GIBSONS
NEIGHBOURHOOD URBAN
DESIGN

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The purpose of this study

This study intends to establish a conceptual framework and to suggest planning and urban design visions aiming to improve the quality of the public realm in Gibsons residential areas. These visions should be considered as introductory ideas to further stages in which specific and differential urban design solutions would be generated for each area of the town and even for each street and each spot within a street, according to physical conditions, characteristics and potentials of the place and as determined in its own context. Therefore, suggestions of this study, though thought in the context of Gibsons and its physical, natural and historical characteristics, should be considered as a phase of exploration of concepts rather than final design solutions. Even these exploratory concepts might be of limited value for Gibsons in terms of their suitability and applicability, unless modified and ripened through public discussion.

This approach is based on the belief that design of the urban space should not be generalized and standardized; that we cannot expect to achieve a "sense of place" based on diversity of form and character, out of generic and repetitive solutions. Each place of urban space is unique and special by its own characteristics, which not only consists of its physical properties and details but, more profoundly, is conditioned by its relation with its context and also by non-physical aspects such as activities, people and memories associated with the place.

Uniqueness of place is particularly more true in a case such as Gibsons which has a legacy from the past since each one of its places bears its own story of evolution and interaction with people who have built the place, have lived there and have changed it according to their needs and visions.

Achieving context sensitive and specifically designed solutions across the town sound nice to say but seem difficult to do. How is it possible to generate specific design solutions for each corner and each spot of every street? Who is going to do that? Can we expect the municipality to think of hundreds of small urban design projects across the town, or hire designers to undertake such a task? And how should those be funded and who is going to build them?

E-interview with Leonor Luzardo, a Gibsons neighbourhood group activist:

1- What problems, needs, etc directed you (and other people) to start a neighbourhood group?

1- The decision to form the current "Heritage Hill" group came about originally **as a result of my frustration upon finding out how many people in my own neighbourhood had not seen the plans the Town of Gibsons has for future changes to Gibsons Harbour.** After discussing some of these proposed changes with a neighbour, Brad Benson, **we decided to act upon our feelings that the people who will be affected the most by some of the Harbour Plan ideas were not participating in the process (including their input) toward final approval of these plans.**

In the existing framework of the town's management and development procedures those questions seem to be impossible to answer. But the solutions might be sought in a different organizational and management framework directly initiated and driven by the community itself and as complementary to the existing systems, to provide quality public realm in the town of Gibsons as uniquely stemmed from its people, its history and its nature. Therefore, this study is going to propose not only a conceptual framework for physical design, but also an organizational arrangement at the neighbourhood level to initiate and direct the incremental process of gentrification as uniquely and specifically shaped within each neighbourhood.

2- What do you intend to solve or expect to achieve through your neighbourhood group?

2- This original reason evolved into a neighbourhood action group based on **better communication with the Town of Gibsons of what improvements the neighbourhood would like to see in "Heritage Hill" and better communication from the Town as to what the future plans are for our neighbourhood.**

It was decided to keep the group focused on neighbourhood issues, but as a group this would give us the opportunity to approach the Town Council with our input on Town issues, such as the Town Harbour Plan and other issues which will affect us all.

As a further note: A "Heritage Hill" group formed in the past to work on handling a problem with heavy traffic taking shortcuts through the neighbourhood by blocking off the entrance to Bals lane. When this was accomplished, the group disbanded. A "Bay" group formed recently to fight the Town's plan to widen Franklin Rd. which would increase traffic. When this plan was cancelled because of the group's action, the group (I think) has disbanded as well.

I've heard of another group forming on the "Bluff" in Gibsons to do something about a rash of break-and-enters. It seems that these groups form to accomplish one goal and do not continue to meet when this goal is accomplished.

This makes our recently formed (and still forming)"Heritage Hill" group a bit different. **We want to meet at least once a month to discuss issues of importance to our neighbourhood and decide how to go about solving them.**

I've been surprised and very pleased with what I've learned about our neighbourhood just from the few meetings we've has to date. It really is a great way of getting to know what is going on and who your neighbours are.

The concept of neighbourhood in this study

Neighbourhood is proposed as a physical unit of the town as well as a social unit of the community.

Street as neighbourhood's basic common space - This study considers the street as the basic spatial unit that defines the neighbourhood. A street, particularly between two intersections, is a single uninterrupted unit of city space that provides access to several residential units and those units share in that street as their common public space. For each person the street that provides access to his/her home is the most immediate piece of public space within the whole realm of the city. That is the extension of home's personal territory and the semi-personal-semi-public part of the city. From a psychological point of view, it is in his/her home street that a person most strongly feels being a member of the community. That is why more than any other place in the city people are sensitive about the street that they live in and decisions that might affect their street. The neighbourhood street is the place where members of community "naturally", spontaneously and frequently interact. People appreciate good neighbours and become annoyed with a bad one. That is the space they are most concerned about regarding the security of their house and safety of their family. Therefore, it is the street, and not the block, which is the center of the community life.

The territory of the house spills over into the road that the house is facing to and is getting access from. This way the road gets a sense of privacy, while the front yard of the house has a sense of publicness. Based on this assertion we use design and planning ideas to expand the territory of "home" from the house to the road and to the neighbourhood.
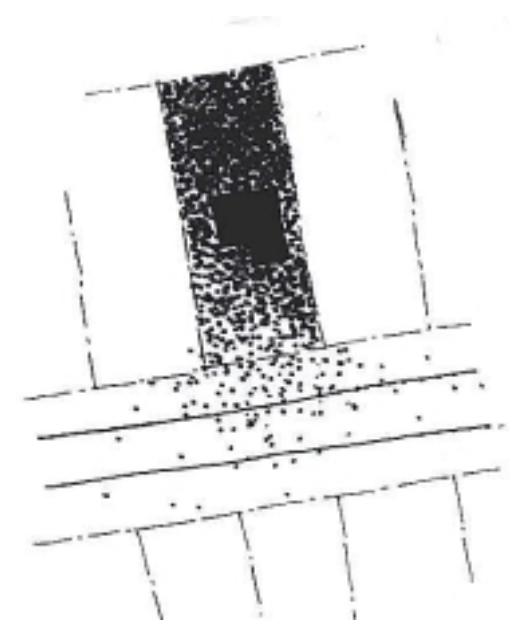
Several studies have examined the breadth of the house territory and its correspondence with the sense of neighbourhood. Pahl (1970) found evidence of strongest relationships, either positive or negative, in groups of 8-12 houses as a result of physical vicinity. Hampton (1970) discovered that people defined their home area only in terms of a few streets.

The residential road is the immediate public space for houses that are facing it. Therefore it is the basic unit of the neighbourhood's public realm.
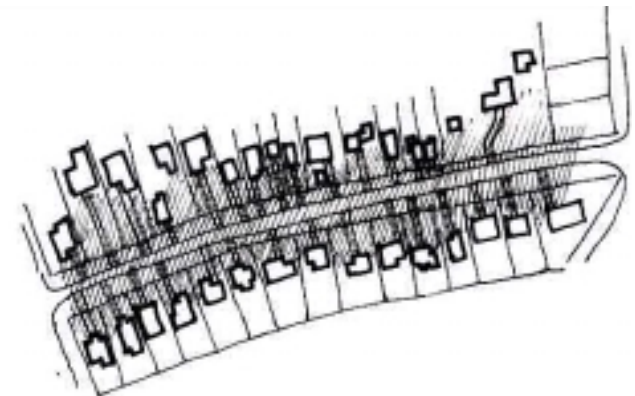
Neighbourhood Boundaries – Since the main access roads are chosen as the community spaces, neighbourhood boundaries, most preferably, pass over the property lines and through the back lanes. This arrangement allows all the properties facing a main neighbourhood road to be included in the same neighbourhood. Therefore the residents of each street can get together and make decisions about the same road that they are sharing. The physical realm of the neighbourhood is most strongly manifested across its main road(s), rather than by its boundaries, which mostly stay invisible at the back of the properties.

