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Planning Together

Lessons from local government
community planning in Victoria

Final Report

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1 Introduction

This report captures the community planning experiences of eleven Victorian local governments in order to increase the knowledge and understanding of community planning within the local government sector and among other interested stakeholders.

The report was commissioned by Local Government Victoria and represents a commitment by the Victorian Government to support the strengthening of local communities by:

- improving people's ability and opportunity to get involved in community planning and decision-making;
- changing the way Government works to improve the way it responds to local priorities and aspirations.

This commitment stems from *Growing Victoria Together* which aims to increase community participation (building friendly, confident and safe communities) and to provide more opportunities for Victorians to have a say about issues that matter to them (greater public participation and more accountable Government).

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) supports community planning through a range of initiatives such as Community Renewal and Community Building Initiatives, and through grants programs such as the Local Area Planning Support Program and Community Support Grants. Local government peak bodies also support community planning with initiatives such as the Municipal Association of Victoria's Community Planning Lighthouse project. *Planning Together* attempts to capture the emerging community planning practices within local governments supported by these initiatives and the lessons learnt to date.

For the purposes of this report community planning refers to a set of principles, processes and products that:

- Are facilitated by local government;
- Produce a long term vision;
- Establish key priorities and actions;
- Have a holistic focus on the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the community (not a programmatic focus);
- Are municipal wide, but incorporate local neighbourhood and precinct plans; and
- Have community strengthening as a goal and community participation as a central feature of the planning process.

The report provides an overview of the history and context of local government community planning in Victoria suggesting that community planning has benefits for communities and governments. It also indicates that as the number of councils doing community planning grows, there is an increased need to learn from and improve upon current approaches.

The third section outlines the methodology for the project. Overseen by a steering committee, project consultants supported participating councils to develop their own case study reports through the completion of a common self assessment tool developed specifically for this project. These case studies were then analysed along with input from two additional local governments.

Section four provides a summary of case study findings and key themes emerging. A strong message emerges from the findings that there is no 'one size fits all' for community planning. Different approaches to community planning have emerged based on local conditions such as the history of council, the length of time community planning has been undertaken, resources available etc. What also is clear is that councils agree that community planning can be improved by being more integrated with council plans and planning cycles.

The last section of the report discusses the issues that emerged from the case studies and discussion of them. It proposes a way forward that strengthens local planning and the outcomes and benefits that flow from community planning processes.

Planning is both a rational/technical process and a political one and it is both an art and a science. This is why there is no simple recipe or formula. It can be improved by the application of rigorous scientific method, but experience and learning from others can also lead to better planning processes. This report aims to contribute to improved community planning by increasing knowledge drawn directly from the experiences of local governments in Victoria.



2 History & Context

In November 2008 all 79 Victorian Local Governments will go to the polls on the same day. It will be the first statewide election of local governments. Much has changed since the amalgamation of councils in 1992 including the breadth of local governments' responsibilities, inter-government relations and the role of local governments in planning and decision making. Although some councils were undertaking community planning prior to this, community planning has received renewed support and gained momentum since.

This section provides an overview of the recent history and context for local government planning in Victoria.

2.1 Local governments' mandate

By June 2009 all seventy-nine local governments will have adopted their four-year Council plans as required under the 2003 amendments to the Local Government Act (i.e. Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003). These plans will include each council's strategic objectives, strategies to achieve them, indicators to monitor them and resources necessary to implement them. In Part 1A, Section 3D(2)(b), the Act species that the role of a Council includes "acting as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making". In an increasing number of Victorian councils, community aspirations are being identified and articulated through a community planning process and linked to outcomes and outputs in Council plans.

Local government community planning did not begin with the 2003 amendments. Public consultation, local decision making and local government planning processes have been evolving over decades, but the 2003 Act acknowledged the central role played by local governments and gave them a clear and strong mandate to undertake broadly based local planning.

The Objectives contained in "Part 1A – Local Government Charter" of the Act include:

*"to promote the social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability of the municipal district;
to improve the overall quality of life of people in the local community;
to ensure transparency and accountability in Council decision making."*

This fitted neatly with the notions of joined up government, building stronger communities and need to often drive innovation from the bottom, connecting top down and bottom up processes.

2.2 Community planning

A broad consensus has emerged based on the following common features of community planning:

- Engagement of citizens in creating a vision for the future, setting priorities and contributing to decision-making.
- Valuing and utilising local networks.
- A focus on people and place that requires a more flexible and joined-up approach to policy and service delivery.
- Connecting top-down and bottom-up policy processes that influence resource allocation.

Although approaches to community planning have been varied, it has become common practice for local governments to develop “community plans” alongside their council plans. Community plans are more inspirational, longer term, involve more extensive community consultation and deal with matters often outside local governments’ domain and direct control.

Community planning is seen to be a natural expression of democracy in a way that links participatory democracy to representative democracy and budget decisions. It also has been recognised that community planning processes have inherent value in strengthening governments’ mandates, building trust in government, mobilising support, facilitating the implementation of government initiatives and improving the effectiveness of service delivery.

Community planning also contributes to stronger, more resilient communities that grow from the inside out and build on local strengths and assets, often finding solutions to problems that cannot be seen or imposed from above.

There is common agreement that community planning needs to be resourced to be effective. It requires money, skills and strong backing from all levels of government. In particular it requires all levels of government to be responsive to the outcomes of community planning processes. This involves information about decision making processes, action taken on priorities emerging from local planning and how agreed priorities translate into budget commitments.

2.3 Local planning methods and process

Planning is about envisioning the future. It is making decisions today that will shape the future. It involves making choices. To some extent these choices are based on evidence, costings and hard numbers, but they are also based on experience, judgement and opinion. As suggested above, planning choices are increasingly informed by local community aspirations and priorities.

In recent years, more local governments have sought to systemically and directly involve their communities in needs identification and priority setting. They have also sought to look beyond traditional local government planning processes and take a leadership role in developing and facilitating planning at the local level that has community engagement and involvement as a central feature.

Local government planning happens within a wider context. Market forces, global trends and the decisions of Federal and State governments are some of the forces that shape this context.

Local governments, through their planning also want to influence the wider context and encourage other levels of government and other sectors, to respond to local priorities.

An important part of planning, therefore, is how it connects with and influences other levels of government and the wider context.

Planning methods change over time. For example, tools for analysis have improved and research evidence has grown. Australian Bureau of Statistics and indicator data are now more accessible at a local level. In addition, there has been an increasing trend toward more participatory and engaged planning methods.

Methods also change from place to place. Whilst there are many common features and underlying planning principles, there are also important differences that reflect different histories, geography and populations. That is why we have local governments, to reflect those differences and to capture them in the council plan.

Finally, planning is rudderless if it is not possible to measure outcomes and progress over time. Periodic reviews using indicators of progress and time sequenced data are an important element in the planning cycle.

2.4 Community indicators

The area of indicator development and measuring progress across social, environmental, economic, cultural and governance domains has been fertile ground in recent years.

The Victorian Community Indicators Project (VCIP 2006), funded by VicHealth, brought together a broad range of indicators developments mostly pioneered by local governments in association with Swinburne University. Out of this work has emerged Community Indicators Victoria (CIV), a partnership between the Melbourne, Swinburne and RMIT universities together with VicHealth, the VLGA, MAV, the Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Human Services and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The survey work, report writing and web hosting for CIV is undertaken by the McCaughey Centre within the Melbourne School of Population Health. This partnership also connects with international developments through the OECD work on “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies” across multiple domains.

Victorian local governments now have access to local government area (LGA) level community wellbeing data across the five domains listed above through the CIV website www.communityindicators.net.au and accompanying research is being developed to explore the use of indicator data to inform local community planning.

2.5 Support for community planning

More engaged processes have been supported by the State government and it is difficult to find a State government strategic plan, policy document or report that does not highlight the importance of community engagement, local planning and the central role of local governments. Growing Victoria Together (DPC 2005), A Fairer Victoria (DPC 2007), and Strong Communities – Ways Forward (MACVIC, 2006) are recent documents.

A Fairer Victoria (DPC 2006) included a commitment for a Local Area Planning Support Program and *A Fairer Victoria* (DPC 2007) continued to express support for community planning:

“Building on changes already introduced, we will support more collaborative work between and across all levels of government. We will focus on strengthening the leadership role of local government in community planning and improve the quality of local governance and councillor performance. We will also be more responsive to locally identified priorities.”

