Consensus-Based Processes for Local and Regional Planning

by

Jennifer Ann Hill

B.Sc., Dalhousie University, 1980
B. Env. D., Dalhousie University (formerly Technical University of Nova Scotia), 1983
B. Arch., Dalhousie University (formerly Technical University of Nova Scotia), 1985
M. Arch., Dalhousie University (formerly Technical University of Nova Scotia), 1989

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE (PLANNING)

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
School Of Community and Regional Planning

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2003

© Jennifer Ann Hill, 2003
AUTHORIZATION FORM

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Jennifer A. Hill, M.Sc.(Planning)
Dated the 8th day of September 2003
School of Community and Regional Planning
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
ABSTRACT

Consensus processes hold considerable potential for application in local and regional planning. Focusing primarily on the Capital Regional District of British Columbia, this thesis aims to understand the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional government; to determine the kinds of planning tasks suited to consensus processes; and to identify actions needed to support their increased use. Nineteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants in a qualitative approach to data collection. A first order concept analysis was carried out on the transcribed texts, followed by a search for categories and groupings of concepts. Data analysis was furthered structured through the use of an analytical framework that defined a series of questions to apply to the research data. Key findings include: there is a wide variation in the level of understanding of consensus and consensus processes among respondents; assessing a situation for its suitability to consensus is a critical step in achieving a consensus outcome; it is important to distinguish between locally-situated planning-related conflicts and broader community planning activities; ways to support the increased use of consensus include political leadership, education and training, and policy and program development. A framework that outlines criteria for assessing consensus suitability is developed as a tool for planners, elected and government officials. Recommendations include the development of a nation-wide network of planning professionals, academics and politicians who are interested in exploring and promoting the use of consensus in local and regional government.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii 
TABLE OF CONTENTS ................................................................................... iii 
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................... vii 
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................. viii 
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................... ix 
DEDICATION ....................................................................................................... x 

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1 
1.1 Research Questions and Outline .............................................................. 1 
1.2 Definitions ................................................................................................ 2 
  1.2.1 Consensus Process .......................................................................... 3 
  1.2.2 Consensus ........................................................................................ 3 
  1.2.3 Dispute Resolution .......................................................................... 4 
  1.2.4 Interest-Based Negotiation .............................................................. 5 
  1.2.5 Mediation ......................................................................................... 5 
  1.2.6 Facilitation ...................................................................................... 5 
  1.2.7 Arbitration ...................................................................................... 5 
1.3 Problem Definition: Why This Topic? .................................................... 5 
1.4 Literature Review ..................................................................................... 7 
  1.4.1 Innes ............................................................................................... 8 
  1.4.2 Forester .......................................................................................... 11 
  1.4.3 Healey ............................................................................................. 14 
  1.4.4 Cormick, Dale, Edmond, Sigurdson and Stuart .............................. 15 
  1.4.5 Thomas .......................................................................................... 20 
  1.4.6 Province of British Columbia .......................................................... 21 
1.5 The Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Process .......... 23 
1.6 Conclusion ................................................................................................. 25 

CHAPTER 2: METHODS ............................................................................. 26 
2.1 Research Strategy and Methods .............................................................. 26 
2.2 Data Collection ........................................................................................ 26 
  2.2.1 Defining Consensus Process: A Necessary First Step ................. 26 
  2.2.2 Interviews: The Procedure .............................................................. 27 
  2.2.3 Interviews: The Questions .............................................................. 27 
  2.2.4 Interviews: The Participants ............................................................ 29 
  2.2.5 Demographic Summary ................................................................. 30 
  2.2.6 Observation .................................................................................... 32 
2.3 Data Analysis ............................................................................................ 32 

CHAPTER 3: DEFINING CONSENSUS AND CONSENSUS PROCESSES .. 34 
3.1 Results ..................................................................................................... 34 
  3.1.1 Definitions of Consensus ................................................................. 34 
  3.1.2 Definitions of Consensus Processes ................................................. 36 
  3.1.3 Consensus Discussed in Relation to Voting ..................................... 38 
  3.1.4 Consensus Considered Difficult to Achieve ..................................... 39 
  3.1.5 Consensus Processes Equated to Public Consultation Processes ...... 40
3.1.6 Planning Processes Used Elements from, Attempted to Approximate, or Initiated and Eventually Abandoned a Consensus Process and Respondents Used General Language when Discussing the Consensus Nature of Planning Processes. 42
3.1.7 Respondents Emphasized the Decision-Making Authority of Elected Officials in Local Government. 43
3.1.8 Respondents Indicated That Consensus Processes Can Raise False Expectations About the Role of Participants in Final Decision-Making. 45

3.2 Discussion. 47
3.2.1 Defining Consensus: Variation and the Thesis View of Consensus. 47
3.2.2 Defining Consensus. 48
3.2.3 Consensus Processes. 49
3.2.4 Voting. 50
3.2.5 Consensus Processes versus Consultation. 50
3.2.6 Approximating Consensus. 51

3.3 Summary. 52

CHAPTER 4: OBSTACLES TO USING CONSENSUS PROCESSES IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING. 54
4.1 Results. 54
4.1.1 Resources Are a Challenge to Using Consensus Processes. 54
4.1.2 The Stakeholder Approach as an Obstacle. 56
4.1.3 Reluctance to Give Up Decision-Making Power. 59
4.1.4 Lack of Commitment or Buy-In to Process. 61
4.1.5 Political Context in the Capital Regional District. 62
4.1.6 Decision Quality Suffers. 64
4.1.7 Emotional Attachment to Peoples’ Homes. 65
4.1.8 Other Obstacles. 66
4.2 Summary of Respondent Views on the Obstacles to Using Consensus Processes in Local and Regional Planning. 68

CHAPTER 5: PLANNING TASKS FOR CONSENSUS PROCESSES. 70
5.1 Results: Planning Tasks. 70
5.1.1 Developing Plans at the Neighbourhood, Community and Regional Level. 70
5.1.2 Planning-Related Conflicts and Disputes. 73
5.1.3 Negotiating Agreements at the Regional Level. 74
5.2 Characteristics of Consensus Planning Tasks. 75
5.2.1 Tasks That are Specific and Narrow in Focus. 76
5.2.2 Tasks That Involve the General Public at a Small Scale. 76
5.2.3 Tasks That Don’t Involve the General Public. 77
5.2.4 Policy Versus Operational Level Tasks. 77
5.2.5 Concrete Versus Abstract Tasks. 78
5.3 Summary of Responses to the Question: “What Planning Tasks are Suited to Consensus Processes?” 78

CHAPTER 6: ACTIONS TO SUPPORT THE INCREASED USE OF CONSENSUS PROCESSES. 80
6.1 Results. 80
6.1.1 Convince Politicians of the Value of Consensus Processes. 80
6.1.2 Formalize Support Through Policies, Programs and Legislation. 82
APPENDIX III: METHODS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK ......................... 148
APPENDIX IV: SAMPLE WORKSHEETS ........................................... 150
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Use of Term Consensus Process ......................................................... 3
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents ................................................................. 30
Figure 2: Highest Level of Education Completed ......................................................... 31
Figure 3: Formal Education in Public Involvement in Planning of Respondents .......... 31
Figure 4: Extent to which job involves public involvement issues .............................. 32
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Tony Dorcey for his role in shaping the thesis study and providing constructive input along the way. Thanks are due also to Mr. Alan Osborne who contributed to the thesis study in a number of capacities, including sharing his knowledge of the practical application of consensus processes to regional planning. Mr. Mark Hornell was particularly generous with his time providing valuable information and insights about the Regional Growth Strategy process in the Capital Regional District. I would also like to express my appreciation to all of the respondents who generously gave their time. This study has benefited from their collective years of skills, knowledge and experience in the planning field.

Thank you to all of my fellow classmates who made my time at SCARP always interesting, stimulating and enjoyable. Finally, thanks to my husband, Phil for his unending support and constant readiness to make life interesting, and to Samantha for reminding me of the small and joyful wonders that life holds.
This thesis is dedicated to Phil and Samantha Hill.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Questions and Outline

This thesis explores the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning practice in Canada, specifically in the Capital Regional District of British Columbia. It starts from the premise that consensus processes hold considerable potential for application in local and regional planning. It then seeks to analyze that potential that exists by addressing three research questions.

### Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?
2. What kinds of local and regional planning tasks are well suited to consensus processes?
3. What action steps could support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning?

The research strategy relies primarily on interview data from individuals experienced in the work of local and regional planning. It integrates this research with the academic literature to provide insights, key findings and recommendations for action with respect to the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning.

The locus of study for the thesis is the Capital Regional District (CRD) of British Columbia with a focus, in the second half of the research, on the Capital Regional District’s process to develop a Regional Growth Strategy. This process served as an excellent example on which to focus the interview questions for two reasons. First, the development of a Regional Growth Strategy in British Columbia is supported by the Growth Strategies Act and the Provincial Government’s Intergovernmental Relations and Planning Division, both of which promote the use of consensus processes for regional planning.
planning. Secondly, it became apparent from the initial set of interviews that this was a process that interview respondents associated with a consensus approach.

The Capital Regional District's Regional Growth Strategy process has served as a vehicle for obtaining answers to questions about consensus processes, rather than being the subject of specific analysis itself. A brief description of the process is provided at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 1 presents the problem definition and an overview of the literature that pointed the way to the research topic. This is followed by a more detailed review of the planning literature that supports the premise that consensus processes hold considerable potential for local and regional planning, describes what they are and how they can be implemented. Chapter 2 describes the research strategy, methods and the framework for analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 3 addresses a question that revealed itself as important during the early steps of the study. After having identified the need to establish a definition of consensus processes, it became clear that it would be important to explore whether respondents shared a common and clearly articulated understanding of consensus and consensus processes. Chapter 3 is presented differently from the chapters that focus on the 3 original research questions. It combines the presentation of results, the discussion of those results and a summary of the key findings. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the results of the interview responses for each of the three original research questions respectively. Chapter 7 discusses the results of the three previous chapters in the context of the literature and presents key findings. The final chapter, Chapter 8, presents a summary of the key findings and recommendations for future actions.

1.2 Definitions
As the study illustrates, there is a wide variation in the definitions of the terms consensus and consensus processes. For clarity with respect to these and five other terms related to consensus processes, the following definitions are used in the thesis.
1.2.1 Consensus Process

A consensus process is a process where:

- Consensus, as defined by the participants, is the outcome of the process;
- All major points of view are represented;
- Communication is emphasized including careful listening, probing, discussion, negotiation, seeking to understand underlying interests;
- Shared learning and transformation of understanding among participants leads to mutual agreement;
- Action arises naturally from the process.

Consensus processes have been defined in the thesis to include dispute resolution as well as agreement seeking processes.

Given the range of terms used to represent the kinds of processes described above the following table presents a summary of why the term consensus process is used, the source of the term, alternative terms and their source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Sources(s) of Origin of Term</th>
<th>Other Terms (&amp; source) Used to Describe Concept</th>
<th>Term Chosen Because:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consensus processes</td>
<td>Cormick et al. (1996); B.C. Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (1994)</td>
<td>Consensus building (Innes, 1996 and 1995; Healey, 1997) Consensual group processes (Innes, 1992) Consensus decision-making; Consensus-based approach (British Columbia, 1999)</td>
<td>The term consensus processes has been chosen for use in the thesis because it reflects the work of authors including Cormick et al. and the BC Round Table on processes that build consensus outcomes in Canadian and B.C. contexts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Use of Term Consensus Process

1.2.2 Consensus

The following definition of consensus is based on the gradient of agreement concept that assesses the strength of agreement with an outcome (Kaner et al., 1996) and the
principles of consensus processes as laid out by Cormick et al. that emphasize the importance of having the group develop together and agree to the ground rules of the consensus process early on.