Neighbourhood Land Use – Coherence of land use is another key criterion in splitting the neighhourhoods.
Also some other criteria such as topographic features, historic background of development, social mix of residents, and so forth, might be influential in deciding upon neighbourhood boundaries.

Neighbourhood boundaries pass through the back lanes and over the property lines so that all the residential units facing a road are included within the same neighbourhood.
In this neighbourhood in Gibsons Bay Area Franklin Road is the main community space.

The neighbourhood road, which is going to be treated as its main pedestrian path and community activities space should meet the following criteria:

- Many houses facing it;
- Connecting important nodes of activity, density, and special spots, landmarks, etc within the neighbourhood;
- Passing all across the neighbourhood and connecting to the road network outside the neighbourhood;
- Passing through the middle of the neighbourhood;
- Being relatively flat (not on a steep slope);
- Preferably, not being a main traffic route.

The Size of the Neighbourhoods –
Neighbourhood should include sufficient number of households to provide a critical mass of residents to form a community institution and to support a collective decision making process. The area of the neighbourhood should also not be too large to make it difficult to get involved in decisions affecting the whole neighbourhood community.

Therefore, suggested neighbourhood divisions for Gibsons is similar to what Lynch (1981) calls "neighbourhood of proximity, where people know each other," which includes 15-100 households. This is the area, he asserts, that provides a local sphere of influence or control for people. This is much smaller than what is known as the classical concept of urban neighbourhood, containing 3000-10000 people, as defined by Perry, Abercrombie, Calthorpe, and others (Biddulph, 2000).

Gibsons Proposed Neighbourhood Areas

In this suggestion the town is defined into 14 neighbourhood areas. Some larger neighbourhoods may be divided into two or three smaller community units.
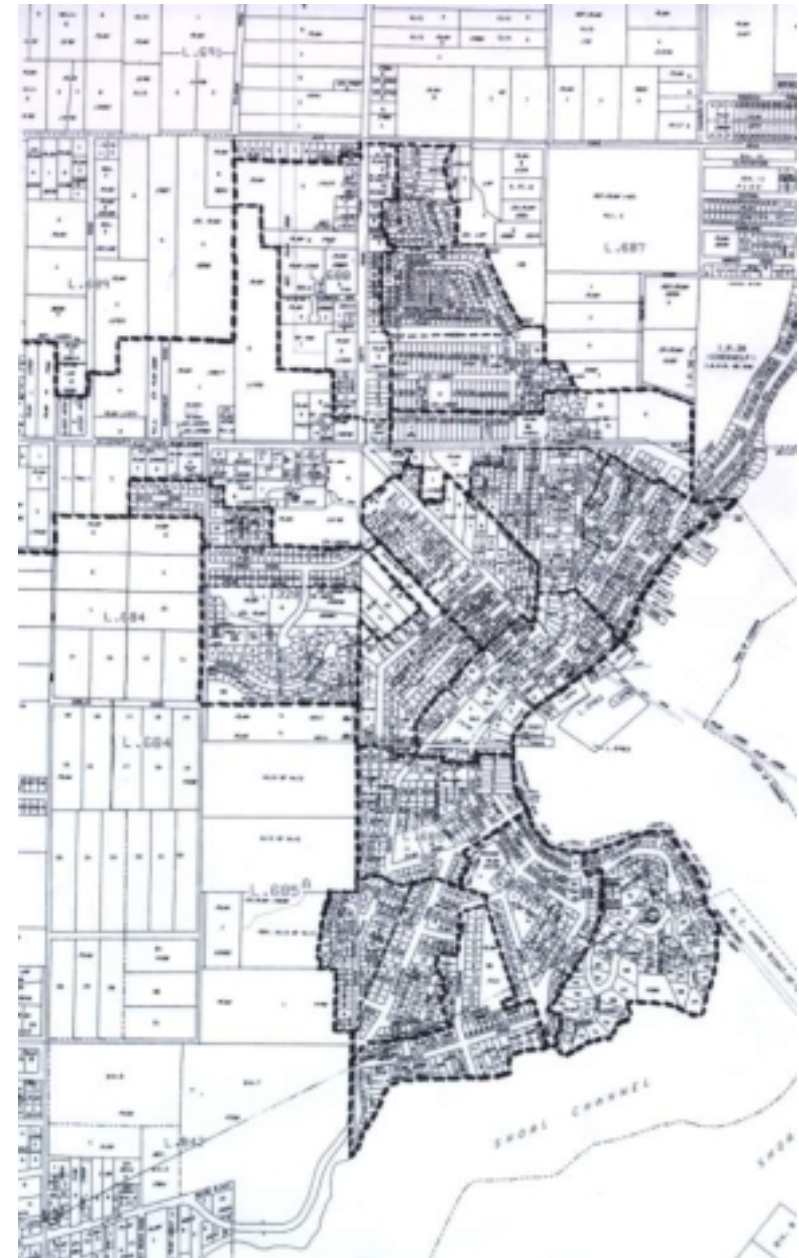
Goals of Neighbourhood Urban Design

- To make the neighbourhood a more enjoyable and convenient place to live in.

- To increase the choice of the residents for spending their time in the community space and in social activities in the context of daily life and in relation to people whom they are living with.

- To enhance residents' sense of identity and belonging to their community.

- To allow residents of each area to directly participate in improving their immediate physical and social environment.

- To provide a ground to strengthen the social bindings between Gibsons residents.

- To initiate a community based bottom-up decision making process as complementary to the existing top-down (Town implemented) and market based processes.

- To challenge the process of physical, social and economic degeneration of the town and old neighbourhoods as caused by forces of local and regional change.

- To invest on the physical assets of the town that makes Gibsons a unique place to live and to visit: its legacy as a ocean front village and one of the earliest settlements in the Sunshine Coast region.

- To build towards a more sustainable community.

3- What institutional/ legal frmaework do you think for your neighbourhood action group?

4- How do you define the relationship between your neighbourhood and the Town Hall?

3- This is a tough one. As I am not the kind of person who normally joins groups and of the nature to become impatient with meetings where nothing seems to be accomplished. **My goal is not to make this a legal, institutional organization. Both Brad Benson, who has a great deal of experience with such groups, and myself are determined to keep this group as informal as possible.** *We have a Council member in our group and the proposal to elect or appoint a president was brought up at the last meeting.* **As a "grass-roots" democratic group, our non-structural structure should be an interesting experiment.**

4- I see this as something which will evolve (as will the group formation). *As it is in its beginning stages, right now it is working very well as a way of the Town communicating works projects upcoming and in progress to the neighbourhood through one or two contacts within the group. The group is still working on getting an information letter out to the entire neighbourhood and acquiring a bigger place to meet. As a group, we feel it's a way of improving communication between us and the Town of Gibsons.*

Key Design Principles

- *Share the space. Give and gain.*

- *Appreciate, preserve and use the legacy of nature.*

- *Respect the memory of the past.*

- *Restore, repair and add.*

- *Design for all groups and all ages.*

- *Think of space and activities together.*

- *Make people dominant over cars.*

- *Design for all seasons.*

- *Design for many occasions.*

- *Let the design ideas mature through discussions.*

- *Design and build incrementally.*

- *Build slow, small and deep instead of fast, big and cheap.*

- *Decide on a case by case basis and as appropriate in the context.*

- *Design for Gibsons. Do not imitate the suburbs.*

- *Design humble, poetic and humorous, not arrogant, formal and cold.*

- *Increase the choice of use and enhance the diversity of form.*

Neighbourhood Main Road and Public Space Design Guidelines

- Think of the neighbourhood roads as the "community living rooms."

