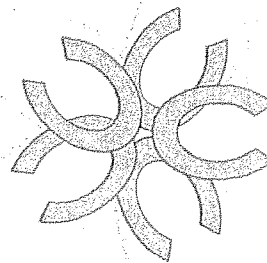
Issue-Based: The boundary size for each issue-based plan will undoubtedly be different. The specific boundary is less important in the issue-based plan than the comprehensive plan, and the issue itself will help to define the approximate boundary. Two examples are traffic and pedestrian safety, and playground equipment in a neighbourhood park:

- a) **Linear Boundary:** A neighbourhood issue-based plan focussing on traffic and pedestrian safety on a particular road would be limited to the road in question. The boundary would incorporate the areas affected along the road, and would also likely incorporate nearby schools or other nearby pedestrian destinations.
- b) **Nodal Boundary:** Planning for playground equipment in a neighbourhood park is an example of an issue-based plan centred on a small area, which affects a specific group in the population: young families. The boundary is clearly defined by the issue itself.



CREATING THE SNAP TEAM

A Strategic Needs Assessment and Prioritization (SNAP) Team will be created to execute the tasks in the *Getting Started* process. The work undertaken by the SNAP Team is a collaborative effort between three different groups: PNAC, NNN, and City Staff. The function of the Team relies on communication between and among them to create a common vision and clear expectations while building the commitment for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo.



Creating the
SNAP Team

The Purpose of the SNAP Team

As a representative planning Team, SNAP will improve neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo. The Team will play a key role in setting the stage for neighbourhood planning over the following five years. By following the 5 Cs throughout the *Getting Started* process, SNAP will make a strong contribution to building relationships in Nanaimo.

SNAP will undertake two inter-related tasks:

Task 1: Conduct a needs assessment.

Task 2: Create a prioritized list of neighbourhoods or areas that will receive neighbourhood plans, and assign the appropriate planning strategy.

TIMELINE: Creating the SNAP Team



CREATE THE SNAP TEAM



TOTAL TIME

1 MONTH

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

3 - 4 MONTHS

MAKING CHOICES

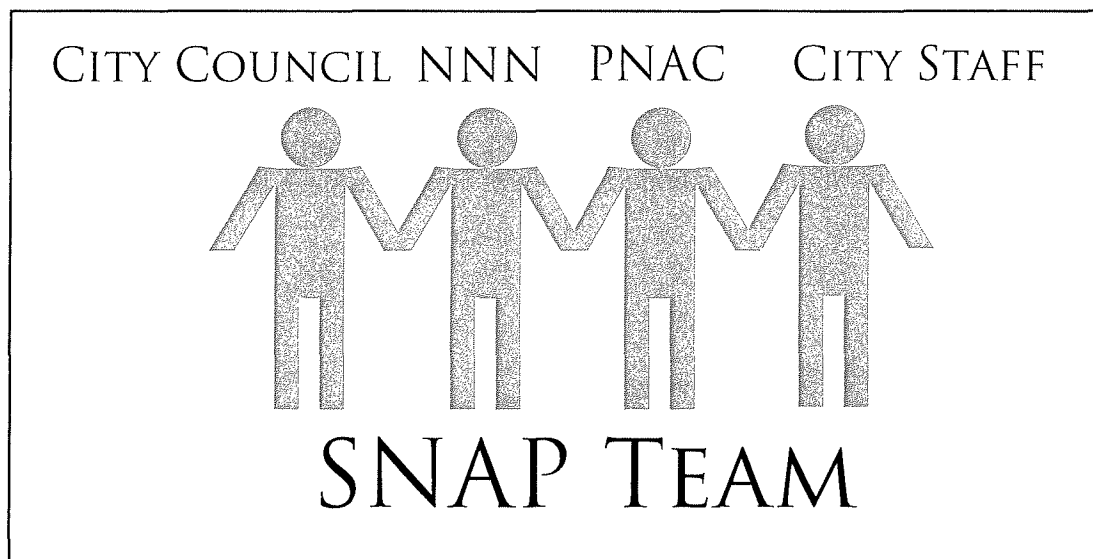
3 - 4 MONTHS

Membership of the SNAP Team

The SNAP Team will be made up of 10 representatives in total. Keeping the number of representatives on SNAP to a maximum of 10 is important, as it becomes more and more difficult to coordinate and accomplish tasks with larger groups.

The success of the *Getting Started* process is dependent on good communication and partnership amongst the different groups at the planning table. The SNAP Team will draw representatives from four groups:

- 4 representatives from PNAC (Plan Nanaimo Advisory Committee);
- 4 from the NNN (Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network);
- 1 City Staff member; and
- 1 City Council member.