Consensus is an outcome that is reached using a decision rule agreed to by the participants in the process. The decision rule can vary and could be:

- full agreement
- full agreement but with varying strengths of agreement acknowledged
- agreement with reservations heard and/or addressed
- greater than 50% majority

The decision rule would probably not be:

- a simple majority vote

It is important to note two key ideas. The first is that it is the group that defines and agrees to the decision rule, which indicates when a consensus agreement has been reached. The second is that it is important to distinguish between consensus as the outcome and the consensus process which is the process that builds relationships, supports social learning of the group and generates outcomes that have been discussed, challenged, reflected upon and mutually created by the members of the group.

1.2.3 Dispute Resolution

The thesis defines dispute resolution within the context of local and regional planning as the application of consensus processes to resolve specific conflicts that may arise between parties in a municipality or region. Conflicts arising from land-use rezoning and the application of development proposals are among the possible disputes. Examples include conflicts arising between a developer and residents or between owners of a noise-generating commercial enterprise and neighbouring residents.
1.2.4 Interest-Based Negotiation
Negotiation among parties that seeks to understand the underlying interests, as opposed to the positions of the parties and strives to reach mutually acceptable decisions. This form of negotiation is a technique that is effective in consensus processes.

1.2.5 Mediation
Mediation is defined as the process where an independent person who is acceptable to all parties manages the discussions and works with the parties sometimes on a one-on-one basis with the aim of helping them find mutual agreement (based on British Columbia, 1999, p.12 and Cormick et al., 1996, p.12).

1.2.6 Facilitation
Facilitation is defined as the process whereby an individual manages the discussions among parties of a group involved in discussions in a wide range of situations (based on British Columbia, 1999, p.12 and Cormick et al., 1996, p.12).

1.2.7 Arbitration
Arbitration is a process whereby a third person makes a decision for the parties in dispute after having heard the evidence and arguments of the parties involved. The ruling by the arbitrator is binding on the parties (based on British Columbia, 1999, p.12 and Cormick et al., 1996, p.12).

1.3 Problem Definition: Why This Topic?
Consensus processes are increasingly being used to resolve conflicts in a wide range of fields such as health care, human resource management, organizational design, sustainable resource development, international commerce and family conflict (CBI, 2002; Institute for Dispute Resolution, 2002) and appear under various names such as alternate dispute resolution (ADR) or mediated negotiation. British Columbia has seen the application of numerous multi-stakeholder processes to complex environmental issues (Duffy, Hallgren, Parker, Penrose & Roseland, 1998). One comprehensive evaluation of public participation in Land and Resource Management Planning in British Columbia
presents criteria for shared decision-making processes and provides insights into the
classification of successful consensus processes to land use planning (Duffy et al.,
1998). The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy in Canada
describes 8 examples of the application of consensus processes for resolving

Parallel to the rise of the application of these approaches in various fields of practice, the
academic planning literature describes the evolution of a Communicative Action Theory
of planning. The theory emphasizes careful attention, critical listening, individual and
shared learning, discussion, negotiation, argument and agreement (Forester, 1989; Healy,
1996; Innes, 1992 & 1995). Although the theory places a major focus on the nature of
communication among participants, it has a practical translation into the implementation
of consensus processes (Innes, 1995, p.187 & Healy, 1997, p.243-244) which share
characteristics with the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy
guidelines and the evaluation criteria developed by Duffy et al.

The planning literature identifies a need to improve on existing “traditional rights-based
and authoritative planning approaches” and calls upon municipal councils to use
consensus-building approaches to improve the ability of planning processes to deal with
situations of conflict (Blakney, 1997, p. 17). Increasingly, there are calls for planning
schools to teach the skills associated with implementing consensus processes (Innes,
1998, p.61 & Forester, 1999, p.5). Closer to home, courses at the School of Community
and Regional Planning emphasize multi-stakeholder consensus processes as a means of
obtaining sustainable solutions to planning problems (Dorcey, 2001).

The literature provides a few examples of the application of consensus processes to local
and regional planning, for example to the development and implementation of state-wide
growth management strategies in the US (Innes, 1992) and for the resolution of specific
land development conflicts in Canadian cities such as Kamloops (Diehl, 1995) and
Kitchener (Blakney, 1997, p.17).
There are voices of dissent. Young notes "We should recognize that adversarial debate is a thousand times more valuable than an endless series of "cooperative hearings" devoid of difference and managed to minimize competing ideas and interests" (2001, p.30).

Nevertheless, consensus processes seem to offer promise as a tool for resolving some complex public issues. But are they being widely embraced, in planning practice in Canada and specifically in the Capital Regional District of British Columbia? Is there a role for these processes in the real world of tight budgets, tight schedules, legislative and administrative systems that function perfectly well enough in the eyes of some? What would a closer examination of the application of these processes tell us about the difficulties of using them, and the possibilities they hold for better resolutions of complex public issues?

These are the kinds of reflections that gave rise to this thesis study and the three research questions noted earlier.

1.4 Literature Review
The thesis research is set within the context of increasingly complex public problems and the call for the greater involvement of the public in decisions that affect them (Thomas, 1995; Diehl, 1995, p. 30). Some planning academics are seeking new ways to resolve complex public problems by acknowledging and incorporating a diversity of views such as those that give rise to environmental conflicts (Sandercock, 1999; Quadeer, 2000). Others describe a changing view of planning from a "narrow scientific rationalism" to "planning as a democratic enterprise aimed to promote social justice and environmental sustainability" (Healy, 1996, p.234).

In the writings of planning theorists seeking new ways of planning, communication-based theories of planning promote the use of consensus processes as one way to resolve complex problems that are characterized by broad public impact and multiple conflicting interests. Innes notes: "planners, in many contexts where knowledge and values are in contention, have created innovative, stakeholder-based, consensus-building processes" (1995, p. 187).
The literature review examines the perspectives of three communicative action planning theorists, John Forester, Patsy Healy, and Judith Innes, and highlights the connection of their contributions to consensus processes. It includes a discussion of the contribution of Cormick et al. to the theory of consensus processes arising from the Canadian experience in seeking consensus solutions to sustainability conflicts, and a discussion of Thomas' (1995) contingent model of decision making for public involvement. The review concludes with an examination of steps the Government of British Columbia has taken to promote the use of consensus processes in regional planning.

1.4.1 Innes

Innes writes of a paradigm shift in the field of planning towards a theory of communicative action planning (1995, p. 183). By studying what planners do in their work, communicative action theorists have found that "planning is more than anything an interactive, communicative activity" (p. 184). In her dissertation research at MIT, Innes investigated how information affects decisions and notes her most important finding: "information that influences is information that is socially constructed in the community where it is used" (p. 185). She came to recognize the essential role of socially constructed knowledge in learning, decision-making and action. Under this view of planning, learning, decision and action are no longer discrete elements in a linear process, but rather indistinguishable aspects of a process of social learning (p. 185).

Innes argues against the notion that it is merely the provision of objective information that generates good solutions. She, on the other hand, notes: "information in communicative practice influences by becoming embedded in understandings, practices and institutions, rather than by being used as evidence" (1995, p. 52). It is not the information itself that influences decisions, it is the process by which that information is understood, shared and reinterpreted among players that influences. The process of producing and agreeing on information is a crucial one.

It will become what we have called "intellectual capital" or shared knowledge, only if there is plenty of talk about the meaning of the
information, its accuracy, and its implications. Information does not influence unless it represents a socially constructed and shared understanding created in the community of actors. If, however, the meaning does emerge through such a social process, the information changes the actors and their actions, often without their applying it expressly to a specific decision. (1995, p. 56)

Innes notes that the social process changes the actors and their actions. She further states that the production of meaningful socially constructed knowledge transforms into action (1995, p. 185).

Having made these observations, Innes draws a connection between the social construction of knowledge and consensus processes, identifying them as effective mechanisms for building socially constructed knowledge. In her view, stakeholder consensus building processes that include negotiation, argument and agreement are effective tools to build socially constructed knowledge that can precipitate action.

Of the communicative action planning theorists, it is Innes who discusses and explores the application of consensus processes to planning in the most depth. She draws a parallel between these processes and Habermas' communicative rationality, pointing to the following principles of this form of learning as effective guidelines for managing stakeholder-based consensus-building processes:

- assuring representation of all major points of view;
- equalizing information among group members; and
- creating conditions within the group so that the force of argument can be the deciding factor rather than an individual's power outside the group (1995, p. 187).

She further elaborates on the conditions for successful group process which include:

- Groups must incorporate the key stakeholders including representatives of the interests that will be affected by the decisions and those who can make the program successful;
- Groups must know that their tasks are important and that the agreements they will reach will matter;
The group process must be conducted in a way that assures to the extent possible all members have an equal voice even if they do not have power outside the group;

Those managing the process must assure that all members have access to essential information;

Those managing the process must also assure that all members follow the rules of discussion that acknowledge all views, preventing a single voice from dominating;

Groups should include experts to help bridge the gap between technical and everyday knowledge;

Groups require training and professional facilitation;

Group process involves informal, exploratory discussion designed to assure that stakeholders learn about each other's unarticulated interests and perspectives;

Individual and group learning may take place;

Attitudes and commitments may change as a result of the process;

Groups can be most effective when accepted views are challenged and problems reformulated in ways that allow consensual outcomes or creative new directions for action (1992, p. 440-441).

Innes presents evidence that indicates that carefully designed and implemented group processes can play an important role in the development of growth management policies at a regional level, in this case, state-wide policies (1992). Her research examining growth management strategies in three US states (Florida, New Jersey and Vermont) illustrates how consensus processes have delivered some successes in developing and implementing growth strategies. She identifies the kinds of planning tasks for which consensus processes have been used. These include: writing, overseeing and reviewing legislation on growth management; preparing, adopting and revising state growth management plans; negotiating compliance of local plans with state plans; and negotiating agreement on state plans with counties and municipalities using a process called cross-acceptance (1992, p. 442).
This work has led Innes to highlight the lack of integration between consensus processes and formal government decision-making structures. She identifies the need to redesign planning and decision-making institutions to support the use of consensus group processes (1992, p.451, 1995, p.140).

1.4.2 Forester

Like Innes, Forester emphasizes communication and says that in planning, argument and talk matter (1989, p. 5). He too learns from planners in practice, taking their experiences into account in his attempt to develop a practical critical theory of planning. While at the same time developing a theory that is responsive to planning practice, he strives for a new planning that is democratic. To him democracy does not mean simple equality for everyone, but it means giving intentional advantage to those without power, therefore levelling the playing field in a system that he believes fundamentally favours the socially and economically advantaged. He emphasizes the central political nature of planning. This means that he recognizes that planning takes place in a context of unequal power, unequal access to information, varying levels of organization among groups of people, varying degrees of authority, conflicts between parties, inadequate representation, and conflicting interests (1989).

To counteract the imbalances in the system and provide advantage to those without power, he develops a theory of planning that is rooted in critical theory and based on communication (1989). Forester notes that communication is fundamental in any planning exercise and the choices a planner makes about the way he presents information clearly have implications and can influence how the issues will be formulated, how agendas will be set and how decisions will be made (1989).

Planners face and produce communication distortions. Forester’s definition of a communication distortion derives from critical theory. He notes: “critical theorists contrast them [systematically distorted communications] with the ordinary communications of mutual understanding and consensus that makes any shared knowledge possible in the first place” (1989, p. 140). He suggests ways that planners can
anticipate those distortions and work to prevent them at the individual, organizational and political-economic structural level. Forester’s planner is highly skilled. He asks the planner to communicate politically and says that this requires planners to be continuously self-reflective and to pay careful and equal attention to content and context (1989, p. 145).