- Design to make the car subordinate to pedestrian activities.

- Calm the traffic (particularly the through traffic) by traffic signing, as well as by design means. Decrease the speed limit in residential areas.

- In residential neighbourhoods keep the road asphalt width as narrow as possible (not more than two lanes for low speed).

- When designing the neighbourhood road as the community open space think of the needs of groups such as children, teenagers, women, elderly, bikers, disabled, etc.

5- What problems do you see or do you think may come up in the process of making decisions (since in some cases it might be difficult to come up with a consensus between residents)?

5. I see that there have been a few disagreements already and there will probably be more. As Brad Benson pointed out, **these problems will have to be dealt with as they appear and that this process will help us to define our group, our goals and what our structure (if necessary) will be.** We hope to make it as democratic a process as possible.

Gibsons Pedestrian Network as a Connection of Neighbourhood Pedestrian Roads

- Create paved walk paths along neighbourhood roads. This should be done, at least, along a neighbourhood's designated main road community space.

- Think of a different theme for road and walk path design in each neighbourhood reflecting its character and physical conditions.

- Choose the material and design pattern of neighbourhood walk paths to conform to the character of the neighbourhood and the town, e.g. stone, wood, etc.

- Avoid common curb and concrete side walks, which is regularly used in conventional suburban developments.

- Tree plant along the neighbourhood paved walk paths. Be sensitive to the remote views of the ocean and mountain, when choosing the type of the tree and distance of planting. Use deciduous species and the
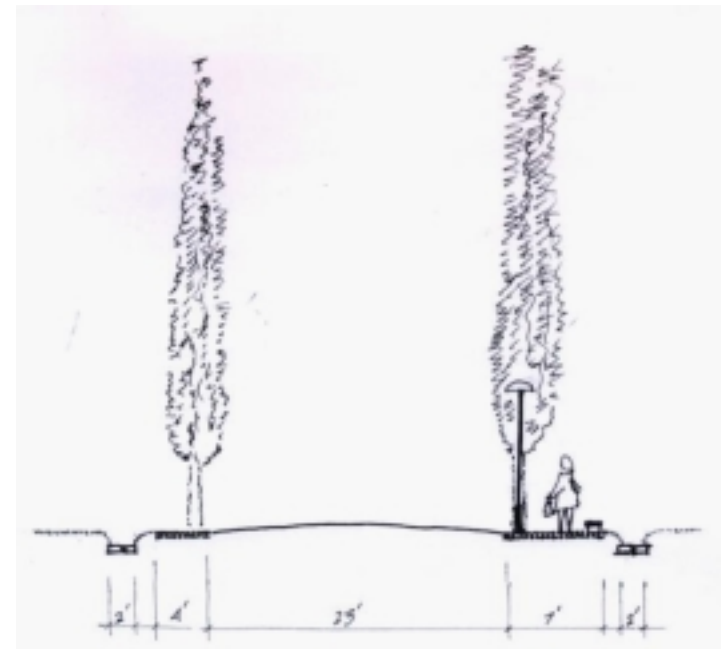
Neighbourhood Road Section

types that do not compete with local species.

- Wherever needed, safeguard the walk path from the vehicular traffic by putting bollards and by tree planting.

- Identify view corridors/ spots along the walk path and emphasize those by design.

- Enhance the meaning and visual effect of natural elements, e.g. old trees, rocks, creeks, etc by appropriate landscaping and design.

- Provide low level suitable lighting for the walk path.

- In steep slopes, provide steps along the walk path.

- In residential neighbourhoods create a perforated edge between the road and properties. Wherever appropriate, let the public realm run into the corner of a property or
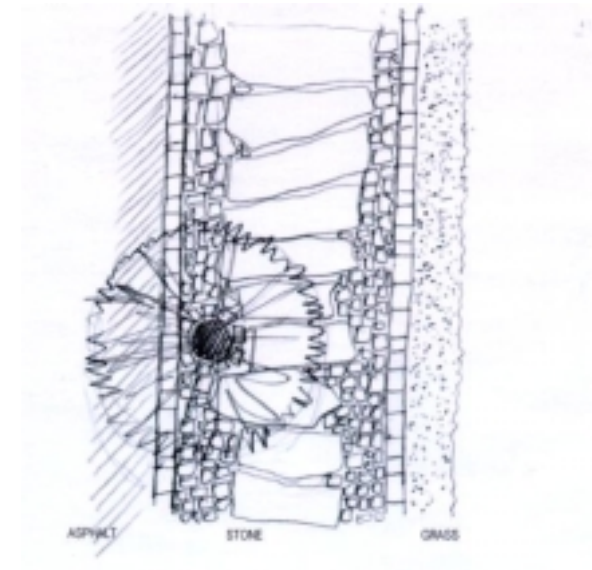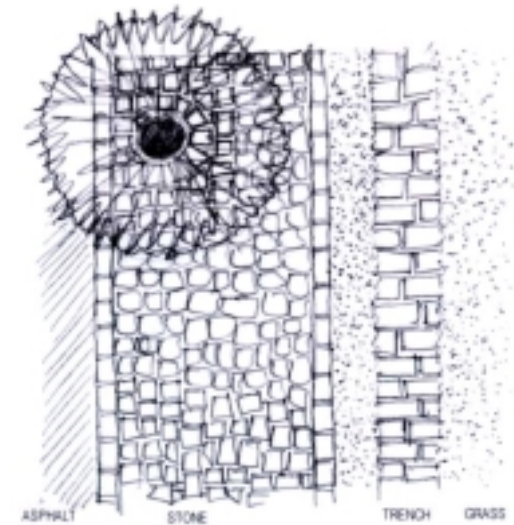
Neighbourhood Walk Path Designs

a strip of a front yard. Create as many small and medium size spots and places as possible. These can be as humble as a single bench in a corner of the road, canopy of a tree, a slightly widened side walk with a seating edge, or more elaborate spaces such as a community plaza or a pocket park. Design and furnish each spot in relation to its size, location and activities that the space might potentially serve.

- Create a strip of community gardens along the sidewalk and by the edge of properties. Choose a theme for the strip gardens e.g. flower, rose, herb, vegetable, etc.

- Identify and sign the special properties that are somehow related to the history of the neighbourhood or the town.

- Create landscaped walk paths as short cuts from cul-de-sacs and secondary neighbourhood roads to the main road and a neighbourhood's open space.

- Provide amenities and appropriate urban furniture in neighbourhood spaces and particularly along the neighbourhood main road. The following is a preliminary list of such features:
  - landscaped open spaces,
  - benches and seating edges,
  - vending kiosks (snack, coffee, newspaper),
  - washroom kiosks,
  - gazebo as a rain shelter and a gathering place,
  - stone fountain,
  - children's play field,
  - open space fire-place,
  - bike rack,
  - basketball pole,
  - litter bin,
  - public phone stand,
  - newspaper stand,
  - mail box,
  - bus stop shelter,
  - lighting features,
  - bollards,
  - gates, fences.