In April 2006 the Commonwealth and all States and Territories signed the Inter-Government Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding inter-Government Relations on Local Government Matters with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

Local government peak bodies, professional associations and academics have mirrored this view, consistently and strongly supporting local community planning.

2.6 Recent developments

There are other pieces of work that are aimed at advancing local government community planning in Victoria.

The Lighthouse Program, a Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) project, has provided considerable support for local government community planning over the last two years. 'Clusters' of local governments undertaking community planning meet as knowledge-sharing networks to support councils to assess, plan and implement community planning models. Additionally, international keynote speakers as well as local practitioners have participated in conferences and workshops on community planning as part of the Lighthouse Program.

Another important recent development is the 'Community – Corporate Planning Project' funded by the Local Area Planning Support Program (DPCD) and being undertaken by the LGPro Corporate Planners Network in collaboration with the Community & Social Planners Network.

This project aims to develop guidelines that will assist community planning to align with council planning. It will "...assess how community priorities can be embedded in key local government decision making structures."

A background paper developed for the project links community indicators to community plans and traces the history of community planning from the push for Integrated Local Area Planning (ILAP) in the late '80s to today. Importantly the paper identifies a range of imperatives *and* challenges for local government community planning.

Draft guidelines developed in the project are currently under discussion and state:

"Traditionally, the planning activities of local government have been segmented into two divisions: Council planning, which refers to the corporate and/or internal organisational planning process; and Community Planning, which are those planning practices undertaken for, with and by the local community. To date, there has been significant work undertaken to define and guide each of these separate disciplines.

"There are, however, few 'road maps' that show how to integrate Community Planning and Council planning within the Victorian context. According to many in the planning realm, this lack of guidance means that Victorian local government has not always been well-positioned to draw on the benefits of integrated Community-Council planning." (Carins, 2007)

The 'Community – Corporate Planning Project' defines the terms and documents the steady progression towards adequately resourced and codified community planning processes led by local governments.

Summary

There is growing consensus that the engagement of communities in planning for their futures both strengthens communities and strengthens the basis for local and state government planning and resource allocation. The State government has sought to support local government community planning and many more councils are now taking a lead role in local community planning. Although some councils have a long history of local community planning, many more are new to this role and are supported by capacity building programs such as the Lighthouse Project. There is still much to learn about community planning and how it can be strengthened. The *Planning Together* project aims to contribute to building a body of knowledge to support community planning.



3 Methodology

3.1 Governance

The project was commissioned by Local Government Victoria, DPCD, undertaken by consultants and overseen by a reference committee made up of stakeholders with a key interest in local government community planning. The following organisations were represented:

- Community Development Division, DPCD
- Local Government Victoria, DPCD
- People and Community Advocacy Division, DPCD
- Sport and Recreation Victoria, DPCD
- Strategic Policy, Research and Forecasting Division, DPCD
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Victorian Local Governance Association
- Local Government Professionals Inc

3.2 Case Studies

The research informing this report is based on a review of nine case studies of local government led community planning undertaken by councils themselves. The participating councils were drawn from a group of seventeen that expressed interest in participating in the project and were selected by the reference group because they represent Councils:

- With long term experience of community planning as well as ones with less experience; and
- From metropolitan, interface and rural areas.

Participating councils included:

Ararat Rural City Council
City of Casey
Golden Plains Shire Council
Hume City Council
Loddon Shire Council
Mitchell Shire Council
Surf Coast Shire Council
Wyndham City Council
Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Councils were supported to participate with a grant from Local Government Victoria, and a 'self assessment framework' and 'guidelines for case study development' developed by the consultants. The latter provided a common template for councils to document their community planning approach and a set of guidelines about the process for their development. (Key questions for reviewing community planning are included as attachment two.) Additionally, the consultants were available during the case study development phase to support the councils.

Two features of the case study development process stand out:

- The decision to participate in the project was made by the CEO of participating councils and the CEOs provided final sign off for the case study report. This high level support demonstrated the commitment of councils to their own learning about community planning.
- A range of people had input into the development of each case study including councillors, CEOs, managers from across the organisation, planning staff as well as residents drawn from community planning committees.

The nine case studies are available on line at <http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au> under Publications and Resources, then Community Strengthening

<http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/Web20/dvclgv.nsf/allDocs/RWPA8839CB9D0B964D7CA2571700031FF3C?OpenDocument>

In addition to case studies the report draws on two other sources of information including:

- A telephone interview with the Manager, Community Strengthening, Wellington Shire Council to learn about the mechanisms they have in place for supporting state government involvement in the implementation of community plans.
- A review of Port Phillip Council's community planning reports.



4 Summary of Case Studies Findings

This section provides a summary of the case study material and has been structured around the key headings used in the local government community planning self assessment tool (see attachment two). Additional learnings from both Wellington Shire Council and Port Phillip City Council have been included to highlight particular aspects of their community planning.

4.1 Models of community planning

Community planning is described in each case study as a set of policies, processes and products closely connected to each council's own particular planning system.

A common understanding of community planning is expressed in the case studies and can be summarized as 'a process of community engagement leading to the development of a future looking plan which sets out priorities and actions needed'.

Emphasis varies across case studies as to the particular key drivers of community planning and how 'community' is defined.

Key drivers of community planning

With the exception of two case studies community planning is described as having emerged in the period immediately following local government amalgamations in Victoria in the mid 1990s. There is an implicit view expressed in these case studies that community planning was a useful political management tool during a period when the confidence of residents in their local council needed to be rebuilt.

The remaining two case studies describe community planning as having evolved in response to the need to plan for accelerated population growth.

Definitions of community

Whilst the views of councils about what a community is vary from case study to case study, they all accept that the communities they are most concerned with exist within the boundaries of their LGA.

Some see communities as residents; some consider communities as anyone who lives, works, studies, or owns property within the municipality. Others include tourists and visitors in their conceptualisation of community. Most consider that communities are people connected by place and some view communities as people connected by commonalities or by issues.

In further discussions with case study Councils, all agreed that LGAs are made up of multiple and overlapping communities.

Emerging models

With one exception, four different types of community planning are described in the case studies:

- Long term visioning to inform all of Council's (and others) work;
- Municipal wide partnership planning;
- Partnership based place management; and
- Township level planning.

Each of these models is further described in Table 1 and a summary of key features of each community planning case study is included as Attachment One.

The exception is the Surf Coast Shire Council case study which rather than describing community planning as one planning process, suggests that community planning is a set of principles and practices that, over time, will inform council's planning across all levels including visioning, municipal wide, place management and township planning. The outcomes emphasised in this case study relate more to community strengthening outcomes rather than a concrete community plan.

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

Upon further discussion with the case study Councils, most suggest that the 'models' described in Table 1 oversimplify a complex planning system in operation within each Council. For example, most Councils doing township planning also undertake municipal level partnership planning and indeed long term visioning. A case study that describes community planning as a visioning process also engages with communities at a township level. Case study Councils agree that a 'community plan' is only one outcome of community planning.

However, it is difficult to analyse such different examples of community planning without using a 'models' method to understand the similarities and differences in approach. For example, community planning described as visioning has a very different sized community to engage than does township planning. This report adopts a models approach only where it is helpful for analysis and for drawing out difference.

Commonalities

Whilst it is clear that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to community planning, common features of community planning emerge from the case studies. Local government community planning is commonly described in the case studies as:

- 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 council's 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 it's implementation in Stage two; and
- Supported with Council resources (sometimes this is existing resources and sometimes additional).

4.2 Council planning and community planning

As previously suggested, a commonality shared by the case study councils is that community planning is considered a separate but interrelated process to council planning. On the whole, case studies describe community planning as a process that captures the views, aspirations and priorities of the community (people, organizations and actions beyond just those things councils are responsible for). Council planning is described as capturing the strategic organizational priorities of councils, linked to resource allocation and work plans.

All case studies report councilor, CEO and senior management endorsement of both community and council planning policies and processes.

All case studies also report that the council plan is developed within a central (corporate) department, yet many report that community planning is the domain of community development/community service areas of Council. One suggested implication is that community planning can sometimes be marginalized and less well understood by other parts of the Council.

Great variance between community planning and council planning is reported in case studies in terms of the amount of money available to support either process and the commitment of council. Generally, council planning attracts higher levels of support. Many case studies report the significance of external funding, such as Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) funding for seeding their community planning approach.