What does Forester have to say specifically about consensus processes? In his earlier work, *Planning in the Face of Power*, there is little specific mention of tools such as consensus processes, although the political communicative strategies noted above are consistent with a consensus approach.

On the other hand, in his more recent work, *The Deliberative Practitioner*, he makes specific and frequent reference to consensus processes, including mediation. This body of work presents the concept of deliberative planning practice, which emphasizes the role of careful listening, learning and action that responds sensitively to what is heard (1999). Forester maintains the objective of creating a democratic form of planning and continues to draw extensively on the real life experiences of practicing planners. This time it is the stories of “deliberative” planners that reveal strategies of effective communication, and do so in an accessible and informing way.

Forester identifies consensus-building processes not as the primary solution to resolving complex public problems but as part of what a planner does within a deliberative planning practice, as a possible tool or strategy to encourage public deliberation (1999, p. 13). He says,

...where some take mediated negotiations and consensus-building processes to be stand-alone procedures, I take them to be directly related to the ongoing staff duties of planners and policy advisors who must work with task forces, special committees, working groups, and formal and informal advisory boards every week. (2000, p. 7)

He notes that consensus-building should not be used for the sake of it but when it serves a useful end. In his analysis of one practitioner’s challenging experience of developing a plan for an historic city in Israel, he says: “here we have consensus-building not for
ideological purposes but ‘so that we can utilize it’ – so that design can be realized, made real, so that the re-imagining of the city can be practiced, put into built form…” (1999, p. 72).

Forester acknowledges the usefulness of consensus processes but cautions against using cookbook recipes and relying on apparently easy solutions wrapped up in appealing labels such as “interest-based bargaining” or “consensus-building” (p. 83-84). He cautions planners not to reduce consensus-building to deal making, but to think about it as part of a practical and realistic way of solving problems, as a process that results in more than a technical solution to a problem but one that creates learning, builds relationships and reshapes views of how things are and might be (p. 84). He encourages us to think of planning not as the search for compromise between conflicting parties and not simply as process design, but to strive for a better understanding of the processes that engender deliberative planning processes (p. 101). And all of this is to take place within his ever-present context of the fundamentally political nature of planning.

Forester makes reference to the political nature of planning when he points out a limit of Innes’ work on consensus-building processes. He notes that her approach does not sufficiently acknowledge the imbalances of power, ideology and structural political-economic forces (2000, p. 7). Innes, on the other hand, argues from a critical theory perspective that consensus-building processes can destabilize established power relations. She says, “discourse can illuminate the many sides of reality and if designed properly, can uncover the rationalizations which reinforce power relations” and “planners must start by challenging assumptions because hidden within these are power relations” (1995, p. 186).

Cormick et al. note that power is not eliminated or neutralized by these processes, but they contend that a consensus process temporarily evens out power imbalances while it is underway (1996, p.35). If, as is likely in a local government context in Canada, a consensus-building process does not have final decision-making authority, the outcome of the consensus process will be subject to the political forces that arise when the final
decisions are made by municipal councillors; municipal councillors who are informed by the results of the process but who did not necessarily participate in it. Innes and Healey would likely counter that it is in the design of consensus processes, for example by including key decision makers in the process, and in the reformulation of our institutions to support consensus processes that these political forces might be overcome.

1.4.3 Healey

Healey recognizes the power of effective communication and is part of the communicative action planning tradition. She notes that it will give rise to "democratic pluralism" that will enable all those with a stake in an issue to speak, be heard and respected. Like Innes, she too recognizes that knowledge is a social construction and that it is comprised of a range of types of information from rational scientific analyses to accounts of personal experience. Healey recognizes the transformative nature of these processes to change attitudes of participants and the innovative potential they have to generate creative outcomes. With Forester, she shares a recognition of the need for ongoing reflection and critique as a regular part of discussions and of the existence of power relations that can work to reinforce diverse positions. Among her key elements of communicative planning theory, Healey makes specific mention of the importance of consensus processes as a means to implement a communicative approach. She notes the need to give equal voice to and include all interests, and the aim of attaining mutual understandings rather than bargaining competitively (1996, p. 247-8; 1997, p. 29-30).

Healey also explores how institutions should be redesigned to support collaborative, mutual learning and consensus-building processes for planning (1997, p. 243). She identifies two areas that require change. The first she labels "soft infrastructure" and it is this part that encourages the use of inclusive consensus-building approaches to planning. She does not prescribe a model for developing an effective soft infrastructure, noting that such a prescriptive approach would be in opposition to a consensus building approach (1997, p.282). Instead, she invites communities to implement democratic planning by creating their own consensus building processes (1997, p.282).
Healey recognizes the potential that inclusive consensus processes have for transformation, social mobilization and innovative action but, like Forester, also recognizes their limits in the face of powerful “political and economic bastions” (1997, p. 263). In response to this recognition, she identifies the need to change the “hard infrastructure” or the political, administrative and legal systems in which planning takes place to support inclusive consensus-building (1997, p. 287). Healey does not provide specific answers about what these new institutions might look like, but offers general principles for the design of institutions to support participatory democratic governance (p. 288-9):

- Recognize the wide diversity of stakeholders that have concerns at local and regional levels and the complex power relations among them;
- Spread power beyond government agencies without creating new patterns of unequal power distribution;
- Incorporate flexibility to enable and facilitate informal local interaction and do not impose standard prescribed models for such interaction;
- Promote the inclusion of all community members and recognize that the resulting interrelations will be complex and require new ways of organizing;
- Make the institutions transparent and accountable, and allow for challenge and critique.

1.4.4 Cormick, Dale, Edmond, Sigurdson and Stuart

In Canada, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy promotes the use of consensus-building to create a sustainable future. Drawing from the practical application of consensus processes, Cormick et al. (1996) describe the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy’s 10 guiding principles for the development of successful consensus processes. Although not born of communicative theory, and without the emphasis on the social construction of knowledge and mutual learning, many of the elements have parallels with Innes’ characteristics of consensus processes. The
National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy's principles for successful consensus processes include:

1. Purpose driven
2. Inclusive, not exclusive
3. Voluntary participation
4. Self-design
5. Flexibility
6. Equal opportunity
7. Respect for diverse interests
8. Accountability
9. Time limits
10. Commitment to implementation

Cormick et al. provide a working definition of a consensus process for sustainability decision-making, agreed to by the members of the Canadian round tables (p.4).

A consensus process is one in which all those who have a stake in the outcome aim to reach agreement on actions and outcomes that resolve or advance issues related to environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

In a consensus process, participants work together to design a process that maximizes their ability to resolve their differences. Although they may not agree with all aspects of the agreement, consensus is reached if all participants are willing to live with the package.

...A consensus process provides an opportunity for participants to work together as equals to realize acceptable actions or outcomes without imposing the views or authority of one group over another. (1996, p.4)

Cormick et al. emphasize the difference between consensus processes and other citizen participation processes that are not consensus, which are designed to assist decision makers by providing them with a variety of diverse views and inputs. Consensus processes on the other hand are designed to engage participants in a process of agreeing to a single mutually acceptable outcome that represents the consensus of the group. This consensus outcome is then subsequently implemented or recommended to decision
makers for implementation (1996, p.5). Whether the group includes elected officials or not, the participants have a clear and direct role in decision-making.

With respect to the definition of consensus, Cormick et al. point out the importance of having the group define the terms of consensus and what will happen in the event difficulties arise, but they insist that any consensus stakeholder process have unanimous agreement as the only possible outcome (1996, p. 36). They discourage the use of partial consensus decisions, such as “consensus minus one,” as decision-making tools on the basis that majority interests could gang up against minority ones (1996, p. 36). This is in contrast to Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk and Berger who support the notion of partial consensus. For example an 80% vote can represent consensus if that is what the groups agree to (1996, p.210). Kaner et al. provide a useful tool for establishing consensus. Their gradient of agreement scale recognizes that everybody’s yes may not have the same meaning or degree of support. A consensus could be represented by a spectrum of yeses from lukewarm to enthusiastic support, while a no might simply mean that a party is not ready to make a decision yet. This tool can help the group understand whether more discussion is required and how likely the agreement is to hold (1996, p. 212-216).

Cormick et al. acknowledge the difficulty and inflexibility that a totally unanimous decision demands. In response, they offer four suggestions based on real experiences. They encourage groups in the design of the ground rules to make provision for a situation where one or more members have serious objections to the outcome. For example, the ground rules in one process require the objecting parties to explain how the agreement fails to meet their interests and propose alternatives. Other parties are expected to consider how the interests can be met (1996, p. 29).

Another suggested provision is that all agreements made in leading up to the decision on the final package are considered interim until a decision on the total package is reached (1996, p.38). In this situation consensus may mean agreement on the total package even if every need has not been met. This probably works when everyone feels that everyone has not met every need but all can live with the final package.
A third suggestion encourages groups to have a provision for members who want to leave the group. For example, should a party reach a point where they wish to withdraw, they must give the other participants prior notice and the opportunity to discuss their reasons before leaving (1996, p.36). Finally, Cormick et al. suggest that groups have guidelines outlining the steps that will occur if a stalemate is reached and consensus is not achieved, for example engaging a mediator (1996, p.36).

Cormick et al. spend considerable time discussing the importance of evaluating whether a situation is suitable for a consensus approach and make clear that these processes are not appropriate in all cases (1996, p. 15 – 22). Parties must evaluate whether there is a common strength of purpose: Do the parties believe that this approach is the best way for them to meet their interests? An evaluation of the alternatives to a consensus process is also a key component of such an analysis (1996, p. 21).

On the subject of stakeholder representation, Cormick et al. insist on an open policy. Participation should be open to anyone including anyone affected by a potential outcome, needed for implementation or that could undermine the outcome if not included. Interest groups should be free to determine their representatives using their own mechanisms (1996, p.23). With respect to implementing this advice, Cormick et al. note that the first task for consensus groups is to ask themselves who should be here that is not here (1996, p.30). They also suggest that a consensus process should anticipate and be prepared to accept a new group into the process as it unfolds and options become defined (1996, p. 31). Others have also noted that it is important to have the implementers of the plan included in the consensus process (Innes, 1992, p. 440; British Columbia, 1999, p. 20).

Cormick et al. respond to the criticism that these processes can undermine existing systems of political accountability. They suggest that one way to ensure that the accountability of elected officials is not eroded by these processes, and at the same time ensure the successful implementation of the plan, is to directly involve the public
agencies responsible for implementation and leave the final approval of the decision to the elected representatives (1996, p. 28-29).

Would the participation of an elected official in these processes abrogate their responsibility or fetter their discretion? Cormick et al. say no. They suggest that a consensus will only be reached if all participants are assured that the policies, regulations and concerns of their jurisdiction have been addressed by the consensus outcome and they can support the implementation of the decision, as in other decision making processes (1996, p. 10).

Cormick et al. also offer practical advice to address the challenge of representing the public interest. They offer two views of how this could happen. The first view argues that the public interest is the sum of the various interests in a community and by ensuring that the interests are adequately represented in a consensus process the public interest will have a voice. The second view is that elected officials are best placed to understand and represent the public view and they, or an appointed representative, should be at the negotiating table (1996, p. 84). Cormick et al. do not favour one view over the other but offer up two safeguards to address what they describe as, “the worst-case fear that consensus processes are nothing more than a handful of special interests cutting deals in their own favour” (1996, p.84). The safeguards include i) maintaining an open and visible process that includes the important element of working with the media to ensure effective communication about the process and ii) linking consensus processes to familiar legal and political institutions to give them greater credibility and assure the public that these are not merely ad hoc processes but are integrated with legitimate systems (1996, p. 84-85).