Neighbour hood open space in Bay Area (Franklin, Burns & Headlands Roads)
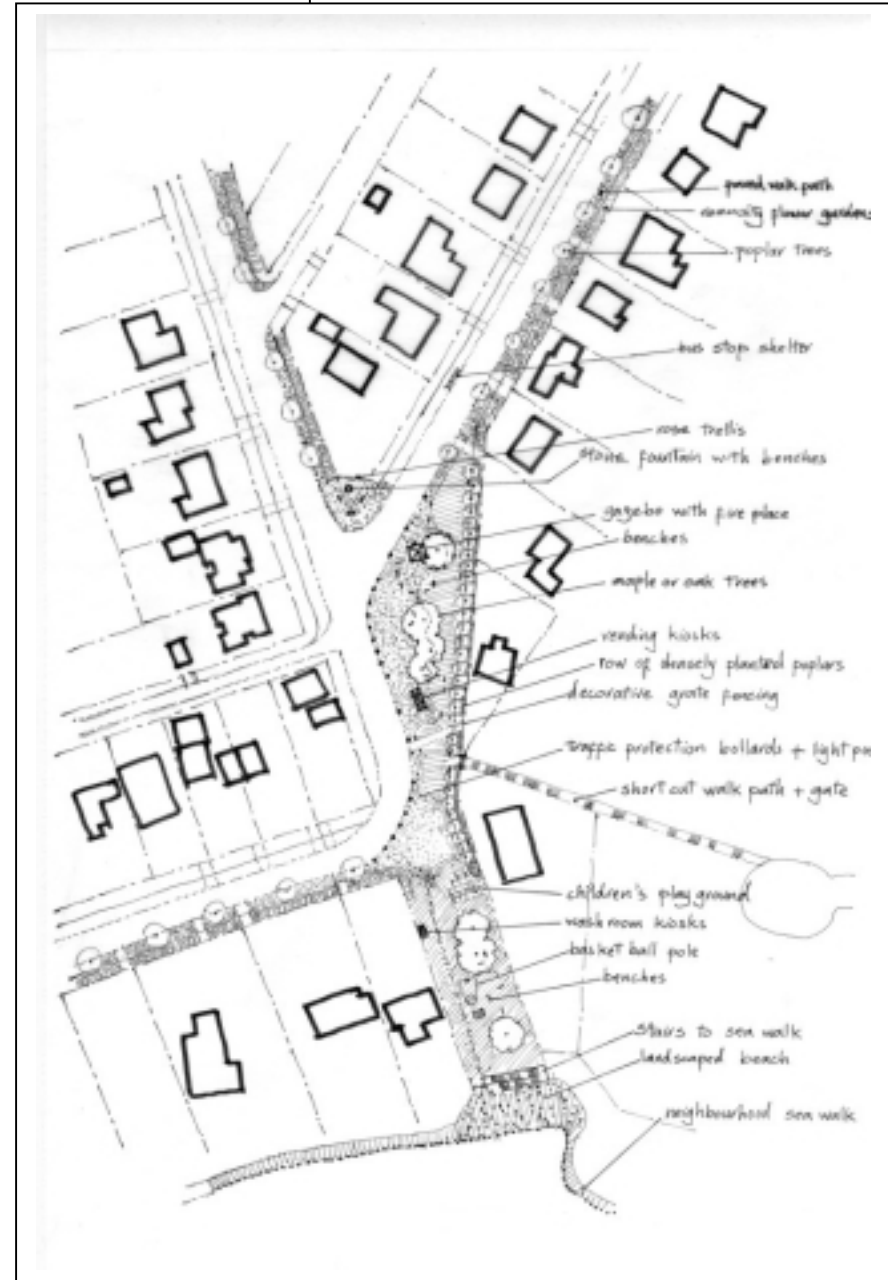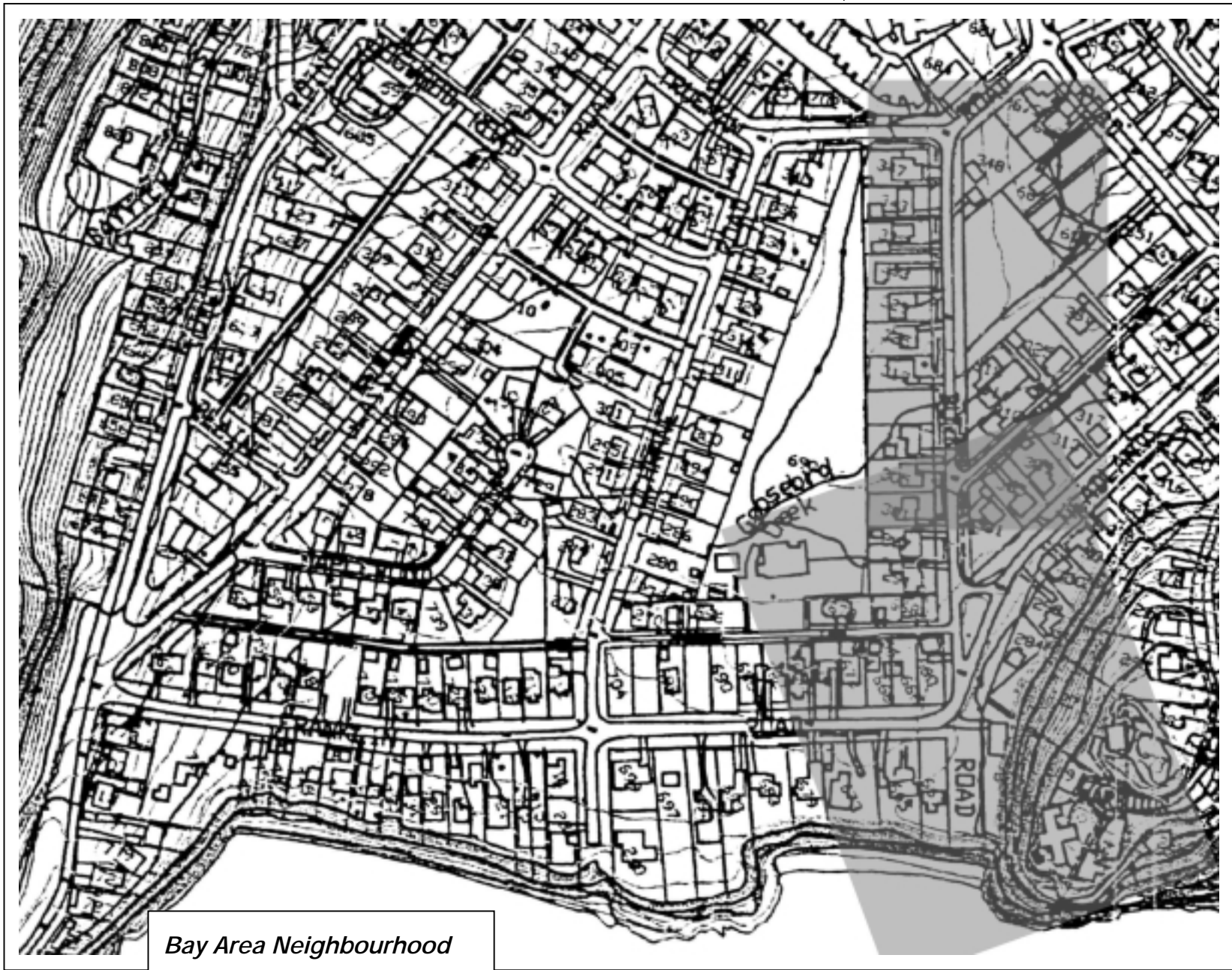
Bay Area Neighbourhood

- Wherever feasible, let the transit pass through the neighbourhood road.