Each of these groups has been selected to encourage information sharing and relationship building amongst the different key groups concerned with neighbourhood planning in the city:

PNAC was created out of Plan Nanaimo, and is meant to provide Council with a community-based review of planning initiatives. PNAC is made up of a broad representation of community interests, and is therefore well positioned to provide a city-wide, general perspective to the SNAP Team.

The Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network is an informal group made up of representatives from the various neighbourhood groups covering approximately 50% of Nanaimo. It was created in 1996 with the intention that the group would meet 3 to 4 times a year in order to share information, resources, and issues of special interest to neighbourhoods. The membership and make-up of the NNN is ad hoc and based on an individual's affiliation with a neighbourhood group.

A City Staff member will sit on the SNAP Team to ensure that information about neighbourhood planning is shared with the rest of City Staff. In addition, this person(s) will be able to assist in fulfilling any information needs the SNAP Team may have. It is expected that City Staff will bring a city-wide perspective to neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo.

A City Council member will sit on the SNAP Team in order to ensure the rest of City Council is made aware of plans for future neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo. It is advisable that the Councillor sitting on PNAC participates on the SNAP Team, in addition to other interested PNAC representatives.

In order to ensure that the decisions made by the SNAP Team meet the interests and concerns of PNAC, NNN, City Staff, and City Council, the representatives sitting on the SNAP Team will need to take on the added duties of reporting back to their respective member groups.

HINTS & TIPS Improving Neighbourhood Representation on SNAP

Prior to forming the SNAP Team and during its operation, the SNAP Team may encourage more Neighbourhood Associations to form and become a part of NNN. Membership provides individuals with the opportunity to provide input to the NNN representative on the SNAP Team. As a part of the NNN, individuals, and their respective Neighbourhood Associations would be able to keep up-to-date with the *Getting Started* process.

The Role of the Community Planner

The Community Planner responsible for neighbourhood planning will facilitate the SNAP Team meetings. This is an important task as the facilitator helps to design and guide the process and makes sure the group stays on track and on schedule. The facilitation of the SNAP Team will be in addition to the regular and ongoing informational or research needs of the SNAP Team. Specifically, the Community Planner will be responsible for:

- meeting agendas and minutes,
- correspondence, including press releases or outreach activities,
- coordinating speakers and information requests, and
- organizing meeting logistics.

Finally, the Community Planner will also act as support for the SNAP Team representatives in their reporting back duties, ensuring that the input and feedback from PNAC, NNN, and other City Staff is brought to the SNAP Team for their consideration as a whole.

Action

The SNAP Team will ultimately make a recommendation to City Council on the steps forward for neighbourhood planning.

HINTS & TIPS Representation

It may be desirable to open up two or three positions of SNAP to the general public by advertising in the local newspapers for 'community at large' representatives. This would be beneficial for two reasons: it would increase representation for parts of the city not represented by NNN, and it would increase awareness that a new framework for Neighbourhood Planning is in the making.

TOOLBOX

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

The majority of the members of the SNAP Team are volunteers. The following tips and resources will assist the staff and City Council in avoiding volunteer burn-out and showing appreciation for the work this group will be doing for Neighbourhood Planning in Nanaimo.

Recognition. It is crucial that the time and energy that volunteers put in is recognized. This ranges from an informal 'thank you' and ensuring snacks and beverages are available, to formal recognition through local newsletters or newspapers, and at local celebrations. Don't forget about National Volunteer Week from April 17-23rd.

Celebration. Celebrating accomplishments is important, especially once milestones are reached for a project. Celebrations can serve to bring people together in a relaxed, casual environment to celebrate the successes they have had as a group. Celebrations can be as large or as small as desired: from a city-wide picnic or parade, to a catered luncheon for the volunteers immediately involved in a project.

Awards are a great way to extend recognition to the exceptional individuals who have consistently volunteered their time for their community. Awards may be provided by the local government or from a variety of national organisations.

Resources:

<http://www.volunteer.ca/>

This is an extensive web site with many suggestions and recommendations for avoiding burnout, showing appreciation, retention of volunteers and more.

The "How-To: Volunteer Management Resources" section is especially valuable with a wide range of resources and links.

CITY-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Purpose of a City-Wide Needs Assessment

The City of Nanaimo, like other municipal governments, finds it necessary to plan strategically for matching available resources to community needs. An objective, logical and structured approach that is developed with city-wide input is an improvement over an ad hoc approach for addressing the entire community's neighbourhood planning needs.