Cormick et al. identify five lines of accountability that need to be respected in consensus processes and strategies to help achieve this accountability. The five lines of accountability include negotiators accountable to 1) their constituencies 2) other negotiators 3) authorities and stakeholders not at the table 4) the public and 5) the process (1996, p. 82-85). Strategies to obtain accountability between negotiators and their
constituencies might include for example, keeping their constituents informed and obtaining their approval for commitments. To ensure accountability of negotiators to the process, they note: “negotiators must respect the core principles of consensus building and behave in a manner that upholds the integrity of the process” (1996, p.80).

1.4.5 Thomas

Thomas (1995) writes about a broad concept of public involvement that includes a range of forms beyond simply consensus stakeholder processes. He argues that public involvement can bring important benefits but also carries serious risks. He notes that the benefits of successful public involvement include: time savings in the implementation stage, better information for administrators on service needs, more services for the dollar, better feelings by administrators about their work, for citizens better services suited to their needs, a more accessible and responsive bureaucracy and more positive feelings about their involvement in government (1995, p. 32). He also identifies challenges associated with public involvement: non-representative participation, cost and time associated with improving the representativeness of public involvement, time involved with implementing public involvement processes, the emotionally draining aspects of these processes, and threats to decision quality (1995, p.24-29).

Thomas proposes that a theory of public involvement must take a balanced perspective; one that strives for meaningful public involvement but at the same time recognizes that practically this is not easy to achieve. Secondly, he advocates for a contingent approach. His theory proposes that any situation must be assessed in terms of the degree to which public involvement is desirable and what form of public involvement is best suited to the situation. He outlines a model to determine the kind of decision that is most appropriate to a situation, ranging from an autonomous decision by the administrator to a public decision that transfers decision-making autonomy to the public. Thomas outlines his criteria for assessing a situation and making this determination:

- Are there significant restrictions on the quality requirements of a decision?
- Does the manager need further information?
- Does the manager need public acceptance for implementation?
- Can that acceptance be assumed to be forthcoming?
- What is the nature of the public?
  - Are they comprised of organized groups, unorganized groups or a combination of both?
  - Do they support agency’s goals?
  - Are the public united or conflicted among themselves on an issue?

He elaborates further on this model providing guidance about what form of public involvement is best suited given the type of decision and the nature of the public (one or many organized groups, unorganized public...). Thomas takes a broader view of public involvement than Cormick et al., who focus exclusively on consensus stakeholder approaches. While Thomas does not discuss consensus processes specifically, one could locate them within Thomas’ model and the contingent nature of the model is an important one.

1.4.6 Province of British Columbia

The Province of British Columbia has initiated the use of consensus decision-making approaches in planning-related activities at the regional level. The Growth Strategies Act, enacted into law on June 8th, 1995 strongly supports the use of alternate dispute resolution processes, including consensus-building, joint problem solving, negotiation or neutral third party intervention (British Columbia, 1999, p.12). The Act requires parties to make all reasonable efforts to reach agreement on a Regional Growth Strategy, in other words, a full consensus outcome1. It encourages, but does not oblige parties, to use interest-based negotiation and reach mutual agreements as a means to develop regional growth strategies and negotiate regional context statements. In the event that local governments and the regional district are unable to reach an agreement on a regional

---

1 The Act allows for an exception to full agreement. A local government may be exempt from complying with a specific provision that it has refused to accept, provided that the Board agrees that the provision is not essential to the Regional Growth Strategy (Local Government Act, Part 25, 853-1,2).
growth strategy, the Act outlines a mandatory and detailed dispute resolution process to resolve the conflicts (British Columbia, 1995, p. 14-19).

The dispute resolution process ensures that a final decision on a growth strategy will be reached. If one or more local governments and the regional district are unable to come to an agreement on a regional growth strategy, the Minister will direct the disputing parties to one of two dispute resolution processes. The first and preferable option is a non-binding resolution process in which the disputing parties continue to negotiate together with the assistance of a facilitator. The second option, a final settlement process, is considered a “last resort” and takes the decision-making power away from the hands of the disputing parties. Three options for final settlement include peer panel, final proposal arbitration or full arbitration. As an incentive for the parties to resolve their dispute using negotiated mutual agreement approaches, the costs of the dispute resolution process at this stage are borne by the disputing parties (British Columbia, 1995, p. 14-19).

The Growth Strategies Act also requires regional districts undertaking a growth strategy to form an intergovernmental advisory committee and outlines its minimum composition. The role of the committee is to advise local governments on the development and implementation of a regional growth strategy. It is to include planning directors from the region and each local government, senior representatives from the Provincial Government, government agencies and corporations and other representatives from authorities and organizations as deemed necessary by the board. The proposed make-up of this committee, including a wide range of stakeholders who will have a role in the implementation of the plan is consistent with a stakeholder consensus approach. With respect to having the general public represented as an interest at the table, the Growth Strategies Act recognizes the importance of having this view incorporated, but promotes the use of “early and ongoing” consultation as the means to gain that input.

The provincial government has produced documentation to assist regional districts in reaching agreements on growth strategies using a consensus decision-making approach that includes interest-based negotiation to reach mutual agreements whereby parties
support the decision made (British Columbia, 1999, p.5). The document provides guidelines about how to establish and carry out a process for negotiation and identifies ways that the Ministry can assist the process to develop a growth strategy. These ways include the appointment of a facilitator to support the process (1999, p. 28-29).

Growth strategies legislation in British Columbia also gives regional districts the authority to enter into implementation agreements and formalize the partnerships (British Columbia, 1995, p.29). While not mandating local governments and regional districts to use consensus processes, the Growth Strategies Act is clearly designed to encourage that approach. The Province of British Columbia also encourages the use of consensus processes to reach agreements on regional service review and withdrawal disputes (British Columbia, 2000).

1.5 The Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Process

In the spring of 1996 and in the context of the new Growth Strategies Act, The Capital Regional District Board comprised of elected officials from the 13 member municipalities and 3 electoral areas\(^2\) initiated a process to develop a regional growth strategy. The Capital Regional District Board is responsible for making all major decisions related to the growth strategy including budget decisions and final adoption of the regional strategy (Capital Regional District, 2001, p.3). The regional growth strategy project is managed by a team from the Capital Regional District Planning Services. Two committees were established by the Capital Regional District Board to ensure adequate involvement of regional residents and impacted government agencies: the Public Advisory Committee and the Inter-governmental Advisory Committee. As required by the legislation, a consultation plan was developed.

The Capital Regional District's regional growth strategy process comprises 5 phases, the first three of which are complete, the fourth underway and the fifth still to be undertaken. Phase 1 launched the project including steps to obtain agreement on the purpose,

\(^2\) The electoral areas were not part of the regional planning exercise. Planning for these areas falls under the jurisdiction of the Islands Trust.
workplan, consultation plan, schedule and budget, and carried out background research on trends and existing policies. Phase 2 included the development and assessment of an Official Community Plan option for regional growth, a public survey to generate a discussion on ideas for future growth among residents, and the first of 2 regional summits of elected officials in which priorities for the regional growth strategy were identified. The final step of phase 2 included the preparation of a framework agreement to be used for the development of further growth strategy alternatives.

Phase 3 included the development and approval of 4 alternative growth strategy options after referral to councils, advisory committees and review by the public. This was followed by the technical evaluation of the alternatives using criteria previously established by the Board, public surveys, open houses and displays culminating in a Capital Choices public forum in which the public made written and oral submissions on the alternatives to the Board.

Phase 4 is presently underway and has included the second regional summit of elected officials at which time they selected their preferred alternative. A regional growth strategy bylaw for the Capital Regional District was prepared and introduced by the Board in February 2002. Following first and second reading of the bylaw, a public hearing was held and the bylaw has been circulated to member municipalities for review and acceptance. The 120-day referral period has been recently extended to October 31 and a provincial facilitator is being used to resolve disputes preventing acceptance of the bylaw (Corbett, T., personal communication, 17 Oct. 2002).

Phase 5 of the process will begin once the regional growth strategies bylaw is adopted and includes the preparation and acceptance of Regional Context Statements by municipal councils, potential development of Implementation Agreements and monitoring of the implementation of the strategy.
1.6 Conclusion

The literature on consensus processes is very broad and presents inconsistencies with respect to the definition of consensus and consensus process. While there are some gaps in understanding how it can best be applied to local and regional planning issues, nevertheless there is a strong basis for increasing the use of consensus processes to resolve complex multi-issue and multi-interest problems in local and regional planning.

With the literature review providing the context for the study, Chapter 2 now follows with a description of the research strategy, the methods used to collect and analyze the data, and the approach taken in writing the thesis.
CHAPTER 2: METHODS

2.1 Research Strategy and Methods
The thesis is an exploration of the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning contexts. It addresses research questions of an exploratory nature asking what are the obstacles to using consensus processes, what kinds of tasks are and might be suited to consensus applications, and what actions could support their increased use. The exploration is primarily a discussion of concepts, description of existing applications of consensus processes and presentation of informed opinions on what might be expected in the future. As a result it calls for a qualitative approach to gathering the data. A solely quantitative analysis would not have been suitable for the presentation of this research.

The study focuses on the Capital Regional District of British Columbia, and in its second phase links questions about the use of consensus processes in planning to the region's process to develop a growth strategy. This is not a detailed case study of the process or the region as neither is the subject of specific analysis.

An exploratory study of this nature calls for research tools that accommodate conceptual information and description. Flexibility in the questions asked is also important. As a result, interviews are used as the primary tool for collecting data. Relevant elements from the literature are an integral part of the discussion of the interview results. Attendance by the author at the public hearing for the Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw served to provide a first hand glimpse of the political context in the region.

2.2 Data Collection
2.2.1 Defining Consensus Process: A Necessary First Step
In order to investigate the use of consensus processes it was a necessary first step to establish a basic working definition of the term, in particular for the interviews. A definition was compiled from the planning literature and presented to the interview participants (Appendix 1). Each participant was asked if the definition corresponded to
what they understood to be a consensus process. Their comments were noted and an agreement was reached on the definition that would be used for the purposes of the interview. In a separate question by email after the in-person interview, participants were also asked to define consensus. The responses to all interview questions were reviewed for additional comments related to the definition of consensus or consensus processes.

2.2.2 Interviews: The Procedure
Interviewees were initially contacted by email to determine their willingness and availability to participate in the study. The email message included a letter of introduction and consent form(s). All interviewees indicated their agreement to the terms of participation by signing the consent forms. Two of nineteen interviews were done by phone. One interview consisted of an email response to a series of interview questions. Sixteen interviews were carried out at the place of work or residence of the interviewee. Thirteen interviews were tape-recorded and five were recorded by hand-taken notes. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed in full. Texts from all interviews, whether recorded on tape or by hand, were sent to the interviewees for confirmation of the accuracy of the text. Interviewees responded by noting any suggested changes on the text. Three respondents did not provide comments on the texts. Where available the participant-revised texts were used for analysis, otherwise the unrevised versions were used.

2.2.3 Interviews: The Questions
The interview approach falls somewhere between Robson’s “focused interview” and “structured interview” categories (1993, p. 159). Robson defines a focused interview as the “use of interview guide specifying key topics; order of questions is not defined” and a structured interview as “standardized set of questions” (1993, p. 159). Each interview was prepared with a set of questions in advance. The questions varied across interviews. The first three interviews were less structured and served as a testing ground. From these early experiences the interview tool developed into a more comprehensive and categorized set of questions. During the interviews, the questions were not strictly asked as written but were used as a guide to draw out a response. The wording of questions
differed according to who was being interviewed, for example questions about education related to public involvement in planning differed when asked of a planner versus a member of the public. The nature of questions also varied depending on who was being interviewed. For example, provincial government officials were asked questions about the legislation relating to consensus processes while members of the public were not and respondent P8 from the Capital Regional District responded to detailed questions about the background of the Regional Growth Strategy process. The order of questions varied, sometimes because of the time constraints on the interview and sometimes in response to the direction of the conversation. Follow-up questions were asked freely depending on the nature and content of the answers provided by the interviewees.

