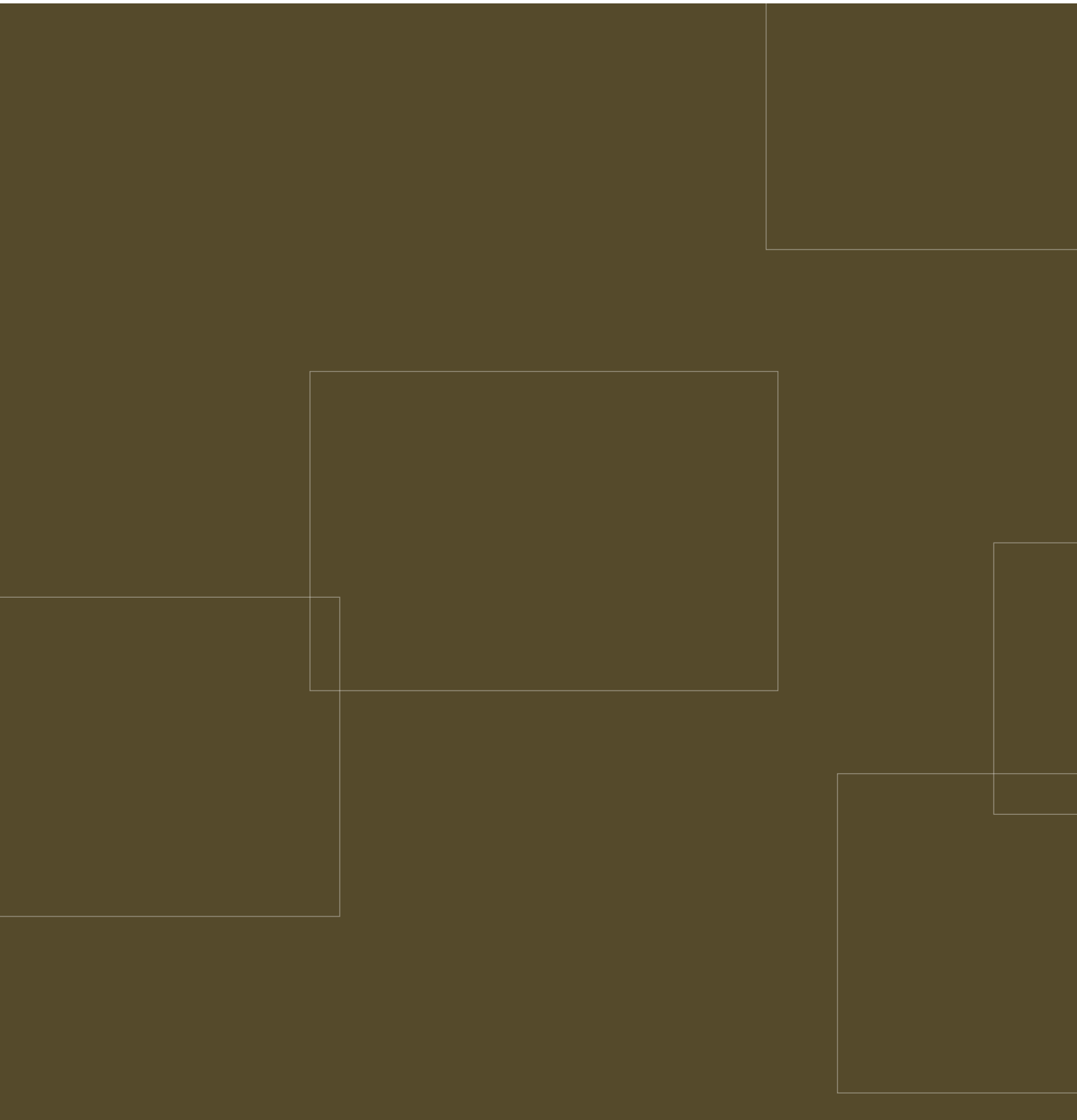




Embedding **Community Priorities** into Council Planning

Guidelines for the Integration of Community and Council Planning
May 2008



Prepared by Brendan Carins Consulting May 2008

Brendan Carins Consulting 
Community, Social and Council Planning

Designed by Johanna Villani Design

 **johannavillanidesign**

Preface

The **Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning** project is an initiative of the Local Government Professionals (LGPro) Corporate Planner's Network. This project has been funded through the Local Area Planning Support Program provided by the Victorian State Government's Department of Planning and Community Development, through Local Government Victoria.

The key objective of the project was to produce a set of guidelines to support the Victorian Local Government sector in the effective integration of Community and Council Planning. Further objectives of the project have been:

- To integrate the extensive activities and expertise in this area in one set of guidelines and bring the sector together around a common framework and shared learning from best practice
- To provide a broad framework and guidance for State Government Departments and other agencies working closely with Local Councils to engage and plan for local communities
- To provide effective links with other State Government sponsored and sector wide initiatives such as the MAV Lighthouse Project, and the Victorian Community Indicators Project
- To provide guidelines that assist in integrating community planning with land-use planning, social and health planning, and Council and corporate planning to support Councils in being better able to respond to the unique issues and key challenges in their municipalities such as: disadvantaged communities, rapid population growth and rural issues
- To enable all Councils to effectively share knowledge, while providing particular support for smaller Councils with limited resources, by providing information, guidance and much needed support, capacity building and assistance from the sector as a whole.

The guidelines have been designed to form part of a package with 3 other guides developed by LGPro through the Corporate Planner's Network between 2006 and 2008 on the topics of: Council Planning, an Organisational Approach to Best Value and Performance Monitoring and Reporting.

The project has been a collaboration between the LGPro Corporate Planners Network, the Community and Social Planner's Network (CASPN) and Local Government Victoria. The Steering Committee was further supported by a Reference Group containing representatives from State Government Departments, Victorian Local Governments, Community Indicators Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

The guidelines were prepared by Brendan Carins, a highly regarded consultant with extensive experience in this field.

Extensive consultation was undertaken as part of this project. This included:

- An initial consultation workshop with over 90 participants at the LGPro State Conference in February 2007.
- Consultation sessions at Network Meetings throughout 2007
- Regular consultation with key stakeholders
- Four consultation workshops held across the state in Geelong, Bendigo, Pakenham and Moonee Valley in December 2007, attended by more than 150 representatives from State and Local Government and other relevant agencies.

These guidelines also contain case studies and information from the research report entitled *Planning Together: lessons from local government community planning in Victoria*, prepared by Sue West and Hayden Raysmith for Local Government Victoria, November 2007. This report reviewed the community planning work of nine Victorian Councils utilising a self reporting tool. The nine Councils involved were: Ararat, Casey, Golden Plains, Hume, Loddon, Mitchell, Surf Coast, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges.

On behalf of the Steering Committee, I would like to thank everyone who has supported and participated in this project.

Chris Newman

Co-convenor LGPro Corporate Planner's Network
May 2008

Acknowledgements

The project consultant wishes to acknowledge the following contributors to the **Embedding Community Priorities in Council Planning** Project.

Funding for this project has been gratefully received from Local Government Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development, through the Local Area Planning Support Program.

An excellent collaboration between the LGPro Corporate Planners Network, the Community and Social Planners Network (CASPN) and Local Government Victoria provided the foundation for this project.

I would like to thank all the Steering Group members for their guidance and assistance over the course of this project and in particular to Chris Newman for his stewardship.

Members of the Steering Committee were:

Chris Newman

LGPro Corporate Planner's Network

Rebecca Haig

City of Maroondah Community and Social Planner's Network

Karen Watson

City of Stonnington Community and Social Planner's Network

Kerryn Stewart-Uden

LGPro Corporate Planner's Network

Chris Phoon

Local Government Victoria

In addition, I would like to thank the members of the Reference Group containing representatives from State Government Departments, Victorian Local Governments, Community Indicators Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) who acted as an advisory group during the course of this project.

The work of Hayden Raysmith and Sue West in the Local Government and Community Planning Project (2007) has been of major assistance and value to these guidelines.

I would also like to acknowledge the many participants at the four workshops held in December 2007 for their participation and contribution to the development of these guidelines.

Ross Goeman and Glenys Butler provided important contributions and feedback on earlier drafts of this document.

EJ Shu, Social Policy and Planning consultant, has provided invaluable research support and expertise in the development and completion of these guidelines, adding significant value to the final product.

Brendan Carins

Brendan Carins Consulting

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Overview of Guidelines

Readers of this document are likely to be asking one or more of the following questions:

1. What are Victorian Local Governments seeking to achieve with Community Planning?
2. What is Council Planning?
3. What are the key principles and practices of Community Planning?
4. Are there models of Community Planning?
5. How are the outcomes from Community Planning integrated with Council Planning?
6. What are the benefits, challenges and barriers in achieving integration?

This document has set out to respond to these questions and to 'demystify' the principles, processes and frameworks relating to Community and Council Planning. It is intended that the improved awareness will help readers to identify avenues and opportunities for integrated Community and Council Planning in their own settings.

1. What are Victorian Local Governments seeking to achieve with Community Planning?

Victorian Local Governments have embraced Community Planning to support their governance structures. The practice of Community Planning **strengthens local democracy**, particularly in terms of:

- Increasing the **responsiveness** of local policy and strategy;
- Facilitating community **engagement**; and
- Increasing government **accountability and transparency**.

If strengthening local governance is a desired outcome of Community Planning, then there are two points on the planning 'map' where Community Planning is likely to be of most use to Councils.

The first of these is at the **visioning or agenda-setting** level, where community values and priorities are investigated, developed and crystallized into a defined set of statements or goals.

The second is at the finer-grained level where **specific actions and strategies are checked** back against these priorities, and where outcomes can be assessed against indicators of success.

For some local governments the post-amalgamation environment has required a re-negotiation of the relationship between local government and its community. For others, impetus has resulted from dramatic community change, such as rapid population growth and in-migration.

Councils are involved in Community Planning in quite strategic and targeted ways. Whilst the following objectives are not exhaustive they do provide some of the major factors as to why Victorian local governments have become heavily involved in Community Planning. Indeed, why it has become core business! This includes the following objectives:

i. Expanding the policy agenda

Councils are using Community Planning to set high level policy, or what might be considered the vision, aspirations, and priorities of the municipality and/or smaller areas within. In doing so, Councils are using Community Planning to transcend the limitations of the Council Plan, which as a four-year plan has limited scope to set out higher-order and longer term agendas.

ii. Trying to do more with less

Principles of New Public Management require that Councils do more with less. Councils are turning to Community Planning in order to go beyond their own limitations of time and resources. By recognizing that different communities are a valuable planning resource, Councils can indeed 'do more with less' and can add value to their strategic planning work.

iii. Building community capacity and participation

Councils are building capacity within the community to organise and to undertake visioning work, which in turn helps nurture community leaders, facilitates community participation and engagement and promotes social capital. At the same time, Councils are educating the community about local government responsibilities and activities, and managing expectations in relation to fostering change and delivering services.

iv. Fostering a Learning organisation

Councils recognise that the professional expertise and skills associated with Community Planning are often situated within particular Council divisions (Community Development or Social Planning), compared with divisions such as Asset management or Engineering, which may not have traditionally seen Community Planning as part of their core business. By setting requirements for Community Planning, Councils are developing and embedding this expertise across a broad spectrum of Council departments, contributing to a learning organisation.

v. Strengthening partnerships with community at multiple levels

Councils are building and nurturing partnerships with multiple communities and organisations, including government departments and regional offices, non-government organisations, special interest groups, industry groups and residents. They are creating relationships that can be drawn upon in both broad-scale municipal planning exercises as well as finer-grained strategy development and evaluation. In turn, Community Planning has the potential to increase community ownership of Council processes and decision-making, and therefore garners a greater level of community support for (or at least comprehension of) Council decisions.

vi. Exploring innovative approaches to integrated planning with State Government Departments

The practice and outcomes from Community Planning provide the basis for Councils to explore innovative approaches to integrated planning. In particular, Community Planning provides improved opportunities for State Government departments and regional offices to engage and plan with Councils, based on identified community priorities. This encourages an integrated approach to planning.

vii. Capturing information and knowledge

By doing Community Planning, Councils are building an evidence or 'knowledge' base that can inform a multitude of processes. This can range from scanning and synthesizing the priorities of the municipality as a whole to capturing the aspirations of smaller or sub-communities (defined geographically, culturally, demographically, or by role such as traders or students, etc).

2. What is Council Planning?

At the centre of Council Planning is the Council Plan. The Council Plan provides the strategic direction for a Council's actions and activities over a four-year period – **the Council Priorities**. It contains strategic objectives that guide Council actions and strategic indicators that monitor the performance of the organization in achieving its objectives.

Across Victorian local governments the policy landscape is dominated by three key instruments: The Council Plan, the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP). Together, these three policy and strategic planning documents have a major influence on the policy and planning directions of local governments.

The hierarchy and importance of strategies and plans varies across local governments.

The strategic framework of local governments has a decisive influence on the process of resource allocation and performance management. A clear and transparent strategic framework that identifies the major linkages and processes for Council decision making is the foundation of Council Planning.

The capacity to embed community priorities into Council Planning is often dependent on how effectively the strategic framework is implemented across the organisation. Most importantly, a clear and understood strategic framework is a necessary organisational pre-requisite to ensuring that the outcomes from Community Planning inform Council Planning.

In addition to the major strategies and plans identified above, Councils have numerous strategic planning requirements, many of which have community consultation as part of these strategies. This also involves significant Council resources in consultation effort.

The result is that municipalities are involved in a constant stream of consultation with their communities, extending from individual services through to policy and strategy development. The capacity of local governments to have good systems in place for the co-ordination, storage and analysis of community consultation information will have a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of Council Planning. The quality of this information and its use in Council Planning is even stronger when a collaborative planning culture exists within a local government.

A planning culture is facilitated when a council organization has a genuine commitment and devotes resources to both Council Planning and Community Planning. This will be reflected in the organisational structure through a senior officer with responsibilities for the Council Plan and with Community Planning/Development recognized as a line management responsibility.

City of Casey

Council Planning differs from Community Planning in that it is the process by which Council sets priorities arising from:

- Its various forms of community engagement, (including Community Planning once this process is embedded), and development of specialist plans (such as the Municipal Public Health Plan);
- Federal and State Government policies; and
- Casey's Long Term Plans (including Casey C21).

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

3. What are the key principles and practices of Community Planning?

Community Planning is shaped less by a pre-defined framework and more by a values-based approach. As such, Community Planning is best understood as being underpinned by a set of **core principles** that assist in identifying community priorities. These principles encompass the key values, objectives and considerations of Community Planning, and provide a broad set of parameters within which individual Community Planning projects are undertaken. Four key principles are outlined below:

a) Community engagement and participation for wide community involvement.

