IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES 
IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION 
OF SOCIAL PLANS: 
LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE CANADIAN URBAN MUNICIPALITIES

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INTERNSHIP REPORT

STUDENT: OLGA SHCHERByna
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, 
SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING
INTERNSHIP AT THE CITY OF RICHMOND
I would like to express my gratitude to all those who gave me the opportunity to explore and complete this study. First of all, I want to thank the City of Richmond for providing this excellent internship opportunity.

I would like to express special gratitude to my internship supervisor, John Foster, Manager, Community Social Development, Community Services Department. It was his encouragement, patience, and valuable feedback that enabled me to complete this work.

I am also deeply indebted to my academic supervisor, Nora Angeles, Associate Professor at SCARP. The support that she provided motivated me to think more broadly about associated concepts and helped expand my understanding of social planning as a discipline. Invaluable discussions we held stimulated my enthusiasm and imagination in the research process.

I would like to thank Alan Hill, Cultural Diversity Services Coordinator, for introducing me to the City of Richmond and making this internship possible. I am very grateful to all Community Services Department staff. In particular, I thank Lesley Sherlock, Social Planner, and Dena Kae Beno, Affordable Housing Coordinator, for making me feel very welcome in the office and for providing all the support I could have asked for. Great thanks goes to Sean Davies, Diversity Services Coordinator, for always being available to provide honest feedback, share resources and encourage new lines of thought.

My gratitude also goes to Scott Graham, Manager of Research & Consulting at SPARC BC, for helping me develop an outline of the report and for providing feedback on the key concepts.

Completion of this project would not have been possible without the eleven city planners who volunteered their time to answer my questions and review Social Plan Summaries for their cities. I am very grateful for their professional expertise and for the time they spent answering my questions via emails. Three planners deserve special mention as they took part in in-depth interviews for this study. They are Joan Selby, Burnaby Senior Social Planner, Marilyn Hussey, Edmonton Social Plan Project Coordinator, and Aileen Murphy, Surrey Senior Social Planner. Interviews greatly informed this study and I am very thankful for planners’ willingness to talk openly about successes and challenges.

Finally, I would like to thank my Research Assistant, Thomas Deane, for his excellent work ethic, positive life outlook and great help with transcribing, coding and proofreading my texts.

This project would not have been possible without the kind support and help of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them.
“We have a new class of working poor in our country; waiting lists for affordable housing that keep getting longer; and people struggling to get to work and find childcare. More and more, the only things giving these people a fighting chance are the services provided by municipal governments.”

- FCM President, Mayor Basil Stewart of Summerside, P.E.I. FCM website
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STUDY RATIONALE

Canadian cities are facing fast population growth along with rapidly changing demographics of their residents. There are more seniors, low income families, newcomers, single parent families and ethnically diverse residents in our cities now and municipalities are struggling to find ways to manage emerging needs of these groups. Traditionally, cities had very limited authority and financial capacity to address social issues. However, in the past decades, Canadian municipalities have become increasingly concerned with growing social challenges in local communities and began introducing social planning polices with the goal to improve community well-being.

This report provides a summary of findings from research that Olga Shcherbyna (Scherbina), a graduate student at the School of Community and Regional Planning, UBC, conducted during her internship with the City of Richmond from January 18, 2011 to May 1, 2011. The City of Richmond was in the process of developing a 10-year city wide Social Planning Strategy. The goal of the study was to review Social Plans/Strategies that were developed by other municipalities and identify promising practices in the development and implementation of strategic social policies. The purpose of this study was not to assess the implementation of Social Plans or provide ‘normative descriptions or operational definitions’. Rather, it sought to inform the development of the Richmond Social Planning Strategy by highlighting lessons learned. Consequently, it will also be of use to other municipalities that are about to embark on the process of developing Social Plans.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

The study was guided by the following main questions:

1. How have Canadian municipalities been addressing social concerns?
2. What are the characteristics of Social Strategies / Plans developed by Canadian municipalities?
3. What are the most promising practices and lessons to be learned?

Three methods were utilized to address the main study questions - literature review, comparative analysis and in-depth interviews. A detailed version of the Study Logic Model is presented in the Chapter Three, Section 3.1. Key theoretical social planning / sustainability concepts as well as existing social well-being / sustainability measurement frameworks and indicators are discussed in Chapter Two.