As one interview experience suggested possible improvements, changes were made in subsequent interviews. In one interview, further reading of the literature led to the addition of extra questions to see what kind of insights they might deliver. Although each interview was different, a comprehensive set of questions covering the key topics was asked of the interviewees. Typically, interviews lasted between one to one and a half hours. The exception was Interview 4, which was cut short when P4 was called to attend an unexpected meeting. Another planner from the same municipality was available to participate. This generated Interview 5. With the exception of the first four interviews, the interviews included questions in the following categories. See Appendix 2 for a sample interview questionnaire.

- Demographic information & participants role in RGS process (if applicable)
- Establishing a definition of consensus processes
- Establishing use of consensus process in a local planning situation
- Exploring the consensus nature of a case (RGS or otherwise)
- Using consensus processes:
  - Obstacles to incorporating consensus processes into local government
  - Tasks well-suited to consensus processes
  - Actions to increase the use of consensus processes
2.2.4 Interviews: The Participants

Nineteen interviews were carried out with seventeen participants. Interview 1 was held with a planner from the District of North Vancouver. Interviews 2 - 8 were carried out with planners and an elected official in 5 of the Capital Regional District municipalities including Oak Bay, Metchosin, Victoria, Saanich, and Central Saanich. These interviewees were chosen primarily because they were planners in the Capital Region, the area of focus for the thesis. One elected official was interviewed on the suggestion of a previous interviewee. The eleven subsequent interviews were carried out with planners, government officials, members of the public, planning consultants and elected officials. Interviews 9 - 19 focused on the process to develop a Regional Growth Strategy for the Capital Regional District. These interviewees were chosen because they had knowledge of or involvement in the Capital Regional District’s Growth Strategy planning process and represented a range of kinds of involvement. As noted in Chapter 1, the Regional Growth Strategy serves as an appropriate concrete example on which to focus interview questions about consensus processes, rather than being the subject of specific analysis itself.

Of the seventeen respondents who participated in the study, 15 were interviewed in person, 2 by phone. The respondents represented different municipalities, various roles in local and regional planning that contributed different bases of knowledge and experience, and varying positions with regard to support for the Regional Growth Strategy process. Codes were developed for each of the interviews and interview respondents to respect the anonymity of their contributions to the thesis research. The respondents, with their respective codes, include:

- 8 planners (P1, P2 ... P8) including 1 from a North Vancouver municipality, 6 from Capital Regional District municipalities and 1 from the Capital Regional District office
- 3 elected officials including:
  - 1 municipal councillor (MC1)
- 2 regional representatives on the Capital Regional District Board (RR1, RR2) elected in their respective municipalities, including a mayor and municipal councillor
- 2 provincial government officials (PGOV1, PGOV2) with the Intergovernmental Relations and Planning Division of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services
- 2 planning consultants (CONS1, CONS2) one of whom previously served in the role of mayor and on the Capital Regional District Board
- 2 members of the public (PUB1, PUB2) involved in the Regional Growth Strategy process.

2.2.5 Demographic Summary
Demographic information is available for 13 of 17 interview participants. The first two charts that follow illustrate the distribution of age of the respondents and the highest level of education acquired. The third chart describes the number of respondents who have had formal education on public involvement in planning, and the fourth illustrates the extent to which respondents deal with public involvement issues in their work. "No data" as a column heading means that the question was not asked of the respondent or no information was provided.
Figure 2: Highest Level of Education Completed

Figure 3: Formal Education in Public Involvement in Planning of Respondents
Employment Dealings with Public Involvement

Figure 4: Extent to which job involves public involvement issues

2.2.6 Observation

One observation session took place at the April 3, 2002 public hearing on Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 2952. Although few direct answers to the research questions were obtained, attendance at the hearing served to illustrate the political context within which the growth strategy has been developed and confirm some of the participants’ views.

2.3 Data Analysis

The transcribed interview texts and documents were analyzed by a careful reading in search of concepts or issues, including direct answers to the research questions. A first order concept search was carried out to highlight concepts or issues occurring in the text. Similar concepts were grouped into categories and patterns or recurring concepts were noted.

A concept analysis summary was created for each interview. The summaries included in most but not all cases: a list of the concepts, questions arising, and actions steps for follow-up. This was followed by a listing of each concept with supporting citations from the interview for easier reference in the writing stage. Memos were noted down as ideas.
about the discussion, synthesis, conclusions and items for follow-up arose during the analysis. Memos were highlighted in text boxes to differentiate the author's thoughts from the words of the interview participants.

The above process was carried out for all interviews. After the first 8 interviews were completed, an interim analysis and summary was carried out. The findings of the interim analysis emphasized the need to define consensus processes and consensus and led to modifications in the interview questions and adjustment to the research and analytical framework. Once the interviews were completed a data accounting sheet was prepared to assess whether adequate data had been collected. This precipitated a follow-up question by email to interviewees (How do you define consensus?) and a search in the literature for follow-up information.

The concept analysis was carried out as a means of extracting key elements and making sense of a large quantity of data. This global analysis also allowed for the possibility that insights from answers to the specific research questions might arise in response to other seemingly indirectly related questions. To further structure the analysis and focus on the questions of interest, an analytical framework was developed. It identifies a series of questions to assist in working through the data. The questions seek to uncover in the findings similarities, differences, conflicts, recurring issues, commonly cited replies, and innovations. See Appendix 3 for the detailed framework.

To assist in compiling and synthesizing the results, worksheets were used. These consisted of a table for each issue or research question composed of 2 columns, 1 for the interview respondent and a second for their comments relative to the issue of interest. Alternatively, some tables organized the results by comment, noting for each which respondents held the same view. Sample worksheets are included as Appendix 4.

This chapter on methods is followed by Chapter 3, which begins by presenting results that provide insights into whether respondents share a clearly understood definition of consensus and consensus processes.
CHAPTER 3: DEFINING CONSENSUS AND CONSENSUS PROCESSES

As stated in Chapter 2, establishing a definition of a consensus process was identified as a necessary first step in the research process, in particular as a basis for the interviews. Although not initially identified as one of the three research questions, early results pointed to the importance of further study on whether respondents shared a clearly understood definition of consensus and consensus processes. Interview questions related to the definition of consensus and consensus processes yielded an interesting and sometimes surprising set of results. After presentation of these results, which are organized into 9 categories representing main findings, Chapter 3 discusses the findings and relates them to the literature on consensus process.

3.1 Results
3.1.1 Definitions of Consensus

In 10 of 11 definitions of the term consensus, respondents identified that an agreement of all the parties is required for consensus. One respondent provided a partial consensus definition noting that a 70% or 80% majority vote could be considered a consensus outcome.

I tend to see consensus not as a 51-49 kind of majority, but generally where people can live with a decision, without getting too specific, or the majority, say 70% or 80% of people around the table are ok with it. (CONS2, 2002, p.8)

Of the 10 definitions that called for agreement of all parties, 4 described some degree of variation among the strength with which participants might support the outcome.

Consensus is a decision-making process for achieving the greatest degree of reconciliation of positions among participants; it does not necessarily mean 100% concurrence but rather that through a negotiated process all involved are able to accept the resulting decision. (CONSI, email communication, 10 Jul. 2002)

A consensus decision or agreement is "one where everyone might not agree with every aspect of the agreement but they can live with the total agreement." (P6, email communication, 9 Jul. 2002)
Consensus = non-objection: This means broad agreement of the group. One or more group members may stand aside but nobody actively opposes the decision and everyone can live with it. (P3, email communication, Jul. 3 2002)

I would define consensus as traditionally defined in the literature where you get basic agreement, not so much that people are going to walk or block on the premise. That is basically consensus. (RR2, 2002, p.4)

Two responses expanded the definition of consensus to include mechanisms that address situations where one or more participants’ have objections to an agreement or where consensus seems unlikely.

If we make decisions on a consensus-basis that means general acceptance of the people at the table, where the group agrees to address the objections of those who do not concur. ... The only time we say there is consensus is where all the folks who had objections feel that there is something on the table that addresses their concerns. (PGOV2, 2002, p.4-5)

Consensus is agreement from different individuals or parties or representatives on a course of action, a plan, a policy or a proposal. Consensus usually implies discussion, consultation, meetings, etc. in order to reach or achieve it. Where it is not reached tools such as mediation might be used to try to achieve it before without referral to an arbitrator or deciding body such as City Council or the Courts. (P5, email communication, 15 Jul. 2002)

The 4 remaining definitions identified the need for all parties to reach agreement. Respondent MCI described a consensus outcome in contrast to a majority vote noting that a consensus outcome is less flexible and consequently less appealing. PUB1 recognized that reaching consensus usually entails a lengthy process. Respondent P7 suggests that consensus usually comes at the cost of compromise, while P8 indicated that a consensus outcome represents a mutual agreement that is willingly supported by the participants.

My working definition of consensus is ‘agreement’. I generally think of the term consensus in contrast to the term majority vote. I think that in the context of planning and local government in general, one thinks of the two different ways of making decisions: one is by agreement of all parties and one is by way of a vote where all of the parties may not agree. In practice, consensus means agreement of all the parties. This is of course where my
apprehensions about consensus are founded. (MC1, email communication, 3 Jul. 2002)

My concept of consensus decision-making is a process under which the various parties discuss/negotiate as long as is necessary to arrive at an agreement. The signal that consensus has been achieved is that none of the parties finds it necessary to call for a vote on the final outcome. (PUB1, email communication, 2 Jul. 2002)

Consensus is “achieving agreement but usually with compromise.” (P7, email communication, 10 Jul. 2002).

Consensus means to think or feel together. In practice I think this implies that unlike an agreement, which may be unequal or grudgingly given by one of the parties, consensus implies that parties have come to a common understanding on their mutual interest which is understood and endorsed willingly by all, which sets the stage for joint action that is willingly entered into as a contribution to realizing the interests of all the parties commonly understood. In process terms, parties cannot be coerced into a consensus (although they can into an agreement), but through a process of dialogue and mutual respect reach an understanding and an agreement to do something together. (P8, email communication, 2 Jul. 2002).

3.1.2 Definitions of Consensus Processes

No responses were available for 5 of 17 respondents on the question of whether the respondents agreed to the presented definition of a consensus process. Four respondents, including P6, P7, MC1 and PUB1 agreed that the proposed definition represented their understanding of a consensus process (P6, 2001, p.3; P7, 2001, p.3; MC1, 2001, p.4; PUB1, 2002, p.10).

Four respondents agreed with the proposed definition but indicated that the definition was idealistic. Respondents CONS1, PUB2 and CONS2 indicated that it would be difficult or unlikely to have everyone agree, while respondent P5 indicated that in practice, training is not always part of a consensus process.