Community engagement and participation is a principle that individuals and groups are able to exchange views and influence policy and decision-making. Community engagement can occur on several levels. The continuum ranges from minimum participation at the information level (informing the community) which is a one-way process about a policy or service initiative through to maximum community participation (empower the community) where communities share responsibility for making decisions and accountability for the outcomes of those decisions.

A clear objective of Community Planning is to seek to obtain the views and engage with a wide cross section of the community, comprising young persons, older persons, families, CALD communities, people with disabilities, single person households, trader and business groups, sporting clubs; etc. A rigorous Community Planning process seeks the views and provides opportunities for every member of the community to participate. This often requires a combination of traditional and innovative approaches to community engagement, based on local knowledge of communities.

b) Understanding community priorities and aspirations

Understanding community aspirations further highlights the principle of engagement described above but it also underscores the importance of detailed information-gathering as part of capturing community information and knowledge. 'Community visioning' describes the process through which a community develops a strategic vision for its future and then plans how to achieve it. Community visioning brings people together to develop a shared image of the future, along with identified actions and strategies.

c). Building social capital (community development)

The relative success of Community Planning is measured in the benefits delivered to local communities, in particular community connectedness and improving social wellbeing. As such, Community Planning can be understood as having a key community development role; most specifically in the fostering of **social capital**. Community Planning provides a contemporary basis and rationale for a community development role for local governments. This is directly related to a renewal and sustainability of their governance role.

d) Tracking community outcomes

Community indicators provide a framework to find out what are the key community concerns and needs and for local government to compile a more detailed and comprehensive base of information on its community. This information can then be used to shape policy and strategic directions at the local level, assist the alignment of services to real community needs and to highlight issues of local concern to other tiers of government and to the wider community.

In a local government context, community indicators can be used:

- To identify and highlight community priorities;
- To inform planning, advocacy and service delivery; and/or
- To build upon and integrate with broader Council Planning processes.

Indicators are usually presented in line with a community priority and measured against a desired trend.

See for example, the City of Moreland, Indicators for Health, Safety and Wellbeing,

www.indicators.moreland.vic.gov.au

and Community Indicators Victoria (CIV)

www.communityindicators.net.au

The above principles underpin and guide the practice of Community Planning. Common features or practices of community planning that emerge from the case studies of Victorian Local Governments and Community Planning include:

- An evolutionary process that changes and develops over time as each council, and their communities, gain experience and confidence;
- Endorsed by councillors and senior management as a legitimate and important function for local government;
- Guided by a set of community planning policies and processes separate from councils' other planning policies;

- Intended to be integrally linked to Councils other planning processes;
- Generally characterised by a process that includes high levels of community engagement and a desire for community ownership of plans;
- A staged process which includes the production of a plan as an outcome of Stage one and its implementation in Stage two; and
- Supported with Council resources (sometimes this is existing resources and sometimes additional).

Source: H. Raysmith and S. West, Planning Together: Lessons from local government community planning in Victoria, 2007.

City of Wyndham

The community planning process needs the following five ingredients to ensure a high quality outcome (in no particular order):

- adequate (and realistic) financial and administrative resources
- the full support from the Council's CEO
- an elected Council which is brave enough to facilitate an independent planning process over which it does not have total control
- in-house professional community planning knowledge (or the preparedness to buy-in these skills)
- community members with the aptitude, personality and skill to drive the process.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.



4. Are there models of Community Planning?

Four different models of Community Planning were identified in the Local Government and Community Planning project and these models are displayed in the following table.

Table 1 – Models of community planning

Model	Key Features	Plans
Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long term outlook. Municipal wide plan. Sits above Council plan. Strongly led by Council. Catchment for community engagement strategy is the whole municipality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Community Plan 1997 - 2015, Wyndham City Council. Vision 2020, Shire of Yarra Ranges. Hume City Plan 2030, Hume City Council.
Municipal wide partnership planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium term outlook. Municipal wide plan. Sits under Council plan. Led by Council in partnership with key stakeholder organizations with shared responsibility for outcomes. Sector specific eg health, education. Strong agency engagement and less direct engagement of residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipal Public and Community Health Strategic Plan 2007 - 2012, Hume City Council. Learning Together Strategy 2004 – 2008, Hume City Council.
Partnership based place management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium term outlook. Sub LGA plan responding to a set of local circumstances (accelerated population growth). Sits under Council plan and once completed, will inform future Council plans. Led by Council in partnership with key stakeholder organizations with shared responsibility for outcomes. Strong agency engagement. Variable engagement of residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cranbourne Community Plan, City of Casey Mitchell South Place Management Project, Mitchell Shire Council.
'Township' planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short to medium term outlook. Township level plan – 500-3,000 people. Feeds up into Council plan through a bottom up process. Facilitated by Council with strong resident leadership and ownership of plans and their implementation (variable). Limited agency involvement. Strong engagement of residents and other community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Township Community Plan, Golden Plains Shire Council. Township Community Plan, Loddon Shire Council. Township Community Action Plans, Ararat Rural City Council. Lorne CBI, Casuarina Project, eForum, Torquay Volunteer Engagement Project, Surf Coast Shire Council. Township Community Plan, Wellington Shire Council.

Source: H. Raysmith and S. West, Planning Together: lessons from local government community planning in Victoria, 2007.

Which model is most appropriate for your local government? Determining which model may be the most appropriate can be informed by the following:

- What are the objectives of the Community Planning process?
- What role will the outcomes of the community planning process play in future Council and community activity?
- Have the elected Council and the Chief Executive Officer developed a sufficient understanding of the process of Community Planning in their local community to anticipate (a) the timeline for the process, (b) the diversity of views they can expect to hear and (c) the relationship between Council and other community stakeholders as the Community Planning process proceeds?
- What is the level of the planning? Municipal wide, township level or small area level?
- What will be the governance structure?
- Who will be responsible for implementation?
- What are the intended outcomes?
- What are the range of community engagement processes to be used?
- Which stakeholders are central to the process?
- What information will you need?
- What is the process for organisational co-ordination?
- How will cross-organisational support for community planning be attained?
- How will the findings and outcomes from the process be communicated back to all participants and the community?

5. How are the outcomes from Community Planning integrated with Council Planning?

The merging of Community Planning principles with those of conventional Council Planning **does not result in a 'one size fits all' approach to integrated planning**. Instead, this integration is a highly creative process which takes its direction from local needs and priorities, local constraints on resources and time, and the broad spectrum of experiences and ideas that are contributed at both Council and community levels.

Effective integration of community priorities into Council Planning requires a combination of:

- Organisational leadership (Councillors, CEO and Senior Management) that facilitates a collaborative planning and learning culture;
- Organisational structure and resources that ensures a high profile to Council Planning and Community Planning;
- Co-ordinated and integrated processes for major community consultation;
- Clear and transparent strategic framework that identifies the connections between community priorities and Council Planning and budgeting;
- Councils' strategic documents such as the MSS, the MPHP, Structure Plans and Community Plans which are underpinned by Community Planning principles and practices;
- Individual/Service Unit/Departmental business and workplans that align with corporate strategic objectives, which in turn are informed and guided by community priorities; and
- Flexibility and capacity to respond to community priorities at both the strategic and operational levels.

6. What are the benefits, challenges and barriers in achieving integration?

Benefits

The integration of Community Planning principles into Council Planning activities presents a number of benefits for communities, local government, State government departments and agencies, and for local service providers. These include:

- Facilitates development of Integrated Planning Framework. Many Victorian councils struggle with connecting the array of plans they are required to complete into a consistent and clear strategic approach for their organisation. Community Planning principles and processes assist to identify community themes and key priorities that can be incorporated in the Council Plan and other major plans.
- Promotes joint planning with State Government departments and agencies on addressing community priorities and monitoring community outcomes.
- Provides strategic direction for Councillors. A Community Plan captures key community issues and priorities and can be used by the elected representatives to inform their opinion and to set long term directions for the municipality/area.
- Builds consensus for community priorities. It clarifies the most important issues, seeks to find the common ground and use this for action planning.
- Provides a positive catalyst to bring communities together, to focus on positives and opportunities rather than problems of the past.
- Improves community understanding on the role and processes of local government, its capacity and limitations.
- Promotes community development, particularly in community networks and fosters sustainable communities by encouraging stronger attachments to areas that people have helped to create. It fosters a process on identity of place and other attachments that are important for local identity.

City of Hume

The approach taken in these plans, and their integration with Council planning and budget cycles has had the following benefits:

- Consolidation of internal and external partnerships to deliver outcomes that are aligned with the community's priorities;
- Improved channels of communication to the community; and
- Levering additional funds from the State Government (for example, the health planning process).

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

Challenges and Barriers

Key challenges for local governments in achieving integration include:

- The current strategic planning demands on local governments;
- Levels of 'disconnect' between the Executive Management and policy and planning staff in Councils;
- Organisational arrangements/structure and capacity of local governments;
- Variable responses from key stakeholders;
- Implementation and follow-through;
- Lack of recognition and legitimation by the State government of the role of local governments in Community Planning; and
- Effectiveness of community engagement processes.

A major barrier for many Councils is how to translate the broad community vision into a set of viable strategies, particularly when this entails a prioritising of some ideas and dismissal of others. This issue has implications for local governance, as a dismissal of community ideas can undermine community confidence.

It is clear that this barrier often arises **because key constraints and limitations – the ‘givens’– are not brought to the table in the earliest days of the process.** Doing so will not only help inform communities about Council’s planning frameworks and activities (the education role), but will ensure that policy informed by community priorities is based on a practical assessment of constraints and opportunities.

In principle, Council’s specific goals (in the Council Plan) will be aligned to the broader, collaborative goals and priorities of the community (as expressed in the Community Plan). However, Councils have obligations under state law or policy which might be less than perfectly attuned to the aspirations of the local community.

Another related issue is the matter of the balance of responsibilities at the implementation phase. When **community expectations exceed Council’s actual capacity for undertaking project oversight, administration, service delivery** and so on there is the possibility for disillusionment and frustration to overshadow any positive gains. As above, it is crucial that if multiple parties are engaged in developing strategic responses to a shared problem, that the lines of responsibility and shared implementation be very clearly delineated from the outset.



Glossary of Terms

Over the course of writing these Guidelines it became apparent that many of the commonly used terms in planning could be accorded a range of meanings depending on the context. While these different meanings often overlap or share a common intent, a glossary of terms has been included in this document as a way to provide some clarity around the intended meaning of these terms as they relate to this project.

Alignment

Arrangement or position. For the purposes of this paper, alignment will refer to the range of processes that occur for Community Planning and the processes for Council Planning.

Community

An organised political, municipal, or social body; body of people having religion, profession, etc. in common. (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, sixth edition).

"...a set of people who have some common characteristics that allow a unique identity and relationships to develop.... People in a community associate through a web of relationships that allows them to exchange views, resources and information. This web is reinforced by community structures and leadership, and forms the basis of the community's sense of identity". (Social Planning Guidelines for Queensland Local Government, Page 23).

Community Engagement and Participation

- Community Consultation
- Community Participation
- Community Engagement
- Community Involvement

Is community consultation the same as community participation, community engagement or community involvement? All of these terms are closely linked with the community strengthening approach of local governments.

This paper is defining community engagement and participation as principles of Community Planning and Council Planning. Community consultation will be referred to as a process (action) to achieve the principle of community engagement and participation. Consultation is therefore one of the processes on a continuum to achieve community engagement and participation. The framework for community and public participation, as developed by the International Association for Public Participation, will be referred to later in this paper to illustrate this point.

Community Plan

Document based on extensive community participation that outlines a community vision, priorities and actions generally ranging from 5-20 years for a municipality or designated local area, such as a suburb, neighbourhood or township and community group.

Community Planning

Based on a set of principles, processes and products to produce a vision and key priorities for a municipality, designated area or community group. It is based on the involvement and participation of community members and open to any resident or stakeholder within a given area and encompasses multiple objectives including social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives.

Community Strengthening

Any sustained effort to increase the connectedness, active engagement and partnership among members of the community, community groups and organisations in order to enhance social, economic and environmental objectives. (Dept. for Victorian Communities)

Council Plan

The Council Plan will specify the objectives, resources and performance indicators for the council for the next four years. A Council Plan must be prepared every four years and comprises Strategic Objectives, Strategic Indicators and a Strategic Resource Plan.

Council Planning

Based on key frameworks for municipal wide strategic planning and policy development. This includes the Council Plan, The Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP), the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS), and all other strategies, plans and policies that a municipality develops, some of which may be aligned and integrated with a Community Planning approach.

Integration

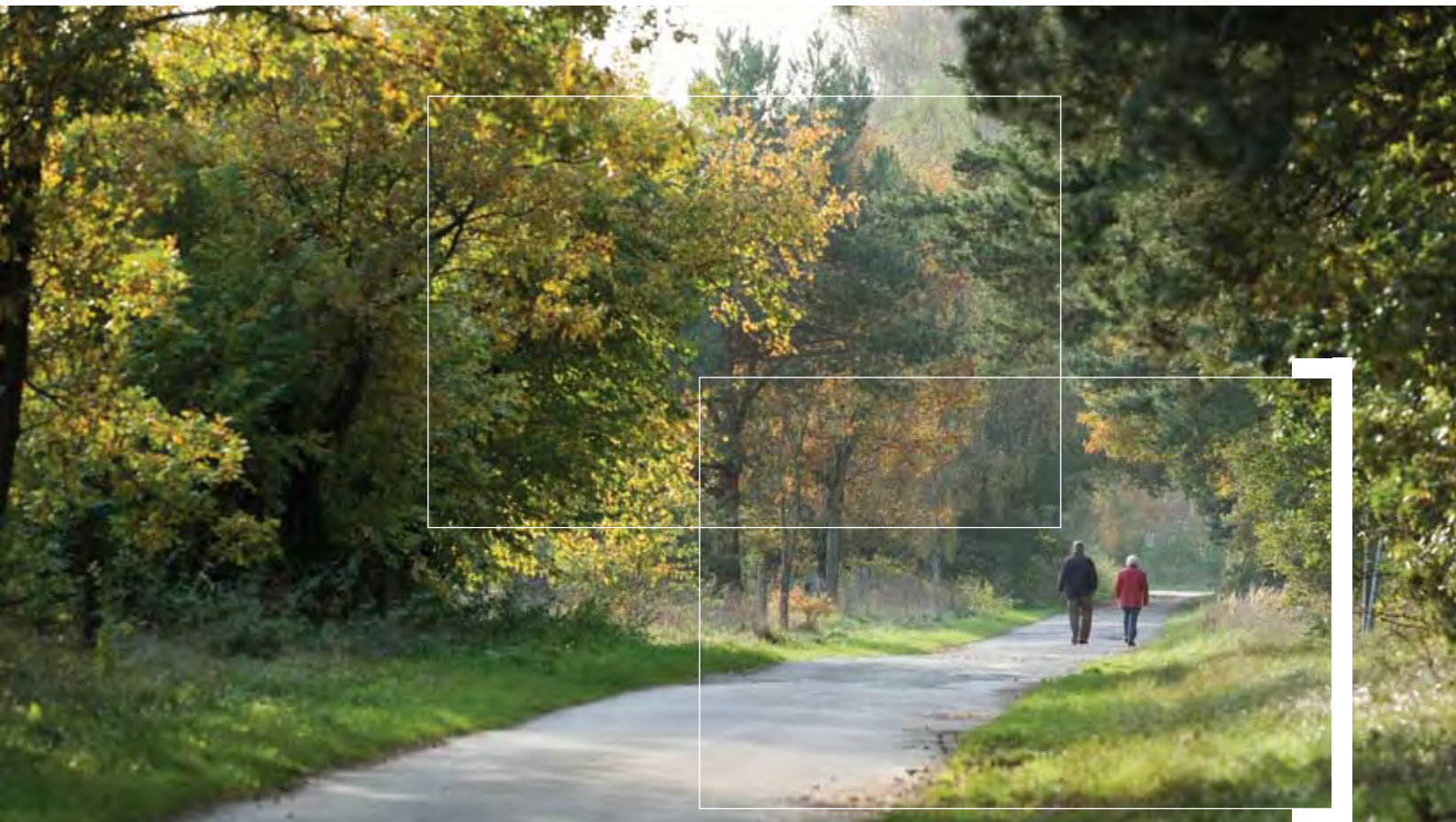
The act or instance of combining into an integral whole (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 6th edition). In the context of this document, integration will refer to the degree of linkage and connection between plans.