Eleven Social Plans/Strategies developed by Canadian municipalities were identified for comparative analysis in an attempt to highlight ‘promising practices’ adopted by municipalities. A two-step approach was taken to identify the promising practices in the development and/or implementation of Social Plans analyzed in this study:
IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL PLANS

STEP ONE: ANALYZING THE CONTENT AND FORMAT OF SOCIAL STRATEGY/PLAN DOCUMENTS

Three dimensions were reviewed to compare the format and content of Social Plans/Strategies: document length, format and themes.

STEP TWO: ANALYZING THE PROCESS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL STRATEGY/PLAN

In Step Two, a four-phase comparative analysis framework was adopted (this considered the Pre-planning Phase, Development Phase, Implementation Phase, and Monitoring & Reporting Phase). Each phase was reviewed based on three-to-five selected qualitative indicators. In-depth overview of the comparative analysis is discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2. A one-page visual comparative analysis summary is presented in Chapter Three, Table 3.4.

Social Plans of the following municipalities were reviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRITISH COLUMBIA:</th>
<th>CANADA, OTHER PROVINCES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. City of Burnaby</td>
<td>8. City of Edmonton, Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. City of Campbell River</td>
<td>9. City of Hamilton, Ontario</td>
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<td>3. City of Nanaimo</td>
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<td>6. City of Surrey</td>
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<td>7. City of Vancouver</td>
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Three cities were identified for further detailed analysis and a Social Planner was interviewed from each of these municipalities (the City of Burnaby, the City of Edmonton, the City of Surrey). The selection criteria for municipalities invited for interviews is summarized in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.

While all Social Plan summaries were checked for accuracy by appropriate city staff from all eleven municipalities it is important to note that only three Social Planners were interviewed for this study. For the rest eight Social Plans data was collected primary from online sources. Therefore Social Plans were not studied in sufficient depths to make any conclusions about the success of these plans.

Therefore, no evaluation was conducted, but rather a comparative analysis of these plans to provide the baseline of understanding and identify ‘promising practices’ and lessons for other municipalities.

CONTEXT: INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY OF RICHMOND
The City of Richmond has a unique socio-demographic situation in comparison with other reviewed cities. Richmond is one of the most multicultural cities in Canada, with 64% of its population comprised of visible minorities. Additionally, over half of its population is made up of foreign-born residents (57%), and close to 9% of its inhabitants do not speak English or French.

These groups face multiple barriers including settlement challenges in a social and economic context. However, research also showed that among the other cities in this study, Richmond residents paid the highest medium rent of $928 while the medium after-tax income for families with children was the lowest ($59,569). Finally, 26% of Richmond children live in low-income families (low income after tax for persons younger than 18).

In the last two decades, the complexity and range of social issues facing the City has grown from insufficient affordable housing and childcare space to an increased level of homelessness and emerging ethnic-specific recreational needs. Therefore, the need for the development of a city-wide, long-term Social Strategy was identified.

In 2009, the Community Services Department of the City of Richmond started the preparation of a comprehensive 10-year Richmond Social Planning Strategy with the goal to position the City as inclusive, innovative and responsive to the needs of the City, community, and external stakeholders. A broad range of public consultation activities were conducted in 2010 in an attempt to engage Richmond’s citizens from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in discussions about the future for the City of Richmond. These activities included key stakeholder consultations, public survey, public forum, online discussion forum, and study circles with immigrant communities. In February 2011 a Request For Proposal was issued by the City of Richmond to seek professional consulting expertise in the development of the Social Planning Strategy and consulting company HB LANARC was hired in April, 2011.

**Key Concepts and Development in Social Planning**

Social planning involves a variety of processes aimed to improve the wellbeing and quality of life in local communities. While municipal governments are well positioned to address social concerns, tackling these issues was traditionally the responsibility of federal and provincial governments. Municipalities have very limited legislative authority and financial capacity to address social problems. Starting from the 1970s both levels of Canadian senior government gradually cut their social spending, which contributed to the current gap in social infrastructure. Additionally, a number of societal trends adversely affect cities, i.e. global urbanization and migration, changes in family structure, aging population, sprawling expansion, increased poverty rate etc. This resulted in increasing demands for municipal assistance from community groups and agencies. Thus, from an initial limited focus on social issues under direct municipal jurisdiction, social planning was broadened to address a wide range of social concerns in the community. As a result of the senior government ‘downloading exercise’, the large part of the cost of social infrastructure gradually became the responsibility of Canadian municipalities.