I agree that consensus is an essential component, but I disagree with the latter part of the statement that decisions are made only by consensus. It is very difficult to get consensus and basically what you are looking for are the trade-offs that are going to form that consensus. You are never going to get everyone to agree. (CONS1, 2002, p.4-5)
Yes, I suppose it is an ideal, but I would say that it is more difficult ultimately to totally achieve. Yes okay, are we using consensus as unanimity I suppose is the question. (PUB1, 2002, p.5)

Ok, if we are going to talk about the process, about how you get most everybody onside, it is through a process of consultation and discussion. But also in my experience, I think that you cannot always get total agreement, I don't care how much talking you do. People will differ because their values are different and their interests are different. They don't always see the path the same way. (CONS2, 2002, p.8)

Three respondents agreed with the bulk of the definition but added refinements. Respondent CONS2 included a definition of partial consensus (2002, p.8, see Definitions of Consensus above). Respondent PGOV2 included a definition of consensus that took into account a process to address concerns of parties objecting to the outcome (2002, p.4, see Definitions of Consensus above). Respondent RR1 suggested that the definition should include a mechanism to ensure the process is brought to closure within a realistic time frame.

I would say that is correct. The only comment I would make is that the only way the RGS varies from it is that there is a conclusion to it all. Where you are in a situation where there are people who are not committed to a consensus process, the facilitator, mediator and finally the arbitrator can conclude the process. (RR1, 2002, p.4)

Respondent PGOV1 agreed with the definition but specified boundaries on the participants.

I would agree with the definition. What is different is that we are seeking consensus between jurisdictions rather than working towards full public involvement. (PGOV1, 2002, p.4)

Respondent RR2 emphasized the distinction between a consensus process and a shared decision process at the local government level. In responses to other interview questions, respondents P8 and PGOV2 also made the distinction between shared decision and consensus based processes.

Shared decision-making is where the stakeholders in the consensus process are also the decision makers. Consensus is where people come to agreement on an issue, or not so strong an agreement that they will block, where they
can live with the overall outcome. When you are dealing with a municipal council, the council is the decision maker and the council rarely, (unless you have held a referendum which are on very legally structured issues and certainly aren’t consensus in any way) rarely abrogates their decision-making responsibility. (RR2, 2002, p.3-4)

... the LRMP processes although they were described as shared decision-making, there was no shared decision-making there. There was shared planning, there was a consensus approach to develop a plan, but at the end of the day, it was cabinet making the decisions. That came forward as a recommendation to cabinet and cabinet would decide whether or not they wanted to take those decisions or not. (P8, 2002, p.2)

A lot of planning processes are called shared decision-making or consensus processes and they are not shared decision making because ultimately the plan will go to Cabinet to make the decision. They are consensus processes to the extent that they attempt consensus but the fall back is that someone else will make the decision. ... Just be careful what people call them. Are they really consensus, or are they really an attempt to consult? (PGOV2, 2002, p.16)

3.1.3 Consensus Discussed in Relation to Voting

Consensus was discussed in relation to voting as a means of decision-making. Of six respondents who discussed consensus in this way, four contrasted consensus and voting, placing the two approaches in different camps.

Voting is anathema in consensus. That is the other interesting thing. People call for the vote and say, ok we have consensus. No, you either have majority, unanimity or you have a failed motion; you don’t have consensus. (RR2, 2002, p.4).

... the signal that consensus has been achieved is that none of the parties finds it necessary to call for a vote on the final outcome. (PUB1, email communication, 2 Jul. 2002)

We decided we were going to make them on a consensus basis not on a voting basis. ... It will take a generation or two before we get used to the whole idea of consensus models as opposed to votes. They are just so ingrained to take votes on things. (PGOV2, 2002, p.10 & 4)

I generally think of the term consensus in contrast to the term majority vote. I think that in the context of planning and local government in general, one thinks of the two different ways of making decisions: one is by agreement of all parties and one is by way of a vote where all of the parties
may not agree. In practice, consensus means agreement of all the parties. (MC1, email communication, 3 Jul. 2002)

As opposed to contrasting consensus to voting, two other respondents described consensus in terms of majority votes, with the second of the two calling a referendum a form of consensus.

... generally where people can live with a decision, without getting too specific, or the majority, say 70% or 80% of people around the table are ok with it. (CONS2, 2002, p.8)

To me that is a form of consensus because what you are saying is that you are allowing everybody to have a say albeit the majority takes the day. Quite often in a referendum it has to be a higher than fifty percent plus one. It is more than just a simple majority. It has to be a higher number of people who come together with a consensus around what needs to happen. (RR1, 2002, 15).

3.1.4 Consensus Considered Difficult to Achieve

Almost half of the respondents, 8 of 17, shared the view that reaching consensus is difficult. Respondents P7 and MC1, who provided the first two excerpts below, indicated that the difficulty in reaching consensus was an obstacle to the use of consensus processes in local government.

It is difficult to guarantee that you will gain consensus. ... There is no guarantee. ... You know, I have never seen a consensus work 100% percent ever. (P7, 2002, p.11 & p.14)

No, there is never consensus. Well, I shouldn't say there is never consensus. But it is not seen as a reasonable expectation, except for some very limited cases, there is almost always opposition,” “I would say that in many, many cases, the possibility of consensus is very low” and “if the demand is total agreement of the parties involved, if it is an all-or-nothing affair I am not sure that it is a valuable way. (MC1, 2002, pp.8, 5,12)

Although council would prefer to see groups reach agreement on an issue, reaching consensus is not a requirement. In reality it would be virtually impossible to have every party come to an agreement. (P2, 2002, p.1)

There are many advantages, but it is not easy. It is not like this is easy to do. (PGOV1, 2002, p.12)
It is very difficult to get consensus and basically what you are looking for are the trade-offs that are going to form that consensus. You are never going to get everyone to agree. (CONS1, 2002, p.5)

But also in my experience, I think that you cannot always get total agreement, I don’t care how much talking you do. People will differ because their values are different and their interests are different. (CONS2, 2002, p.8)

I would differentiate full consensus from full agreement. Full agreement probably isn’t possible. Let’s go back to the definition of consensus that we try to work towards and encourage the parties to adopt. That definition is one where the group reaches agreement in such a way that the people who object consider that their objections have been understood and dealt with in some way. So, yes, full agreement is probably not possible on most issues but you can get closer to it if at least the parties think that their issues and concerns have been addressed. That is one step closer. That is not always possible or realistic and that is fine. (PGOV2, 2002, p.9)

It is much more difficult to make decisions on a consensus basis than in an authoritarian fashion because if you make decisions in an authoritarian fashion you just make it. But I don’t think our communities are going to put up with that anymore. (RR1, 2002, p.7)

3.1.5 Consensus Processes Equated to Public Consultation Processes

In discussing consensus processes, 6 respondents referred to public consultation. Two respondents made clear statements about the distinction between consultation and consensus processes. Four respondents equated consensus processes with processes that provided opportunities for public input.

Excerpts contrasting consensus and public consultation processes include:

In my line of work we make a decision between consultation and consensus processes. If we need a certain level of understanding of what we are doing and want input then we basically consult with people. We start to use consensus processes rather than simply consulting when we need their buy-in and their acceptance to go ahead, or where we are dealing with an issue where our long term relationship is very important to us. Then we see consensus process as a building block – it is money in the bank for our future relationship. (PGOV2, 2002, p.8)

We have come up with different approaches that we are starting to use that are advisory or consultation instead of consensus because this word
consensus leads to huge amounts of discussion and requests for additional studies and reports, which imply additional costs. (P6, 2002, p. 4)

Excerpts equating consensus processes with processes that provided opportunities for public input include:

The existing process that includes notices of application and public hearings is consensus in the sense that people have ample opportunity to present their views and there is discussion back and forth that can bring the sides closer together. (P2, 2002, p.1)

In discussing the first phase of a process designed to build consensus, respondent CONS1 replied:

... we are hoping to build collaboration. We have three phases and we are talking about building a consultation process around the working methodology as well as the substantive methodology. The first phase is assembling the database, and that is what we are calling our working capacity. There is everything from the demographics to the planning tools through to the financial viability mechanisms and so on. So you assemble all of that and the consultation process itself is very interesting I think. It is basically an educational process. ... As part of that we will be working with various stakeholder groups in different meetings, workshops and different consultation processes ... So that is the first phase in terms of building that consensus. (CONS1, 2002, p. 5-6)

When asked how closely the Regional Growth Strategy process approached a consensus process respondent CONS2 replied:

Well it did in the sense that there were a number of points in the process in which various stakeholders and to a limited extent the public had opportunities to express their views. If you really were interested you could submit a survey response or apply to speak at a workshop or presentation or meeting. (CONS2, 2002, p.9)

In another excerpt, CONS2 responded to a question about obstacles to the use of consensus processes and slipped into a discussion of public consultation.

Time is a huge obstacle. It is not just time for the planning department and the administration, it is time for the public. When we were doing some work on the Nanaimo OCP, one of the things discussed in a workshop with city staff, was that the requirements for public consultation slows the whole process down because there is so much time taken in even just setting up a consultation process. That takes a lot of time. As part of responding to an RFP, I am about to write something on the public consultation process for
the regional strategy on the arts. It will take days to develop that. And it will take many more days to implement it. It all takes a lot of time, and there is a cost to that, either an outright financial cost or something that gets hidden in terms of the time. (CONS2, 2002, p.13)

In a final excerpt, RR1 responded describing techniques normally associated with public consultation.

It is part of the process to try and develop consensus in the community through open houses, public meetings, small meetings, any technique we can use really. (RR1, 2002, p.7)

3.1.6 Planning Processes Used Elements from, Attempted to Approximate, or Initiated and Eventually Abandoned a Consensus Process and Respondents Used General Language when Discussing the Consensus Nature of Planning Processes

Six respondents described situations that approximated a consensus approach or used elements of a consensus process. In some situations a consensus approach was abandoned if a consensus outcome was not seen to be possible. The following four excerpts describe such planning processes. In addition, they illustrate that the language used to describe the situations was general and revealed little about the kind of consensus approach undertaken.

... generally a consensus approach although they voted if no consensus was reached. They were a 'pragmatic' group, so took things to a vote if consensus wasn't reached. (P1, 2002, p.1)

It was a hybrid approach that was generally consensus. (P3, 2002, p.1)

There is a process that isn't consensus necessarily but which does work towards consensus. Council, though they are not consensus because they vote on everything, strives to reach consensus amongst the community. ... It is sort of like a nice feature to have in all your processes if you can afford it. But on the other hand if you can't, you still have Council's decision. (P5, 2002, p.14)

With my committee structure I use a lot of consensus. In fact, even though it is required to hold a vote, what I make sure I do is to make sure everybody has a chance to speak at least once around the table. (RR1, 2002, p.8)
P8 described two summits that were part of the process to develop a Regional Growth Strategy for the Capital Regional District, examples of processes that approximate a consensus approach.

At each of the two summits public input was put into the discussion with technical input, and elected officials from around the region had to work toward, if not a consensus, then a reasonable agreement. ... It wasn't a pure consensus process however largely because we had limited time and resources (these were day and a half sessions) and the groups were large (in the order of 80 participants). Also, the summits were not decision-making gatherings but advisory, in the sense that the findings of the summit were given as recommendations to the Board, who then prepared proposals on the basis of the recommendations that were sent out to member councils for ratification. So it was a mix of standard politics and consensus seeking group process. (P8, 2002, p. 2)

Respondent P8 also described the overall process to develop a RGS:

The Capital Regional District's Regional Growth Strategy Project, while well documented and agreement-seeking, has not been based on a consensus methodology, although it has made efforts to seek consensus among municipal councils. (P8, email communication, 24 Sep. 2001)

In responding to a question about whether the municipality used consensus processes, respondent P4 cited an example that illustrated that consensus processes are not rigorously or formally designed.

