



**American Planning Association**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

# Policy Guide on Neighborhood Collaborative Planning

Adopted April 6, 1998

## Introduction

Neighborhood advocates and experts representing a variety of perspectives convened in Chicago in late 1996 for a Symposium on Neighborhood Collaborative Planning. A series of working papers were commissioned through APA's Research Department to inform the discussion. Dozens of communities were surveyed and plans and programs collected and analyzed. This Policy Guide responds to the needs identified in both the working papers and the symposium, and in subsequent discussions with participants and others identified through the process.

APA defines neighborhoods as diverse, dynamic social and economic entities with unique characteristics, which are recognized by residents of both the neighborhood and community at large. Neighborhoods should be recognized as building blocks of overall community development. Local officials and planners must heed opinions and suggestions of people and groups within the neighborhood to create a framework that will enable plans to have a greater chance of being supported and implemented, not at just the neighborhood level, but at the municipal, regional and even state levels.

It should be noted that this Policy Guide is intended to apply to those large jurisdictions that have identified neighborhoods. The policy recognizes that some jurisdictions may have sound and effective comprehensive plans without a neighborhood planning component or specific identification of neighborhoods. Further, the policy may not apply to smaller jurisdictions that may be a neighborhood itself.

## Findings

Neighborhoods are the strategic building blocks of overall community development. Neighborhood collaborative planning requires understanding of the economic, social and physical characteristics in order to maintain both the sense of place and the sense of community. Neighborhood planning is not consistently found at the municipal level. Very few neighborhoods have plans. Many have piecemeal plans, such as housing plans, business revitalization plans, traffic plans, but not a comprehensive and integrated plan. Unfortunately what is more commonly found is a confusing array of programs, boundaries, staff, and objectives.

Planning often occurs in response to a problem, for instance a plant closing, siting of a "LULU" (locally unwanted land use), or crime and grime. Residents are tired of endless community meetings where nothing ever seems to happen. Planning is viewed suspiciously as either ineffective or top down, simply telling the neighborhood why the city or other entity is doing something. Planning is not seen as a cooperative effort.

Planners can help remedy this problem. Planners have unique skills to provide communities with information and alternatives, help coordinate the efforts of many players to resolve neighborhood problems and maintain a long-term perspective that incorporates various disciplines. It is incumbent upon municipal planners, familiar with the workings of local government, to help neighborhood

residents see their local problems in the broader contexts of the city and the region. Planners can contribute assistance on a wide variety of subjects including plan- and grant-writing, the use of maps, models, and case studies, and appropriate contacts within government agencies and other organizations. Research conducted by the American Planning Association and other groups has shown that the best neighborhood plans are developed by informed residents collaborating with decision-makers, service providers, and business leaders in a process designed and facilitated by neighborhood planners. Coordinated planning efforts can enhance and protect property values within the neighborhood.

Finally, most neighborhoods do not have any consistent funding for planning at the neighborhood level, or for basic resources, such as computer, printing, publications, conference registrations and administrative support to keep things on track. For neighborhood plans to be implemented, more resources should be passed on to the neighborhood itself.

The following are specific policy recommendations of the American Planning Association to address these general findings.

## Policy Positions

### General Policies

**POLICY 1. Comprehensive plans provide the framework for neighborhood planning and should be done within the context of a community-wide plan.**

**POLICY 2. Where there are identifiable neighborhoods, a jurisdiction's comprehensive plan should reflect neighborhood plans and neighborhood plans should support the broader needs of the community and region.**

**POLICY 3. Planning decisions should be directed to the most appropriate level. Planning decisions that have limited impact on the community as a whole should be made by, or on the basis of advice given by, those neighborhood groups primarily affected. On the other hand, planning decisions that affect the community as a whole should not be overly influenced by a single neighborhood's needs or interests.**

**POLICY 4. Neighborhoods should be encouraged to seek the best organizational structure that is suited to achieve their goals and objectives such as, but not limited to neighborhood associations, co-ops, development corporations.**

**POLICY 5. Neighborhood-based coalitions that assist in the development of individual neighborhood organizations, articulate neighborhood views on community wide issues, and facilitate coordination in the planning process should be encouraged and supported by local government.**

**POLICY 6. Advocacy planning for neighborhoods should be accepted as a legitimate role for professional planners, both publicly and privately employed.**

**POLICY 7. To be effective in many cases, neighborhood planning needs to go beyond addressing the physical conditions of the area and also examine issues of social equity. To that end, the APA at the national, chapter and division levels should work with social service, housing, economic development, public health, educational, recreational, judicial and other organizations to ensure that the issues social equity, children and families receive attention through the efforts of planners.**

### Specific Policies

## Federal Policies

**POLICY 8. The Federal government should allocate funding and develop new programs based on the following considerations:**

- a. Emphasize a long term, staged improvement of neighborhoods in their entirety, in accordance with their needs as expressed through the community's adopted comprehensive plan.
- b. Give priority to the revitalization of neighborhoods experiencing deterioration and declining condition.
- c. Permit the greatest flexibility in the use of funds and encourage innovative and locally-tailored solutions.
- d. Provide multi year funding with incentives for performance of stated goals.
- e. Tie housing to the neighborhood's overall development plan.
- f. Require that housing authorities and non-profit agencies comply with neighborhood plans, adopted in conformance with this policy, as a condition of receiving federal funds.
- g. The Federal government should give emphasis to preventing deterioration of at-risk neighborhoods and provide resources accordingly.