Social Planning

Social planning is the practise of strategic planning applied to addressing identified social objectives (Social Planning Chapter, Planning Institute of Australia). Social planners study community needs, examine the social impacts of development, and design strategies to enhance and benefit the community.

Acronyms

CIV	Community Indicators Victoria
DHS	Department of Human Services
DPCD	Department of Planning and Community Development
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
LGPro	Local Government Professionals
LPPF	Local Planning Policy Framework
MSS	Municipal Strategic Statement
MPHP	Municipal Public Health Plan
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
P&E	Planning and Environment (Act)
SPPF	State Planning Policy Framework
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association



1. Background and context

Increasingly, local government authorities are being encouraged to adopt Community Planning principles as part of their Council Planning activities. For some, this shift reflects an emphasis on improving government responsiveness to community needs, while for others it provides a way to improve concrete outcomes such as community strength and wellbeing. The following section provides an overview of this trend towards Community-Council Planning at the international, national and state level, with the aim of providing a picture of the diverse policy and program initiatives that form the background and context to these Guidelines.

1.1 International

United Nations – Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is a United Nations initiative aimed at implementing sustainable development at the local level. LA21 program comprises systems and processes to integrate environmental, economic and social development. Founded on a strong partnership between local government and the community, the progress towards local sustainable development is guided by the preparation of a long term strategic action plan that integrates existing policies and programs and an agreed future direction.

What distinguishes LA21 from other planning processes is that it attempts to encourage the active involvement of the community to determine and implement actions for local sustainable development. It is particularly important that those groups within the community (e.g. Indigenous people, youth, migrant groups, women) which have previously had little role in the planning process, are included.

Local governments play an important role through the LA21 framework by helping communities to understand sustainability; by encouraging debate on sustainability issues; by leading the LA21 planning process; by improving their own operations; by forming strong local partnerships; and by implementing action within the community to make their area more sustainable.

UK Local Government Act

In the United Kingdom, the Local Government Act 2000 has required each principal council in England and Wales to prepare a community strategy to promote and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. A process of plan rationalisation for local authorities is also occurring in conjunction with the development of Community Strategies. Community Planning was given a statutory framework by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

The UK Government has put in place a number of mechanisms as part of a policy objective for Sustainable Communities. These mechanisms include:

- Local Strategic Partnership (LSP): Co-ordination of local private, voluntary and community sectors to both facilitate and implement the sustainable community strategy in an area, to turn the vision of a sustainable community into a reality;
- Sustainable Community Strategy: Creates a long-term, sustainable vision in an area and sets the agenda for priorities in the local area agreement; and
- Local Area Agreement (LAA): A three year 'contract' between a local area (represented by the local authority and other partners through the local strategic partnership) and central Government to deliver particular priorities as set out in its sustainable community strategy.

A recent evaluation of the development of community strategies in the UK has indicated ongoing tension between local priorities/needs and national targets. This evaluation identified that community strategies have added value in relation to a range of process oriented outcomes and that the closer alignment of plans with the community strategy has been facilitated through the development of performance management systems that are used across a number of different plans as a key mechanism for integration.

New Zealand – Long Term Council Community Plan

In New Zealand, a new and critical area for local government is a requirement for councils to develop a **Long Term Council Community Plan**. This plan requires local authorities to focus on the community as a whole and the actions that central and local government, the private sector and community groups can collectively achieve. Councils will need to have a greater awareness of their communities and priority issues and to have stronger emphasis on the use of community indicators and outcome measurement. The Auckland Long Term Council Community Plan provides a user friendly overview of this approach.

It is worth noting in both the UK and New Zealand that central governments have put in place a legislative requirement for local governments to carry out formal Community Planning processes and for these to be integrated with their Council Planning requirements.

1.2 Australia

Across Australia, Community Planning has gained new prominence over the past five-ten years, with local governments in most states incorporating the principles and processes of Community Planning into their Council Planning. In NSW, for example, there is a legislative requirement for local governments to produce a Social or Community Plan every five years. The emphasis of these plans, however, is generally to set the direction for the community services of local governments. In Tasmania, Partnership Agreements have been developed that set out actions and timeframes that will be undertaken to address agreed key social, environmental and economic activities between the State Government and Local Governments. Partnership Agreements are entered into for a three year period. The **Governments in Partnership Annual Report to Parliament on State-Local Government Partnership Agreements** (Nov. 2006) notes that: 'The Partnership Agreements have provided the mechanism for State agencies to work with Local Government to develop and implement plans and strategies that address local priorities, in key areas such as economic development, tourism, culture and the arts, events, positive ageing and sport and recreation. Improved community safety is a significant area of achievement of Partnership Agreements. It is common for them to include initiatives in relation to emergency management, crime prevention, Inter-Agency Support Panels and community road safety.' (page 15).

1.3 Victoria

The Bracks Government placed considerable emphasis on community connectedness and community strengthening as pivotal for the future development of communities. This has informed the planning and practice of many local governments.

The language and values of community connectedness, social capital, community building and social development that underpin the themes or strategic directions of the Council Plans of many Victorian local governments are broadly consistent with the state government policy objective of community strengthening.

Current trends and developments in the area of Community Planning and Council Planning in Victoria include the following:

- State government policy objective of community strengthening to remain a key principle across Community Planning and Council Planning;
- Recognition that successful Community Planning contributes to community strengthening. Community Planning as a range of activities that contribute to the attainment of community strengthening; (Strong Communities: Ways Forward);
- Continued prominence for a Council led Community Plan (Strong Communities: Ways Forward); and
- Opportunities for improved alignment of Council Planning processes and integration/rationalisation of plans (Joint State-Local Planning Project).

Interwoven with the Community Planning emphasis in Victorian local governments has been the Community Strengthening policy objective under the Bracks Government. The clearest expression of this objective was reflected in the 2005 release of **A Fairer Victoria: Creating Opportunities and Addressing Disadvantage**, which outlined the social policy priorities for the Bracks Government, including a renewed approach for local and regional planning that has direct implications for local governments.



Strategy 14 of A Fairer Victoria, Developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level, has included a number of reforms for State and Local Governments. The reforms have included aligning the State Government's administrative boundaries with local government boundaries and establishing eight standard departmental regions.

This was followed by the establishment of Regional Management Forums (RMF) in each of Victoria's eight new administrative regions. Each Regional Management Forum includes a State Departmental Secretary, Local Government Chief Executive Officers and the Regional Managers of State Departments and the Victoria Police. The Forums have developed work plans to initiate regionally identified issues and priorities.

Community Project Teams are another approach to linking government effort at the local level and partnering with stakeholders, such as local government and the community sector, in developing place-based projects. Teams will implement priority projects identified and agreed by the Regional Management Forums and work under their direction.

Mapping the extent of activities under the community strengthening umbrella is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some of the major initiatives and projects are:

- Community Building Initiative;
- Victorian Community Support Grants;
- Community Building Demonstration Projects;
- Neighbourhood Renewal Program;
- Transport Connections; and
- Community Renewal.

All of the above programs have been developed in partnership with local governments and local communities, often based or informed by the principles and processes of Community Planning and Council Planning. The emphasis of these programs is generally on small localities and suburbs, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst this approach has provided a number of important local community benefits its wider applicability to Council Planning is less apparent.

In August 2006, the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Victorian Communities released its report titled – **Strong Communities: Ways Forward**. This report was developed in response to the then Minister for Victorian Communities, the Hon. John Thwaites, seeking advice on successful initiatives in community building, barriers to success and lessons learnt. The report highlights a number of essential elements for community strengthening that include:

- A local government led, inclusive Community Planning process as the key mechanism by which communities' interests, aspirations, needs, visions, values, and priorities are articulated and actioned; and
- A place-based focus where community and whole-of-government priorities can be negotiated, integrated, resourced and made sustainable.

The report recommends that the Department for Victorian Communities continue to work with the MAV and the VLGA to help all local governments work with their communities in establishing and putting an inclusive community plan into action.

In addition to **A Fairer Victoria and Strong Communities: Ways Forward**, there have been a number of other state and local government funded projects and initiatives in recent years that include:

- Victorian Community Indicators Project, a VicHealth funded initiative (2005/2006);
- **Indicators of Community Strength 2006** (2005; 2004), Dept for Victorian Communities;
- Professor Mark Considine, **Building Connections - Community Strengthening and Local Government in Victoria**, (August 2004);
- Professor Bill Russell, **Joint State-Local Planning Project**, (2005);
- **Community Strengthening in Local Government Continuous Improvement Review** (2006); and
- **Lighthouse Project**, an initiative of the MAV.

These initiatives are outlined in Appendix 2.

2. The Benefits of Integrated Community Planning and Council Planning

The integration of Community Planning principles into Council Planning activities presents a number of benefits for communities, local governments, state government departments and agencies, and for local service providers. While the lists below are not exhaustive, they set out the key benefits that can be obtained from implementing an integrated approach to Community-Council Planning.

2.1 Communities

- Sets out a long term vision for the community. The resultant plan is community based and provides a platform for managing change.
- Builds consensus for community priorities. It clarifies the most important issues, seeks to find the common ground and use this for action planning.
- Provides a positive catalyst to bring communities together, to focus on positives and opportunities rather than problems of the past.
- Improves community understanding on the role and processes of local government, its capacity and limitations.
- Promotes community development, particularly in community networks and fosters sustainable communities by encouraging stronger attachments to areas that people have helped to create. It fosters a process on identity of place and other attachments that are important for local identity.
- Assists local community agencies through the provision of up to date and accessible information for submissions, fund raising and other work.
- Brings together a range of varied groups, agencies and individuals to work towards a desired future which has positive aspects to contribute to networking and community development.
- Informs communities of challenges and opportunities – provides a realistic outlook of current and likely future trends and outcomes in a municipality, avoids wish lists and develops a sense of shared responsibility.

2.2 Local government

- Facilitates development of Integrated Planning Framework. Many Victorian councils struggle with connecting the array of plans they are required to complete into a consistent and clear strategic approach for their organisation. Community Planning principles and processes assist to identify community themes and key priorities that can be incorporated in the Council Plan and other major plans.
- Provides strategic direction for Councillors. A Community Plan captures key community issues and priorities and can be used by the elected representatives to inform their opinion and to set long term directions for the municipality/area. The information within a Community Plan contains both an evidence base and significant community views to assist Councillors in setting the direction for the council based on wide community input.
- Ensures alignment of community indicators with organisational strategic indicators in the Council Plan and other major council strategies. Indicators are tools that measure and communicate information about trends and events and are a guide to policy and action. They may inform council about areas of achievement or where strategies need to be revised. They can also be used to inform the community about progress in terms of goals and outcomes. They can be incorporated into all facets of an organisation's strategic planning processes and performance management systems. The indicators can be viewed as organisational focus points. Good indicators have the following characteristics:
 - Orientated towards strategic objectives;
 - Integrated social, environmental and economic factors;
 - Responsive to change over time;
 - Community understanding and recognition; and
 - Ability to be implemented and to inform planning processes.
- Improves efficiency in consultation processes, particularly for major strategic plans. This can occur through improved co-ordination of consultation and the alignment of major strategic planning processes.
- Increases community understanding, awareness and support for local government. This is often taken as a given but modern governance at the local level requires constant development of the democratic process.

- Assists Council in priorities of future service delivery and resource allocation decisions beyond 4 year planning cycle of Council Plan. The criteria that councils use to inform service planning decisions and allocate non-recurrent resources are often complex, time consuming and sometimes politically driven. The processes and outcomes from a Community Plan provide one way of managing and setting the boundaries for resource allocation that is more focused on community priorities.
- Helps to ensure alignment of Council Plan with community values and priorities. The Council Plan needs to contain strategic objectives on what the organisation will be seeking to achieve over a four year period. Strategic or performance indicators are also required on how the organisational performance aligns with the objectives. Community priorities/themes in a Community Plan can be used and/or inform the strategic objectives. The result is for the Council Plan to be informed by community priorities.
- Sets up a broader framework for where Council is going. The capacity to take a long term view that extends beyond the life of a council term helps to focus the organisation and to build a culture of common and shared goals.
- Strengthens the overall capacity of Local Government and promotes a local community leadership role. This is particularly important in rural communities where a facilitation and co-ordination role is central to economic, social and cultural development.

2.3 State Government

- Facilitates joint planning with State Government departments and agencies on addressing community priorities and monitoring community outcomes. This has occurred at the agency level in service planning via Primary Care Partnerships, Municipal Early Years Plans and Neighbourhood Renewal Networks. There appear to be further opportunities in this area for State and Local Governments to facilitate integrated planning within and across local government areas. This can incorporate both place based and partnership approaches to Community Planning, informed by consultative and collaborative models.

- The practice and outcomes from Community Planning provide the basis for Councils to explore innovative approaches to integrated planning. In particular, Community Planning provides improved opportunities for State Government departments and regional offices to engage and plan with Councils, based on identified community priorities. This encourages an integrated approach to planning.
- Provides an opportunity to advocate to other instrumentalities by involving a number of other public sector authorities – “joined up” planning, co-ordination of govt. authorities informed by community priorities.