A city-wide needs assessment can be thought of as good planning, in that it can help to determine how to best use limited resources. An assessment can also help to strengthen relationships and understanding within individual neighbourhoods, between neighbourhoods, and between the neighbourhoods and the City. A thorough, city-wide needs assessment is a good place to make a fresh start, reopening lines of communication and providing a sense of perspective across the city.

A city-wide needs assessment is a lot of work, but is well worth the effort as they can help to...

... improve accountability: Open identification of the needs and assets of each neighbourhood, combined with transparent decision-making based on the systematic assessment of those needs, enhances the accountability of local government.

... increase equity and understanding: By highlighting the wide variety of needs and assets within a city based on clear and understood criteria, it is possible to move towards improving the quality of life in each neighbourhood. A needs assessment can serve as a powerful means for citizens to gain insights on the daily experience of living in other neighbourhoods in their city.

... achieve balance: By tying together the city-wide goals outlined in Plan Nanaimo, the Official Community Plan, with the needs and interests identified at the neighbourhood level, a balance between local and city-wide issues can be reached.

... make best use of resources: By prioritizing which neighbourhood needs should be met first, it is possible to meet the most pressing needs in a timely way.

Collecting and sharing information during a neighbourhood needs assessment provides the City and community with an excellent opportunity to take stock and plan for the future. The needs assessment process should be redone every five years or so, to maintain momentum and keep lines of communication open.

TIMELINE: City-Wide Needs Assessment

CREATE THE SNAP
TEAM

1 MONTH

CITY-WIDE
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Collect Information

1 - 2 MONTHS

Analyze, Compile & Present
Results

1 - 2 MONTHS

Non-Neighbourhood Planning
Issues

1 MONTH

TOTAL TIME

3 - 4 MONTHS

MAKING CHOICES

3 - 4 MONTHS

The City-Wide Needs Assessment Process

A needs assessment is made up of a number of components, all of which contribute to developing a better understanding of individual neighbourhoods and a better sense of the wider community needs. Achieving these two levels of understanding is very important for everyone involved in the planning process.

A needs assessment requires a lot of information gathering and public consultation. The procedure for doing a neighbourhood needs assessment needs to match its purposes: an assessment is done not only to collect information, but also to build community and relationships. The ideal process should be guided by principles that build community and strengthen relationships. The procedure the SNAP Team creates for the first needs assessment will form the template for future assessments. The Team will learn what works and doesn't work, so that the next rounds will be even more successful in achieving shared objectives.

Collect Information

The SNAP Team needs to collect all the information that will tell them about the type and distribution of issues across the city. The same type of information should be collected in each area, to allow for comparison and ranking. The Planning Area boundaries, which coincide with Nanaimo's census tracts, will be used to coordinate data collection and future planning processes.

The list of issues the needs assessment brings forward should capture all aspects of community life that the City can help improve. There are numerous good examples of city-wide needs assessments that have been done in the past, the case study on the next page is just one of these examples. Many cities that are undertaking a needs assessment for the first time build on the procedures developed in other cities.

Information Sources

Much of the information for a needs assessment comes from formal records and statistics prepared and maintained by municipal, regional, provincial, and even federal levels of government. This information can be collected relatively easily by the SNAP Team and City staff, but is only part of the story. A good needs assessment also requires the input and involvement of community members. These two sources of information complement each other. Together, they help produce a well-rounded and accurate assessment, while also building relationships and strengthening communication during the process.



Case Studies

Needs Assessment Case Study:

Kansas City, Missouri

Kansas City, Missouri, developed a thorough needs assessment process that has informed many other cities' needs assessments. With a population of 441,500 the City does have a lot of resources smaller cities do not. However, the methods developed here are applicable at a variety of scales, as long as they are modified to be realistic.

The process involved City staff and neighbourhood residents working together through four basic steps:

1. Review statistics and maps about the neighbourhoods;
2. Identify neighbourhood features, needs and assets;
3. Identify the neighbourhood amongst four area types: developing areas, conservation areas, stabilization areas, or redeveloping areas; and
4. Identify actions that could be taken to make neighbourhoods better, amongst three action types: City Actions, Partner Actions, and Self Actions.

Kansas City planning staff drew on census information and statistics to establish city-wide issues, and also used extensive community consultation to identify issues within each neighbourhood. The process classified issues into Planning and Development, Quality of Life, and People.

In Kansas City, with 300 neighbourhoods participating in the process, the complex needs assessment process was simplified by identifying neighbourhoods among types. The neighbourhood type assignment provided a basis for tailoring services, programs, and other actions based on varying neighbourhood needs and characteristics. Smaller cities with fewer neighbourhoods may not find neighbourhood classification to be a useful step. The remaining steps in the process are standard, and are likely to form the foundation of any needs assessment.