**POLICY 9. The Department of Housing and Urban Development should work closely with Congress, executive agencies to ensure that program design and delivery of all neighborhood related resources — human service, transportation, economic development and so on — are coordinated in their application at the neighborhood level.**

**POLICY 10. Citizen participation should be required in sufficient form and detail to ensure the broadest possible participation opportunity for the widest variety of residents and stakeholders.**

## State Role

**POLICY 11. The state should develop programs and provide technical and financial support to local governments for neighborhood planning and commit resources according to the recommendations of approved neighborhood plans.**

**POLICY 12. Legislation that focuses resources in communities and defines neighborhood planning as a legitimate municipal function needs to be adopted, such as described in APA's Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook.**

**POLICY 13. The state should provide flexibility in funding for communities so that it might be used in a coordinated and targeted manner.**

**POLICY 14. The state needs to link state university resources, especially in information, planning process and community organizing with neighborhood assistance organizations. Neighborhood planning should be incorporated into accredited planning programs at colleges and universities.**

## Municipal Role

**POLICY 15. City plans should incorporate neighborhood level perspectives to the city's decision-making and planning processes. The city should also establish the neighborhood as a basic area for needs assessment, provision and improvement.**

**POLICY 16. City government should establish city-wide goals and criteria for approving neighborhood plans. These criteria should be developed with the participation and support of the neighborhoods. Goals and criteria should address the issue of neighborhood boundaries and how neighborhood organizations are recognized as "official".**

**POLICY 17. City planners must ensure compatibility among the city master plan, zoning ordinances, CIP, recreational plans, and other regulations and the approved neighborhood plan.**

**POLICY 18. At a minimum, cities should be encouraged to provide financial assistance for a variety of categorical programs for undertaking comprehensive neighborhood vision programs, planning efforts, and establishing indicators of performance.**

**POLICY 19. City government should be encouraged to coordinate the resources of the city according to approved neighborhood plans. This includes funds for transportation, community policing, solid waste services, housing and community development, school and library funding and economic development and tourism among others.**

**POLICY 20. The municipal planning agency is encouraged to designate a planner to coordinate technical assistance to neighborhoods and provide information such as demographics, public investments and plans, economic performance data and property ownership and taxation. In larger jurisdictions, neighborhoods should have specific planners assigned to work with them on a regular basis.**

**POLICY 21. Local capital improvement plans, service area boundaries, community and human service allocations and other community resource strategies should link funding to neighborhood priorities. The municipality should actively solicit neighborhood participation in the overall budget process to truly reflect neighborhood needs and interests. Neighborhoods should see tangible benefits come out of their work and the city should favor neighborhoods that undertake neighborhood planning.**

**POLICY 22. Cities need to involve and educate elected and appointed officials and municipal employees about the importance of neighborhood plans and the planning process.**

**POLICY 23. Effective neighborhood planning requires that the municipality provide regular opportunities, formal and informal, for neighborhood leaders across the municipality to meet among themselves and with local officials to discuss how the implementation of neighborhood planning is going and to compare progress with their own and the community's overall goals.**

**POLICY 24. Neighborhood plans and planning should address a wide range of issues, but should be tailored to meet their specific needs, for example:**

- a. A definition of neighborhood boundaries — a description of how they were derived and how they apply to municipal service areas;
- b. A directory of who is involved and who should be involved in the planning process;
- c. A vision statement;
- d. Overall objectives for each element of the vision statement;
- e. Physical plan of the neighborhood indicating proposed improvements to the neighborhood
- f. Specific tasks and assignments;

- g. Design guidelines
- h. Links to city-wide objectives;
- i. A directory of resources;
- j. Short-term implementation projects to build support and momentum.
- k. Statistics about the neighborhood, including population, employment, education, etc.;
- l. Maps showing neighborhood resources such as churches, libraries, parks, historic sites, neighborhood landmarks and characteristics such as demographics
- m. An implementation chart
- n. A date of adoption and date for the next review or update
- o. Statement of acceptance by the municipality

## Exceptions

Exceptions from the General Policy positions or the Specific Policy positions supported by specific findings and reasoning

NONE TO DATE

## Amendments

This Policy is subject to amendment for the purpose of the following;

1. adding findings or supplementing previous findings with new data or interpretations; and
2. adding Specific Policy Positions based on new findings or reasoning that tend to add to or qualify, but not reject entirely, the General Policy Position, one or more Specific Policy Positions, or one or more Exceptions from Policy Positions.

NONE TO DATE

AUTHORITY

Endnotes

Bibliography