2.4 Service providers/non-government sector

- Helps service providers and related professionals gain greater insight into local needs and issues, leading to more targeted and responsive levels of service provision.
- Allows limited resources to be better allocated to match community needs.
- Collaborative service planning makes it easier for service providers and other agencies in the non-government sector to share information and maintain professional networks.
- Process for organisational policy and systems development to be undertaken in alignment with community priorities.
- Minimises the chance of service duplication within a single sector or community.
- Places organisations in a better strategic position to undertake advocacy work and attract funding dollars.

3. About Council Planning

At the centre of Council Planning is the Council Plan. The Council Plan provides the strategic direction for a Council's actions and activities over a four-year period – **the Council Priorities**. It contains strategic objectives that guide Council actions and strategic indicators that monitor the performance of the organization in achieving its objectives.

In Victorian local government the policy landscape is dominated by three key instruments: The Council Plan, the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP). Together, these three policy and strategic planning documents have a decisive influence on the policy and planning directions of local governments.

The capacity to embed community priorities into Council Planning is often dependent on how effectively the strategic framework is implemented across the organisation. Most importantly, a clear and understood strategic framework is a necessary organisational pre-requisite to ensuring that the outcomes from Community Planning inform Council Planning.

In addition to the major strategies and plans identified above, Councils have numerous strategic planning requirements, many of which have community consultation as part of these strategies. This also involves significant Council resources in consultation effort.

The result is that municipalities are involved in a constant stream of consultation with their communities, extending from individual services through to policy and strategy development. The capacity of local governments to have good systems in place for the co-ordination, storage and analysis of community consultation information will have a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of council planning. The quality of this information and its use in Council planning is even stronger when a collaborative planning culture exists within a local government.

A planning culture is facilitated when a council organization has a genuine commitment and devotes resources to both Council Planning and Community Planning. This will be reflected in the organisational structure through a senior officer with responsibilities for the Council Plan and with Community Planning/Development recognized as a line management responsibility.

City of Casey

Council Planning differs from Community Planning in that it is the process by which Council sets priorities arising from:

- Its various forms of community engagement, (including Community Planning once this process is embedded), and development of specialist plans (such as the Municipal Public Health Plan);
- Federal and State Government policies; and
- Casey's Long Term Plans (including Casey C21).

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

3.1 The Major Council Planning frameworks

Development of the Council Plan, the MSS and the MPHP is guided by a clear legislative framework. It is important to recognise that State legislation helps to define and set the boundaries for Council Planning.



Importantly, the strategic 'work' of Council is from the outset envisioned to fit loosely within three distinct clusters: corporate and/or organisational (the Council Plan), community health (MPHP), and land-use (MSS). This clustering is notable for two reasons. Firstly, the fragmentation of issues into these three clusters tends to set the pattern for how Councils structure their own departments and operations. Secondly, the three plans receive attention in different ways, as the work of establishing and reviewing these plans is guided by different State Government departments and takes place according to different timeframes. This creates a certain amount of fragmentation, as well as inefficiencies in Council Planning processes.

It is timely to assess the existing legislative frameworks and what they require of Council in terms of community involvement in planning, as well as what possibilities they indicate. The frameworks relevant to the Council Plan, the MSS and the MPHP are each explored below.

3.2 The Council Plan

The **Local Government Act 1989** (and the amendments implemented through the **Local Government (Democratic Reform) Bill 2003**) does not make specific reference to Community Planning. It does, however, set out a number of Council responsibilities that are linked to Community Planning principles and processes.

Victorian local governments are required to prepare a Council Plan every four years. The Act states that a Council Plan must include:

- i. Strategic Objectives of the council;
- ii. Strategies for achieving those objectives over the next four years;
- iii. A Strategic Resource Plan; and
- iv. Strategic Indicators for monitoring the achievement of the objectives.



No requirements for community consultation are set out with regard to the development of the Council Plan. However, both the Council Plan and subsequent Annual Reports and Performance Reports are required by the Act to be made available to the public. Under Section (129), any person has a right to make a submission on any proposal contained in the budget or revised budget. Council is also required to convene a meeting to consider its Annual Report. Under Section (131), this meeting must be kept open to the public while the annual report is discussed. The LGPro Corporate Planners Special Interest Group has noted that 'a Council Plan needs to reflect the aspirations of the community and be relevant to the organisation. Therefore the quality of the Plan will be enhanced if there is broad ownership of the Plan by Councillors, community and staff' (Council Plan Guidelines, p11).

Requirements for community consultation and responsiveness are somewhat more defined in Section (208B) of the Act, which talks about Best Value Principles. Here, services provided by Council are required to be responsive to the needs of the community and be accessible to that community. This section notes that Council 'must develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides' and must report back to the community on its achievements. In applying Best Value Principles, Council may (note: the Section does not say 'must') take into account 'community expectations and values'.

At the same time, the general requirements of local government as set out in the **Local Government Act 1989** indicate that Councils should be 'responsible and accountable' to the local community, and should provide governance and leadership for the local community through advocacy, decision making and action (1). 'Local community' is defined as including people who live in the municipality, ratepayers, and people who conduct activities in the municipality (1A). The primary objective of a Council is defined as 'endeavour[ing] to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions' (3C).

Council is required to have regard to a number of facilitating objectives, which include: promoting social, economic and environmental sustainability; providing services in accordance with Best Value Principles to best meet community needs; and ensuring transparency and accountability in Council decision making (3C). Council's role is seen to include 'taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making', and 'providing leadership by establishing strategic objectives and monitoring their achievements' (3D). Council's role is also defined as 'fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life' (3D).

3.3 The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS)

The second document in the 'big three' of Victorian local government policy is the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS). The MSS establishes the land-use strategic planning framework for the municipality. It is a concise statement of the key strategic planning, land use and development objectives for the municipality and the strategies and actions for achieving the objectives.

The MSS forms part of the Local Planning Policy Framework (LPPF) for each municipality's Planning Scheme. The LPPF is in turn dependent on the State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF), whose provisions are determined by the **Planning and Environment Act 1987 (P&E Act)**. A careful reading of the **P&E Act** and the SPPF reveals that while Victorian local government Planning Schemes are required to address community wellbeing and social need, they require and invite only limited community participation in land-use planning processes. Recent changes to the Planning and Environment Act now requires a review of the whole Planning Scheme every 4 years (including the MSS) and this is intended to be aligned with the review of the Council Plan.

The **P&E Act** notes that preparation of the Scheme or an amendment **may** (note: not 'must') take into account its 'social effects and economic effects' (12). Further, Council may carry out studies and commission reports; and **may** 'take any steps and consult with any other persons it considers necessary to ensure the co-ordination of the planning scheme with proposals by those other persons'.

Section (20.01) of the Victorian Planning Provisions (a state-wide reference document or template from which planning schemes are sourced and constructed) notes that the MSS 'provides an opportunity for an integrated approach to planning across all areas of council and should clearly express links to the corporate plan. The MSS is dynamic and enables community involvement in its ongoing review.'

Copies of any planned amendment to the Scheme – including changes to the MSS – must be given to affected persons and authorities, and the amendment must also be made available to the public during office hours for any person to inspect free of charge (18). Any person may make a submission to the planning authority, and all submissions must also be available for public inspection (21). A planning authority must consider all submissions made on or before the date set out in the notice (22). Normally, if submissions include objections which cannot be resolved, a panel is usually appointed to consider the matter. Panel hearings are required to be open to the public (160).

While not making specific requirements around Community Planning principles or community engagement, the SPPF notes that ‘society has various needs and expectations’, and that the aim of planning should be to meet these needs by addressing aspects of economic, environmental and social well-being affected by land use and development (11.03). Section (12) of the SPPF, which relates to Metropolitan Development, makes a number of references to ensuring that communities are supported by good planning practices and outcomes, but apart from requiring neighbourhood character to take account of ‘community identity’ and the community’s values, needs and aspirations (12.05-2), the SPPF makes no specific provision for including the community in land-use planning processes.

3.4 The Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP)

According to the **Victorian Health (General Amendment) Act 1998**, a key function of Victorian local government is to seek to prevent diseases, prolong life and promote public health through organised programs including the prevention and control of environmental health dangers, diseases, and health problems of particularly vulnerable population groups. Councils should achieve this by isolating the special factors affecting the health of people within the municipal district, by developing and enforcing up-to-date public health standards, and by intervening if the health of people within the municipal district is affected.

The Act requires that Victorian municipalities produce a 3-year Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) that sets out the strategic directions and actions for the municipality in the area of health prevention and promotion.

Under the Act, a MPHP must be updated annually, and must:

- i. identify and assess actual and potential public health dangers affecting the municipal district.
- ii. outline program and strategies which the council intends to pursue to -
 - a. prevent or minimise those dangers
 - b. enable people living in the municipal district to achieve maximum well-being.
- iii. provide for periodic evaluation of programs and strategies.

MPHPs are shaped by the Municipal Public Health Planning Framework, entitled **Environments for Health**, which was launched by the State Government in 2001. **Environments for Health** was designed to provide an integrated planning approach for Municipal Public Health Plans (MPHPs) in Victoria. It aims to make public health a central focus for local government and to increase its capacity to prevent ill health and increase wellbeing. It is based on a social model of health which recognises the impact of the social, built, economic and natural environments on community health and wellbeing.

Of each of the three key local government policy instruments, the MPHP and its relevant planning framework exhibits the strongest commitment to involving the community in its planning processes. This commitment is evidenced both in the text of **Environments for Health** and the framework’s use of World Health Organisation documents such as **Community Participation in Local Health and Sustainable Development: A Working Document on Approaches and Techniques**.

Section (6.3.4) of the **Environments for Health** Framework states that: ‘The involvement and participation of the municipal community in the development of the MPHP is an important part of the planning process. Community participation involves engaging people as members of communities in identifying, deciding about, planning for, managing and/or delivering programs and policy. Ideas of social justice and equity involve inclusion and participation and the need to include not just other service providers but also the users of those services. The term, “community participation”, is often used in conjunction with other terms such as consultation, collaboration, involvement, empowerment, community capacity building, and community development’.

The Department of Human Services is currently reviewing the MPHP and the outcomes of this review are likely to include the frequency and review timeframes for this plan.

4. About Community Planning

Shire of Golden Plains

Golden Plains Shire defines 'community planning' as locality based planning...

This planning has, at its core, the enabling of communities to identify and find solutions to their own needs in the social, environmental, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, cultural and economic areas.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

Community Planning is not a single-model approach. The application and practice of Community Planning across Victorian local governments is diverse and varied, and is typically shaped by local needs and issues and by organisational priorities and resources. Local governments in Victoria have, for a number of decades, carried out Community Planning in some form. In recent years, however, Community Planning has received higher status and prominence as local governments have sought to underpin their strategic planning processes with more transparent community participation and engagement.

The result across Victoria is that many local governments have produced a Community Plan as the defining feature of their Community Planning process.

A Community Plan is not an essential component of Community Planning. However, it does provide a focus for both the community and the organisation in the implementation of key community actions derived from Community Planning processes. So, a Community Plan is definitely a useful tool in a planning kitbag.

Unlike the frameworks for Council Planning, there is no legislative or statutory framework for Community Planning. Instead, Community Planning is driven from a value perspective informed by social justice and community development principles.

Local governments in Victoria have become involved in Community Planning for a number of reasons. One of the key reasons is the place of local government within the community that it represents. Community leadership is a key local government role. This leadership role requires the local authority to drive and/or facilitate processes that will assist the community to respond to pressures, if not influence and shape the future of the area.

The practice of Community Planning in Victoria, particularly in the development of a Community Plan, generally requires the local authority to take either a leadership or facilitation role. It also means sharing this leadership with significant other agencies, where applicable, and promoting and developing leadership attributes for its citizens.

Victorian Local Governments have embraced Community Planning to support their governance structures. The practice of Community Planning **strengthens local democracy**, particularly in terms of:

- Increasing the **responsiveness** of local policy and strategy;
- Facilitating community **engagement**; and
- Increasing government **accountability** and **transparency**.

If strengthening local governance is a desired outcome of Community Planning, then there are two points on the planning 'map' where Community Planning is likely to be of most use to Councils.

The first of these is at the **visioning or agenda-setting** level, where community values and priorities are investigated, developed and crystallized into a defined set of statements or goals.

The second is at the finer-grained level where **specific actions and strategies are checked** back against these priorities, and where outcomes can be assessed against indicators of success.

For some local governments the post-amalgamation environment has required a re-negotiation of the relationship between local government and its community. For others, impetus has resulted from dramatic community change, such as rapid population growth and in-migration.

Councils are involved in Community Planning in quite strategic and targeted ways. Whilst the following objectives are not exhaustive they do provide some of the major factors as to why Victorian local governments have become heavily involved in Community Planning. Indeed, why it has become core business! This includes the following objectives:



1. Expanding the policy agenda

Councils are using Community Planning to set high level policy, or what might be considered the vision, aspirations, and priorities of the municipality and/or smaller areas within. In doing so, Councils are using Community Planning to transcend the limitations of the Council Plan, which as a four-year plan has limited scope to set out higher-order and longer term agendas.

2. Trying to do more with less

Principles of New Public Management require that Councils do more with less. Councils are turning to Community Planning in order to go beyond their own limitations of time and resources. By recognizing that different communities are a valuable planning resource, Councils can indeed 'do more with less' and can add value to their strategic planning work.

3. Building community capacity and participation

Councils are building capacity within the community to organise and to undertake visioning work, which in turn helps nurture community leaders, facilitates community participation and engagement and promotes social capital. At the same time, Councils are educating the community about local government responsibilities and activities, and managing expectations in relation to fostering change and delivering services.

4. Fostering a Learning organisation

Councils recognise that the professional expertise and skills associated with Community Planning are often situated within particular Council divisions (Community Development or Social Planning), compared with divisions such as Asset management or Engineering, which may not have traditionally seen Community Planning as part of their core business. By setting requirements for Community Planning, Councils are developing and embedding this expertise across a broad spectrum of Council departments, contributing to a learning organisation.

City of Hume

What emerges for all strategies is the challenge of creating shared language within Council to describe community planning. While many sections of Council are actually engaging in community building, the professions from which many Council Officers are drawn don't have a common lexicon to express what they are doing. This can be a barrier to moving forward.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

5. Strengthening partnerships with community at multiple levels

Councils are building and nurturing partnerships with multiple communities and organisations, including government departments and regional offices, non-government organisations, special interest groups, industry groups and residents. They are creating relationships that can be drawn upon in both broad-scale municipal planning exercises as well as finer-grained strategy development and evaluation. In turn, Community Planning has the potential to increase community ownership of Council processes and decision-making, and therefore garners a greater level of community support for (or at least comprehension of) Council decisions.

6. Exploring innovative approaches to integrated planning with State Government Departments

The practice and outcomes from Community Planning provide the basis for Councils to explore innovative approaches to integrated planning. In particular, Community Planning provides improved opportunities for State Government departments and regional offices to engage and plan with Councils, based on identified community priorities. This encourages an integrated approach to planning.