As cities grew and the scope and nature of social issues became increasingly complex, municipalities started to introduce more proactive measures, such as the development of

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1 Refer to Appendix 1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Canadian Municipalities

Social Plans/Strategies. These Plans are intended to be forward-thinking and high-level policies. They intend to provide a guiding framework and identify priority directions for cities to take in addressing all social issues (problematic and celebratory) at the systemic level.

Recently, municipalities began including social issues as part of broader Sustainability Frameworks. Social sustainability is considered to be one of the dimensions of ‘sustainable development’, which also has economic and environmental considerations. In principal, social sustainability should be included as an equal concern in the decision-making framework. However, there is a general consensus that policy makers have not considered the social dimension to the same degree as they have the financial and environmental pillars. Another general agreement among researchers is that there is no universal definition for ‘social sustainability’. Most of the definitions are context-bound, and it is suggested that case-specific approaches should be adopted.

Historically, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was used as a master measure of the value of economic activity and the associated standard of living - and by extension - the indicator of social well-being. This approach has been greatly criticized because it does not incorporate negative costs associated with growth (crime, commuting, unemployment, pollution etc.). A number of alternative measurement frameworks have been developed in North America and Europe, including the Human Development Index, The Genuine Progress Indicator and The Index of Social Health.

In Canada, there has been a growing interest to monitor and report social trends. Statistics Canada publishes the quarterly Canadian Social Trends, However, this publication covers different topics in each issue, and does not provide a comprehensive picture of social well-being or report on the overarching trends over a certain period of time.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) collects social well-being data through its Quality of Life Reporting System. These data are collected for 24 municipalities, which represents close to 50% of the Canadian population. However, data is only available to member municipalities and presented to the public in a highly aggregated manner.

In September 2002, The Canadian Policy Research Networks had published its first and last the 'Citizens Report Card' on 'Quality of Life in Canada'. The agency no longer exists.

Community Foundations across Canada participate in the national Vital Signs project. Each Foundation produces a City report card in ten issue areas based on data collected from local, regional and national sources. On October 5, 2010, fifteen communities released 'Vital Signs' reports. The Community Foundations of Canada compiled Canada's Vital Signs report to identify priorities of shared concerns. However, while data is available in an aggregated form at the Canadian Community Foundations website, it does not allow for easy comparison between communities as specific data is dispersed between Community Foundation websites. Besides, Vital Reports do not all follow a standardized measurement framework.

The Canadian Council on Social Development initiated the Community Social Data Strategy, which provide municipalities and community-based organizations access to
customized data from Statistics Canada. However, municipalities have to purchase access to this valuable data. Besides, the latest research product on the website is dated 2007.

Recently, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network (CIW) initiated the CIW project. The Network is planning to publish its composite index (including sets of eight quality of life category indicators) in the fall of 2011. This new measurement instrument was created in an attempt to develop a single, national measurement tool that will show if quality of life, based on eight identified dimensions, is getting ‘better or worse’. To sum, in Canada, while increasing interest in the area of social monitoring and reporting can be observed from academic, government and research institutions, unlike European countries, there is no regularly updated and published national level social report.

Finally, social well-being / sustainability indicator data collected by national and international agencies is highly aggregated and presents challenges for disaggregation at the community level. Moreover, the comparing process might be misleading given considerable regional differences and it is difficult to compare across regions and sectors (health, public engagement) due to little degree of commonality in the dimensions included in the measurement frameworks. In order to make informed decisions and raise public awareness on the emerging trends we need a reliable and easily available data. The study echoes CWI Network call for the development of more robust social well-being measurement tools in Canada.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PLANS/STRATEGIES: FINDINGS

PRE-PLANNING PHASE

DOCUMENT ACCESSIBILITY:
In six municipalities, documents pertaining to the Social Strategies were relatively easy to access. Two municipalities (the City of Edmonton and the City of Surrey) made extra efforts to ensure the accessibility of documents for the public and were identified as adhering to ‘promising practices’ by this criterion.