The full Kansas City Needs Assessment Report is available at <http://www.kcmo.org/planning.nsf/web/FOCUSSummaryReport?opendocument>

Information for the needs assessment can come from two different places: from statistics and existing records and from the community.

Statistics and Existing Records

The needs assessment can draw on existing statistical data such as census data, labour surveys, school and hospital information. These information sources include data already collected and maintained by the different city departments, as well as data maintained by other agencies, such as Statistics Canada. The different city departments that have information on neighbourhood conditions can also be drawn on to provide background for key issues such as:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Information Needs | Environmental Conditions |
| Development Pressure | Safety and Crime Prevention |
| Infrastructure Condition | Community Services |
| Social Conditions | Housing Supply |
| Organizational Capacity | |



HINTS & TIPS

Information Sources

City of Nanaimo Departments

Community Services Division

Engineering and Public Works
Fire Services
Parks, Recreation and Culture
Police Services

Development Services Division

Community Planning
Economic Development
Permits, Bylaws and Properties
Planning and Developments

The Community

The specific methods the SNAP Team uses to get community input will depend on the funds and labour available. In general, the needs assessment should be structured to capture the key information that describes the present condition of each neighbourhood, while maintaining a city-wide focus.

The SNAP Team has a number of options for getting the neighbourhoods involved in the needs assessment. Data can be collected from the public by open house or survey (telephone, hand-delivered, or mailed). In a perfect world, there would be a limitless supply of money and time to do the assessment. Realistically, the Team will have to be creative in designing a good process in a cost effective and timely manner.

It is recommended that the SNAP Team keep the consultation straightforward in order to enable efficiency in compiling and analyzing the results. Two questions could yield this key information:

1. What are the three biggest issues in Nanaimo right now?
2. What are the three biggest issues in your neighbourhood?

Two options for getting answers to these two questions are briefly explored:

Option 1: Hold a City-Wide Open House

One way to collect information from neighbourhoods is to hold a city-wide open house, either at one location or a number of central locations, such as Parks and Recreation facilities. Participants provide information on their neighbourhoods, and results can be 'coded' back to match up with Planning Area boundaries.

⊕ The Plus Side	⊖ The Down Side
Fewer consultations across the city mean that the process can go more quickly and cost less. Community members can mingle with people from other neighbourhoods, and see for themselves the issues in other neighbourhoods.	This strategy requires a lot of resources in terms of preparation time and staffing, and may require hiring a consultant.

Option 2: Conduct Surveys

Telephone or mail out surveys are often used to get quick results that can be easily tabulated. The surveys can ask very specific questions, and get detailed information that can be easily compared across neighbourhoods. Surveys can be structured in a number of ways: from open-ended questions to closed. ended questions. Providing a space for general comments and allowing space for open-ended questions can address some of the problems typically associated with surveys. Sample size will be key in designing the survey; there are many resources (both websites and books) to help with establishing appropriate sample sizes and other important aspects of conducting surveys.

⊕ The Plus Side	⊖ The Down Side
Surveys can be quick to assemble and administer, and fairly easy to analyze.	Community members can feel they have not been given the opportunity to assess their neighbourhood on their own terms. They can feel that the process is not collaborative.

Analyzing, Compiling, and Presenting Consultation Results

Depending on the option for information gathering, linking the issue to a Planning Area will take place in different ways. The survey results will be linked through geo-coding. Information from the open-houses will be collected with the use of maps, and detailed information about the location for each issue will to be collected at that time.

Compiling the information collected from City departments, statistics and the neighbourhoods themselves is a big job, and will likely require additional help. Help is available: Consultants can be hired, or students from Malaspina college, or other university or colleges might be contacted.

The results of the neighbourhood needs assessment should be compiled and circulated to City staff, council, and community. Publishing or posting summarized Fact Sheets on neighbourhood issues on the City's website are good ways to show the results of the assessment.

Non-Neighbourhood Planning Issues

Once the needs assessment is complete, the SNAP Team needs to make decisions regarding how to deal with all of the different issues that are identified. While the assessment is being initiated and conducted through the Community Planning Division with the idea of improving neighbourhood planning, not all of the issues identified in the assessment are appropriately dealt with through neighbourhood planning processes. Some issues may be better handled at a city-wide level or by a different department within the city.

City-wide Issues: Issues that pop up in more than one neighbourhood across the city may be dealt with in city-wide planning process.