Great difference is also expressed in case studies in relation to the hierarchy of council and community plans. All agree that the Council plan is the overarching plan that guides councils work plans and budgets. Where they differ is in how community plans fits within the planning hierarchy.

Three case studies describe community planning as the vision that provides a top down 'frame' for the council plan and all other council planning and activity. Another set of case studies define community planning as bottom up: input from small communities that is fed up into the council plan and all other planning. Two councils see community planning as delivering on an aspect of the council plan, for example, responding to anticipated population growth, and one considers community planning as a set of principles and processes that the Council plan and all other council planning is required to undertake.

4.3 Community participation and engagement

Community engagement is an essential feature of local government community planning. Case study councils commonly accept that you can't have community planning without hearing the views of the community. Where they differ is around the following aspects of community engagement:

- The size of the community,
- The level of community leadership and participation by residents in community planning governance arrangements;
- The level of community engagement;
- Methods of community engagement;
- Who is engaged in the process;
- The level of ownership of the resulting community plans; and
- The value given to community 'knowledge'.

Size of community

Each of the case studies was asked to nominate the size of the community they identified as the target for their community planning. The results are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2 - Model and size of the community

Model	Size of 'community'
Visioning	Whole municipality 121,00 – 144,000+
Municipal wide partnership planning	Whole municipality 121,00 – 144,000+
Partnership based place management	8,000 – 35,000
'Township' planning	500 – 3,000

Case studies reveal a number of tensions associated with the scale of community:

- Community ownership is reported to decrease as the size of the community increases;
- Some townships are considered too small for sustainable community planning;
- A large number of townships within just one municipality makes community planning with all townships prohibitive.

Community leadership

Case studies report mixed roles for community leaders in the governance and decision making around community planning. Some councils don't engage community members at this level at all whilst others, such as Wyndham City Council, have a community planning taskforce for their visioning process made up of community members. Township planning provides the most potential for community leadership and is described in case studies as a capacity building process which results in the emergence of new community leaders. These leaders take on a key role in developing, and in some areas implementing, community plans.

Methods of community engagement

Case studies describe a wide variety of methods of community engagement. Most feel that their engagement falls within the range of informing and consulting communities.

Table 3 - Methods of community engagement using IAP2 descriptors

Model	Community Engagement	Comments
Visioning	Inform, consult	Desire to move more into collaboration at the implementation phase
Municipal wide partnership planning	Inform, consult	Desire to move more into collaboration at the implementation phase
Partnership based place management	Inform, consult	Desire to move more into collaboration at the implementation phase
'Township' planning	Consult to empowerment, collaboration.	The emphasis varied between Councils

Case study councils agree that community planning provides an opportunity to explore innovative community engagement practices. Many acknowledge the insights gained from their participation in the Lighthouse Project.

Who is engaged in the process?

Case studies share a limited understanding of who *actually* engages in the community planning process. Most councils assume that because the 'community' is engaged – people with a disability etc are included. Young people are an exception and many case studies reveal a concern about the lack of engagement by this population group and the need for youth specific engagement strategies. One Council identifies that CALD communities have been hard to engage in community planning.

Level of community ownership

Case studies describe the issue of community ownership of community plans as vexed. On the one hand, councils express the view that community ownership of the plan is important: communities should share the responsibility for delivering on the plans and not just expect Council to do everything for them; communities have access to resources that Councils don't etc. Yet most case studies reveal that Councils don't believe that community ownership has resulted from their community planning.

The following factors are identified as contributing to the level of community ownership:

- The size of the community being planned with: the smaller it is, the stronger the sense of ownership.
- The establishment of committees that involve residents in the planning and implementation phase, for example working groups, action groups, and planning associations, results in stronger community ownership
- Community ownership can be diminished by the process of having community plans endorsed by council when the endorsement process results in the content of plans being changed. Golden Plains is an example of where ownership of township plans remains with the township. Council doesn't seek to endorse the plan but accepts them as a point of negotiation with communities about future priorities.

The value given to community knowledge

A common assumption by case study councils is that communities know what they want and what is important to them (and that they have the ability to articulate this knowledge). Yet councils differ in terms of the extent to which this knowledge is valued:

Council knows *best* or Community knows best.

A tension exists here. Whilst some councils base their community planning on a view that communities know best, this is then disputed at the endorsement or implementation phase. Councils reprioritise community priorities when their planners take into account a range of other 'knowledges' such as quantitative evidence, policy and service delivery knowledge. When this happens there can be a mismatch between council priorities and community priorities.

Issues arising

Further discussion with case study councils about the issue of community ownership of community plans identified the following questions for future review:

- How should community ownership of community planning be measured?
- Should the level of 'community' ownership of a plan for 100,000 people be the same as the level of ownership of a community plan for 500 people?
- Does the level of community ownership have an impact on the implementation of community plans? How? Why?

4.4 Engagement of other stakeholders

Most case studies report that the engagement of people other than residents is an important part of their community planning process. The variety of stakeholders engaged is immense:

- Local politicians
- State and federal government departments;
- Local businesses and traders groups;
- Non government organizations;
- Sporting and recreation associations;
- Arts and cultural sector;
- Religious groups;
- Environmental groups;
- Emergency services; and
- Organisations serving youth, older people, children and families, CALD communities.

The engagement of other stakeholders is particularly critical for partnership based community planning in growth areas. Partners such as government departments and authorities, LLENs, Primary Care Partnerships, Area Consultative Committees are all important for identifying the needs of future communities and for being able identify the contribution their agency can make in responding to identified priorities.

The three township planning case studies indicate that they don't tend to engage non resident stakeholders in the needs identification and prioritizing stage of community planning phase. They share the view that the primary objective of this stage of community planning is to capture resident's perspectives and agree that other stakeholders are important for the implementation phase.

4.5 Mapping, evidence and indicators

Case study councils report varying use of quantitative evidence in community planning. Differences arise in relation to:

- Whether evidence is used or not;
- The frameworks used for understanding the evidence; and
- Data sources

The use of evidence or not

The case study councils doing township level planning report that quantitative data does not feature highly in Stage one of community planning: the development of a township plan. Instead, these community plans mostly represent the views of local residents only. One case study goes as far as to suggest that communities aren't interested in evidence '.....they just know their needs and want changes to be made'.

The remaining case study councils consider quantitative data an important source of information for strengthening the issues identification process. This is particularly the case for councils planning for growth areas. Evidence is commonly used to both profile communities and to forecast growth. Evidence is also used to spotlight issues that may require action in the future.

Frameworks

Primarily two frameworks are used for structuring and understanding quantitative data. These include both the *Community Indicators Victoria (CIV)* framework with five community wellbeing domains and the *Environments for Health* framework with four health and wellbeing domains.

Data sources

A range of data sources were used including:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Existing state government surveys such as DPCD's Community Strengthening Survey;
- State and local government administrative data;
- New surveys of communities including CATI surveys and asset mapping.

Councils using evidence to inform community planning agree that *Community Indicators Victoria* provides useful data for community planning. However, most community planning reported in case studies occurred prior to the release of CIV data.

Issue arising

An issue raised by several councils is the difficulty finding sub LGA data for local community planning. Data tends to be available for LGA and regional analysis only. This was particularly a problem for partnership based place management planning for new communities. These two case studies highlight the need for high quality sub LGA data and reliable population projections.

4.6 Connections with other levels of government and other planning.

The information provided in case studies about the connections between community planning and the policies and plans of State and Federal reveal mixed responses. For example, some suggest that at the local level it's not very easy to see how macro state government policies such as *A Fairer Victoria* are used. On the other hand they provide examples of local community planning undertaken utilizing State Government community building money.

It is fair to say that most councils consider State Government policy and the flow on resources as strategic opportunities to secure funding or improve services rather than as important approaches for 'framing' Council's work. Issues and priorities from local plans are fed up into funding submissions for grants and other initiatives.

The lack of a clear link between community plans and State government resource allocation decisions is identified by case studies as a challenge. Two examples were given where resident groups initiated contact with the State Government and the State Government responded positively with an expectation of Council also contributing financially. In one example the Council refused to support the initiative and the money was handed back. In a second example, the Council saw an opportunity to extend the resource base for the community and committed money even when the initiative had not initially been budgeted for.

A consistent issue raised in discussion with the nine case study Councils is the lack of recognition and legitimation by the State government of the role of local governments in local community planning.