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT INFORMATION:
Most (9) municipalities developed relatively in-depth analysis of their current assets, gaps and challenges in the preparation phase. Cities mostly focused on collecting data about demographic trends but five municipalities developed a more in-depth analysis and looked at broader dimensions of social planning. Five municipalities were recognized as showing promising practices in the development of background information, i.e. City of Vancouver, City of Burnaby, City of Surrey, City of North Vancouver and City of Edmonton.

COUNCIL LEADERSHIP:
Information about Leadership from the Council was not available for several municipalities. Additionally, the City of Vancouver never moved into the development phase. Thus, it is assumed that there was no strong commitment from the Council to
move forward. In the same vein, the Council of Campbell River has never adopted/actively participated in the development of the Social Development Strategy, a policy document introduced by the Campbell River Social Planning Committee in 2010. The City of Toronto was rated as adhering to ‘good practice’ standards, and so was the City of Edmonton. In Toronto’s Social Strategy Steering Committee, five Councilors were members of the Committee (13% of Council) and the Strategy was adopted by City Council. All Edmonton Council members participated in the pre-planning interviews, provided input and laid out their expectations for the Social Plan for the City of Edmonton. Council leadership of the City of North Vancouver was noted as it became known that additional staff were allocated to develop the Plan. Also, the City of Burnaby and the City of Surrey were recognized for their promising practices in this dimension.

**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:**
This study reviewed different levels of community leadership, with most cities having at least some kind of community involvement in the development of their Strategies/Plans. While the City of North Vancouver did make an effort to strike a Steering Committee, it was only composed of six (6) community members, which does not resemble a representative and inclusive process. The City of Vancouver and the City of Edmonton engaged limited community leaders in the process (local Social Council, Foundations etc); the City of Nanaimo and the City of Hamilton both used Steering Committees with broad representation from local leadership. However, they were so called ‘usual suspects’. Both committees featured local government agencies, United Nations members, and senior-level government representatives. Three cities/planning processes were recognized for “thinking out of the box” to bring community leadership to the table (the City of Burnaby, the City of Toronto and the Campbell River Social Planning Committee).

**ADDITIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES:**
Most of the reviewed municipalities (8) allocated some additional human resources to advance the development of the Social Plan/Strategy. All these municipalities attracted external consultants to either develop background information and/or facilitate public consultation processes. The City of North Vancouver was the only municipality that is known to have allocated a budget for hiring additional Social Planning staff to relieve existing staff for the development of the Social Plan.

**PRE-PLANNING PHASE: CONCLUSION**
The majority of reviewed municipalities had developed in-depth contextual information to inform the development of their Social Strategies/Plans. Most of the documents pertaining to the Social Strategies/Plans were found to be relatively easy to access through City websites. In terms of the Council leadership and commitment, Burnaby was the only municipality that made an effort to ‘showcase’ their Mayor and Council leadership in the development of the Strategy. The Surrey Council leadership was assumed by default as they made a commitment to report on the progress and allocated money for the implementation. This information is recorded in publically accessible Council reports. In terms of community leadership, the Campbell River Social Planning Committee was recognized as the only community group to initiate the development of its Social Plan without municipal leadership. The City of North Vancouver was the only municipality where Council allocated budget to hire additional staff to release city Social Planners for the development of the Social Plan.


**DEVELOPMENT PHASE**

**PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS**
The majority (9) of municipalities in this study engaged local residents in the consultation processes in the development phase. The breadth and depth of consultations as well as the timelines varied significantly. The City of Vancouver has never initiated broad community consultations and it has not finalized its Social Development Plan. The City of North Vancouver reported in its Social Plan that: “... the Social Plan consultation relied on key stakeholders primarily, with fewer in-depth consultations with specific target groups and the general public, than initially planned”\(^2\). The City of Burnaby engaged local citizens by having them participate in Working Groups (members had to go through a selection process) and through ‘community check-ins’. Members of the public were also invited to participate in the online survey and provide feedback on the Social Sustainability Strategy Draft at four open houses and by written submissions. Public engagement efforts of four municipalities were noted as adhering to ‘promising practices’. They were the City of Prince George, the City of Nanaimo, the Campbell River Social Planning Committee, and the City of Edmonton.