Other City Departments: Technical Issues that do not require the amount and type of input that a neighbourhood planning process provides can simply be directed to other City departments.

In conjunction with City staff, the SNAP Team may want to set aside some time to discuss criteria for determining what constitutes a neighbourhood planning issue and a non-neighbourhood planning issue.

Examples of Criteria include:

- Is there a different mechanism for dealing effectively with the issue?
- Is it an issue that affects the entire city?
- Did this issue come up in a number of different neighbourhoods?
- Does this issue require a technical response?

In making these decisions, The SNAP Team should keep in mind the need to make a good match between the issue and the solution. Some issues are more sensitive by nature and will require strong neighbourhood involvement to reach good solutions. These issues should be dealt with through one of the two types of neighbourhood planning processes: comprehensive or issue-based.



HINTS & TIPS

It's A Question of Scale

Some issues that pop up during the needs assessment may be limited in terms of scope and location. While the issue may not fit into the category of city-wide issues, it may be too small for a full-blown Issue-based Plan. It is important to find creative solutions that best address the issue and make the best use of resources.

Community Grants are one such solution and are typically used to fund community art projects, public gardens, youth initiatives and small-scale environmental restoration actions are all examples of projects that can enhance neighbourhoods through partnerships. A neighbourhood-based organization, like a registered non-profit, is usually the recipient of the funds and administers the project. In Nanaimo, community grants are administered through the Finance Department.

Action

The needs assessment provides the foundation for the SNAP Team to strategically prioritize planning actions, issue by issue, across the city. Once the SNAP Team has shared the results of the needs assessment with the City and the community, it will then be ready for the next task: making choices.



HINTS & TIPS Needs Assessments

The neighbourhood needs assessment is a very useful tool for getting a good overview of cities' neighbourhoods, and therefore has been used by many cities. A quick internet search yields many great examples.

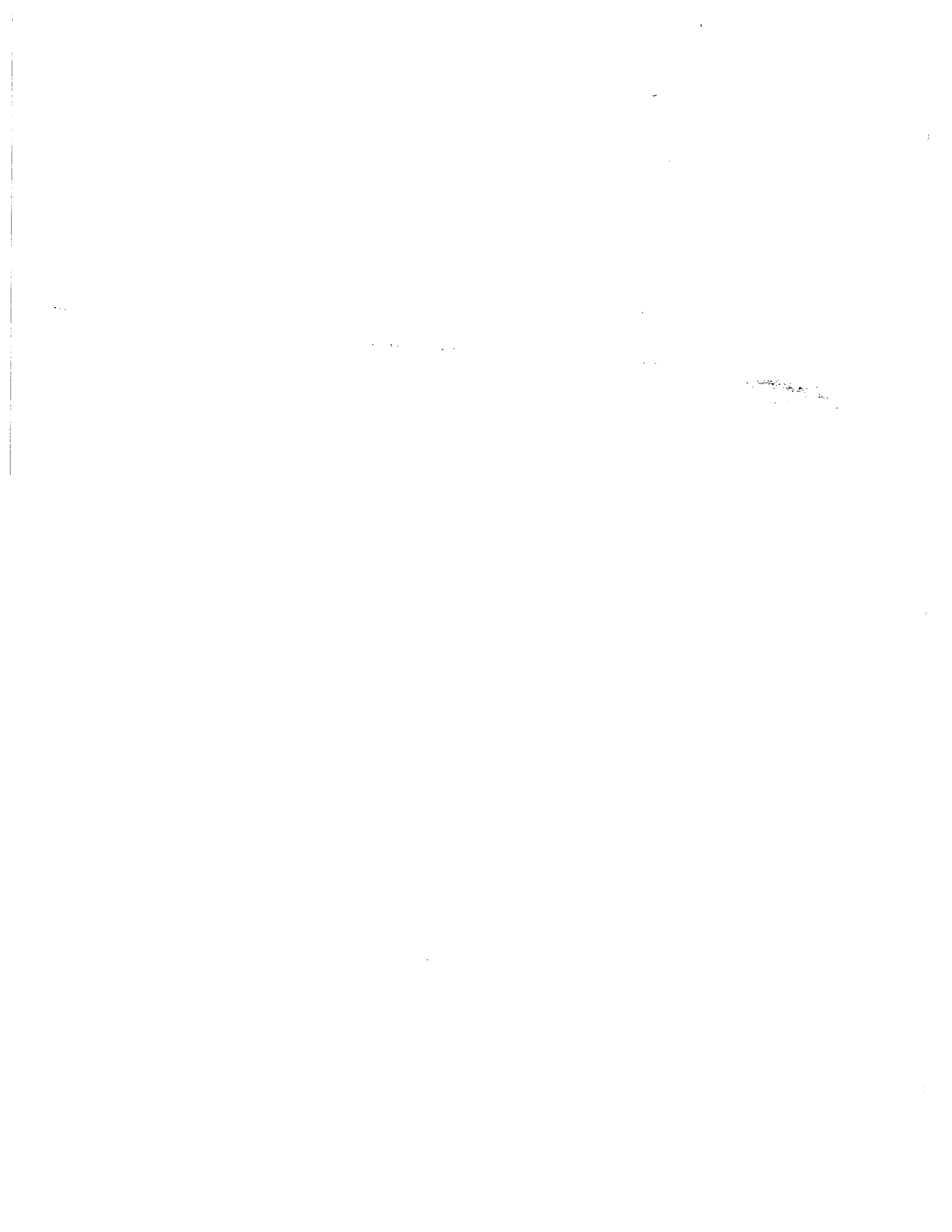
A Thorough Process: Kansas City developed a very thorough needs assessment process that has been borrowed by many other cities. <http://www.kcmo.org/planning.nsf/web/FOCUSSummaryReport?opendocument>