- Connect the pedestrian neighbourhood roads. Make a network of pedestrian/ biking paths at the scale of the town.

6. We define our neighbourhood mostly by the streets that make the boundary lines. The Town does not have a definite boundary for our area (at least this is what I was informed by Chris Marshall). As a neighbourhood, we've decided to include all the residences on the water side of Marine Drive (which the Town didn't) up to five corners as well as residences between Bals Lane and five corners and Marine Dr. and Gibsons Way

6- How do you define your neighbouhoods's physical boundaries?

Compact multi unit development with a plaza space in front that is shared with the whole neighbourhood

paved walk path

stacked housing units

entrance driveway with housing unit above

paved pocket space with benches

parking space

exit driveway with housing unit above

back terrace + private garden

stairs to above units

play ground (shared with neighbourhood)

Infill Housing, Density Increase and Mix of Uses

- Encourage infill/ multi–unit housing and density increase as appropriate in the context.

- Let neighbourhood communities get involved in making decision about special cases of density increase and mix of use.

- Locate the higher density developments in places that have easy access to main traffic routes.

- Allow:
  – additions
  – basement suites
  – upper floor and above garage
     suites
  – duplexes

- Allow live/ work units.

- Create a mix of housing types.

- Think of specific community based scenarios of housing

Properties and Areas Suggested for Higher Density, Mixed-Use and Multi-Unit Developments

First priority ─────────

Second priority ─ ─ ─ ─ ─

development, e.g. a joint investment of five senior families, a housing co−op of artists, a shared investment of four adjacent properties for a seven unit complex.

- Wherever feasible, and as appropriate to the context, allow and encourage small scale residential−friendly uses in the neighbourhood, e.g. corner store, pub, coffee shop, kindergarten, small school, home business, art studio, seniors' club, bed and breakfast, etc.

Additions
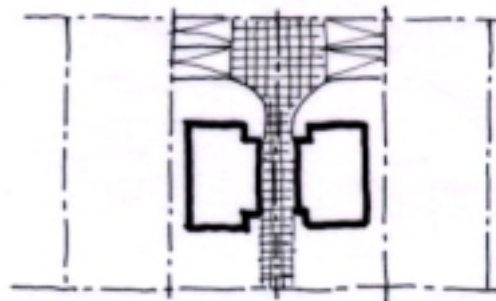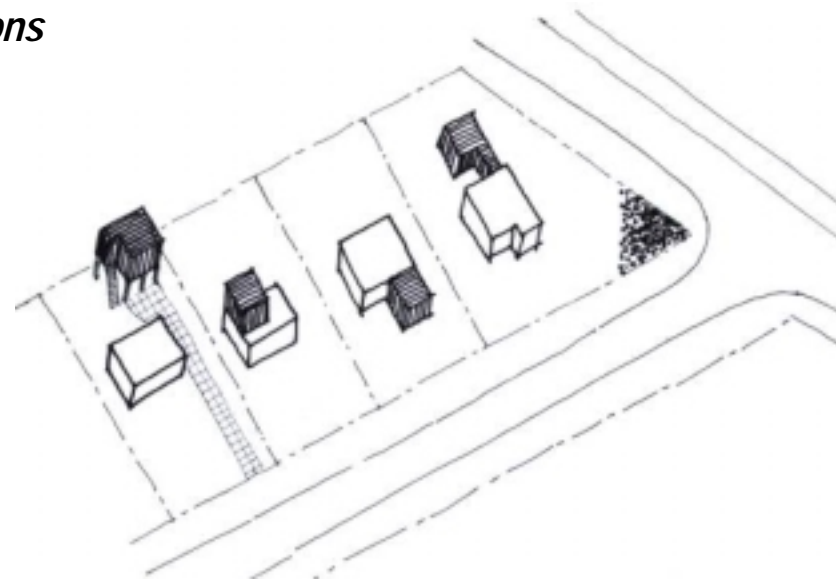
Shared driveway and duplex development in narrow lots
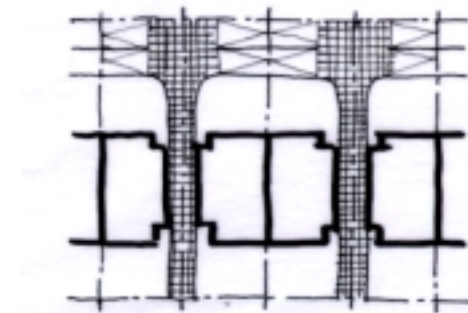
Site and Building Design

- Through landscaping, treat the front yards as a part of community space (semi–private space).

- Take the car and the garage to the back, or de–emphasize its look by design and landscaping.

- Design the house to face the road. Let the house's main entry be from the road. Let some of the house's living spaces look into the road. Let the building (or parts of it) be seen from the road.

- Design the building with a "village sense" (by using appropriate architectural elements, materials and colors). Pay attention to vernacular styles. Avoid "monster–look" designs.

- Avoid flat roofs.

Garage Solutions
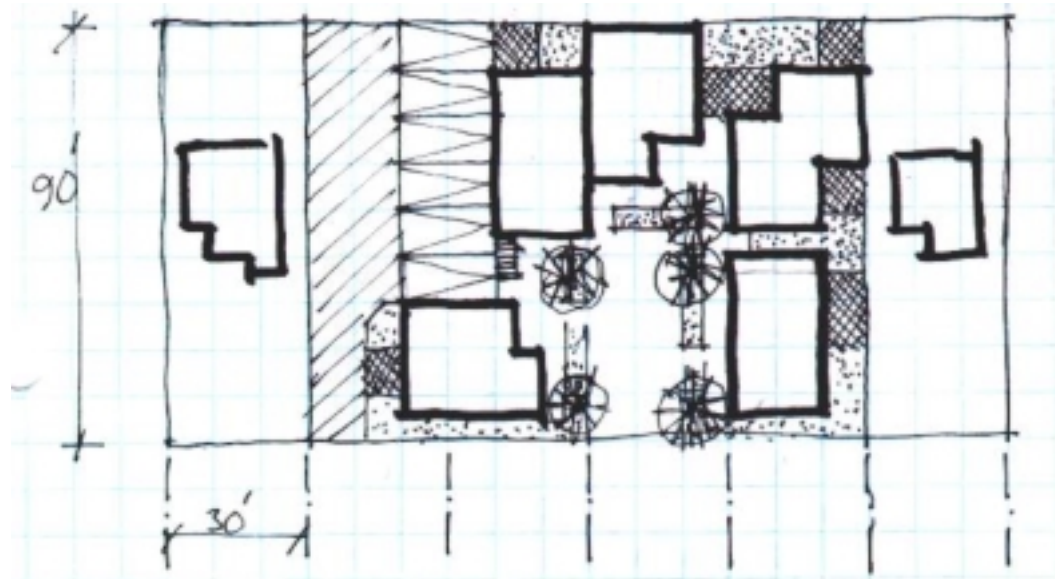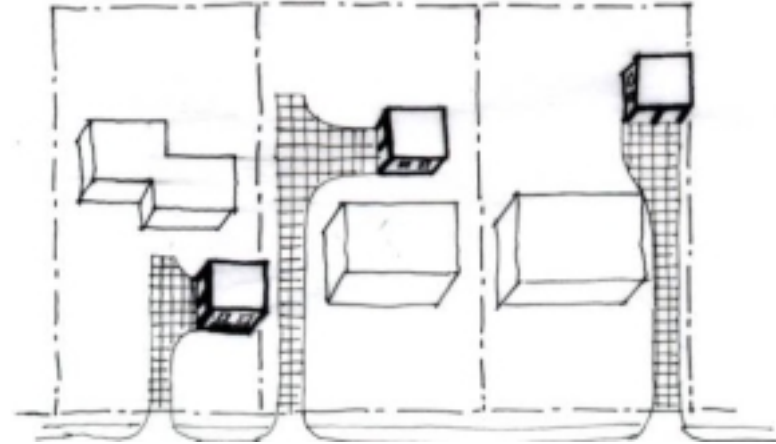
A multi–unit residential development on four single family lots may acquire five town houses and three above garage suites.