**VISION**
Social vision for the City should reflect the context of the City. Thus, it is not feasible to compare visions that were created by municipalities. Therefore, no ‘promising practice’ award was identified in this dimension, but rather the study was concerned with whether the vision was actually developed. Four municipalities developed vision statements specifically for their Social Plans/Strategies. For some, the Social Plans/Strategies were a part of a higher-level policy and visions from the latter were adopted for the former. For example, The Human Services Plan (HSP) for the City of Ottawa adopted a vision from Ottawa 20/20 plans. In a similar vein, the Social Strategy for the City of Prince George was developed as a part of the integrated My PG Plan, as was Edmonton’s People Plan (developed as part of ‘The Way Ahead’ Strategic Plan for the City). Other cities had either goals or policy statements in their Plans that resembled a broad definition of a vision (i.e. the City of Vancouver’s definition of ‘sustainable Vancouver’).

**GUIDING PRINCIPALS/VALUES**
It is out of the scope of this study to evaluate all guiding principals/values developed by cities. Therefore, no ‘promising practice’ awards were identified for this dimension. Most of the municipalities (8) developed either guiding principals and/or values that could fall under the category identified as ‘principals that guide the process’ to answer questions such as: “What conditions should be in place to succeed?” etc.

**LINKS TO EXISTING POLICIES**
Social Plans cannot exist and be developed without the context and links to existing Policies. The study found that seven Social Strategies/Plans had some kind of links with other Plans/Policies, or with Official Community Plans (OCP), or with a Sustainability Charter. These were the City of Nanaimo, the City of Surrey, the City of North

\(^2\) City of North Vancouver, Social Plan, 1998, p.2
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Vancouver, the City of Edmonton, the City of Burnaby, the City of Prince George, the City of Campbell River.

DEVELOPMENT PHASE: CONCLUSION
While most of the municipalities engaged local residents in the consultation process, the scope of consultations varied greatly. The majority of cities either adopted over-arching visions for their Social Plans or developed visions specifically for social policies. Guiding principals/values that were developed for Social Plans fall into the category of ‘principals that guide the process and answer questions such as: ‘What conditions should be in place to succeed?’ Finally, for some cities, the study revealed strong links between some Social Plans and other over-arching City Strategies (included into OCP etc.).

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

BUDGET ALLOCATION
The City of Surrey and the City of Nanaimo were the only two municipalities to explicitly show how budgets were allocated to advance issues/take actions identified in their Social Plans. Cities produced progress reports presenting the results of activities etc. The City of Nanaimo developed a baseline of community indicators in 2004 and allocated a budget to update community indicators in 2007 and in 2010-2011. Additionally, in 2007, a consultant was hired to conduct a follow-up evaluation of the implementation of the Social Strategy. The City of Surrey has been committed to the Strategy by allocating annual budgets to act on identified priorities and producing progress reports since 2006.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
The study revealed that many municipalities included action steps/implementation frameworks into their Social Plans. Of the 11 reviewed municipalities, one has never developed its Social Strategy (City of Vancouver) and one is in the process of developing the Social Strategy (City of Burnaby). Three developed their Social Strategies/Plans in 2010 (City of Prince George, City of Campbell River and City of Edmonton) and only one reported to be in the process of developing implementation plans (City of Edmonton). Three municipalities have initiated new processes to address citywide social issues at the systemic level (City of North Vancouver – Sustainability Charter, 2008, City of Hamilton – Human Services Planning Initiative, 2008-present, and City of Ottawa – Choosing Our Future Initiative, 2010-present).

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
It is out of the scope of this study to evaluate the progress made by Social Plans/Strategies in eleven municipalities. The study was primarily concerned with assessing whether any actions were taken as a result of Social Plans/Strategies and how accessible this information is. Thus, the “promising practice” was noted for only one municipality which clearly indicated that strategic actions were implemented and how it was done (City of Surrey).
While it was mentioned that the City of Vancouver has not developed its Social Plan, nevertheless, the City has one of the largest Social Planning Departments in the region, made public its research about the processes of developing Social Plans in other municipalities and developed some innovative programs and initiatives in the social planning area, i.e. the development of Vancouver’s Housing and Homelessness Strategy, Healthy City Strategy, sustainable food system initiatives, Mentoring Project for Immigrant Professionals, Aboriginal Dialogue Project, etc.