The Wellington Shire Council's community planning experience provides an insight into possible ways for bridging the divide between local community planning and State government decision making. Wellington Shire Council is implementing a township model of community planning much like Golden Plains Shire Council. Township plans are developed and implemented by the communities themselves. Council's role is to facilitate the process and support the elements of community plans that fall within the responsibility of the council. Additionally, council has backed township planning groups by finding ways to bring other levels of government into the process. As part of the latter commitment council invited State government regional directors to join a municipal community planning forum called the Wellington Resource Network (WRN).

The original purpose of the WRN was to provide a forum for township planning groups to present their community plans and priority projects to State government representatives for the purposes of attracting resources. However, in the eighteen months that the WRN has been meeting no community plans have yet been finalised. Instead, the WRN has been through an extensive capacity building process in order to develop a shared understanding and commitment to community planning by the main State government stakeholders.

All WRN members participated in a professional development program focused on understanding community planning and its potential. Following this, the regional directors agreed with the importance and value of community planning and committed to send their community engagement staff to future WRN meetings on their behalf. A process of capacity building has now commenced with these new WRN members.

During its short life, the WRN has been a vehicle for building relationships between council and key State government partners and for ensuring that all have a shared understanding of community planning. In the future it will provide a platform for communities wanting to advocate to, and problem solve with, the State government themselves. The strength of this model is yet to be realised in real terms. How will the WRN cope as 23 community planning groups make their way forward one or two at a time? The Wellington Shire Council is confident of one thing: regional offices of State government departments want better relationships with communities and the WRN offers them the opportunity to achieve this.

4.7 Bringing it all together

Bringing it all together refers to the process of integrating community aspirations with the views of other stakeholders, quantitative evidence, and state government policies.

Only one group of case studies report the inclusion of the 'bringing it all together' step in community planning. These are the councils working within the 'partnership place management' model. They suggest that before priorities and actions are established in a plan, other evidence and sources of knowledge is weighed up by the planning group. The resulting plan includes decisions based on a range of evidence and inputs.

However councils supporting township planning, for example, describe community planning as the process of capturing community aspirations, needs, issues and priorities. They see *council planning* as the process of integrating community planning outcomes with other evidence to inform council priorities and actions.

For community planning at the visioning level the process of 'bringing it all together' is often missing as well. Case studies suggest that community visions focus on community aspirations without prioritising or weighing up a range of inputs. As one case study suggests – the visioning process isn't where the hard decisions are made. Each part of the vision, whether it be environmental sustainability or housing growth, is considered of equal value in a vision. Therefore the 'bringing it all together' step occurs as part of later stage as the vision is translated and integrated into council plans and actions.

Most of the case study councils agree that the 'bringing it all together' stage is usually the first step in the process of integrating community planning into council planning and a necessary step for Stage 2 – implementation. All case studies report that the work of bringing together the range of inputs and data is done by senior level professional staff employed by the council. In addition, three case studies report that partners are involved in the process through taskforces, working groups or steering committees.

There are many challenges at this point:

- Some professional and expert staff in councils are challenged by the requirement that they consider community views;
- Communities feel their input is devalued by going through a further process of assessment.
- Sometimes community priorities are not acted upon by councils as a result of being challenged by other data/views.

4.8 Aligning and integrating council and community planning

The alignment and integration of community planning with council planning is complex. It is the point where community aspirations, views and priorities are linked with council's planning. All case studies describe having both community plans and council plans. How they relate to each other and whether they 'fit' are important considerations.

Alignment and integration are also steps in the planning process that occur when councils move into Stage two: implementation. It's often where the 'rubber hits the road' and competing demands and new evidence is brought to bear.

Importantly, all case study councils seek to integrate community planning outcomes into council planning processes and outcomes. However, they also identify the alignment and integration of council and community planning is an area of challenge requiring further learning.

Issues identified by councils include the following:

- There are never enough resources to do everything;
- Priorities identified by communities are not always considered priorities by council. When a mismatch occurs, community priorities tend to be overturned/overlooked and communities feel disenfranchised;
- Community priorities are not always considered the same as Commonwealth and State government priorities (and therefore the flow of money). Councils have to address the later e.g. early years plans, disability plans, human rights audits;
- Communities lack an understanding of the fact that councils have to weigh up lots of different things when making decisions.
- Market forces exist that councils can't control;
- Unanticipated events impact on council capacity to respond to community aspirations e.g. floods and fires;
- In some instances, community plans are not recognised by (some) council staff as legitimate 'evidence' and are seen by some as totally separate to planning council does.

All case studies report that they would like stronger integration of community and council planning.

Recent community planning undertaken by Port Phillip City Council provides an example of community planning which attempts to 'bring it all together' as part of the planning process and attempts integration of community priorities into council plans.

The Port Phillip Community Plan is based on four levels of input:

- Community views captured through the Port Phillip Speaks Community Summit attended by 750 people and follow up community consultations; a survey of 2200 people, and interviews with 700 people including local service agencies. The outcome was ten key priorities;
- Council's response to the ten community priorities: council went through a process of considering it's role in delivering on the ten priorities. This step included consideration, amongst other things, of additional evidence and available resources;
- Neighbourhood meetings to identify neighbourhood level actions to be undertaken independent of council;
- Partnership commitments developed with other organisations and governments to deliver on community priorities.

The outcome is the Port Phillip Community Plan 2007 – 2017 which presents a community vision, ten community priorities and plans for their implementation involving resident groups, council and partner organisations. Thus the process of embedding community priorities in council's work plan occurred simultaneously to the sign on of community groups, service providers and other levels of government. Indeed the Port Phillip Council suggests that:

"Monitoring of the reach and influence of the community plan in other organisations action agendas will be a key determinant of the success of delivery of the Community Plan". (Port Phillip Council, 2007)

For Port Phillip Council the community plan sits next to and across the Council plan in the planning hierarchy:



4.9 Learnings

The following section provides a summary of the learnings reported by case study councils based on their community planning experiences.

Benefits to council

- Gives council a strong understanding about what is important to the community;
- Assists council to make strategic decisions;
- Brings a level of 'integrity' to council planning;
- Improves council's reputation in the community;
- Provides a powerful lobbying tool; and
- Can be a process (or result in a process) for building partnerships with key stakeholders.

In some instances, case study councils report that councils benefit from the process of communities taking responsibility for their own futures.

Benefits to the community

- A sense of empowerment as their views are listened to and incorporated into future planning;
- A chance for people to deliberate together and to get to know each other;
- Community capacity is built as new skills are learnt;
- More connected communities where difference can be tolerated;
- An increased sense of wellbeing from being engaged in community life;
- An understanding that people can influence outcomes;
- Feelings of belonging are engendered;
- Assists local groups to lobby; and
- Community perceptions of what's important are crystallized.

Downsides

The most commonly reported downside of community planning is the resource intensity. This was particularly challenging for small rural councils.

What helps it work well?

- Adequate financial and administrative resources;
- Full support from councilors and the CEO;
- Policies to frame and guide the work;
- In-house staff with professional community planning knowledge;
- Embedding community engagement skills throughout the whole organization. Communication and networking skills are regarded most highly by case study councils; and
- Community members with skills to drive the process.

Challenges

All case studies report that the greatest challenge is that of managing community expectations:

- Communities desire quick outcomes and resolution of issues;
- Balancing single interests with 'community' aspirations has been challenging;
- Councils are often seen as responsible for delivering on community plans – ownership by others is hard to achieve;

Further discussions with case study councils reveal that the issue of community expectations can be better managed by being clear with communities about:

- What Council is being responsible for in developing this plan: process and outcomes;
- The space for negotiation; and
- Where decisions lie: where council can decide something and where the decision is beyond council.

It is also considered important for councils undertaking community planning to:

- Think ahead about risk management; and
- Provide clear and consistent information to staff and communities.

A second common challenge identified is the lack of strong recognition of community planning by other levels of government and the inadequate structures and processes of governments for responding to local issues and priorities.

A third set of challenges relate specifically to community engagement:

- Dealing with overly consulted communities;
- Achieving 'representative' consultations;
- Ensuring 'hard to reach' communities are heard;
- Engaging young people;
- Keeping people engaged in an ongoing and meaningful way;
- Managing the cultural shift with council staff who don't value community engagement; and
- Encouraging communities to do things for themselves.