Shire of Mitchell

Community planning such as the Mitchell South Place Management Project provides the opportunity to align local and state government policies and directions. It helps governments and communities target shared local priorities in respect to such areas as health, infrastructure, education and the environment to name a few. This project also played a vital role in being able to communicate to the community the reality of future developments within the Mitchell South area. It was used as a means of strengthening the relationship between the community and Council and reinforcing the importance of community participation in effectively planning for the overall health and wellbeing of the community.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

- Generally characterised by a process that includes high levels of community engagement and a desire for community ownership of plans;
- A staged process which includes the production of a plan as an outcome of Stage one and its implementation in Stage two; and
- Supported with Council resources (sometimes this is existing resources and sometimes additional). (Source: H. Raysmith and S. West, Planning Together: lessons from local government community planning in Victoria, 2007).

City of Hume

Community planning is a process that involves:

- Ensuring that the community is informed of information, services, activities and Local, State and Commonwealth Government initiatives that could have an impact on their health and well being
- Enabling community members to express their opinions on services, activities and Local, State and Commonwealth Government initiatives that could have an impact on their health and well being
- Providing accessible governance structures that enable community members to have an ongoing relationship with the decision making processes in their local and municipal area
- Developing partnerships with community members and community based organisations to enable collaborative local planning between Council, community members and community based organisations with a shared understanding of community needs and priorities
- Establishing an evidence base for prioritising actions and initiatives in the municipality that can be monitored, reviewed and improved on in an ongoing cycle.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

7. Capturing information and knowledge

By doing Community Planning, Councils are building an evidence or 'knowledge' base that can inform a multitude of processes. This can range from scanning and synthesizing the priorities of the municipality as a whole to capturing the aspirations of smaller or sub-communities (defined geographically, culturally, demographically, or by role such as traders or students, etc).

Common features or practices of community planning that emerge from the case studies of Victorian Local Governments and Community Planning include:

- An evolutionary process that changes and develops over time as each council, and their communities, gain experience and confidence;
- Endorsed by councillors and senior management as a legitimate and important function for local government;
- Guided by a set of community planning policies and processes separate from councils' other planning policies;
- Intended to be integrally linked to Councils other planning processes;

4.1 Community Planning Principles and Practices

As mentioned above, Community Planning is shaped less by a pre-defined framework and more by a values-based approach. As such, Community Planning is best understood as being underpinned by a set of core principles. These principles encompass the key values, objectives and considerations of Community Planning, and provide a broad set of parameters within which individual Community Planning projects can be undertaken. The key principles outlined in this document are:

- Community engagement and participation for wide community involvement;
- Understanding community priorities and aspirations;
- Building social capital (community development); and
- Tracking community outcomes.

This section will outline each of these principles and how they operate in practice.


4.1.1 Community engagement and participation for wide community involvement

Community engagement and participation is a principle that individuals and groups are able to exchange views and influence policy and decision-making. Governments seek to ensure community engagement and participation as a means of establishing legitimacy of government policy and decision making.

There are at least three key reasons for community engagement and participation as an essential component of and rationale for Community Planning:

- i. Community engagement enhances the quality of decisions;
- ii. Community engagement builds partnerships and promotes community strengthening; and
- iii. Community engagement develops and ensures a sense of community ownership.

Figure 1 – Public Participation Spectrum

Increasing level of Public Impact 				
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal	Public Participation Goal
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulation solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools	Example Tools	Example Tools	Example Tools	Example Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Web sites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

According to the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (see Figure 1 below), community engagement can occur on several levels. The continuum ranges from minimum participation at the information level (informing the public) which is a one-way process about a policy or service initiative through to maximum community participation (empower the public) where communities share responsibility for making decisions and accountability for the outcomes of those decisions.

The level of community participation sought will guide both the level of public impact and the type of consultation instruments or tools that are used. It is important to note that 'consultation' is not equivalent to 'participation'. Participation allows community members to actively take part and be involved as members of a group, such as advisory groups.

Consultation policies and frameworks have been adopted by many councils in Victoria and will guide the approach to consultation. The breadth and scope of consultation reflects the time, resources and expertise available.

The Consultation Plan will be guided by (i) consultation principles which in turn will inform the selection of (ii) consultation instruments. Some of the most frequently used consultation instruments include:

- E consultation – Council Web page, use of email for feedback;
- Focus Groups – small groups of up to 10 participants to assist in identifying community issues;
- Workshops – presentation from 1 or 2 speakers as the basis for large and small group discussion;
- Community Events and Festivals – Provision of Talking and Listening posts;
- Stakeholder Forum/s – Planning Day or session of key decision makers, typically local agencies comprising community, business and government;
- Community Survey – extensive household or telephone survey;
- Community Panel – interested community members who provide feedback on the Community Plan, in person or through email;
- Targeted Consultation – useful for hard to reach communities as a result of distance, cultural barriers or accessibility;

- Exhibition of Vision Statement in Council offices and Community Centres; and
- Future Search Conference - highly structured events, usually lasting 2.5 days, at which a cross-section of community members or 'stakeholders' create a shared vision for the future, identify common ground and make public commitments to action.

For details on Future Search methodology see Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, *Future Search – An Action guide to finding common ground in organisations and communities*, Berret-Koehler, 2000, www.futuresearch.net

For more detailed information on the application of consultation instruments – See the **Consultation and Resource Guide** at the vlga website - www.vlgaconsultation.org.au

See also the Public Participation Toolbox developed by the International Association for Participation - www.iap2.org

See also *Let's Talk – a consultation framework*, VLGA, April 2007, for a concise and practical handbook on consultation principles and instruments.

Nick Wates (2000) *The Community Planning Handbook: How people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world*, Earthscan – www.communityplanning.net

is a very helpful resource for community planning. The following list are a useful selection of consultation techniques from this excellent handbook:

Action planning event

Facilitated action planning events allow people to produce plans of action at carefully structured sessions at which all those affected work creatively together. Local residents, business people, professionals, officials and politicians all work creatively together for an intensive period. Conventional boundaries tend to break down, releasing spirit, humour, imagination, positive thinking and collective creativity.

Briefing workshop

Briefing workshops (usually 1.5 hours in length) are simple, easy-to-organise working sessions held to establish a project agenda or brief. Briefing workshops can introduce people to the project, help establish the key issues, get people involved and motivated, identify useful talent and experience, and identify the next steps needed.

Interactive display

Interactive displays can be used as part of a forum, workshop, exhibition, conference or other event. The displays can range from blank sheets with simple one-line questions to drawings or models of complex development proposals. A dynamic develops as people's comments build up on the displays over time.

Photo survey

Participants go around their neighbourhood individually or in teams, taking photos of places and images according to a general or specific theme. After processing, the photos are sorted, selected and placed on large sheets of blank paper or maps. Photos can be grouped or cut up and comments may be added using Post-its or felt tips. The completed sheets or maps are used as a basis for discussion, analysis and design.

Design fest

Organisers decide on a theme that needs exploring and determine a brief. Multidisciplinary design teams are selected and briefed. The teams are likely to comprise architecture or planning students as well as practising professionals from a range of disciplines. The teams hold an intensive design workshop (or 'charrette') in public, coinciding with a public exhibition on the theme. The public are encouraged to respond to the theme and the team's ideas as they emerge and to develop their own.

Design game

Design games are like jigsaw puzzles. They are a highly visual way of allowing people to explore physical design options for a site or internal space. They are particularly useful for designing parks and room layouts and can also be used for land-use planning. They can be used in isolation or as part of a broader participation process.



Design workshop

Design workshops are hands-on sessions allowing small groups of professionals and non-professionals to work creatively together developing planning and design ideas. People work in groups around a table with plans or a flexible model. Everyone is encouraged to develop their ideas by drawing or making adjustments to the model. Each group usually needs a facilitator, a note-taker and a mapper (who marks points on a map or plan).

Electronic map

Electronic maps allow people to explore an area and make comments at computer terminals with specially created software. They have immense potential for helping people to visualise proposals and make their views known.

Mapping

Individuals or groups create physical maps of their neighbourhood or city using pen and paper, lines in the sand, cloth, chalk or other materials to hand. A framework or theme is normally provided to focus people's thoughts, e.g. places you visit frequently, landmarks, boundaries, places you dislike, things you would like to see.

4.1.2 Understanding community priorities and aspirations

Effective Community Planning is highly reflective of community priorities, aspirations and concerns. These sentiments—which collectively describe the community's 'vision' for the future—should form the basis of Community Planning aims and objectives. 'Community visioning' describes the process through which a community develops a strategic vision for its future and then plans how to achieve it. Community visioning brings people together to develop a shared image of the future, along with identified actions and strategies. A 'vision statement' is a document which sets out collective thinking about future scenario/s. In this context it also includes the processes which help a community to develop a shared vision for the future of its area.

This emphasis on understanding community priorities further highlights the principle of engagement described above but it also underscores the importance of detailed information-gathering as part of the Community Planning process.

Many local governments in Victoria have developed a Community Profile. This is largely based on the 5 yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing, and it details social and demographic data. It is an important base on which to build a more detailed community inventory that also comprises economic, environmental and cultural data.

The community inventory provides a more comprehensive picture of the community. The inventory can be viewed as an integration of the key data and information from the Community, Economic and Environmental Profiles compiled by local governments.

The inclusion of pictures, stories, songs and words from local people can be a powerful way of conveying information. Presenting complex information in a concise and clear format is a good approach, generally with easy to view graphs or maps that portray a key variable in a straightforward way. This requires some skill in the interpretation and presentation of data. These skills are not sufficiently recognized within local governments as an essential competency and should be considered a key part of the research capacity of council organizations.

The purpose of the collation and analysis of the above data is to build the evidence base to:

- inform all participants in the community planning process;
- provide a source of authoritative information on the state of the local community; and
- provide a basis to inform the community vision and priorities.

The availability of reliable and valid data at the municipal, suburb, postcode and/or township level to inform this level of planning appears to be problematic for local governments. This stage benefits from expert knowledge, and the application of multi-disciplinary skills to provide a clear picture of likely community futures based on a thorough assessment of the present. It identifies the key drivers that are producing the trends and how these will shape likely scenarios. That is, current and likely future issues of significant impact and assessing the possible outcome on the local community.

The range of key social, economic and environmental drivers may include any of the following:

- Rate of population change;
- Level of household growth by housing type and geographic location;
- Current and forecast levels of economic activity;
- Planning constraints on current and future development;
- Major infrastructure projects – road, rail, tourism, etc; and
- Environmental factors related to impact of salinity, rainfall, water storage levels.

Specialist, consultant skills are helpful in this area. However, the specialist knowledge will have added strength if it is based on a sound understanding and appreciation of local issues and concerns. It should be informed by community values to ascertain what may or may not be viable.

4.1.3 Building social capital (community development)

The relative success of Community Planning is measured in the benefits delivered to local communities, in particular community connectedness and improving social wellbeing. As such, Community Planning can be understood as having a key community development role; most specifically in the fostering of **social capital**. Community Planning provides a contemporary basis and rationale for a community development role for local governments. This is directly related to a renewal and sustainability of their governance role.

‘Social capital’ has been theorised in many different ways, but can be broadly conceived as being the trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for the mutual benefit of community members (Putnam 1993). In Australia, Eva Cox (1995) has described social capital as ‘the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust, and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.’ She notes that higher levels of social capital tend to correlate with better functioning social systems and higher standards of health and education, while low social capital limits life chances and quality of life.

Cox observes that social capital processes underpin:

- Working together collaboratively and with respect for each other’s values and differences;
- Resolving disputes civilly by recognising and accepting of different interests, within a framework, which takes account of the common good, not just sectional interests; and
- Recognising that building trust requires fairness and equity to all involved.

The relationship between healthy levels of social capital and community involvement in decision-making and conflict resolution points to the important role of Community Planning in fostering social capital.

A number of reports by Tony Vinson for Jesuit Social Services, based on comparative research at the postcode level, indicates that strengthening the social bonds between residents can be an important first step in minimising the harmful effects of social and economic conditions. The most recent report, **Dropping off the edge.the distribution of disadvantage in Australia**, points to the benefits of community strengthening programs in turning around entrenched disadvantage.

The principle of building social capital and the range of community development practices from the municipal to the neighbourhood level are now viewed as central components of Community Planning in action.

Shire of Loddon

It has always been a basic premise of Loddon Shire Council's Community Planning model that each community owns its community plan. However Council must initially receive and adopt a community plan and reserves the right through its policy to request a community plan group to revisit an area or issue in a plan before adoption for action by Council. As part of the 2008/09 planning and budget cycle Council will receive and consider for adoption fully revised and updated plans for all its communities after a five year review has been undertaken by each group.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

4.1.4 Tracking community outcomes

The resurgence of the community indicator movement in the last 10 years throughout OECD countries has contributed to significant policy research and debate in Australia at national, state and local levels. In response to this and other locally driven issues, a number of local governments in Victoria have put in place frameworks to monitor social, cultural, economic and environmental priorities. Recurring themes and terms in these frameworks and strategic approaches are 'triple bottom line', sustainability and community well-being.

Tracking outcomes should be considered a key principle of Community Planning. Measures to track progress on Community Outcomes have a variety of names such as Community Well-Being Indicators, Sustainability Indicators, Quadruple Bottom Line Reporting and Balanced Scorecard. Community indicators provide a framework to find out what are the key community concerns and needs and for local government to compile a more detailed and comprehensive base of information on its community. This information can then be used to shape policy and strategic directions at the local level, assist the alignment of services to real community needs and to highlight issues of local concern to other tiers of government and to the wider community.

In a local government context, community indicators can be used:

- To identify and highlight community priorities;
- To inform planning, advocacy and service delivery; and/or
- To build upon and integrate with broader Council Planning processes.

Indicators are usually presented in line with one or a number of community priorities and measured against a desired trend. See for example, the City of Moreland, Indicators for Health, Safety and Well-being, - www.indicators.moreland.vic.gov.au

The Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) Project has provided a framework for Victorian local governments on the design, content and application of community indicators. The project, conducted over 2005 and 2006, was funded by VicHealth and the project partners are a broad collaboration comprising VicHealth, the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

The CIV framework is based on a set of approximately 80 community wellbeing indicators, covering a broad spectrum of local community life. The indicators are grouped according to five key domains:

- i. Healthy, safe and inclusive communities;
- ii. Dynamic, resilient local economies;
- iii. Sustainable built and natural environments;
- iv. Culturally rich and vibrant communities; and
- v. Democratic and engaged communities.

Further information can be obtained through the project website located at –

www.communityindicators.net.au

4.2 Models of Community Planning

Four different models of Community Planning were identified in the Local Government and Community Planning project and these models are displayed in the following table.