Overall, it was revealed that municipalities lack reporting mechanisms. Even those that did act on priorities identified in Social Plans/Strategies did not do a good job reporting their efforts to the public. It was quite challenging to find any follow-up information with regard to the adopted Social Plans/Strategies on City websites. Although most of the municipalities have yet to develop action/implementation plans to advance their Social Strategies, the latter served as resources/forerunners for the advancement of other social policies. Upon reviewing Social Plan Summaries for their municipalities, a number of Planners provided examples of how cities had acted to address social issues identified in their Social Plans, however, this information is not easily accessible for the public.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: CONCLUSION
It is important to reiterate that this study does not evaluate the effectiveness and/or efficiency of implementation plans, but rather seeks to provide examples of what action steps were taken.

The City of Surrey and the City of Nanaimo were the only two municipalities to explicitly show how budgets were allocated to advance issues/take actions identified in their Social Plans. The City of Surrey was not the only municipality to develop its Social Plan in the action plan format, but it was the only one that took a real action-oriented approach in the implementation phase and made efforts to report about its progress to the public.

Overall, it was revealed that municipalities lack reporting mechanisms, and even those that did act on their priorities identified in Social Plans/Strategies did not do a good job reporting to the public.

MONITORING PERFORMANCE & REPORTING PHASE

ANNUAL REPORTS
The study identified four municipalities that produced follow-up reports on the implementation of their Social Plans/Strategies: the City of Nanaimo, the City of North Vancouver, the City of Toronto and the City of Surrey.

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING/SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS
Five out of 11 municipalities developed some kind of community well-being/social sustainability indicators. Of these, four introduced community indicators through their sustainability framework (City of North Vancouver, City of Surrey, City of Hamilton and
City of Vancouver). The City of Nanaimo adopted a community well-being approach. Two municipalities are in the process of developing indicators (City of Prince George and City of Toronto), while the City of Edmonton introduced a very general framework in The Way We Live to monitor City performance in the identified social issues.

**INDICATORS LINKED TO SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

The City of Toronto was identified as the only municipality that attempted to develop measurement tools for assessing the strength of the community-based system in neighbourhoods and across service areas, i.e. evaluate accessibility and efficiency of services they fund.

**TRACKING INDICATORS**

This study showed that three municipalities, which developed some kind of community well-being or services/program progress indicators, reported on their progress/trends at least once (the City of Nanaimo, the City of Vancouver, and the City of Hamilton). The City of Surrey and the City of North Vancouver have just established their indicator baseline in 2010.

**MONITORING & REPORTING & PHASE: CONCLUSION**

Monitoring & Reporting was the only phase where no ‘promising practices’ were found for two criteria. The study revealed that although municipalities are following emerging trends in planning and bringing new vocabulary to their social planning policies (i.e. ‘sustainability’ and ‘livability’ concepts), the measurement frameworks for these new trends are lagging behind. Additionally, while six municipalities endorsed their Social Plans/Strategies over five years ago – only one reported its progress to the public on an annual basis, and in a user-friendly format. Additionally, most of the municipalities that developed some kind of quantitative measurement frameworks - whether they were community profiles or other social [sustainability] indicators - did not establish social indicator targets but just tracked the progress and/or deterioration in social conditions. However, establishing targets shows municipal commitment to monitor performance and makes government and other involved stakeholders accountable for their actions in the social realm.

Meta-analysis of collected data revealed a pattern worthy of note. Sixteen indicators in four development phases and one indicator which compares document format and content were adopted for the comparison of eleven Social Plans/Strategies. For three indicators, it was decided that no ‘promising practices’ award be assigned (vision, guiding principals and implementation of strategic directions). Therefore, out of 136 potential ‘promising practices’ only 29 were identified. Out of 29, three (3) were chosen based on the content and format of the Social Plan/Strategy; thirteen (13) in the pre-planning phase; eight (8) in the development phase; three (3) in the implementation and two (2) in the monitoring and reporting phases. Even if taking into account the subjectivity of the comparison criteria, the study discovered a certain downward trend with each consecutive phase in the development of Social Plans/Strategies. While most municipalities are doing remarkably well in terms of planning for the development of Social policy, there is a certain gap with respect to monitoring and reporting on the progress to the public.

**LESSONS FOR DEVELOPING SOCIAL PLAN/STRATEGY POLICY DOCUMENTS**
Ten policy documents were reviewed. The City of Vancouver has not developed its Social Development Plan, however, potential themes and guiding principals etc. were identified. Nine municipalities produced final drafts of their Social Plans/Strategies, and had these endorsed by their Councils by April 2011. The City of Burnaby is in the process of writing its Social Sustainability Strategies and produced a first draft for public review in March 2011. All ten documents vary greatly in format, length, complexity and content.