- Use darker color (not black) materials on the roof and light colors on exterior walls.

- Quality old buildings are irreplaceable assets of neighbourhoods. In the case of aged robust buildings encourage preservation, restoration and repair, instead of demolition and entire replacement.

- Identify "character buildings" in the neighbourhood. Preserve them and enhance their appearance. Those can immensely contribute to the character of the neighbourhood.

- Avoid repetitive, monotonous and box–look design in multi–unit developments. Avoid use of "cheap–looking" material in additions or in new developments. Encourage rich detailing.

Scenario 1

Four single family lots consolidated and developed as five residential units for young families and three above garage rental suites.
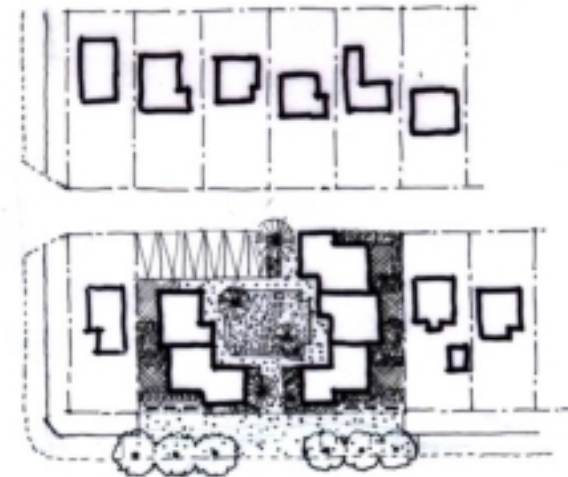
Scenario 2

Four single family lots developed as eight small residential units (four at the basement). Each unit with its basement suite can be used as live/ work artist studio. Or the basement can be rented out only for residential use.

Organizational Tools and Implementation Processes of Neighbourhood Improvement

- Hold a public meeting and finalize the neighbourhood boundaries;

- Start a core group within each neighbourhood. Shape neighbourhood association.

- In each neighbourhood define the goals of neighbourhood improvement and incrementally work towards shaping a Neighbourhood Improvement Plan. The plan will shape and grow during the time and through discussions among neighbourhood residents.

- Compile a library of information about neighbourhood approaches and community based planning as relevant to the context of the neighbourhood.

- Discuss the plan with other neighbourhoods and make adjustments and modifications accordingly.

- Modify and enrich Gibsons OCP through incorporating the ideas of neighbourhood plans.

- Divide the plan into distinctive projects. Set priority for projects;

- Shape project groups to find funding resources and to implement the projects.

- Initiate a neighbourhood newsletter and road side bulletin board.

7- More specifically thinking about the neighbourhood public space (e.g. streets and other open spaces), what problems do you see in there or what suggestions may you have to improve it?

7. We have come up with numerous problems and areas in need of improvement in our first three meetings. I'll include the notes we have from these meetings at the end of the answers to your questionnaire.

Notes from first three "Heritage Hill" neeighbourhood group meeting

General Issues
* Communications Between Town and Community
** Water Testing. Drinking Water - protect the Gibsons Aquifer from contamination - how? **The new well drilled into the Gibsons aquifer will supply this high-quality water to more residents, who will benefit?***
* Appearance / Landscaping
** **Gibsons Harbour Plan** - much of neighbourhood has not seen it /**aspects of plan not clear**.*
** **Armour's Beach - what is in future plans of Town (fix broom sticks?)***
** **Pocket Park** at end of Seaview - Park and **trail for Gibsons Creek ravine** - **Bird population in neighbourhood** - create base line, track.*
** How can we ensure availability of **low cost housing**? Find out status of zoning in neighbourhood.*
** Request Dogwood Princess **add a stop at Gibsons Government dock***
** **Parking** - not enough in some areas of the Hill, especially along Marine Drive.*
** Hold a **block party**. .Hold a **neighborhood garage sale***

Traffic and Pedestrian Safety
** **Sidewalk to Upper Gibsons along Hwy 10**. Build upper section first between Bals Lane and North Rd. Note: this subject was discussed at the Oct 31s Infrastructure Committee of Gibsons' council. At least two residents from Heritage Hill attended this. Council heard very well presented and researched presentation by concerned residents group citing safety of pedestrians as top priority. Angela Letman mentioned that **something, if even of a temporary nature, be done within the year rather than waiting for all the studies etc. to take place.***
** **Speeders** (taking shortcut) on Seaview possible solution: - create traffic circle at Seaview and Beach. or Speed Bumps? **Lower speed limit from 50k to 30k** from Post Office to Armours Beach.*
** **Wooden Stairs at trail** to Bals Lane - broken & in need of repairs (this trail is going to be redone along with the installation of a new water line by the Town supposedly around November 7th, 2000).*

Retaining the Heritage Aspects of the Neighbourhood
** **Keep historic list of old houses.***
* Contacting Heritage Society and working together on this.

Advisory Committee Business
** How do we **communicate with all neighbours** - hand delivered letter decided on.*
** **Need to introduce ourselves advised by Council member Angela Letman to write letter to town council asking for chance to introduce ourselves.** Go to following council meeting as delegation. **Letter is being organized. Get plans for future work in Heritage Hills by Town of Gibsons.***

Some Ideas for Social Activities in Neighbourhood Level

- Bring the ceremonies and social activities into the neighbourhood space, e.g. potlucks, birthday parties, block garage sales, etc.

- Initiate cooperative and collective programs such as
  - food co-op,
  - neighbourhood waste recycling and composting,
  - car pool co-op,
  - community gardening,
  - energy saving program,
  - housing repair co-op, etc.

- Start community based small businesses such as snack kiosk, community pub, etc run by youth, elderly and so forth.

- Connect community activities to school programs to make children and teenagers get involved.

- Start a housing co-op program in the neighbourhood.

8- How do you agree with the neighbourhood divisions as defined in the Gibsons OCP?

*8- Unfortunately, I can't comment on the other neighbourhood boundaries in the OCP at this time, as I'd have to study the old plan to do so. **I personally disagree with the boundary the Town did** define in the Gibsons Community Plan related to Marine Drive (where I have lived for 20 years) at the entrance to Lower Gibsons. This has been zoned for multiple-family along Marine Dr., which is now mostly older cottage style single dwellings. **I personally don't want to see town houses or condos replacing these character dwellings. To me this would destroy the very thing that makes Gibsons unique and would reduce it to another Surrey look-a-like.** The OCP designates the streets behind Marine Dr. up to the highway as "Heritage Hill". Actually, this designation kept me from attending the previous "Hill" meetings because I felt that I was not part of this neighbourhood. **This designation separated the two areas that actually should be one.** I feel very good about belonging to the "Heritage Hill" group now and perhaps we can work as a group to try to correct the separation that was created with the OCP.*

Summary

– Approach to neighbourhood urban design, as presented in this study in the context of Gibsons, should be considered as a component of a more comprehensive approach to micro-scale community development and management. This approach assumes a correlation between the quality of physical environment and the quality of activities that are actually or potentially associated with the urban environment. This approach is also based on the belief that development and management of urban space to be better responding to the needs and expectations of its inhabitants should allow and encourage a bottom-up participatory process along with currently established government and private sector initiated processes.