Staff encourages developers to get out and meet with the public before bringing the application to council. This is a political requirement. The practice has been in place for 10 to 15 years. The process is not formalized. How they do it is left up to the developer. The developer takes the initiative to approach community associations. It is not a uniform process. (P4, 2002, p. 1)

3.1.7 Respondents Emphasized the Decision-Making Authority of Elected Officials in Local Government

Ten respondents highlighted the obligation of elected officials to uphold their decision-making responsibilities and emphasized that local government elected officials cannot fetter their discretion to an external process.
Shared decision-making is where the stakeholders in the consensus process are also the decision-makers. Consensus is where people come to agreement on an issue, or not so strong an agreement that they will block, where they can live with the overall outcome. When you are dealing with a municipal council, the council is the decision-maker and the council rarely, (unless you have held a referendum which are on very legally structured issues and certainly aren't consensus in any way) rarely abrogates their decision-making responsibility. (RR2, 2002, p.3-4)

There are legal issues. The government can't fetter their discretion. There have been cases (fettering discretion cases) where these challenges have been brought against governments. The referendum section of the Local Government Act outlines the responsibility of councillors to not fetter their discretion. However, I think that some people over-play this issue or wrongly rely on it as an excuse not to work with the public. ... Also, the fettering discretion argument irritates me a bit. People use it as a justification for no community process. It is not a good reason to stop council from appointing a consensus committee to prepare recommendations or a full draft. Council can accept all the recommendations as long as they have shown that they have turned their minds to other options. It is not a good argument. (P3, 2002, p. 3-5)

You can't fetter council's decision making. That brings up the issue of the involvement of council in the process. At the end if they are there and receive the report and there is consensus presumably they will be delighted and support the recommendations and changes based on the recommendations but it is certainly not guaranteed. (P5, 2002, p. 10)

All decisions must go to a vote by Council. The Local Government Act requires councillors, the community's elected officials, to be the decision-makers. Councillors cannot be bound by an agreement reached by another process. (P2, 2002, p.1)

This probably doesn't happen very much in local government in that you are going through a planning process and council is the ultimate decision-maker. Council will definitely take in all this information, would probably like a consensus but still makes its decision in an autonomous way in the end. If there is not a consensus council can still approve or reject the decision. (P7, 2001, p.3)

But they don't in the end make the decision. The elected officials make the decision. But if they come up with a solution, particularly one that is a consensus solution, we are more than happy. (MC1, 2001, p.12)

I think elected officials just have to be very careful not to make any commitments. They still have to walk into a public hearing and still be
willing to listen to new ideas at the public hearing. From a legal perspective, they have to be very careful about what they say. They may have made up their mind as a result of the fact that there was a consensus reached, and they go to a public hearing. But, they can’t be seen to say, now I know what I am going to do because we have sorted all this out, the public interests have come together so I am going to a public hearing and I know what I am going to do. You can’t say that. From a legal perspective, that is probably the key. As an elected official, you still have to be prepared to hear a new perspective at the hearing and to recognize that that perspective may influence your final decision. ... Elected officials should not encourage people to think that the outcome of the consensus group, whatever it may be, will bind them, because you will make people very unhappy. They may perceive that they were working hard to reach a consensus and now the officials have gone and made a different decision. (PGOV1, 2002, p. 17)

But here I think one has to educate the elected officials because I believe this sort of process is valuable. ... It can be a valuable process, but you can’t take your decisions that way. The idea that you go from, having a group of stakeholders to actually take the decisions, you can’t do that because they aren’t elected. (PUB1, 2002, p.16)

The politicians should make their decisions unfettered. (CONS1, 2002, p. 10)

The more we talk to our public and listen to them, the better. The more we attempt to arrive at some kind of consensus overall regional view for the community the better. I don’t see that as interference at all. ... No, I think it is important to go through that process even if some of the conclusions that people come to you don’t agree with. I would not be bound by that however if they were in violation of the primary principles of what we were trying to accomplish. (RR1, 2002. p 13 –14)

3.1.8 Respondents Indicated that Consensus Processes can Raise False Expectations about the Role of Participants in Final Decision-Making

Six respondents highlighted the issue that consensus processes can raise the expectations of the participants about their influence over the final decision. Three emphasized the importance of being honest with participants about the role of their decision in a final decision making process.

Well, if you have a sufficiently well run, in-depth broadly based process, then that should be a very significant factor in the input that politicians
make their decisions on, I would think. ... Given the number of person hours that would go into this compared to the amount of time you would have at a council meeting to consider something, surely this would be... Well, a politician could decide to override it, but it would be a rather silly thing to do, I suppose. And to the extent that there had been a large amount of public involvement, and at least the public that would have been involved would have been rather ticked off if they ignored their input. (PUB2, 2002, p.8)

The LRMP process wasn’t a shared decision-making process. It was a consensus process, but then ultimately the actual decision-making process is actually at the Cabinet table. It has a strong influence because it is consensus. (PGOV2, 2002, p.17)

It must be made clear to participants that they are only making a recommendation to council who retains the final decisions. In some of the Federal processes peoples’ expectations were high they expected their decisions to be accepted by the elected officials. People were taking time off work, volunteering their time, and considering the amount of staff time provincially and municipally that it took, I think if the elected officials didn’t accept the decision there would have to be some very good reasons. (P6, 2002, p. 14)

It raises false expectations sometimes. If you tell the community it is going to be a consensus process, they will strongly put their case forward, expect to be heard and think that their side will be upheld. And the developer thinks the same thing. So they come from two opposites so you can’t guarantee there will be consensus. (P7, 2001, p.11)

... you have to be honest with the public that you are going to try and accomplish consensus and allow as much discussion as possible but in the final analysis, especially when it comes down to straight policy issues or issues of rezoning or whatever, the council makes the final decision. You can’t pretend that that is not the case. You have to be really clear and honest in that case what consensus means. (RR1, 2002, p.12)

People would always say well what guarantee do we have that they will listen to us. And we would say quite honestly that you have absolutely no guarantee whatsoever. You have the opportunity to give input to people who are empowered by the electorate to make these decisions and they can take your advice or they may not, on the basis of their own biases, judgements, knowledge whatever. But if you are in a situation of a more enlightened community where the politicians say it is important to try and find a community consensus; we are not confident that we have a take on what the overall vision or solution should be; we recognize that there are a variety of interests in the issue. And they set up a process and say that they are going
to take the outcome of the process seriously. And a lot of times they will because they understand, particularly if it has been effective and pulled the community together in a way, they would be taking issue with it with some political peril. Then fair enough yes it is a good way to go. But you have to have a clear sense from the outset what the exercise is really about. Because if you go out there telling people it is consensus and it isn’t that is not being fair to people. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.16)

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Defining Consensus: Variation and the Thesis View of Consensus

The planning literature presents a range of definitions, or descriptions, of consensus and consensus processes. Innes and Healey link their discussions of consensus to the communicative theory of planning and spend considerable time discussing the social learning aspect of the process to reach mutual agreement on solutions. In one article, Innes presents a broad definition of consensus: “processes in which individuals representing differing interests engage in long-term, face-to-face discussions, seeking agreement on strategy, plans, policies, or actions.” In defining consensus she is specific in her exclusion of processes that include: “mediations among competing players who come together to resolve a specific dispute, for example on the siting of a waste facility” (1999, p.11). Forester also stays away from the concept of consensus as negotiation and advocates for its incorporation into a problem solving approach that creates learning, builds relationships and reshapes views of how things are and might be (1999, p. 84). Cormick et al. are more specific in their description of what a consensus outcome involves and Kaner et al. tackle the specifics of what a consensus outcome means from unanimity to gradients of agreements. Diehl’s (1995) discussion of consensus in terms of alternate dispute resolution applications to local planning is in direct contrast to Innes’ 1999 description noted above. Given the variation in the definitions or descriptions of consensus in the literature, it is therefore not surprising that there is considerable variation in the definitions of consensus among the interview responses. For the purposes of the thesis, consensus processes are taken to include the spectrum of descriptions from Innes’ long-term face-to-face discussions that seek agreement on policies, plans and
actions to Diehl’s more focussed application of consensus processes including dispute resolution by mediation.

3.2.2 Defining Consensus

Respondents generally agreed that consensus means obtaining the agreement of all the parties to an outcome. Only 1 of 11 respondents was satisfied with a partial consensus definition. Where the respondents differed was in their recognition or not that there is likely to be varying degrees of enthusiasm for the support people give to an outcome. Some acknowledged this softness and others translated a full agreement consensus into an exacting inflexible situation that would be very difficult if not impossible to achieve.

In general, there was little evidence of a more developed definition of consensus such as proposed by Cormick et al. (1996, p.4) and Kaner et al. (1996) for example. Cormick et al. include as part of their definition the notion of living with the overall solutions even if there are elements of the package with which the participants do not agree. Kaner et al. distinguish between consensus as a process and unanimity as the decision rule to determine when to bring the process to a close. They further elaborate on the decision rule, introducing the concept of a gradient of agreement, which makes room for less than full enthusiastic support but allows the group to come to an acceptable agreement nonetheless (1996, p.210-216). Two respondents elaborated on the definition of consensus. One suggested that addressing the major objections of dissenting parties could assist in bringing the processes to a consensus outcome. A second respondent noted that mediated negotiation could help unblock a stalemate. These kinds of refinements to the understanding of consensus and consensus processes are very important. They illustrate how achieving consensus can be made more realistic, more of a possibility and less of an unattainable goal.

The results also indicated that many respondents were aware of the difficulty involved in reaching consensus and two respondents indicated that this difficulty would be an obstacle to the use of consensus processes. This finding, along with the lack of evidence of a more developed understanding of consensus processes and the use of general
language in discussing consensus processes, suggests that respondents may not know enough about how consensus processes are designed and how they work to fully appreciate the value of them, including:

- the view that taking more time to make the decision pays off later in implementation, and ensuring it is not further challenged (Thomas, 1995, p.32);
- the power of a consensus decision, even if the consensus includes a range of strength of affirmative support. Innes’ discussion of the positive reaction to a consensus state growth plan is an example. Participants in the process argued for avoiding state legislative approval of the plan noting that it was more representative of the will of the people than it would be if adopted by the legislature (1992, p.449);
- the flexibility of consensus processes for application to a broad range of tasks and at different scales of focus from local to global (Cormick et al., 1996 and Dorcey, 2002).

3.2.3 Consensus Processes

On the subject of the nature of consensus processes, 3 respondents distinguished between shared-decision and consensus processes. One clearly indicated that in the context of local government, shared-decision making processes would not be an option because of the responsibility of elected officials not to abrogate their decision-making responsibilities. The view that local government politicians must make their final decision unfettered is one strongly recognized and supported by many respondents. The literature indicates that this decision-making responsibility does not preclude the use of consensus processes to develop a recommendation to a municipal council, or even to a public hearing for that matter. Diehl specifies ways to incorporate a process of mediation for planning-related dispute resolution into the municipal decision-making process in Kamloops (1995, p.34). Lomax provides examples of how other municipalities, including Calgary and Edmonton, have integrated alternate dispute resolution approaches (2000). Similar evidence is provided by the City of Kitchener’s policy on public participation and alternate dispute resolution in the planning process (1996a, 1996b).
This finding is not inconsistent with the theory of consensus processes. The fact that an elected body makes the final decision does not negate the value of developing a consensus outcome. This value arises from the engagement of participants in a process of agreeing to a *single* mutually acceptable outcome that represents the consensus of the group, rather than from a process that collects a variety of diverse views for consideration. Aside from the fact that a consensus process could be seen to have political influence over the final decision makers, the outcome of a well-designed consensus process should, on its own merits, be able to withstand the scrutiny of another body or even a public hearing for that matter.