The study revealed that there are certain common features of the high-level social policy document that make it easy to interpret and use:

- **Plain Language:** It is important to keep in mind who an intended audience is and use plain language, i.e. no abbreviations, action verbs rather than nominals, active rather than passive voice, short paragraphs, simple tables etc.

- **Preface:** A short statement about what the policy intends to do and when it was adopted by Council makes it more relevant to the public.

- **Document Organization:** Separate sections/paragraphs briefly explaining the structure of the document, policy rationale (trends affecting a community), summary of public consultations, existing programs, policies etc.

- **Key Document Features:** Vision, guiding and operating principals, municipal role in addressing social issues, identified priority themes, identified long, mid and short-term objectives for each theme, identified partners for each objective, identified City roles for each objective (leader, partner, advocate etc.), identified City actions for each objective.

- **Accountability to the Public:** Reporting and monitoring mechanisms included in the document, including proposed timelines, responsibilities and format (qualitative, quantitative indicators or a mix etc.)

- **Document Length:** Social Plan/Strategy is a long term, city-wide policy, which might turn out to be quite a long document (over 50 pages). Creating a shorter version (20 pages maximum) will make it easier for the community to read, make references to, and use.

- **Colourful Format:** Images from public consultations, including photos and products of public brainstorming (community maps, identified challenges) as well as pictures of the city make the policy document more relevant to residents. Additionally, information presented in colourful graphics (community profiles, links to other policies etc.) makes it is easier to understand for non-experts.

**Lessons from Key Informants:**

Three cities were identified for further detailed analysis and a Social Planner was interviewed from each of these municipalities (City of Burnaby, City of Edmonton, City of
Surrey). Twelve common themes emerged as the key lessons learned following in-depth interview analysis. These lessons could be useful when considered by any Canadian municipality about to embark on the development of their own long-term Social Plan/Strategy. Although these lessons appear below in the order of frequency in which interviewed Planners spoke of their importance, they are not ranked in terms of their absolute value. These lessons are:

**Allocation of Time**

- Allocate sufficient time to each of the phases in the development of Social Plan/Strategy
- Plan in advance for online presence and allow time to approve online communication tools in municipal bureaucracy
- Learn to compromise in a given timeframe
- Allocate adequate time for broad community consultations
- Have other responsibilities taken care of (if possible)

**Role of Council**

- The importance of having the support and leadership of Council when developing and implementing the Social Plan/Strategy should not be underestimated
- Ensure that Council priority and expectations are understood and that the Mayor and Councilors are clear about the process ahead
- Have Councilors/Mayor on the Social Plan Steering Committee (if possible)

**Public Consultations**

- Use innovative techniques to engage community groups in consultations
- Utilize previous public input on social issues
- Engage community in developing priorities and directions early in the process
- Engage community members in the reporting phase to ensure transparency
- Ensure that not only ‘usual suspect’ voices are heard
- Engage various staff groups in consultation processes

**Background Information**

- Be prepared to spend time on developing background information, including demographic profiles and an inventory of services and programs to inform development of the Plan
- Learn about major theoretical concepts for your Plan (sustainability, livability etc.)
- Consult with senior staff, Mayor and Council to learn their concerns and visions
- Review how other municipalities tackled the process

**Municipal Role**

- Understand municipal mandate in the social realm
- Ensure that the public understand the municipal role in addressing social issues
- Develop / utilize an existing matrix of government responsibilities to address social issues
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VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS
• Implementation of the Social Plan/Strategy is not possible without developing partnerships
• Use existing City collaborations to engage key players
• Do not be afraid to build partnerships from the ground up
• Think strategically and involve key potential partners early in the pre-planning/development phase

MONITORING AND REPORTING RESULTS
• Develop a solid measurement and reporting framework to track and report progress
• Social Plan/Strategy will gain more community and partner ‘buy-in’ if consistent reporting system is in place
• Find a balance between reporting successes and tracking progress on all recommendations
• Report in user-friendly format and language(s) and include all themes identified in the initial Plan rather than reporting on these elsewhere

UTILIZING SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE
• Bring consultants on board (preferably highly specialized in certain fields and/or home-grown experts with passion for their community)
• Do not shy away from requesting help from other staff in the City