Table 1 – Models of community planning

Model	Key Features	Plans
Visioning	<p>Long term outlook.</p> <p>Municipal wide plan.</p> <p>Sits above Council plan.</p> <p>Strongly led by Council.</p> <p>Catchment for community engagement strategy is the whole municipality.</p>	<p>Quality Community Plan 1997 - 2015, Wyndham City Council</p> <p>Vision 2020, Shire of Yarra Ranges</p> <p>Hume City Plan 2030, Hume City Council</p>
Municipal wide partnership planning	<p>Medium term outlook.</p> <p>Municipal wide plan.</p> <p>Sits under Council plan.</p> <p>Led by Council in partnership with key stakeholder organizations with shared responsibility for outcomes.</p> <p>Sector specific eg health, education.</p> <p>Strong agency engagement and less direct engagement of residents.</p>	<p>Municipal Public and Community Health Strategic Plan 2007 - 2012, Hume City Council</p> <p>Learning Together Strategy 2004 – 2008, Hume City Council</p>
Partnership based place management	<p>Medium term outlook.</p> <p>Sub LGA plan responding to a set of local circumstances (accelerated population growth).</p> <p>Sits under Council plan and once completed, will inform future Council plans.</p> <p>Led by Council in partnership with key stakeholder organizations with shared responsibility for outcomes.</p> <p>Strong agency engagement.</p> <p>Variable engagement of residents.</p>	<p>Cranbourne Community Plan, City of Casey</p> <p>Mitchell South Place Management Project, Mitchell Shire Council</p>
'Township' planning	<p>Short to medium term outlook.</p> <p>Township level plan – 500 – 3,000 people.</p> <p>Feeds up into Council plan through a bottom up process.</p> <p>Facilitated by Council with strong resident leadership and ownership of plans and their implementation (variable).</p> <p>Limited agency involvement.</p> <p>Strong engagement of residents and other community members.</p>	<p>Township Community Plan, Golden Plains Shire Council</p> <p>Township Community Plan, Loddon Shire Council</p> <p>Township Community Action Plans, Ararat Rural City Council</p> <p>Lorne CBI, Casuarina Project, eForum, Torquay Volunteer Engagement Project, Surf Coast Shire Council</p> <p>Township Community Plan, Wellington Shire Council</p>

One of the main findings from the case studies is that there is no one approach or model to Community Planning, as demonstrated in the above table. Common features of Community Planning from the case studies included:

- Evolutionary process, changing and developing over time;
- Endorsed by councillors and senior management;
- High levels of community engagement and desire for community ownership of plans;
- Supported with Council resources; and
- Intended to be linked with planning processes of Councils. (Raysmith and West, 2007).

Table 1 provides a useful guide and references for community planning models. Which model is most appropriate for your local government?

Determining which model may be the most appropriate can be informed by the following:

- What are the objectives of the Community Planning process?
- What role will the outcomes of the community planning process play in future Council and community activity?

- Have the elected Council and the Chief Executive Officer developed a sufficient understanding of the process of Community Planning in their local community to anticipate (a) the timeline for the process, (b) the diversity of views they can expect to hear and (c) the relationship between Council and other community stakeholders as the Community Planning process proceeds?
- What is the level of the planning? Municipal wide, township level or small area level?
- What will be the governance structure?
- Who will be responsible for implementation?
- What are the intended outcomes?
- What are the range of community engagement processes to be used?
- Which stakeholders are central to the process?
- What information will you need?
- What is the process for organisational co-ordination?
- How will cross-organisational support for community planning be attained?
- How will the findings and outcomes from the process be communicated back to all participants and the community?



4.3 Ingredients of success in Community Planning

This section sets out some of the features and characteristics of Community Planning as practiced by local governments in Victoria. It is not intended to be a definitive list but provides a guide to assist local governments in determining the range of matters to consider and to be prepared for to carry out Community Planning.

City of Wyndham

The community planning process needs the following five ingredients to ensure a high quality outcome (in no particular order):

- adequate (and realistic) financial and administrative resources;
- the full support from the Council's CEO;
- an elected Council which is brave enough to facilitate an independent planning process over which it does not have total control;
- in-house professional community planning knowledge (or the preparedness to buy-in these skills); and
- community members with the aptitude, personality and skill to drive the process.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

4.3.1 Checklist for a Community Plan

Before embarking on a Community Plan, a clear assessment is needed on whether it is a practical exercise for the area. This requires some "testing of the water" based on the benefits, costs, opportunities and risks of a Community Plan. Some key questions to consider are:

- Is there sufficient organisational knowledge and evidence of community priorities through existing Council Plans, strategies, community consultation findings and related processes?
- Does the Council have supportive leadership, at the Councillor, CEO and Senior Officer levels, to successfully lead and/or facilitate a Community Plan project? (See Yarra Ranges, Wyndham and Golden Plains case studies).
- Will council staff, at all levels, support & commit to this project?

- Does the community require community building, involving small community development projects, before commencing a more ambitious project on the long-term vision for the municipality, township, suburb or local area?
- Is there sufficient community good will and trust to develop a Community Plan?
- Are there community leaders and agencies that will support the development and implementation of a Community Plan and potentially provide a partnership role?
- Are there other community and/or organisational priorities that may have an impact on the timing, resourcing and support for a 6-12 month community planning process?
- Are there sufficient organisational and community resources to complete an extensive consultation program, provide sufficient administration support and for a range of consultant, marketing and publication costs?
- What will be the implementation process?
- What type of community planning model will be used?

It is strongly recommended that these questions be used as a checklist to assess the feasibility of developing a Community Plan/s for your municipality. Each Community Plan reflects local conditions and issues and will therefore vary in emphasis and style.

4.3.2 Organisational research and planning capacity

Do local governments have the capacity to integrate and collect wide-ranging information relevant to effective community planning on a cost effective basis? How do local governments organise their consultation information?

These questions concern the availability of reliable and valid community planning data at the municipal level and at the suburb, postcode and/or township level. Ready access to this information and the organisational skills to interpret this information appears variable across local governments. Finding the balance and the resources, between the use of consultant and/or in-house skills in this area, can be challenging but is increasingly important for effective Community Planning.

Councils need to consider how effectively consultation information is collected, stored and accessible in their organisations. Local governments carry out many consultations in any year, ranging from large through to

small scale projects. A great deal of valuable information lies hidden or not utilised as effectively as it should be because the consultation information is either not known about or not easily accessible. Addressing this issue through improved collaborative planning and intelligent use of information systems is an important first step.

Council organizations which have an organizational unit with responsibilities for co-ordinating community consultation have an advantage in this area. This is further strengthened with an appropriate information system to capture and disseminate consultation information in an organized and accessible way. A number of municipalities are currently moving in this direction.

4.3.3 Approaches to Consultation

Knowledge of the local community should be the starting point to guide the approach to consultation and what is likely to succeed. What are the best consultation approaches for success? How do we ensure wide community involvement?

The importance of pre-planning to optimise the consultation process cannot be overstated. The outcomes from this process can be long-term, with networks and community partnerships formed and consolidated. In order to communicate with diverse communities and individuals, considerable planning is required for community engagement and participation.

This can involve discussions with people and agencies who have influence both locally and regionally. They can provide insight of possible futures for communities, particularly for regional and rural communities. This can include important leaders, groups or agencies who can energise local communities and identify opportunities in the future development of areas. This list is potentially very large but is likely to include Commonwealth and State government agencies, business networks, local members of Parliament, community health services, regional boards for utilities and major local employers.

4.3.4 Bringing it all together - From Priorities to Actions to Implementation

A major barrier for many Councils is how to translate the broad community vision into a set of viable strategies, particularly when this entails a prioritising of some ideas and dismissal of others. This issue has implications for local governance, especially as a dismissal of community ideas can undermine community confidence.

It is clear that this barrier often arises **because key constraints and limitations—the ‘givens’—are not brought to the table in the earliest days of the process.** Doing so will not only help inform communities about Council’s planning frameworks and activities (the education role), but will ensure that policy informed by community priorities is based on a practical assessment of constraints and opportunities.

Another related issue is the matter of the balance of responsibilities at the implementation phase. When **community expectations exceed Council’s actual capacity for undertaking project oversight, administration, service delivery** and so on there is the possibility for disillusionment and frustration to overshadow any positive gains. As above, it is crucial that if multiple parties are engaged in developing strategic responses to a shared problem, that the lines of responsibility and shared implementation be very clearly delineated from the outset.

It needs to be acknowledged that there can be a divergence of views – and even disagreement – between key decision makers. Sometimes groups within a community or different stakeholders actually want different futures to come to pass. (E.g. a state department might want housing and population numbers to change in one way, and the local residents might want them to change in another way. For a Local Government, this can raise large, fundamental issues such as: Is Council to represent the interests and wishes of its local community, or is it required to implement the policies of the Victorian Government?)

Shire of Golden Plains

An important and unique aspect of the Township Plans is that while Golden Plains Shire plays a key role in facilitating the process, **the plans are clearly owned by the local residents** (emphasis added). The Township Plan consequently becomes a key point of negotiation between local communities and a range of stakeholders depending on the nature of the priorities identified in the Plan. This includes the Council.

Community action will therefore only involve Council when the nature of the priority has implications for Council business. In all instances the challenge for local communities is to work towards getting their project onto the agenda of other key stakeholders.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

Further Information and Advice

Although not exhaustive, the list below (gratefully sourced from: Nick Wates, 2000. *The Community Planning Handbook: How people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world*, Earthscan) provides a selection of the main ingredients for effective Community Planning.

Accept different agendas

People will want to be involved for a variety of reasons, for instance: academic enquiry, altruism, curiosity, fear of change, financial gain, neighbourliness, professional duty, protection of interests, socialising. This need not be a problem but it helps to be aware of people's different agendas.

Accept limitations

No community planning activity can solve all the world's problems. But that is not a reason for holding back. Limited practical improvements will almost always result, and community planning activity can often act as a catalyst for more fundamental change.

Accept varied commitment

Far too much energy is wasted complaining that certain people do not participate when the opportunity is provided. All of us could spend our lives many times over working to improve the local environment. Everyone has their own priorities in life and these should be respected. If people do not participate it is likely to be because they are happy to let others get on with it, they are busy with things which are more important to them or the process has not been made sufficiently interesting.



Agree on rules and boundaries

There should be a common understanding by all main interest groups of the approach adopted. Particularly in communities where there is fear – for instance that others may be trying to gain territorial advantage – it is vital that the rules and boundaries are clearly understood and agreed.

Build local capacity

Long-term community sustainability depends on developing human and social capital. Take every opportunity to develop local skills and capacity. Involve local people in surveying their own situation, running their own programmes and managing local assets.

Communicate

Use all available media to let people know what you are doing and how they can get involved. Community newspapers or broadsheets in particular are invaluable.

Encourage collaboration

Create partnerships wherever possible between the various interest groups involved and with potential contributors such as financial institutions.

Flexibility

Be prepared to modify processes as circumstances dictate. Avoid inflexible methods and strategies.

Follow up

Lack of follow-up is the most common failing, usually due to a failure to plan and budget for it. Make sure you set aside time and resources for documenting, publicising and acting on the results of any community planning initiative.

Involve all sections of the community

People of different ages, gender, backgrounds and cultures almost invariably have different perspectives. Ensure that a full spectrum of the community is involved. This is usually far more important than involving large numbers.



5. Approaches to Community and Council Planning across Victorian Local Governments

5.1 The Planning Continuum

The approach to Community and Council Planning shapes and informs issues of transparency, governance, accountability and implementation.

The practice of Council Planning and Community Planning can occur across a range of models, representing a diversity in approaches to planning. The models can be viewed as a continuum from a top-down approach through to a wholly community driven process as indicated by the following:

- Expert Planning: Top-down approach, planning and implementation undertaken by professionals and 'technical experts', minimal community ownership, based on assumption that governments are able to accurately represent the aspirations of community through a rational approach.
- Conventional Planning: Top-down approach with consultation reliant on selected community representatives such as professionals, experts, managers of community groups and agencies, minimal community ownership of priorities, actions and outcomes.
- Consultative Planning: Government as facilitator and driver, diverse range of consultation methods employed, promotes community ownership and joint responsibility, community endorsement of final plan.
- Collaborative Planning: Stronger partnership approach and greater community involvement and participation than in Consultative Planning, based on notion that communities can reach consensus and resolve conflicts.
- Participatory Planning: Full participatory governance model, communities have full influence and power over all decisions and policies that affect them, based on local assemblies of groups.

Traditionally, Council Planning has been associated with expert and conventional planning models as described above. Community Planning is more commonly associated with consultative and collaborative planning models.

One of the factors for local governments to more effectively incorporate community priorities into Council Planning is to place greater emphasis on consultative and collaborative approaches to planning, particularly in their major plans and strategies.

The purpose and practice of the approaches to planning are to build an evidence base of quantitative and qualitative information and data to guide, inform and establish policy and planning directions for local governments based on solid research, sound consultation, resource parameters, community priorities, legislative and funding responsibilities.

The approach to planning is frequently a matter of emphasis between organisational knowledge and community knowledge. This is often about striking the balance between technical, 'expert' knowledge contrasted with the views and opinions of residents and community groups.

In the process of planning, each local government has to make a judgement as to the weight and importance to both 'expert' knowledge and 'community' knowledge. A mature and sophisticated approach to planning will acknowledge that at times there is likely to be disagreement between the two areas.

The process of working through these issues will vary from place to place, often depending on the governance approach. The multiple role and duties of councillors as community builders, community leaders and political representatives also informs the outcome, underpinned by advice and support from the council administration for these duties.

Most importantly, the approach to planning is not simply a clear and straightforward path but lies within a political context. This context, of its nature, can at times be a challenge to the rational approaches to planning outlined above.

City of Wyndham

From the outset, Council established a team of community members to lead the community planning process: the QCP Taskforce. In 1997, the QCP Taskforce was established and its role was to assist Council promote the original vision and coordinate its implementation. However in subsequent QCP updates (2002 & 2007), the Taskforce assumed more autonomy and independence; effectively leading the entire pre-planning, planning and documenting processes. Council's role in these later community plans was limited to providing administrative support and resources to facilitate the process; and high-level guidance from Council's Mayor, CEO, Director of Corporate Services and Corporate Planner, who are permanent members of the taskforce.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

5.2 What to consider in Planning – Addressing key steps and processes

This section provides a brief outline of the most commonly identified issues in the processes of Council Planning and Community Planning as currently practiced by Victorian Local Governments. The following provides the reader with a list of key things to consider for their planning processes. Further information, with detailed reference material, is attached in Appendix 1.