Procedure for Strong Participation:

The Seattle Community Network describes a process for needs assessment that puts the neighbourhood front and center <http://www.scn.org/ip/cds/cmp/modules/par-int.htm>

Tools for getting the neighbourhoods involved:

The Citizen Science Toolbox website describes numerous tools for getting the community involved. <http://www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/alpha-list.asp>



MAKING CHOICES

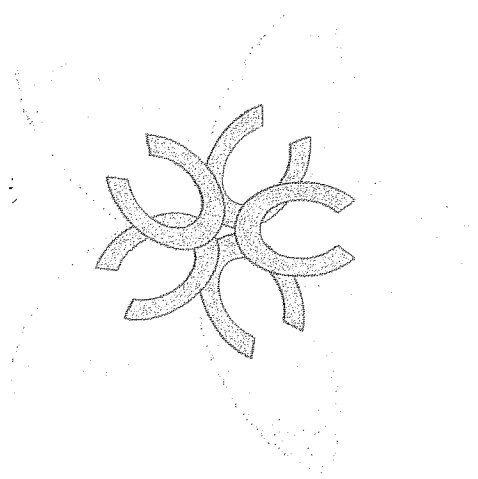
The SNAP Team is responsible for ranking the issues that come out of the needs assessment. This is a very important step because it seeks to openly identify the most pressing issues for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo, and then link those issues to Planning Areas in the City, which will then undergo planning processes. The result from this final step is a prioritized list of neighbourhoods along with the type of plan that is best suited to address the issues at hand, either issue-based or comprehensive. This final phase of *Getting Started* is expected to take three months.

The Purpose of Setting Priorities

As not all neighbourhood needs can be met at the same time, a prioritization exercise is necessary. Priority setting allows for a lively discussion around what the most important issues are in a city-wide context. The SNAP Team should be aware that this task is likely to involve sensitive discussions about values. Like comparing 'apples to oranges', the task of comparing the different issues identified in the needs assessment is going to be difficult. How should the needs for sidewalks in one Planning Area be compared to the need for affordable housing in another? The SNAP Team needs to maintain a city-wide perspective throughout the exercise to ensure that resources are distributed fairly and equitably. Ensuring a certain level of quality of life across the city can help to guide the SNAP Team in their decision-making.

General Procedure

The general procedure laid out here has been designed to allow for variability in the ranking given to different issues, and for a discussion around differences. The procedure relies on good communication and a collaborative approach among the SNAP Team members to establish a common vision. The Community Planner is to be present at each stage of the process, acting as a liaison and keeping information flowing.



Prioritizing

Two linked decisions will occur during this task: the SNAP Team needs to decide the prioritization of issues, and from that, a prioritized list of areas and/or neighbourhoods will be created.

1 Prioritizing Issues:

1. The SNAP Team is made up of representatives from PNAC, the Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network, City Staff, and City Council. Each of the representatives will go back to their respective groups and prioritize the list of issues identified in the needs assessment from their perspective.

The criteria for prioritizing should address basic needs first. Keeping in mind that as the purpose of the needs assessment is to increase equity, achieve balance, improve accountability, and make best use of resources, basic quality of life issues (such as health and safety) should be placed ahead of discretionary issues (such as aesthetics or recreation).