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
• Having implementation plan in the Social Plan/Strategy adds credibility
• Build strong interpersonal relationships with other departmental staff to overcome municipal bureaucracy and improve coordination efforts

ACCESSIBILITY OF MATERIALS
• Ensure all processes of Plan development are recorded and well documented
• Ensure all documents are accessible to the general public in terms of content and availability through public domain portals

HAVING CLEAR OBJECTIVES
• Crystal-clear objectives must be in place, so that Council, staff and community members are all aware of directions and actions
• Ensure that priorities (short, mid and long-term) are established as well as compliance with goals in other plans and high-level policies.

THINK BIGGER THAN BASIC NEEDS
• Think bigger than social concerns in the community
• Try to go beyond basic needs and pay attention to and nurture ‘happy’ things and what worked in the community
REPORT CONCLUSION

The major goal of this study was to identify ‘promising practices’ highlighted by the processes undertaken in the development and implementation of Social Plan/Strategies by Canadian municipalities. One of the major lessons learned was that there is no ‘magic bullet’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’ blueprint for the development of a long-term policy that will be applicable to all Canadian cities. What works for one municipality would not necessarily work for a different one. Even if municipalities have comparable demographic structures, there are many other variables that influence the directions each City might take, including the political climate, provincial legislation, city corporate philosophy, level of civic leadership in a given city, and the level of urgency of issues based on the current situation etc.

Another important observation was made with respect to monitoring and reporting mechanisms. There is a definite gap between municipal efforts in developing Social Plans/Strategies and allocating resources to track and report on the progress of identified social priorities. Usually, municipalities have established internal protocols (which were not reviewed in this study) for reporting on departmental activities to Council, including activities and programs of Social Planning Departments. However, among the eleven municipalities for which Social Plans/Strategies were reviewed, only one had adopted a formal public reporting model and produced Annual Reports tracking progress of the Plan in terms of addressing the identified social issues in a format that is accessible to the public.

Additionally, out of those municipalities that had developed some kind of quantitative measurement frameworks, whether it is community profiles or social [sustainability] indicators, only one established social indicator targets and the rest simply tracked the progress and/or deterioration in social conditions. As establishing targets shows municipal commitment to monitor performance and makes government and other involved stakeholders accountable for their actions, municipalities need to make efforts to institute more accountable ways of measuring progress of their actions as well as the social health of their communities.

What works for one municipality would not necessarily work for another - context is crucial.

There is a definite gap between municipal efforts in developing Social Plans/Strategies and in allocating resources to track and report on progress of the identified social priorities.

Municipalities rarely establish social [sustainability] targets, but instead focus on tracking the progress of social indicators.
Moreover, there are always cause-effect or causal relationship issues. How did the Social Plan/Strategy affect the change in the community? What kind of impact newly introduced municipal programs and services made on the community health? Literature shows that outcome indicators that provide insights into changes in the community social health are quite difficult to develop. However, if municipalities are aiming for positive change in their communities they need to introduce measurement tools which allow them to measure the change.

Finally, it was discovered that municipalities typically adopted Guiding Principals, which ‘guide the process’ and answer questions such as: “What conditions should be in place to succeed?” However, very few municipalities incorporated Operational Principals, which answer questions such as: ‘How will our plan be developed/implemented?’ and ‘How should the City address implementation of the Plan?’ These two questions are very different from the one above as they call for accountability from City staff to take action. One might assume that municipalities that incorporated Operational Principals (thereby ensuring a degree of government transparency/accountability) would be more diligent in reporting progress to the public - but this has not been the case. The City of Surrey did not have any guiding or operational principals listed in its Social Plan, yet there was substantial staff and Council commitment to ensure a process was put in place to report progress to the public and to develop social sustainability targets. To conclude, it is important to have the philosophy of promoting transparency and accountability by using Operational Principals to ensure the City is held responsible for acting on its Plan. However, what is crucial is that staff and Council are committed to a transparent, action-oriented approach, and that the City allocates adequate resources to this process.

There is an issue of causal relationships between what is being measured and what has been done, i.e. outcome indicators/conditions.

Philosophy of promoting transparency and accountability is embedded in Council and staff commitment to an action-oriented approach. This depends on the availability of adequate resources to take actions, monitor progress and report it.