Research and Analysis

- Capacity and willingness of organisation to carry out multidisciplinary research;
- Organisational skills and/or capacity for consultant expertise to collate, analyse and interpret quantitative and qualitative data through primary and secondary data sources;
- Presentation of complex information to variety of audiences; and
- Access to valid and reliable community data – at lga, suburb and township levels.

Consultation and Participation

- Consultation Policy/Framework of Council to guide the approach to consultation – statement of principles, purpose of consultation and consultation instruments utilised;
- Clear and realistic timeline and appropriate level of resources for community consultation;
- Determining level of consultation and community participation sought;
- Endorsement of consultation strategy by Senior Management and Council;
- Implementation of Consultation Strategy at Community, Organisational and Councillor levels;
- Understanding of Consultation strategy by key stakeholders; and
- Feedback to participants and community on key findings from consultation.

The process of organising the consultation activities which are required for effective community planning requires a mature understanding of the relationship within the Council administration between Community Planning, Council Planning and the other aspects of the Council organisation which will use community consultation. Ensuring that these consultations complement one another depends upon a clear understanding of the relationship between the consultation activities themselves and Council's use of them. This can be a significant challenge.

Co-ordination – consultation processes, strategies and plans

- A co-ordinated approach to consultation – the results of community consultation are effectively captured and stored across the organisation;
- Internal co-ordination of strategies and plans to ensure consistency of objectives, strategies and actions to corporate goals and community priorities; and
- Timing – annual corporate timetable developed for plans and strategies to minimise duplication and maximise available resources.



Implementation – Progress towards and achievement of identified actions

- Clear and understood governance structure for community planning (see for example Wyndham and Golden Plains case studies);
- Determining and negotiating responsibility for addressing community priorities – where does Council have lead responsibility?; and
- Demonstrated link between Council Plan objectives, strategies and actions with community priorities.

Measurement and Review – what is important and how to measure?

- Clarifying relationship between Community Indicators, developed through Community Planning process, and Strategic Indicators in the Council Plan;
- Accurate and user friendly performance management system in place at the organisational level;
- Assess achievement of actions in Council Plan, particularly in relation to community priorities, and report back to community; and
- Review alignment of strategic objectives.

Impact of the Political environment

Throughout any plan development there is likely to be political dimensions. These can range from dealing with the priorities of an individual councillor, local members of parliament advocating for a group of constituents on a particular issue and the ever present 'squeaky wheels' across the local community.

Effective management of the political processes are a key component of ensuring the effective completion and implementation of plans. At times, there can be a tension between rational planning and the political environment in which these plans are being developed. In these instances, the Planners motto to - "Manage the political – focus on the strategic" is worth keeping in mind. Ensuring the support and assistance of senior organisational staff at these times is critical and part of managing the political processes. In other words, relationship building across the organisation should be viewed as integral and not additional to the planning process.

Professional networks

Networking through planning forums (meetings, conferences, workshops) and information-sharing between Council planners via phone and email acts as an important (but largely hidden) factor in the policy process.

Organisational and team dynamics

The capacity of individuals, with varying professional backgrounds and frequently from different parts of the organisation, to work together in a unified project team is a key challenge for effective and co-ordinated planning. This can also be influenced by the degree and level of understanding and commitment of senior management to the principles of Community Planning and the concept of integrated planning.

Changes at the organisational level, such as restructures and staff changes, impact upon the development of plans. One of the most common impacts from change in this area is that the project timetable can be delayed whilst the administrative changes take time to settle down.

6. The Integration of Community Planning and Council Planning

It is important to recognise that the merging of Community Planning principles with conventional Council Planning is invariably a creative process. A central aspect of this creativity is associated with the active co-operation and collaboration of staff in project teams.

Team dynamics, and the effectiveness and capacity of individuals to work together for shared goals, is critical if effective integration is to occur. An encouraging and supportive culture from senior management and suitable organisational structure will help to facilitate effective integration.

Most importantly, **there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to integrated Community-Council planning.**

6.1 Integration of the Community and Council Plans

Community Planning is not a one model approach. It can be quite varied. The result across Victorian local governments is that many councils have produced a Community Plan as the defining feature of their Community Planning process.

A Community Plan is not an essential component of Community Planning. However, it does provide a focus for both the community and the organisation in the implementation of key community priorities derived from Community Planning processes. So, a Community Plan is definitely a useful tool in a planning kitbag.

The characteristics as to how council organisations integrate the Community Plan with the Council Plan include the following:

- Organisational ownership, understanding and commitment for community planning, particularly at councillor level and senior leadership of organisation;
- Organisational structure has clearly defined responsibilities and adequate resources for Community Planning;
- Clear, strategic framework;
- Well planned and co-ordinated community engagement processes; and
- Skilled officers in strategic locations of the organisation – strengthened research and policy capacity of local governments.

Key features of the integration of the Community Plan and the Council Plan are set out below. Community values (in the Community Plan) are reflected and/or acknowledged in the organisational values of the Council Plan. The community vision (in the Community Plan) connects with the organisational mission in the Council Plan. The goals/objectives of the Council Plan connect with community priorities which are set out in the Community Plan.

The Community Plan and the Council Plan can be viewed as the two faces of one planning process; one dealing with collaboration across the community, and the other dealing with Council's more specific goals in its own activity. In principle, Council's specific goals (in the Council Plan) will be aligned to the broader, collaborative goals and priorities of the community (expressed in the Community Plan).

A further point of integration is that the two planning documents have integrated sets of indicators, one relating to the outcomes which the community wants/aspires to in the long term (community indicators), and the other relating to what Council plans to do (performance/strategic indicators).

Table 2 – The Integration of Community and Council Plans

Community Plan Components	Council Plan
<p>Community Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline of where community wants to be, ranging from 5 to 20 years • What the community wants to achieve 	<p>Organisational Mission and Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The corporate values and culture reflect and/or strongly based on the long-term community vision and priorities • Organisational structure responsive to delivering community vision • Council Plan vision, mission and values informed by Community Plan vision
<p>Community Priorities & Aspirations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of most important issues for community • Key community outcomes desired • Actions for community to address 	<p>Council Plan Objectives and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan structure and objectives influenced by priorities in Community Plan • Incorporation of Community Plan priorities and aspirations into Council Plan Actions, where Council has lead responsibility for implementation • Reporting back to community for actions in the Community Plan where Council is the lead agency
<p>Tracking Community Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Indicators that measure progress towards vision and change in priority areas/themes 	<p>Strategic Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Indicators that align with Community Indicators where council is lead agency

6.2 Integration with Business and Service Planning

The integration of Community-Council Planning (Policy and Planning Directions) with the budget process and business plans (Operational Planning) is the focus of this section. The main components of the integration of Policy and Planning Directions with Operational Planning are examined – Budget Allocation and Performance Management.

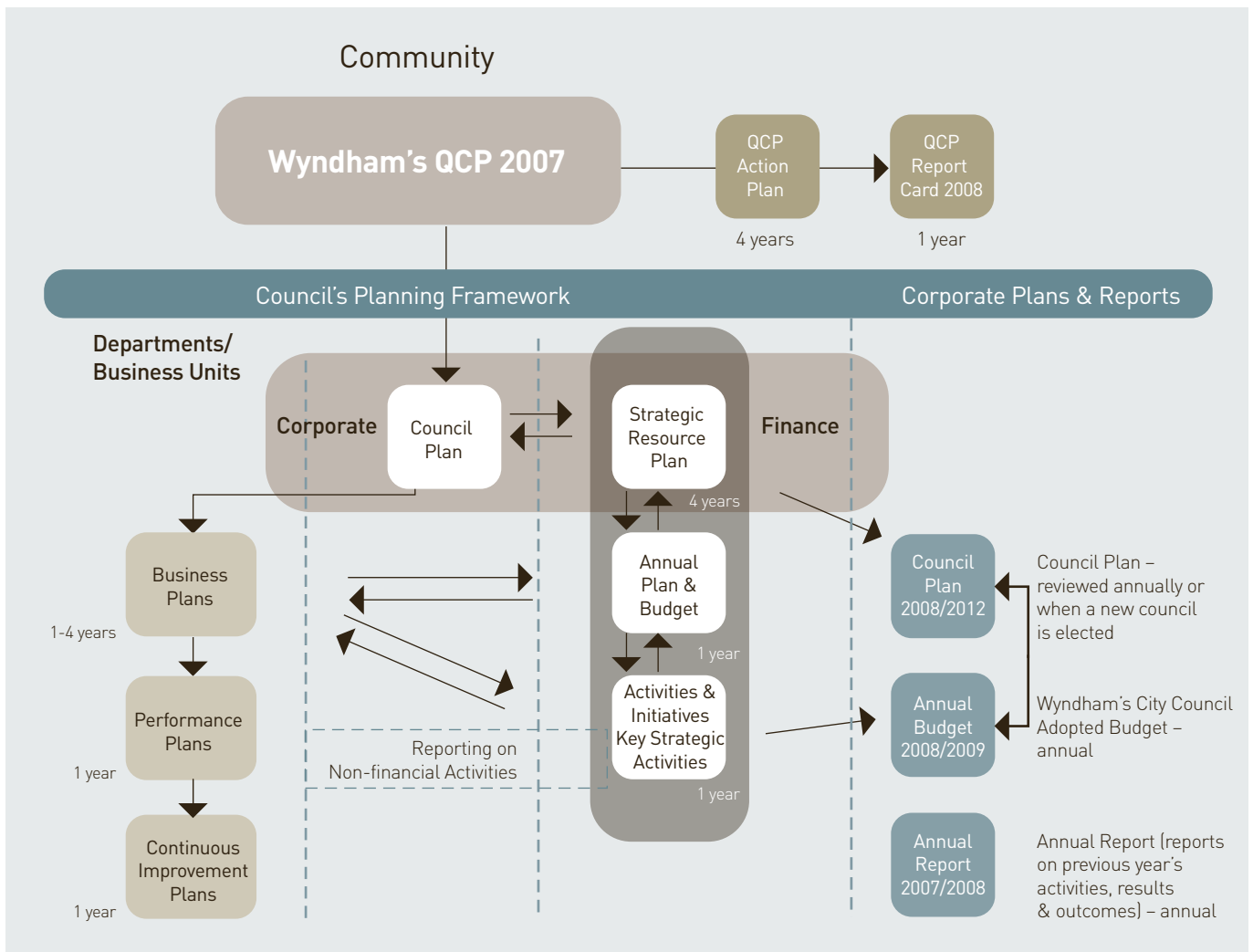
6.2.1 Budget Allocation

The formulation of the strategic resource plan and budget should reflect the priorities and objectives of the Council Plan. The Strategic Resource Plan details how the Council Plan objectives will be resourced and provides the basis for the annual budgetary process. Decisions on the scale of capital works, new initiatives, major projects and changes to service delivery are part of this process and should be aligned with Council Plan goals and objectives.

The principle of connectivity is met when the policy and planning directions of local governments are shaped by community and organisational priorities within the context of available resources. This provides a greater degree of transparency in the financial decisions of local governments, underpinned by community planning principles and facilitated through an integrated planning framework. (See Figure 2 below).

Resource allocation has traditionally been viewed as an economic process. Integrated planning seeks to ensure that resource allocation is based on and/or informed by wider community and social objectives as well as economic objectives.

Figure 2 – City of Wyndham Strategic Overview



Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

6.2.2 Performance Management Frameworks

The second component of integration relates to performance management, which is also referred to as performance monitoring and reporting. A common criticism of local governments is that the strategies and plans they have developed, from the Community Plan through to Business or Service Unit Plans, do not achieve a linked approach. The plans appear to stand alone and it is not clear how they connect.

The purpose of a performance management system for local governments is to ensure that the organization works in unity to pursue understood and clear goals; to achieve the corporate vision. An effective performance management system assists staff at all levels to understand their role and purpose within the Council and to embed community linkages as part of this system. This is also consistent with the Best Value legislation that seeks to ensure that Council Planning processes are developed in consultation with the local community and are responsive to community needs. (See – *A guide to achieving a whole of organisation approach to Best Value*).

Performance management frameworks are developed to link and integrate individual, service and corporate objectives. They provide a key linking mechanism for the policy and planning directions and operational planning. An effective organisational performance management system has to integrate the Council Plan, the MSS, the MPPH, and all subsidiary plans and strategies (Planning Directions) with the Annual Report, Annual Budget, Business/Service Plans and Staff Performance Plans (Operational Planning).

Common and Best Practice features of performance management frameworks for local governments include:

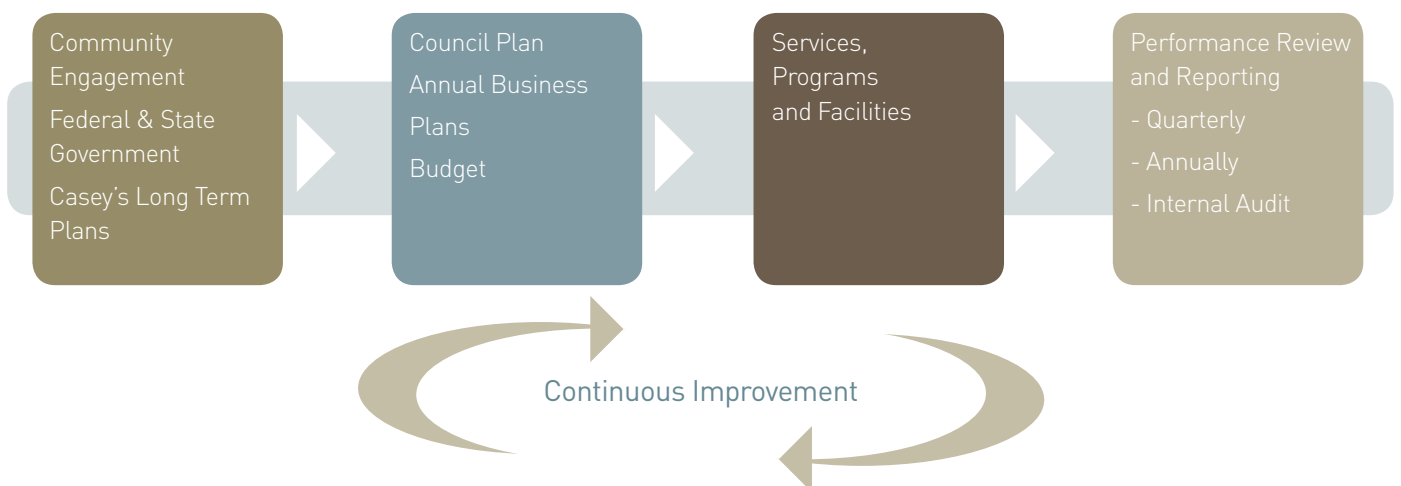
- Clearly articulated direction;
- Outcome and operational measurements;
- Strong evidence base for decision making;
- Continuous improvement focus;
- Integrated tools; and
- Regular review mechanism.