Finally, a common challenge to most case studies is that councils don't yet have ways of measuring the success of community planning.

What would help?

Case study councils agree that community planning will be strengthened by three main strategies:

- Achieving broad acceptance, by all levels of government, for community planning and the resultant community plans.
- The allocation of resources to local governments to fund community planning processes, projects and activities; and
- Workforce development and other resources to improve practice, particularly around community engagement.



5 Issues & Discussion

5.1 Preamble

Two aspects of the case studies are striking:

- They highlight the differences in community planning from local government to local government.
- They highlight tensions inherent in community planning.

At one level community planning has been represented as an embellishment or extension of democracy. It combines participatory democracy with representative democracy, leading to more informed decision making and more accountable government. The view casts community planning in a virtuous light. It is seen to be wholesome, aligned with stronger communities and better governance.

One might conclude from this view that 'the community knows best'.

An alternative view might be that community planning has become a new form of amateurism where uninformed opinion over-rides evidence and professional knowledge. This could be seen as an extension of post-modernism into planning, where larger strategic plans are deconstructed and a new form of cultural relativism values all opinions equally and basic principles ignored.

This perspective would challenge the view that the community knows best.

It is not surprising therefore, that the case studies highlight tensions between what emerges from community planning processes and council planning. At the point where the outcomes of community planning are fed into a broader strategic framework or where wider evidence is brought into play these tensions are evident.

This might be manifested in a variety of ways; between local knowledge and wider evidence; specific priorities and the larger strategic framework; between short term action and longer term strategy; and between the development of ideas and implementation.

Difficulties also existed in relation to scale and the linking of local planning to municipal planning and linking municipal planning to state wide priorities and funding and then linking all of that to the Regional Management Forums (RMFs). On the whole the case studies showed that these links did not exist although considerable effort was made to connect local plans to municipal wide plans.

Apart from technocratic questions of how strategic planning frameworks should be shaped, how evidence should be brought to bear and how community opinions and ideas should be fed into the process, these tensions raise some important and fundamental questions about democracy and government.

Citizens have every right to state their values and express their opinion, but should this extend into making planning decisions and setting priorities? Once a person moves from speaking for themselves into speaking on behalf of others, does this have legitimacy and how will that person be accountable for the views they express on behalf of others? If community involvement in planning is a form of market testing of what is acceptable or popular, is this simply opening planning up to market forces, devoid of principles and a longer term view? Is the notion of community planning limited to decisions on which there is consensus?

Governments are elected to make decisions for the common good and for both the short and long term. They are given a mandate to deal with hard and sometimes unpopular decisions. They are a forum for dealing with competing claims and resolving conflict. They have powers of enforcement. They are required to consider evidence to receive professional advice and to develop strategic plans with a view to implementation. These obligations have the potential to be in conflict with, or at least, lead to tension with community planning. The case studies appear to demonstrate that this is the case.

5.2 Evolution of community planning

Although the 2003 amendments to the Local Government Act required local governments to prepare four year council plans, the Act was in practice building on a process that began with amalgamation. The case studies demonstrated that each local government commenced community planning processes soon after amalgamation.

Community planning was part of the glue binding together the newly formed municipalities and dealing with tensions and competing claims arising from those amalgamations. It is not surprising that for rural areas this was township based, whilst for fringe metropolitan municipalities it was also about managing growth.

Almost all case studies reported that their community planning processes had been modified in light of early experience. Sometimes this was to lessen community expectations, sometimes to improve the level and breadth of community engagement and at other times to more closely connect community planning with council planning. Several reported that they had become more structured or focussed from the outset; clearer as to what the planning process was for. Considerable progress had also been made in relation to community ownership of the plans developed.

As a consequence of this learning from experience and slow evolutionary growth the processes of community planning were deeply embedded in the psyche and the history of each local government and no two were the same.

5.3 Diversity of approaches

Because of this history the approaches to community planning varied greatly. As the summary of the case studies in section 4 of this report shows, they differ in focus, method of engagement, population/geographic unit, framework, ownership and purpose. The length, timing and resourcing of the planning cycle also varies from local government to local government. Who has carriage of it within council's structure also differs.

It is not possible to conclude from the case studies that there is a right and a wrong way to undertake community planning. There is definitely not one size to fit all and it is unlikely that a template will emerge that will shape a common approach.

Whilst acknowledging these differences it would be unwise to conclude that every community planning process is as good or as bad as the one next to it. There are lessons to be learned and there are some methods that work better than others. Each of the case studies acknowledged strengths and weaknesses in the approach they had used and each had learned from past experience. This suggests that a body of knowledge is emerging and that it is possible to draw on the experience of others.

Diversity therefore does not equate to everyone doing their own thing and every local government having to reinvent the wheel. Diversity and common body of knowledge can coexist and have the potential to strengthen each other.

5.4 Common issues

Common issues resonated throughout the case studies and in discussion of them.

All case studies wrestled with the connection between community planning and the council plan. Some developed a close working relationship throughout the community planning process and council had a strong sense of ownership of the priorities and directions emerging from that process. Others developed visionary statements that were a point of reference for council, whilst others developed competing bids arising from a township focus.

There were other dimensions to this issue, which the case studies highlighted.

Community planning did not sit well with land use planners. It was also more problematic in fringe metropolitan municipalities and other growth areas where the needs of newly arrived and yet to arrive residents might be very different from existing residents wanting to hold on to the past. Their vision for the future might be what used to be and to hold back growth.

Generally the case studies also struggled with consultation overload and other departments within council as well as other levels of government conducting surveys or community consultations. This sometimes resulted in the community being left feeling used and as if nothing ever comes from such processes.

All local governments felt that good community planning practice was expensive and time intensive and recent efforts had only been possible because of State Government funding, such as through the Local Area Planning Support Program and the Community Support Fund.

The largest issue to emerge from the case studies and discussion of them however was the nexus between the vision and implementation. Engaging the community in expressing values, shaping a vision and setting priorities could be seen as Stage one. Moving that into a broader strategic framework and implementation plan was another stage: Stage two.

In part this is another way to express the difficult connection between community planning and the council plan, but it is far more than this.

The nexus between Stage one and Stage two is also about the legitimacy and authority of the community plan, the ability to get others to respond to its priorities and the capacity of council and the community to leverage support from other levels of government and other sectors.

This goes to the heart of community planning and where it might go next if it is to move beyond being an elaborate form of amateurism trying to shape the hearts and minds of hard nosed managers and decision makers.

What would give community planning the authority to demand a response and to more directly influence resource allocation? How are community values and a collective vision best married with overarching strategic plans, evidence and implementation plans?

These are two key questions that emerge from the experience of the case studies.

5.5 The community plan & community planning

Community planning mostly ended with a community plan. Whilst the process had community building benefits it also left community members and council staff exhausted. The plan was the product that marked the end of the process, which limited its impact on Stage 2. Did it remain a document on the table or a tool for a Stage 2 implementation process?

This raised the question as to whether the process or the plan should be the main focus of community planning.

The impact of community planning and the community plan was further limited by not having a policy context or formal authorisation.

Council plans are mandated under the Local Government Act. Municipal Public Health Plans are mandated under the Health Act and Municipal Strategic Statements under the Planning and Environment Act.

These local government plans have a direct connection with State Government legislation, policies and resource allocation.

Community plans have no such context. Many of the community plans documented in the case studies were not closely linked to Growing Victoria Together (GVT), A Fairer Victoria (AFV), Melbourne 2030, or other State government policy frameworks. Whilst the case studies often said that their community plan sat above other council plans and provided the overarching framework for them their actual impact varied and was often limited to a broad commitment to general principles and broad directions.

Impediments to linking Stage 1 to Stage 2 included: overriding economic imperatives; irreconcilable competing demands; evidence based planning; land use planning; planning for growth that included the needs of future residents, and the requirements of State and Commonwealth governments. Budget processes, resource allocation and the ability to get buy-in from other funders and investors were the crunch issues that dominated implementation decisions in Stage 2.

Whilst community planning has received wide endorsement and was embraced by local governments in each of the case studies the potency and relevance of the community plan was left in considerable doubt and the nexus between the community plan and the council plan a matter yet to be resolved.



6 A Way Forward

6.1 The context and considerations for a way forward

The discussion of draft reports for this project with the Steering Committee and representatives of the local governments documenting the case studies has been enormously valuable. These discussions have drawn on a broad range of experience and enabled key issues to be crystallized.