Efforts should be made to maintain a city-wide perspective during the priority setting, and each member of the SNAP team should take a proactive approach in moving towards a fair and equitable approach for ensuring good quality of life across the City.

2. The representatives will come back together as the SNAP Team and discuss the results of their ranking exercise. Differences and similarities will all be explored, and implications of different rankings will be discussed.

3. The SNAP Team will agree upon a finalized, ranked list of priorities for neighbourhood planning. This may be achieved through a variety of decision-making mechanisms, such as voting or by reaching consensus. (see **Hints & Tips: Making Decisions**)

4. The SNAP Team may decide to consult the community for feedback on the finalized list.

2 Prioritizing Planning Areas:

1. Once the prioritized list of issues has been completed, the issues will be matched back to the Planning Areas from which they came.

TIMELINE: Making Choices

CREATE THE SNAP
TEAM

1 MONTH

CITY-WIDE NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

3 - 4 MONTHS

MAKING CHOICES

Prioritizing

1 - 2 MONTHS

Choosing Plan Types

1 - 2 MONTHS

TOTAL TIME

3 - 4 MONTHS

Choosing Plan Types

Finally, the SNAP Team will make the choices that will guide neighbourhood planning over the following 5 years. At this point, Planning Areas have been identified and prioritized, according to the distribution of the highest priority issues across the city. All that remains is assigning the appropriate plan type, either issue-based or comprehensive, to these Planning Areas.

HINTS & TIPS Making Decisions

There are many different ways that groups can make decisions. You group should discuss and agree on guidelines for how you will make decisions during the planning process. Strategies include:

Straw Polling: This involves asking for a show of hands to see how the group feels about a particular issue. It is a quick check that can save a great deal of time.

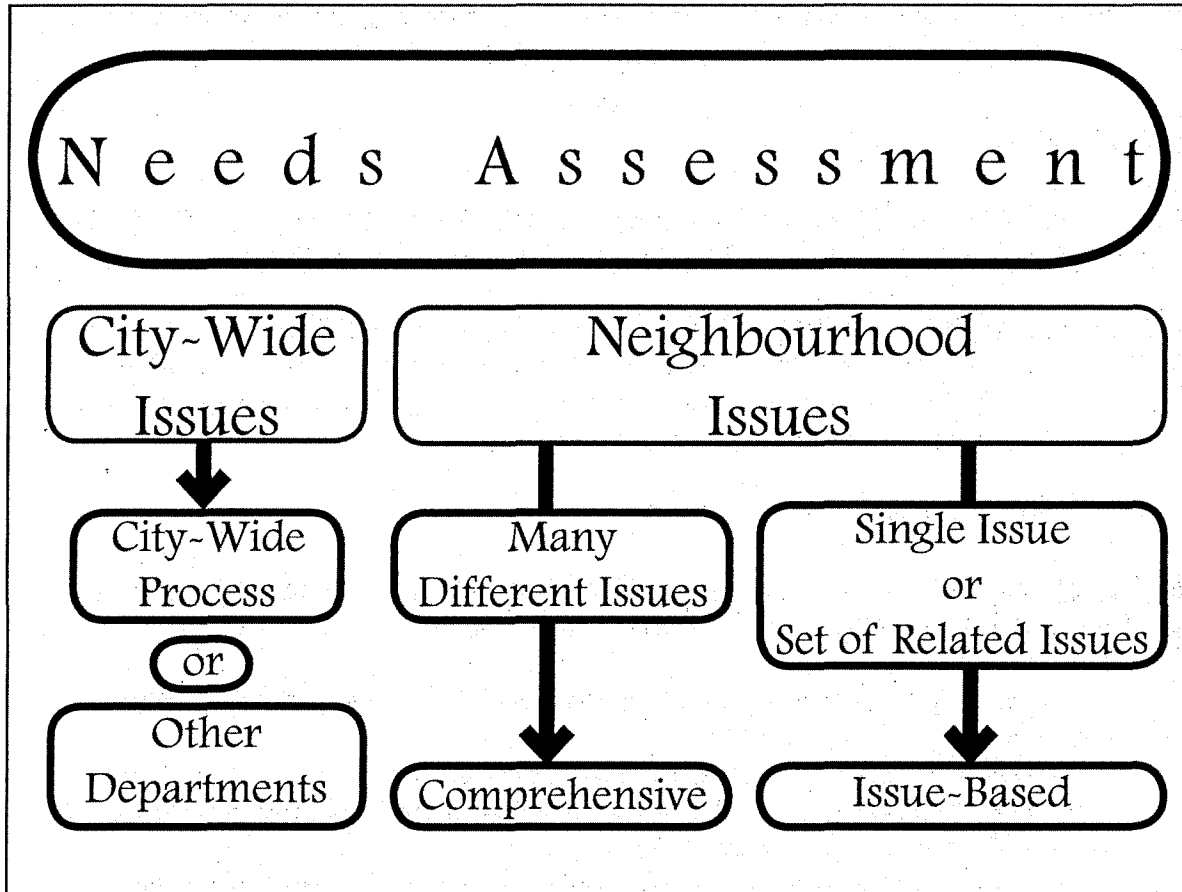
Voting: This is more formal than straw polling. Each person will formally vote on an issue. The group will need to establish rules before hand establishing who can vote, procedures for voting, and what constitutes a majority vote. For example, you might decide a motion will only succeed with a two-thirds majority. If rules are used, they should be simple and understood by everyone.