Many local governments in Victoria have performance management systems in place as a central mechanism for co-ordination and integration. A recent assessment of performance management systems in Victorian local governments by the Corporate Planners Special Interest Group indicates a variety of models that are used by councils. The major finding from this assessment is that each Council has to determine what is the most appropriate and effective performance management system for its own circumstances. (See LGPro Corporate Planners Special Interest Group, *Performance Monitoring and Reporting Guidelines, 2006*).

For example, one measure of successful integration is when the process and/or criteria for determining capital works priorities are referenced to the strategic objectives and actions in the Council Plan. The strategic objectives and actions in the Council Plan are in turn underpinned by community priorities.

Another example relates to performance monitoring and reporting, also known as performance management. Performance management systems are identified as a key mechanism for integration from the individual work plan through to the Council Plan, helping to ensure consistency and alignment across corporate policy and operational planning and delivery. (See Casey Strategic Framework below).

Figure 3 – City of Casey Strategic Overview



Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.



6.3 Challenges and Barriers (what to look out for!)

City of Casey

Balancing government priorities, agency resources and initiatives raised by the community is a continuing challenge. Encouraging government agencies to realign their work programs and budgets across many priority areas is also a challenge. The time taken to put the whole process together can be alienating for many residents, who just want to see some positive action in their community.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

Despite the clear benefits to integrating Community and Council Planning, there are a number of challenges and barriers to be met. These include:

- Current strategic planning demands on local governments, particularly from State Government Departments;
- 'Disconnect' between the Executive Management and Policy and Planning staff in Councils;
- Organisational arrangements/structure and limited capacity (resources and skills) of some local governments;
- Variable response of key stakeholders;
- Implementation and follow through – there is an emphasis on plan development in current practice and a weakness in the implementation and linkages across plans;
- Lack of recognition and legitimation by the State government of the role of local governments in Community Planning;
- Effectiveness of community engagement processes; and
- Communicating the **constraints and limitations** to help inform communities about Council's planning frameworks and activities (the education role), and to ensure that policy informed by community priorities is based on a practical assessment of constraints and opportunities.

These challenges are highlighted to provide a reality check for your local situation and they have been identified by Victorian local governments as being the most significant barriers to integration. Some of these challenges are within the capacity of local governments to address whilst others are problematic. Nonetheless, the above challenges can be used as a reference point for local governments when designing their processes for Community and Council Planning.

City of Wyndham

Two of the largest challenges presented by the QCP process were:

- being representational in community consultation – the dilemma of getting the right people with the right knowledge 'at the table', without inadvertently disenfranchising community groups or sectors
- ensuring hard to reach communities are properly heard.

To overcome the challenges, the Taskforce went to much effort to profile consultation participants to try to obtain an even representation of community groups, geography, age etc. With regard to hard to reach communities, the QCP Taskforce needed to use innovative methods, such as utilizing the local Migrant Resource Centre as a conduit to QCP participation.

Source: Local Government and Community Planning Project, LGV, 2007.

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Range of Planning Models – page 40

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Appendix 1 - Further information and references

Useful References for Planning Processes

Research and Analysis

This involves the collection, analysis and presentation of primary data sources (Data collected by local governments) and secondary data sources (Data from other sources). The use of both sets of data requires adherence to the criteria of validity, reliability and from an authoritative source.

Primary data sources for local governments range from service information, household information, and the results of community consultation. It is an excellent base of information for a community yet the potential for this information to be integrated in a dynamic way to assist Community Planning, for example, is still to be realized.

Secondary data sources are generally produced by government agencies such as the ABS and state government agencies. The Department for Victorian Communities publication, **Getting to Know Your Community – a guide to using local data**, is a useful reference on appropriate ways on the use of secondary data sources.

Many local governments in Victoria have developed a Community Profile. This is largely based on the 5 yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing, and it details social and demographic data. It is an important base on which to build a more detailed community inventory that also comprises economic, environmental and cultural data.

This more detailed community inventory provides a more comprehensive picture of the community. The purpose of the collation and analysis of the above data is to build the evidence base to

- inform all participants in the planning process
- provide a source of authoritative information on the state of the local community
- provide a basis to inform the community vision and priorities

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has a number of excellent references that provide useful information at the national and state level and which can also guide the selection of variables at the local level - the **Australian Social Trends, Cat. No. 4102.0** series produced annually and **Measuring Australia's Progress, Cat. No. 1370.0**. are major authoritative references that should be a starting point for all work in this area.

Department of Sustainability and Environment, **Victoria in Future**, 2004

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), **Australia's Welfare - 2005**, AIHW Cat. No. AUS 65, Canberra, 2005

Australian Bureau of Statistics (Census data and Social Trends Series)

www.abs.gov.au

Know Your Area

www.services.land.vic.gov.au/knowyourarea

Australian Policy Online (Wealth of policy and research material) www.apo.org.au

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

www.aihw.gov.au

Australian Disadvantage

(Tony Vinson's material on postcode disadvantage)

www.australiandisadvantage.org.au

See also Participatory action research and Action Learning:

Aimers J (1999) 'Using Participatory Action Research in a Local Government Setting' in Hughes I (Ed) **Action Research Electronic Reader**

www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arr/arrow/aimers

Wadsworth, Y., (1998) What is Participatory Action Research? Action Research International, Paper 2,

www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/p-ywadsworth98

Consultation and Participation

Consultation policies and frameworks have been adopted by many councils in Victoria and these will guide the local approach to community consultation.

A list of consultation principles are likely to refer to the following:

- All participants in consultation processes should be clear on the purpose, methods, timelines and how outcomes will be decided;
- Consultation needs to respect the legitimacy and point of view of all participants, and not simply those with influence;
- Consultation processes need to be well planned and adequately resourced;
- Consultation methods should be sensitive to the social and cultural diversity of the municipality to ensure equity in decision forming processes;
- Effective consultation requires feedback. All participants are entitled to know what use is made of the views and information they provide;
- Consultation techniques and instruments are designed and implemented in accordance with stated principles.

One of the best and most comprehensive guides for community consultation and other techniques for social planning in an Australian context is the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc., **Social Planning Guidelines for Queensland Local Government**, Second edition.

For more detailed information on the application of consultation instruments – See the **Consultation and Resource Guide** at the vlga website - www.vlgaconsultation.org.au

See also the Public Participation Toolbox developed by the International Association for Participation - www.iap2.org

Victorian Local Governance Association, **Lets' Talk – a consultation framework**, August 2007

Marvin Weisbord & Sandra Janoff, **Future Search – An Action guide to finding common ground in organisations and communities**, Berret-Koehler, 2000, www.futuresearch.net

Councils need to consider how effectively consultation information is collected, stored and accessible in their organizations. Local governments carry out many consultations in any year, ranging from large through to small scale projects. A great deal of valuable information lies hidden or not utilized as effectively as it should be because the consultation information is either not known about or not easily accessible. Addressing this issue through improved collaborative planning and intelligent use of information systems is an important first step.

Co-ordination and integration

Local Government Association of Queensland Inc. **Social Planning Guidelines for Queensland Local Government**, Second Edition

Nick Wates, **The Community Planning Handbook**, Earthscan Publications, London, 2000 - www.communityplanning.net

Peter Bridgman & Glyn Davis, **Australian Policy Handbook**, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards NSW, 1998

Council planning is stronger when a collaborative planning culture exists within a local government. A collaborative planning culture is facilitated when a council organisation has a genuine commitment and devotes resources to both corporate planning and community planning. This will be reflected in the organisational structure through a senior officer with responsibilities for corporate planning and with Community Planning/Development recognized as a line management responsibility.

Monitoring and Review

LGPro, Corporate Planners Special Interest Group, **Performance Monitoring and Reporting Guidelines**

LGPro, Corporate Planners Special Interest Group **A guide to achieving a whole of organisation approach to Best Value**

Australasian Evaluation Society
www.aes.asn.au

Campbell Collaboration
www.campbellcollaboration.org/index

The Atkisson Group
www.atkisson.com

Environmental Indicators for Metropolitan Melbourne
www.aius.org.au/indicators/index



Appendix 2 - Detail of Victorian initiatives

One way to consider how the above initiatives and projects connect with Community and Council Planning is to assess the function and purpose of each activity. In what way do they contribute to shaping the principles, processes and products of Community Planning and Council Planning?

Professor Mark Considine, Building Connections - Community Strengthening and Local Government in Victoria (August 2004);

Mark Considine's work provides a rationale and understanding for community strengthening in local government, with reference to principles and governance processes. It examines the possibilities for local government in light of changing governmental approaches to addressing difficult policy issues and points towards a more strategic and stronger coordination role for local governments based on an understanding of key community goals.

Many will recognise that the strengthening agenda rests upon a longer tradition of community development going back to the 1960s and 1970s. What is different about the new approaches is that they push further in asking how government at all three levels and private organisations might engage directly with communities, and how this engagement might lead to fundamental changes in the way government itself is organised.

By addressing key goals through strategies which foster community strengthening, governments aim to stimulate and draw upon the contributions of many different public and private stakeholders. It is through the knowledge, experience and capability of different agencies, officials and community groups that our most complex and pressing priorities can be successfully addressed.

(Mark Considine, Building Connections, August 2004)

Department for Victorian Communities – Indicators of Community Strength 2004, 2005, 2006

Informed by international trends on community wellbeing indicators, the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) has developed a set of indicators that measure community attitudes and participation across a range of areas. The Indicators of Community Strength provide a useful reference for monitoring change in community attitudes across selected topics.

Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) Project (2005/2006)

The Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) Project aims to provide a framework for Victorian Local Governments on the design, content and application of community indicators. The project, conducted over 2005 and 2006, was funded by VicHealth and the project partners are a broad collaboration comprising VicHealth, the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). The project team includes Victoria and Swinburne Universities and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The long term aims of the CIV project are to provide a sustainable Victorian foundation for the development and use of local health and wellbeing indicators and to support more informed and democratic Community Planning and policy making at the local government level. The indicator framework developed by the CIV, informed by extensive local government participation, identifies a suite of indicators organised into five broad domains:

- Healthy, safe and inclusive communities
- Dynamic, resilient local economies
- Sustainable built and natural environments
- Culturally rich and vibrant communities
- Democratic and engaged communities.

Under these domains are a set of approximately 80 community wellbeing indicators, covering the broad spectrum of local community life. These indicators were publicly released in mid 2007 and can be viewed at the following website - www.communityindicators.net.au

Professor Bill Russell, Joint State-Local Planning Project (2005)

This review found that councils develop a number of plans with varying planning cycles and consultation requirements, with little reference to the planning frameworks of local governments. In particular, there is a lack of appreciation of the differences in capacity and local priorities of councils across Victoria. This has contributed to duplication of consultation processes and lack of integration in the strategic plans of local government's.

One of the outcomes of this review was to assess how the strategic planning requirements of state agencies can be incorporated into the strategic planning frameworks of local governments. This may provide an opportunity to councils to streamline their existing processes and to reduce the current number of plans.

The implementation of the Joint State-Local Planning Project will allow local governments to integrate a number of State strategic planning requirements into their Council Planning framework. This will reduce the administrative burden for local governments around strategic planning, and increase the likelihood of State objectives being embedded at the local level.

Community Strengthening in Local Government Continuous Improvement Review (2006)

In August 2005, an advisory group on community strengthening supported the development of a Community Strengthening Continuous Improvement Assessment (CSCIA) tool to assist councils. Revisions to the CSCIA tool occurred in 2006 and a consultation program occurred in late 2006 seeking contributions from the local government sector on the implementation of the tool.

The tool is designed to assist councils with identifying opportunities for improvements and for making judgements about the processes which can best deliver improved outcomes for their communities. The tool provides a general guide to the characteristics which may help Councils identify for themselves whether they have processes in place to assist their community strengthening program.

The tool or checklist comprises four sections – Foundations of Community Strengthening, Developing Community Wide Interventions, Joining-up Council Services, Changing the Way Council does Business.

Under the community strengthening section, the checklist seeks information on whether Council has an explicit commitment to community strengthening in the Council Plan, consultation approaches to community strengthening, data collection and analysis processes, ways of identifying social exclusion.

Whilst the checklist items are suggested to be treated flexibly and adapted to the circumstances of each Council there does not appear to be in the checklist any explicit reference to Community Planning as part of the process of community strengthening or as part of a council's strategic framework.

There are, however, a number of points in the checklist that are consistent with the integration of Community and Council Planning such as 2.1 Council undertakes specific actions to build social capital within the municipality and 3.6 – Council Planning methodologies include explicit processes for considering how programs and projects impact on community strengthening goals.

The value of the checklist (CSCIA) is that it requires councils to examine their organisational approach to community strengthening and provides a framework and reference point to guide their approach and understanding. It also provides comparative information on approaches and techniques for community strengthening.

Councils will still need to clarify for themselves as to whether community strengthening is a policy objective at the local level and how Community Planning fits into the scheme. Whilst community strengthening remains an important policy objective at the state level, its emphasis at the local government area level as an overarching policy goal within the Council Plan, for example, may be less apparent for some local governments.

Other Initiatives

- VLGA Consultation and Engagement Resource Website (2001 & updated in 2006);

In response to the introduction of Best Value in Victoria and to wider demands to increase community consultation in the provision of services by local governments, the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) and Local Government Victoria developed the Community Consultation Resource Guide. The guide is recognised as an excellent reference for community consultation and the range of techniques and instruments available to utilise for community consultation. The guide is available on the Internet at the following location - www.vlga.org.au/vlga-ce

- MAV Lighthouse Project (2006);

In March 2006 the MAV launched the Lighthouse Program which aims to consolidate and promote Community Planning across local governments in Victoria. The Lighthouse Program is establishing 'clusters' of projects to operate as knowledge-sharing networks that support councils to assess, plan and implement Community Planning models.

The Program sponsored the Planning By and For the People Conference in December 2006. The conference brought together councillors and community workers from across the nation to participate in workshops discussing techniques for effectively engaging the community in the planning process.



Contact details for the Project Steering Committee:

Chris Newman	LGPro Corporate Planner's Network	0412 318 384	chrisn19@optusnet.com.au
Rebecca Haig	Community and Social Planner's Network	1300 882 233	rebecca.haig@maroondah.vic.gov.au
Karen Watson	Community and Social Planner's Network	03 8290 1175	kwatson@stonnington.vic.gov.au
Kerryn Stewart-Uden	LGPro Corporate Planner's Network	03 9658 9575	kerryn.stewart-uden@melbourne.vic.gov.au
Chris Phoon	Local Government Victoria	03 9208 3621	Christopher.Phoon@dvc.vic.gov.au
Brendan Carins	Brendan Carins Consulting	03 9849 2289	bcarins@optusnet.com.au

For further information on the LGPro Corporate Planner's Network, go to www.lgpro.com

For further information on the Community and Social Planner's Network, go to: www.vlga.org.au