These issues are summarized here as a way to help guide thinking in relation to the next steps and the way forward.

Victoria has progressively built a solid foundation for moving forward. Synchronized four year terms for local governments, the broad mandate contained in the preamble and “Local Government Charter” contained in Part 1 of the Local Government Act and the statutory requirement for four year Council plans and Strategic Resource Plans are already embedded in local government practice and will have full effect after the 2008 local government elections.

Community planning processes are well established in local governments and have evolved over the last decade. The VLGA, MAV and LGPro have all taken leadership roles in supporting these processes and continue to do so, including through their active involvement in this project.

Apart from the legislative reforms, in particular the 2003 amendments to the Local Government Act, the State government has taken other significant steps to support local government planning and to strengthen the connection between local and State governments. A Fairer Victoria 2005 made three significant steps: it aligned departmental boundaries (and made them consistent with local government boundaries); it established Regional Management Forums and ‘champions’; and it established the Department for Victorian Communities local teams. These measures were reinforced in AFV 2006 and supplemented by Local Area Planning Support Grants and the Inter-governmental Agreement.

The Ministerial Statement “*Recognition, Reform and Partnership – Governments Working Together for Stronger Communities and Better Services*” made by the Minister for Local Government, Candy Broad MLC on 10 August 2006, opened the door to more integrated local planning. Minister Broad stated:

“...to improve the integration of local and state objectives and achieve more responsive services at the local level the Bracks government will give councils, where appropriate, the flexibility to incorporate state strategic planning requirements into their strategic planning framework rather than in a separate plan.” (Hansard, Legislative Council, 10 August 2006)

The Minister followed her statement with a letter to Mayors that reinforced the new opportunity for more integrated planning by local governments and the intention to follow through with State government departments. The letter states,

"I am pleased to inform you the Government has decided that, over the next 12 months, every Government Department will review the planning requirements made of local governments, with a view to:

- giving Councils the flexibility, where appropriate, to integrate State strategic planning requirements into Councils' own planning framework; and*
- synchronising State strategic planning requirements with Councils' four-year planning cycle, where possible.*

This decision was based on the outcomes of the Joint State-Local Government Planning Project, which was initiated last year by my Department, with Professor Bill Russell. The Project's aims were to examine ways to reduce local government's reporting requirements to State Government, streamline the strategic planning undertaken by local government and to promote more joined up services between the two spheres of Government to deliver community outcomes. This Project came about in response to the Best Value Commission's concerns about reducing the level of reporting local government's were required to undertake to meet State requirements." (Ministerial correspondence to Mayors 17 October 2006)

Responses from government departments are in the process of being collated as this report is being finalised.

The other significant measure undertaken by the State government in relation to integrated planning and joined up government has been place based strategies such as Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Renewal and Community Building Initiative.

Place based strategies have added a fine grained dimension to local planning by developing local action plans for disadvantaged neighbourhoods and small towns that also involved both State and local governments. Place based strategies involved a high level of community engagement, consultation and decision making together with support and involvement by State and local governments.

The Victorian Community Indicators Project, which further added momentum to local planning, was based on local government as the key unit for planning and priority setting as well as measuring progress and outcomes across five domains: social, economic, environment, cultural and democracy. Ongoing work in relation to indicator development and measures of progress is being continued by the McCaughey Centre in the School of Public Health at the University of Melbourne, in conjunction with Swinburne, RMIT, ABS and VicHealth.

With these foundations Victorian local governments are in a strong position to make the most of community and council planning processes.

This project based on nine case studies, however, highlighted a number of unresolved issues that were confirmed and further clarified in the discussions referred to above.

The evidence for this project did not suggest that the current system was fundamentally flawed, but rather that it had not reached its full potential. It had unresolved issues that needed to be addressed.

The most basic of these, as already discussed in this report, was the connection between community planning and the council plan and between the council plan and State government policy frameworks and priorities.

The systemic links between community planning processes, policy frameworks, the council plan and resource allocation is where the current system falls short in practice.

If the system is to work it needs stronger feedback loops and mechanisms for both local and State governments to respond to stakeholders and the outcomes from local planning processes. Where this had occurred, community engagement and the planning process had been greatly strengthened. It also led to joined-up responses that had a greater chance of delivering tangible outcomes.

If local governments know that reporting back to the community is part of the planning process it helps shape the approach from the outset. Similarly, if State government determines that it intends to respond to local governments' proposals, it needs to consider how this will be done from the outset and the role of departments, regional offices and RMFs in such a response.

Planning processes where stakeholders had been engaged and had contributed to discussion from the outset also had the best outcomes. If council officers outlined the negotiables and non-negotiables early in the process, brought evidence to the table, raised competing demands and joined the discussion, community input became more valuable. This was also the case where State government officers joined in formative discussion about particular projects or council plans and where they were active in place based strategies.

Although State departmental local teams may be able to play an increasing role in a whole of government approach, there is a capacity issue for State government representatives. Already where there are multiple place based strategies in the one region, State government representatives have many more meetings to attend and processes to be on top of.

If the link between State and local governments is to be more systemic, more whole of government and more flexible with a strong outcome focus the capacity of State government representatives to both contribute to and respond to local planning will have to be increased.

At present local government planning takes little account of State government policy frameworks and connects with State departments on a program by program basis as funding becomes available. This is more short term and ad hoc than should be the case.

The challenge for State government therefore, is how to build on the foundations it has already put in place and go to the next level of engagement with local planning. This will involve participation in place based action plans, Council plans, community planning processes and indicator development and then responding in terms of its own resource allocation and prioritizing of local actions.

For local governments the challenge lies in being able to more successfully bring the outside in and report back on how it has done this.

What is meant by bringing the outside in is that the council plan should be responsive to any community planning process that it has endorsed, to State government policy frameworks, to statutory plans such as the MSS and MPHP, to local action plans arising out of recognized local governance structures such as Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Renewal steering committees and to endorsed plans based on defined population groups such as indigenous Australians, refugees or cultural minorities.

As part of this project an attempt was made to assess whether there was a hierarchy of plans, whether the community plan set the context for the council plan or whether the council plan sat above all others. The response was mixed and the finding unhelpful. What emerged was that the council plan is and should be the center-piece. Although it only looks out four years it would be a positive step if the council plan was stretched in three ways;

- It incorporated a longer term perspective, which was able to include more of the community's aspirational thinking and visioning of the future as well as consideration of longer term asset management, infrastructure, and land use requirements.
- It incorporated a more thorough reflection of State government policy frameworks, issues where local government could be an advocate and driving force and how local governments might assist the delivery of statewide targets.
- It could incorporate the specific actions arising from local action plans emerging from Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Renewal initiatives that incorporate a cross sectoral and whole of government focus to disadvantage.

This is not a criticism of existing council plans, but arising from the case studies it is fair to say that there is an opportunity to stretch local government plans by including a longer term perspective, a broader perspective and a more fine grained perspective. This would consolidate the council plan as the centerpiece rather than just one of many local plans.

If this was combined with increased State government participation and responsiveness and better feedback loops to stakeholders, local planning could be taken to a new level.

6.2 The way forward

At first glance the solution to making the community plan more relevant and more powerful would appear to be to mandate the plan, to require it under legislation like the council plan, MPPH and MSS. People point to the New Zealand 2002 legislation, which was more prescriptive than the Victorian Local Government Act in this regard.

The downside to this solution is that it would be another impost on local governments, it would be seen to be a one-size-fits-all approach and it would not necessarily solve the problem of the connection of Stage 1 and Stage 2.

What has been embraced and is widely supported is “community planning”: the process. It is community building, builds trust, taps community resources and resourcefulness and leads to better informed citizens and local governments. The case studies clearly show that it has many benefits.

The weakness of community planning is that it may be ill-defined at the outset and may be poorly connected to implementation at the other end.

The platform for integrated local planning in Victoria has been mandated and strengthened through the 2003 amendments to the Local Government Act, A Fairer Victoria 2005, 06, & 07 and the 2006 Ministerial Statement. Community involvement in local planning has been further reinforced by place based strategies such as Neighbourhood and Community Renewal. The opportunities created by this legislation and the whole-of-government policy initiatives are yet to be fully realised.

The case studies that provide the evidence for this report suggest that there are three key issues, or connections, yet to be resolved in order to take community planning to another level and to institutionalise it as a core element of our democratic system. They are the connection between:

- community planning and the council plan;
- State and local government; and
- community planning and resource allocation.