Consensus: A consensus process aims at bringing the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity. Consensus can take longer than other processes, but fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions.

Live with disagreements: Get agreement on the big picture, then turn to action. Don't exhaust yourself trying to achieve consensus on details.

Further Resources: http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/1_09_meet_decide.html & <http://www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/alpha-list.asp>

The Strategy Tree



This is a largely intuitive exercise based on the knowledge and experience gained during the needs assessment and priority setting stages. As illustrated in this diagram, the SNAP Team has essentially two options available to them: issue-based plans or comprehensive plans

An Issue-based Plan is just that - an issue, or set of closely related issues, that is specific to an area of Nanaimo. Based on the information received from the needs assessment, the location where this issue is most relevant will be known and understood. Issue-based plans do not necessarily need to coincide with Planning Area boundaries. Should any doubt exist as to the area affected by the issue raised through the needs assessment, further work will need to be done to create an appropriate boundary for the area impacted by that particular issue.

A Comprehensive Plan is appropriate for a number of issues, both related and unrelated, that exist within a larger geographic area. This might include both long and short-term issues and tangible and intangible concerns. The comprehensive neighbourhood plan will use Planning Area boundaries, and may include more than one Planning Area.

Final Decisions

The tasks set out for the SNAP Team are now complete - all that remains is for the results to be shared with the community and for Council to make the final decision.

The Community Planner will write a report to Council chronicling the process that the SNAP Team has undergone to reach decisions it recommends. This report should be presented with the final recommendation from the SNAP Team and will lay out the work plan for neighbourhood planning over the next five years.

Reporting to the Community

Once Council has made its decision, information can be shared with the community at large. The type of information that could be shared includes:

- The process that led to the creation of the neighbourhood planning strategy
- The creation of the SNAP Team
- The methods and outreach for the needs assessment
- The different strategies available: non-neighbourhood planning processes, issue-based plans, and comprehensive plans
- Next steps: the timeline for neighbourhood planning over the next 5 years.

A variety of methods can and should be used to share this information: Brochures can be created and distributed through city hall; Fact Sheets can be posted on the cities website; a web log (blog) can be created for neighbourhood planning; and/or a city-wide Open House can be held.

Action

The SNAP Team makes a recommendation to Council, delivering the final prioritized list for the City as a whole. Council will consider the prioritized issue and planning area lists as well as the planning strategy assigned to each issue and make a final decision.

TOOLBOX

Resources

Prioritization:

<http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/method104.htm>

Conflict Resolution:

The Search for Common Ground website provides this web-page entitled "Tips for Transforming Conflict". Visit this website for a new perspective on conflict and extensive resources.

http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_tips.html

The Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk, and Duane Berger. This book is an invaluable tool for facilitators and for anyone who needs to attend meetings. The techniques and tips provided in this book help to identify where and how conflict might arise and how to avoid it. It is available at your local bookstore and is published by New Society Publishers (ISBN: CAN 1-55092-255-6)

This website has a variety of useful documents available for downloading on the topic of negotiation, mediation and consensus-building.

<http://www.community-problem-solving.net/CMS/viewPage.cfm?pageId=211>

Consensus decision-making:

<http://www.npd-solutions.com/consensus.html>

CONCLUSION

Getting Started is the first phase in a new planning framework developed to improve neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo. The process works towards the goal of improving the efficient delivery of City services to neighbourhoods, while strengthening and building relationships.

Upon completing the tasks in *Getting Started*, the SNAP Team will have identified and communicated the goals for neighbourhood planning in Nanaimo over the following five years. From here neighbourhood planning will follow one of two possible paths: Issue-based Plans or Comprehensive Plans.

Hard work lies ahead - and with it the opportunity for creativity, initiative, and change. *Getting Started* sets the stage for that work to begin.

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