– To allow such a process to take root, this study has suggested the concept of "proximity neighbourhood", both as a physical unit of the urban space and a social unit of the community, which may function as an institution (e.g. association, committee, group) to make decisions about the development of its own public realm and management of activities in there.

– The goal is to make the neighbourhood, and consequently the town, a more enchanting place to live in at present and to maintain such a quality for the future generations. To achieve that goal, the study has proposed to base the design guidelines, and eventually the specific design solutions for each parto of the town, on a set of conduction (key) principles.

– In this study design guidelines and management ideas are categorized under four groups, addressing:
  1- neighbourhood main road and public space;
  2- in-fill housing, density increase and mix of uses;
  3- site and building design;
 4- organizational tools and implementation process.

Appendix

A Review of the Literature on the Neighbourhood Design Approach

The Concept of the Neighbourhood Design Approach

Planning based on the neighbourhood concept is not an innovation (Aldous, 1995, p. 19). From the early periods of modern planning the concept have been adopted as a physical as well as a social unit of the city. The origins of the concept can be traced back to the starting decades of the twentieth century to the garden city ideas in England, the neighbourhood center movement "to socialize immigrants" started in St. Louis, and to the paper by Unwin who asked for "the proper distribution of the parts of the city, and the adequate localization of the life of its citizens" (Buddalph, 2000). The purest expression of the "neighbourhood unit" was formulated by Clarence Perry (1929). By him neighbourhood is a unit of the city encircled by main traffic routes and commercial uses, and should be large enough by population to afford an elementary school and some other daily used community facilities in its center. In the 1920s and 1930s the neighbourhood concept was taken up quickly in the USA in frequently quoted schemes such as Radburn, and also gained favour in the UK. By 1954 Mumford was able to claim that neighbourhoods were a "Fact of Nature" (Mumford, 1954, p. 257). Since then the concept has re-emerged at times up until the present day. One significant and influential instance is the general conceptualization of a desired urban form presented in *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1977) in which the neighbourhood is advised to be the size of 500 inhabitants. This is suggested as the feasible size for managing the matters of community life in a face-to-face manner.

Among contemporary planning currents three groups have heavily drawn upon the neighbourhood concept: New Urbanists, "Urban Village" Group, and proponents of "Traditional Neighbourhood

Figure 4.6: The neighbourhood unit. This is Clarence Perry's diagram in the New York Regional Plan of 1929. Other diagrams show it applied to industrial and apartment districts. The neighbourhood unit has proved to be one of the most widely adopted and enduring planning ideas of the century, and has been used as a basic organising device in both European new towns and North American suburbs
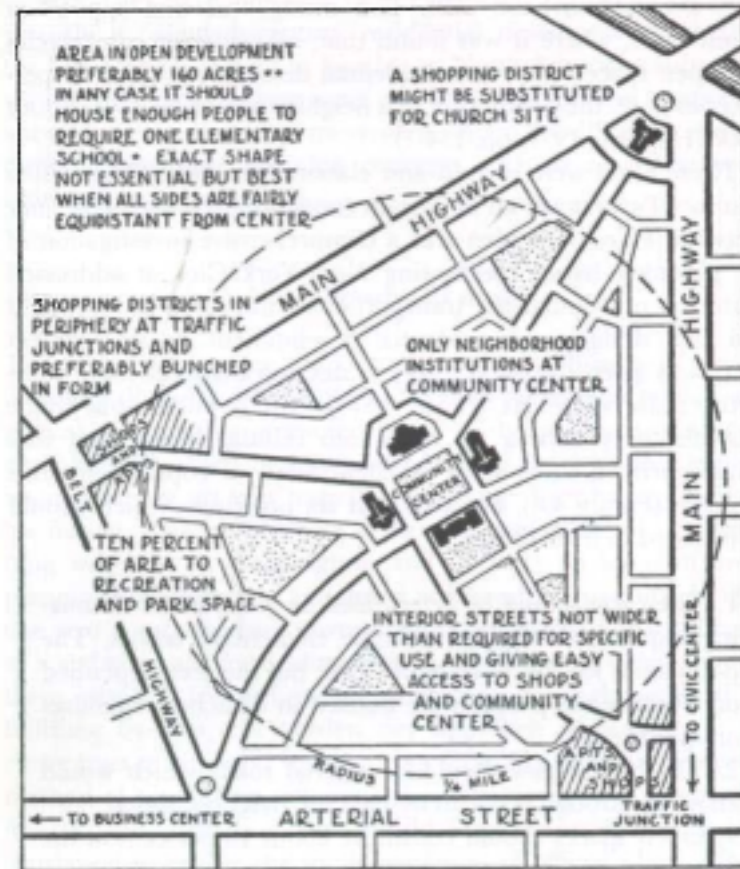
Development" (TND). All these three trends were shaped out of the rejection of the unsustainable, auto-dependent forms of suburban development. These advocates of the neighbourhood approach, according to Biddulph (2000), proclaim that urban areas must be developed anew or retro-fitted to include a compact network of neighbourhoods with higher density centers organized along distinct public transport corridors. Biddulph has characterized the urban village idea as an urban design approach to the neighbourhood concept. According to Aldous (1995) urban village design focuses include (a) architectural style to be derived from locality; (b) emphasis on architectural focal points, street corners, building lines, visual incidents, enclosures, and legibility of the physical environment; (c) mix of uses within neighbourhoods, street blocks, streets, individual buildings; (d) permeable, pedestrian friendly, traffic-calmed roads, avoidance of cul-de-sac and preference of short blocks to be oriented towards principal streets; (e) prominence of social mix and consultation between residents; (f) variety of buildings and spaces that change and adapt overtime; (g) bringing life to the buildings and the spaces in front of them. Talen (1999) asserts that "New Urbanists attempt to build a sense of community, broadly defined, via two avenues: integrating private residential space with surrounding public space; and careful design and placement of public space." She also comments that in particular, the scale of neo-traditional development, the prominence of public space and the emphasis on mixed land uses may be seen as contributing to increased neighbouring.

Suggestions for neighbourhood size remarkably vary (Biddulph 2000). Examining Gibsons, for instance, against these variations it appears that the whole town (currently inhabiting 4000 population) is about the size of neighbourhood as conceived by most scholars: 3000 – 10000 inhabitants. However, some versions of the concept are proposed as much smaller units. Alexander et al suggest 7000 (or a range of 5000-10000) people as the ideal size for autonomous, self-governing

communities which would consist of several neighbourhoods (1977, p.71). Further, as defining their concept of neighbourhood, they comment that "the neighbourhood inhabitants should be able to look after their own interests by organizing themselves…. This means the families in a neighbourhood must be able to reach agreement on basic decisions about public services, community land, and so forth. Anthropological evidence suggests that a human group cannot coordinate itself to reach such decisions if its population is above 1500, and many people set the figure as low as 500…. The experience of organizing community meetings at the local level suggests that 500 is the more realistic figure" (p.81). Lynch (1981, p.401) is careful to distinguish between the neighbourhood of proximity, where people know each other, and the classical planned neighbourhood of planning doctrine. He focuses on the neighbourhood of 15-100 households, which provides a local sphere of influence or control for people.