The three are closely related and need to be addressed together.

Before establishing the frontiers for making progress it is important to acknowledge that local governments may shortly be able to make the decision to meet their statutory planning obligations in one plan. It should also be recognised that community planning processes are widespread and whilst most end up with a community plan as one of the outcomes this may be less necessary under the more flexible and more integrated arrangements proposed in the Ministerial statement.

Whilst the community planning process would be more influential if tied to the statutory plans and mandated as an integral part of their development, local governments still want to keep open the option of producing a community plan: something that reflects community values and aspirations and is unencumbered by competing demands or short term constraints.

A community plan, however, should not be the sole purpose or only outcome of a community planning process. It is important that consideration be given to the council plan being stretched in the manner described above in 5.6 so as to include a longer, broader and more fine grained view. Community planning should be an integral part of the council plan and the council plan should be seen as the centrepiece not just the corporate plan.

It would appear to be difficult and perhaps undesirable to codify community planning in legislation. Whilst the wording of the Act may be changed to more clearly mandate community planning as a necessary element of the council plan the form that community planning may take will vary from local government to local government.

The methodology of community engagement, consultation and planning, together with issues of empowerment and partnership, are constantly evolving. It is important that the body of knowledge around these important issues continue to evolve and respond to further research. What would strengthen the effect of the legislative mandate would be guidelines adopted by local governments through the MAV, VLGA and LGPro. These guidelines could address the process, how to respond to the outcomes and how to integrate the process with the council plan. All three bodies have extensive knowledge and experience in the area, most recently the MAV Lighthouse Project, the VLGA Community Consultation Resource Guide and the LGPro project on the integration of council and community planning. They also could address issues of timing given that the first council plan after the November 2008 elections will be required by June 2009. Some community planning processes and the development of MPPs and MSSs will require longer timelines and more than one planning cycle will be necessary to get quality outcomes. This would also address the second point in the Minister's 2006 letter to mayors about synchronising State strategic planning requirements with councils' four-year planning cycle.

Integrating community planning with the development of the council plan is only one side of the equation. The other side is the connection with State government policy frameworks, input by State government representatives and the responsiveness of State government.

Under Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Renewal, local governance structures develop neighbourhood plans. These have been very effective in driving new investment into these designated low socio-economic areas with the aim of closing the gap between these neighbourhoods and the rest of the State.

The next step in mainstreaming these place based initiatives could be to sign neighbourhood agreements involving both State and local governments and floor targets that will measure outcomes in these areas against State averages or other benchmarks.

Much could be learned from the success of these programs particularly in relation to citizen involvement and the close connection between local and State planning and the measurement of outcomes.

Discussion of the case studies raised the possibilities of looking at the role of State departmental local teams and how they might increase the connection between State policy frameworks and planning and the community and council processes. This might flow back into the Regional Management Forums where joint action and co-ordinated responses to local plans might be considered.

The key issues to be addressed in strengthening local government community planning are;

- How to engage State government in the formative stages of local planning so that State government policy frameworks and priorities are part of the community planning process;
- How to make the council plan an integrated plan and centre piece that can address the community's aspirations as well as the evidence, statutory requirements and practical considerations;
- How to provide feedback on the outcomes of the community planning process and in relation to the council plan and resource allocation;
- How best to synchronise planning processes so as to minimise demands on citizens but increase the effectiveness of their participation;
- How to establish guidelines, best practice and build a body of knowledge in relation to community planning; and
- How to ensure the skills and resources are available to undertake community planning processes.



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Attachment 1

Key Features of Community Planning

Case study summary table

Features	Ararat	Surf Coast	Yarra Ranges	Wyndham	Mitchell	Golden Plains	Casey	Loddon	Hume
In a word..	Township community action plans (CAPs)	Community Engagement Framework (CEF): an engaged approach to all planning	Vision	Vision	Partnership plan for a sub LGA district	Township plans	Partnership plan for a sub LGA district	Township plans	Municipal level plans
Hierarchy – links to council plan	Council plan makes provision for CAPs. CAP priorities influence other Council planning	Vision shapes the council plan. Local area plans will inform priorities and actions	Vision informs the council plan.	Vision informs the council plan	Council plan sits above all others. Place management planning influences Councils strategic and service plans.	Council plan is shaped by township plans (and other planning evidence, policy and plans)	Unclear at this point	Informs council plan and other council planning. Local priorities get linked into Council plans	Vision – sits above council plan.
Funding for planning	CSF, VicHealth, Council	DPCD and Council	Council	Council	Council, DHS and DPCD	Council, FACS, others over time	Council and DPCD	Council and DPCD	Council (x3) and DHS (x1)
Time frame reported on in case study	2000 - 2007	2000 - 2007	1997 - 2007	1997 - 2007	2004 - 2007		18 months into a three year process	2002 - 2007	2003 - now
Timeframe of community plan	3 years	Vision – 2020, otherwise community planning is ongoing and non linear	Vision – 2020 Reviewed 2002, 2006	Vision – 2015 Reviewed each four years	Annual?	Ongoing with review each 18 months	?	Ongoing with review each 12 months	Vision 2030 5 yrs 4 yrs
Pop size for planning	Less than 500	CEF: depends on the planning being undertaken or the issue being addressed	144,993	121,000 (pop projections 205,000)	8,000 (pop projections 36,000)	Up to 3,000 people.	35,000 (pop Projections up to 100,000)	?	154,000 as at 2007

Features	Ararat	Surf Coast	Yarra Ranges	Wyndham	Mitchell	Golden Plains	Casey	Loddon	Hume
Community is...	Geographic places – township.	Residents, rate payers, visitors and tourists	All people (working, living, studying)and organisations in the LGA	Communities of interest within the municipality	People who live in the geographic area	Residents who live in or are in some way a part of the township/s	People with a relationship to the planning area	People with something in common	All people (working, living, studying)and organisations in the LGA
Growth				Incl planning for growth	Incl planning for growth		Incl planning for growth		Incl planning for growth
Ownership of plan	Community and Council	CEF: Depends on the plan	Council	Corporate plan says it is Councils long term vision. Case study says it belongs to the community	Partners all considered owners. Community reps are 'partners'	Communities in relevant townships Council does not endorse plans	Partners all considered owners	Community with Council adoption (may request changes)	Council All partners All partners
Council role	Lead and manage process and outcomes.	Lead and manage the process and partnering with communities to set process and outcome goals	Lead and manage process and outcomes.	Secretariat to taskforce	Lead and manage process and outcomes.	Fund the process, institutional mechanisms for valuing and responding to plans	Lead and manage process and outcomes.	Fund the process, institutional mechanisms for valuing and responding to plans.	Lead and manage process and outcomes.
Councillors' roles	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed. Advocacy role and 2 councillors have active role in CEF working group	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed. Mayor on steering committee	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.	Approve planning approach, Regularly briefed.
Residents on ref gp	Residents, business reps, gov't reps sit on planning committees	No	No reference group	Yes – selected by Council	No	Residents in each town run their own process	?	Residents in each town run their own process	No x2 Yes x1

Features	Ararat	Surf Coast	Yarra Ranges	Wyndham	Mitchell	Golden Plains	Casey	Loddon	Hume
Level of community engagement	2 x consult 1 x collaborate	Use of all levels of engagement, increasingly moving towards: involve, empower	Inform, consult, involve		Consultation: e.g. survey	Full community ownership and participation	Inform – moving to collaborate over time	Full community ownership and participation	Inform, consult, involve and collaborate
Stakeholder engagement in planning (NGO, Private, State/ Fed Gov't)	Residents, business reps, gov't reps sit on planning committees	Depends on the reason for engagement and the issue	Inform, consult, involve	Consult	Yes, as partners in the process	Not in planning phase	Yes, as partners	No	Yes, as partners
Shaped by State and Fed policy	No	CEF – yes	No – but strong synergies	No – but strong synergies	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Informed by evidence	In some communities, yes.	CEF - Yes	Yes		Yes	Not in planning phase but more at the point of feasibility, scoping	Yes	No	Yes Yes Yes
Informed by other local plans eg NR, LLENs, PCP	No	Depends on the reason for engagement and the issue	No	No	Yes through members on	Local priorities get linked into other plans	No	No	No Yes Yes
Links to State govt priorities in planning phase	No	Depends on the reason for engagement and the issue	No	No	Yes	None		None	Yes Yes Yes
Links to State govt in implement phase	Yes	Yes	An area of challenge. RMF considered important	An area of challenge.	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes Yes Yes



Attachment 2

Key Questions for Reviewing Council's Community Planning

1 Overview - model of community planning

- 1.1 Using Carins' (2007) models of community planning which do you think best describes your council's community planning? Please explain.
- 1.2 Describe the key principles, processes (and stages) and products of community planning in your municipality?
- 1.3 What key stakeholder groups participate in community planning?
- 1.4 Who leads community planning – council, community, shared? What are the governance arrangements?
- 1.5 Who owns the products that have resulted from community planning? i.e. the community plan.
- 1.6 How did you define 'community'?
- 1.7 How did you define 'community planning'?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make

2 Council planning and community planning

- 2.1 Council planning:
 - 2.1.1 Who within council drives and manages the development of council plans? Internal structure and does it include all parts of council administration?
 - 2.1.2 Does the planning process go to council for discussion and endorsement?
 - 2.1.3 Budget allocation for the planning process?
 - 2.1.4 Is there a 'hierarchy' of plans? Are processes in place to ensure the 'hierarchy' operates effectively? Describe. Where does community planning fit within this framework?

2.2 Community planning:

- 2.2.1 Who within council leads council's role in community planning? Internal structure and does it include all parts of council administration? Who else from council was involved in community planning and why?
- 2.2.2 What were the pre-planning processes for community planning? Who decided what the community planning process should be and what were the principles or rationale used to inform these decisions? How do these principles/rationale differ to the principles that inform council planning?
- 2.2.3 What were the governance arrangements in place for community planning? What was the rationale for this approach and who made this decision?
- 2.2.4 Did the planning process go to council for discussion and endorsement? What was the role of the councillors in the preplanning phase?
- 2.2.5 Budget allocation for the planning process?
- 2.2.6 How was community planning communicated across council – process, key messages, when and why?
- 2.2.7 What feedback loops were built into the planning process for councillor feedback?
- 2.2.8 What is the relationship between community planning and council planning? How are community planning and council planning aligned, integrated and/or different in terms of their structures, principles, processes, priorities, products?
- 2.2.9 What skills, ICT, tools and other capacities were essential to carry out the pre planning process for community planning? (for council officers, councillors, community members etc)

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make

3 Community participation and engagement

- 3.1 Who took responsibility for promoting and explaining the community planning process to the community? How did this occur?
- 3.2 At what stages in the planning or pre planning process was the community engaged? If it was a community led process, at what stage in the planning or pre planning process was council engaged?
- 3.3 What was the level of community engagement and participation (according to the IAP2 Spectrum) at each stage in the process?
- 3.4 What structures, strategies and methods were used to engage the community at each stage in the process?

- 3.5 What population groups (youth, non English speaking, people with a disability, Indigenous people) were separately targeted? What strategies were used? Were these effective? If not, why not? (How do you know?)
- 3.6 What was the geographic unit (suburb, neighbourhood) used for community engagement?
- 3.7 How many community members were involved in leadership activities associated with community planning? How many of these were young people, non English speaking, people with a disability, Indigenous people?
- 3.8 How many community members were involved in the community planning process overall? How many of these were young people, non English speaking, people with a disability, Indigenous people?
- 3.9 How many community associations were represented in the community planning process? (non government organisations and voluntary associations)
- 3.10 How many community activities/projects were initiated because of community planning?
- 3.11 What percentage of these were successfully implemented?
- 3.12 What were the expectations of community members engaged in community planning? Were they met? What feedback loops were built into the planning process for community feedback?
- 3.13 Which engagement strategies do you think worked well and why?
- 3.14 What challenges were experienced in engaging communities?
- 3.15 What skills, ICT, tools and other capacities were essential to carry out the community engagement aspect of the community planning process?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

4 Engagement of other stakeholders

- 4.1 Which key stakeholder groups other than residents were engaged in community planning?
- 4.2 Why were they involved?
- 4.3 How many 'other key stakeholders' were involved in leadership activities associated with community planning?
- 4.4 How many 'other key stakeholders' were involved in the community planning overall? What was their level of involvement? How were they involved?
- 4.5 What were the benefits of their involvement?
- 4.6 What were the challenges?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

5 Mapping, evidence and indicators

- 5.1 Was data analysis and mapping undertaken for community planning? Who did this work? At what stage and how was it used?
- 5.2 What use was made of the framework, and/or indicators from the Victorian Community Indicators Project (now Community Indicators Victoria)?
- 5.3 What other research evidence was used?
- 5.4 What methods were used to collect objective data beyond that available in the census or the surveys above?
- 5.5 What methods were used to collect subjective information?
- 5.6 What indicators of progress and wellbeing were used?
- 5.7 What issues arose in relation to indicators and evidence?
- 5.8 What skills, ICT, tools and other capacities were essential to carry out the data collection and analysis aspect of the community planning process?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

6 Connection with other levels of government and other planning

- 6.1 Did the community planning take into account macro state Government policy frameworks (GVT, AFV, Melbourne 2030)? At what stage? How?
- 6.2 Were top down policy initiatives, priorities and targets factored in? How?
- 6.3 Were local area/neighbourhood plans (particularly where they related to place based approaches to addressing disadvantage) incorporated into community planning? How?
- 6.4 Were plans developed by other planning bodies such as PCPs, LLENs incorporated into community planning? How?
- 6.5 Most of the questions above relate to top down processes. How were local community priorities taken back up into regional and state level planning and dialogue– to have community planning issues recognised?
- 6.6 Has a connection been made between local community planning and the Regional Management Forum, sub-regional bodies and other State Government planning processes? How?
- 6.7 What skills, ICT, tools and other capacities were essential to carry out the 'connecting with other levels of government' aspect of community planning?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

7 Bringing it all together – State level policy, regional priorities, indicators and other evidence and indicators and input from communities and other stakeholders.

- 7.1 If community planning included input from a range of sources (community participation, evidence and indicators, micro plans and macro policy) who was responsible for bringing it all together – Officers, partnership group, community leaders etc?
- 7.2 How did that person/group prioritise or give weight to various layers of input –state policy, regional priorities, sub lga level plans (such as neighbourhood renewal), indicator and other data, community views and aspirations? What logic was used when it was brought together? How many community members were involved in this stage? Did councillors have a role at this stage of the process? Describe.
- 7.3 What were the challenges at this point in the process? Were there structures, strategies or processes that helped to overcome the challenges?

- 7.4 If there was a clash between input received, for example, from community input and input from other data sources (eg statistics) – how was this resolved in the planning process? (processes, who involved?) What were the implications? Was there any backlash from this?
- 7.5 What skills, ICT, tools and other capacities were essential to carry out the 'bringing it all together' aspect of the planning process?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

8 Aligning and integrating community and council planning (see Carins paper)

- 8.1 Are community and council planning aligned in terms of principles, process, products, council structures and timelines?
- 8.2 How do the aspirations and priorities in the community plan impact on council planning, the council plan and budget allocations? Are they integrated into councils planning and decision making? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 8.3 If the council does have an integrated approach, what are the benefits you have seen?
- 8.4 What are the challenges of alignment and integration?
- 8.5 What would help?

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.

9 Learnings about community planning

- 9.1 What processes do you have in place to reflect on the experience of and learnings about community planning?
- 9.2 What criteria or measures do you use to determine whether community planning has been successful?
- 9.3 In your assessment, has the community planning been successful?
- 9.4 What were the benefits to council of community planning? How do you know?
- 9.5 What are the benefits to for community? How do you know?

- 9.6 Are there other beneficiaries? Who and what do they gain?
- 9.7 What were the downsides of community planning from a council perspective?
- 9.8 What are the factors that made your community planning high quality?
- 9.9 What were the challenges– for planning staff, for councillors, for residents, other stakeholders?
- 9.10 What strategies have you developed in response to these challenges?
- 9.11 How do you think your community planning could be strengthened?
- 9.12 What do you think is an ideal population or geographic size for community planning? Why?
- 9.13 What resources do you think would help improve community planning in your municipality? (ICT, skills development, policy, tools)
- 9.14 What resources do you think would help improve the participation and engagement of community members, councillors, council staff and others in community planning? (ICT, skills development, policy, tools)

Comments, reflections and possible improvements you would like to make.