It seems that such small-size conceptions would better allow residents' participation in neighbourhood management, while large-size neighbourhoods seem to be more feasible from a functional viewpoint. A neighbourhood of 5000-10000 inhabitants is large enough to support an elementary school, some park and playground space, and a number of shops and offices, allowing "more people to work, shop and play all within walking distance of their homes" (Aldous 1992, p.25). We may conclude that large and small conceptions of neighbourhood are not contradictory and incompatible. Instead, those can be considered as complementary divisions within a settlement, the large unit to be planned in response to the functional and economic advantages of compact, mixed-use area to serve an optimal minimum of a mass of population within walking distances, and the small unit to realize the democratic advantages of residents' participation in community development and decision making

processes. Therefore one neighbourhood of 5000 residents may include 10-40 units of "proximity neighbourhoods."

Critiques of the Neighbourhood Design Approach
Many writers have scrutinized and criticized claims of the neighbourhood design approach as presented through New Urbanism, TND, and Urban Village movements. These critics, in general, attempt to condemn the determinism of design in those doctrines. According to Biddulph (2000) "New Urbanists have attempted to construct a robust rationale for their neighbourhood design by suggesting that if we design in this way we will get the communities we want: We will overcome auto-dependent forms of development by adopting a deformed grid, mixing uses, developing to appropriate densities and having utilities and services within walking distance from all houses; we will encourage a great mixing of socio-economic groups and mask socioeconomic distinctions between residents if we design houses to look similar in status, and if we adopt `polite' and typically neo-vernacular architectural expression; we will promote community and improved community relations if we design central focal spaces, axial routes and public buildings at key junctions." Design solutions, however, should not be expected to solve complex problems of the community development. And recent advocates of the neighbourhood design approach have hardly asserted such a claim. Instead it is suggested that coherent and supportive physical environment is a prerequisite, or at least an important factor, for "economic vitality, community stability and environmental health (Congress for the New Urbanism, no date). Several studies have demonstrated the impact of physical environment on social behaviour. For example, one study asserts that environmental variables affect the frequency and quality of social contacts, and that increased opportunity for social contacts in turn creates group formation and social support. Group formation is enhanced by: passive social contact (creating settings which support

such contact); proximity (facilitating closeness by arranging space appropriately); and appropriate space (properly designing and placing shared spaces) (Fleming et al., 1985).

More specifically, criticism of the neighbourhood design approach focus on a variety of themes. The following is a briefing of the most important aspects of neighbourhood design approach critiques:

1- Neighbourhood as a physical locality can serve only a limited number of the needs of the individual or the family who seek through greater mobility to take advantage of city wide opportunities (Thorns 1976, p.61). Jacobs raises the same point as she argues that the conception of neighbourhoods in cities is meaningless as they are seen as "self-contained" units to any significant degree (1961, p.127). However, local self-sufficiency should be understood as a relative notion. No unit of a city, even the whole city itself, can claim to be entirely self-sufficient. But we may find different levels of relative self-sufficiency in various locations. A number of variables, particularly the arrangement for the use of land and diversity of services/uses, determine how people in an area are able to find their working, shopping and leisure needs in their own locality. Somewhere else Jacobs (1961, p.126) puts up her doubts about the idea of self-sufficiency by asking this question: "isn't wide choice and rich opportunity the point of cities?" In return it can be commented that local self-sufficiency does not obscure people's choice for seeking their needs beyond their neighbourhood area. Actually, it seems more democratic to attempt for increasing the choices and enriching the opportunities at home vicinity. And, we may ask, doesn't this mean liberating and empowering people through reducing dependency on car?

2- Some commentators have criticized the idea of socially mixed neighbourhood as supported by new urbanism and urban village advocates. Lynch (1981) notes that a diverse social mix is difficult

to achieve in a free market for property where some form of social homogeneity normally persists. In fact, social and economic homogeneity are prevalent characteristics of actual (as opposed to theoretical) new urbanist development (Plas and Lewis, 1996). Based on new urbanist rhetoric, the homogeneity associated with new urbanism (at least in new developments) could put the building of sense of community (based on social mix, as defined by new urbanists) at risk. The irony, however, is that increasing homogeneity may provide a social arena which is more conducive to physical determinism.

3- Some writers draw upon the conflicting aspects between people's ideas and designers' criteria of places desirable for living. Mulholland Research Associates (1995) have found a real interest in suburban living among families, where life in a cul-de-sac, secure private gardens and leafy vistas are more important to residents of these areas than vicinity to community services (p.viii). Living close by some of these services is also seen as a real disadvantage because they tend to attract "groups of noisy/ troublesome young people." According to one research by Housing Forum, "the majority of residents were concerned about living in a 'nice area' or a 'quiet area' and about half of the people questioned expressed a desire to be close to amenities" (Popular Housing Forum, 1998, p.30). Another strong and possibly contradictory desire found to be living in a detached house. Southworth and Parthasarathy (1997) note that in the USA, as in the UK, many suburban residents do not want to live in higher density areas closer to their neighbours. This view contradicts that of the new urbanists who think of social and environmental advantages of higher density developments and multi-unit residences.

4- In questioning the neighbourhood design approach some sociologists have argued that sense of community is increasingly losing its aspect of locality. Better mobility and advancing tele-

communications is liberating people from confinements of local space. Then, community of locale (i.e. traditional neighbourhood) is giving place to "community of interest" in which residents actively seek affiliation with a homogenous, like-minded social group and avoid heterogeneous social interaction. In the community of interest social life is spatially diffused (Flanagan 1993). Out of these interpretations a new concept—non-place sense of community—is coined. In the non-place argument, resident interaction and sense of community are more a factor of homogeneity than locale (Talen 1999). Responding to these opponents, it can be argued that these interpreters present a simplistic picture of a complex trend by taking the emergence of the "community of interest" as a counter-equivalent to the demise of the "community of locale." Instead the sense of community at modern time should be understood as a blend of place and non-place senses and such a perspective would be more conforming to the pluralist character of the contemporary society. Then, we may expect such a hybrid sense of community taking various tones among different social groups depending on their economic, social and physical status. In fact social researches support this vision. Ahlbrandt (1984) found that residents with the highest range of economic choice were less attached to their neighbourhoods, in part because of the wider geographical range of contact available to them. Fried (1986, p. 350) also found that neighbourhood "diminishes in importance with increasing social position." More specifically, high-income groups deem the proximity of goods and services and interaction with neighbours as essential to a much lower degree than low- and moderate-income groups. Perhaps the difference between high-income and low-income groups as how they appeal to the sense of community can be more directly interpreted by indicators such as car ownership which is both the most important factor of mobility and one of the essential indicators of the level of income. In this

context it is also crucial to consider how other so called marginal (but counting) groups, e.g. children, elderly, disabled, women (particularly single mothers), ethnic minorities, and so forth—those who have limited or no opportunity of owning car—mean of the sense of community. It is clear that the sense of community among these groups cannot be but strongly connected to the area of residence—to their neighbourhood. Then thinking of neighbourhood as a physical realm of social life, as a place of identity, safety, and acquaintance is not only relevant but essential.

5- Neighbourhood traits such as activism were normally organized by key individuals rather than being anything to do with design, and that this activism normally aimed to inhibit change, or that neighbourhood units aimed to promote introversion and ethnic and social segregation and were a sentimental reaction against urban life (Biddulph 2000). In response to this assertion it can be stated that although community activism does not result directly from aptly designed environment, nevertheless good design can provide venues for a more dynamic interaction between community members.

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