3.2.4 Voting

Results indicated that respondents compared consensus processes to voting. While the notion of an 80% approval representing a consensus has been found acceptable to some consensus groups (Kaner et al., 1996, p.210), the tendency to describe a consensus approach in win-lose language suggests that there is considerable scope yet for people to change the way they think about making decisions. Respondent PGOV2 notes that it might “take a generation or two” (2002, p.4). Local government is fixed within a system that uses win-lose language and Robert’s Rules of Order as discussion and decision-making methods. This context does little to encourage an alternate approach. Despite a strong indication of support and openness to using consensus processes, one respondent suggested that a referendum is a form of consensus. While a greater than fifty percent majority could be considered a consensus outcome by a group of participants, a referendum fails to meet many other criteria of a consensus process, not least of which is the need for the decision makers to spend a lot of time engaged in discussion with each other.

3.2.5 Consensus Processes versus Consultation

The research indicates that there is a tendency among some planners, planning consultants and elected officials to equate consensus processes with public consultation. This suggests that a more refined understanding of what consensus processes are and how they are carried out is lacking among some respondents. Cormick et al provide an
interesting and useful comparison of the two processes (1996, p.11). They noted that the inclusion of the general public’s view in a consensus process is problematic (1996, p.11), an issue that respondents identified as an obstacle. Cormick et al. suggest that the literature on consensus processes does not provide a complete response to this complex issue (1996, p.84-85), although Innes argues that consensus processes can effectively represent the public view (1996, p.465). This is explored further in Chapters 4 and 7 in a discussion of the obstacles to the use of consensus process.

3.2.6 Approximating Consensus
The research suggests that respondents recognize that a consensus approach has value and they have attempted to use it in their activities. However, some of the processes discussed merely approximated, or initiated and eventually abandoned, a consensus approach. Perhaps this has arisen as a result of a lack of knowledge about how consensus processes work or a lack of skill and experience in their implementation. Consider, for example, the issue of lengthy time lines associated with consensus processes. It is important that groups planning to undertake a consensus process understand that they can take a long time. It is also important that they are aware that a technique such as having the group set a schedule together in the early stages of a process can set up a more realistic picture of how it will unfold (Cormick et al., 1996).

Cormick et al. highly recommend an initial analysis of whether the situation is suited to consensus processes. Such an analysis can open the eyes of planners and process managers as to what they can reasonably expect with respect to the likely success of a consensus process. Forester makes a similar point when he notes that consensus-building should not be used for the sake of it, but should serve a useful end, and cautions against using cookbook recipes for these approaches (2000, p. 72 & 101).

It is perhaps education about how to evaluate a situation for its suitability to consensus processes that is most pressing, but this necessitates education about what consensus processes are and how they work. Training in consensus process will also help planners and others to alert potential participants to what they can expect in terms of their role and
the influence they will have over any final decision, an issue that was highlighted by a number of respondents.

3.3 **Summary**

The research indicates that planners, elected officials and government officials are aware of consensus as a concept and that it is taking more prominence in processes of public involvement. More importantly however, the research has led to the conclusion that while there is an awareness that consensus processes are valuable and a recognition that they cannot be ignored, there is considerable variation in the degree and refinement of understanding of consensus and consensus processes. The data illustrating a tendency to equate consensus processes to public consultation supports this conclusion and highlights a lack of connection between the concept of consensus as an outcome and the recognition that a particular and different kind of process is required to achieve that outcome. The research suggests that a further evolution in understanding will be required before local and regional governments can make appropriate, full and effective use of consensus processes as a tool for planning. Education, including an understanding about when it is appropriate to use consensus processes, will be an important aspect of this evolution.

The results of Chapter 3 have indicated that there is an uneven understanding of consensus processes among planners, elected and government officials. It is important that the findings arising from the subsequent research questions be viewed in light of this conclusion. Does this cast doubt on the value of the responses to the subsequent research questions? No, insights about the use of consensus processes that are specific to the domain of local and regional planning have arisen, for example how a consensus process can be integrated into a municipality’s existing public review process (Diehl, 1995).

In a number of instances, obstacles to the use of consensus processes that were reported by respondents are identified in the literature and counter-argued there. These arguments are presented in Chapter 7 in the section that discusses the findings related to the research questions on obstacles to the use of consensus processes. While an unrefined understanding of consensus and consensus processes might cast some doubt on the
interview responses to the question "What tasks are suitable for consensus?" it is the view of the author that the experience and knowledge of local and regional planning that is reflected in the responses provides insights and raises challenges that the literature on consensus processes must be able to address. The discussion in Chapter 7 presents the relevant literature, links it to the interview findings and draws conclusions that are relevant to the domains of local and regional planning.

The presentation of the results of the three original research questions follows, beginning with the question "What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?" addressed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4: OBSTACLES TO USING CONSENSUS PROCESSES IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Chapter 3 noted that respondents may not have a highly developed understanding of consensus processes and how they work, and suggested that this would be an obstacle to their increased application in planning. As Chapter 4 will illustrate, there are other factors that present obstacles to the use of consensus processes. Obstacles reported by respondents in response to the question “What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?” are presented below in decreasing order of number of respondent mentions. A discussion of the results follows.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Resources Are a Challenge to Using Consensus Processes

Nine respondents identified time or money as a challenge to consensus processes.

_Council cannot always wait for consensus to be reached. They must cast their votes on the issue in a timely fashion. ... Drawing out an approval process can result in significant costs for the developer. The developer has a right to have a timely reply to his request for approval to proceed._ (P2, 2002, p.1-2)

_They are time consuming. They require a lot of guidance including staff and council resources._ (P3, 2002, p.3)

_Finding the resources to do it. The costs. The city itself may have some costs and may say to the developer you pay it. ... There is going to be an issue of who pays._ (P5, 2002, p.10)

_... the amount of resources, costs and peoples' time. You need additional people and need to dedicate a staff person to this. It has huge time implications. You have to provide support to the group, which is more cost and time._ (P6, 2002, p. 4)

_Cost and time._ (MCI, 2002, p.11)

_These things are expensive and local governments are usually fairly impoverished any way._ (PUB1, 2002, p.16)

_Wrapping it up, drawing the process to a conclusion is one of the major obstacles. I think the length of time it can take. It can be very time consuming._ (CONS1, 2002, p.9)
Time is a huge obstacle. It is not just time for the planning department and the administration, it is time for the public. ... It all takes a lot of time, and there is a cost to that, either an outright financial cost or something that gets hidden in terms of the time. (CONS2, 2002, p.13)

Time, money and skill. They take a long time and people often don't understand why they take so long. And compared to other processes they seem to be too cumbersome, and they are very unfamiliar. People get very frustrated with touchy-feely stuff. As I mentioned, we spent about 4 hours talking about process: "What about cell phones? What about press releases? What about open meetings? How do we make decisions?" The sentiment is “come on let's get down to issues" and it can be very frustrating. At the end of the day they might never understand why it took so long. But every process I have been involved with takes way too long and then finally when the group starts to trust each other and work together, decisions come quickly. So let's say it takes 20 hours. That's 15 hours of frustration, 4 hours of real discussion and then within the hour everything disappears because it is all resolved. ... Money is a problem because time is money and because sometimes you end up involving professional facilitators and you may not have allocated enough money to run a proper consensus process. Sometimes some of the key players cannot afford to participate and you end up subsidizing people to come to the table but it is important that they are at the table. So cost is one barrier for sure. (PGOV2, 2002, p.16)

Three respondents noted a lack of skilled, knowledgeable and experienced planners and participants as an obstacle.

Skill is a barrier, when people are not fully skilled. It is early days for the technology. We have to wait for the technology to develop and for the skills to develop and for people to appreciate the value obviously and make the right choice as to when to use it. It isn't always the best technique. (PGOV2, 2002, p.16)

Lack of experience of participants. They don't understand what it means, what it is, and it all can seem very airy-fairy to them. We are working on a service review of general administration in the Comox-Strathcona regional district and we have 18 people sitting around the table ... and they have never done this before. They are used to using Roberts' Rules and they don't understand why we are taking all this time to talk about how we are going to make decisions. (PGOV1, 2002, p.16)

In government, people who are experienced in this approach of reaching consensus as an approach to problem solving tend not to be in the land use planning or planning field, but more in social decision-making (e.g.
problems with families) or with resource agencies which work very differently. So finding good skilled people who can come in and help with this stuff and really understand the issues that local government are dealing with is another obstacle. (PGOV1, 2002, p.16)

The other issue is training. I think Kamloops tried volunteer facilitators, I think that it didn’t work all that well. So training is something where you really need to get qualified people doing it. That could also be an obstacle. (P5, 2002, p.10.)

Three respondents identified the challenge of getting people to participate as an obstacle to using consensus processes.

Another obstacle that comes to mind is not being able to get volunteers to participate. (P3, 2001, p.5)

Well, just getting the parties together because if one party doesn’t want to be part of it, they both have to agree to be part of it. (P5, 2002, p.9)

Well, for all the stakeholders really, the problem of getting that public involvement at all. It is difficult to get them out to any kind of meeting. So to get them in substantial numbers to meetings that require a big time commitment could be difficult. ... I suppose that is true of politicians as well. Some of them were there probably saying: “Oh, not another meeting, I have been to fifteen this week already”. (PUB2, 2002, p7)

4.1.2 The Stakeholder Approach as an Obstacle

Nine respondents made mention of some aspect of a stakeholder approach as an obstacle to the use of consensus processes. The obstacles identified include:

- Ensuring full and avoiding self-selected representation
- Stakeholders do not necessarily represent a general public view
- Working with the general public as opposed to elected officials or government jurisdictions
- Single interest representation is not realistic
- Stakeholder approaches create divisiveness not consensus
- Ensuring stakeholder accountability

Seven respondents indicated a concern about ensuring full representation and avoiding representation only by self-selected individuals.
A key problem is how to include the views of all affected and also those who will be affected in the future but are not now in a position to voice their views via a planning committee. (P1, 2001, p.1)

There is also the question of who you actually involve, which stakeholders? So it is a different question. And how you do it? (P5, 2002, p.9)

More important is how do we get those voices who don’t usually profit from being heard, how do we get those voices heard? ... That is one of the big problems in politics in general. How do you really get those voices out there? You have to identify, ask and hear them. (PUB1, 2002, p. 16)

So what you are left with is the people who have perhaps quite strong interests and views and maybe what you need are more of the “Joe-in-the-street” types who are perhaps not that interested but you need to know where they are coming from. (PUB2, 2002, p. 7)

Another obstacle is the difficulty of hearing from everyone and not just the self-selected interested individuals or the person who is primarily or most closely affected by the potential decision. It is really hard to get beyond that. You need to develop different techniques that cost more money and take more time. (CONS2, 2002, p.13)

And you have to respect that you are probably going to hear from the vocal majority or minority that cares deeply about any particular issue. That becomes very dangerous to define your consensus basis around. ...these processes don’t attract stakeholders; they attract cheerleaders. They attract the social do-gooders. They are not attracting the people who just want to be left alone, because the people who want to be left alone are being left alone. They are not joining the cheerleaders to change things. That is the biggest failure of a regional consensus process. (RR2, 2002, p. 5 & 10)

... people self-appoint themselves to stand forward and do that. But the process of saying that someone is a stakeholder, well who made them a stakeholder? Well, somebody in Victoria who is setting up the process decides that so and so who is a member of Greenpeace or is somebody working for the forest industry or whatever has been given status. They are pulled out of the herd of the rest of us and given a place at the table. I think that there are some real problems with that. (P8, 2002, p.19)

Three respondents questioned whether a stakeholder approach could adequately represent the general public view or public interest.

When you are talking about a municipality, and when you are talking about the stakeholders, then who defines the public interest? Who defines the
public? What are your boundaries when you are identifying who the stakeholders are with respect to municipal issues. It gets very convoluted. (RR2, 2002, p.5)

...stakeholders represent valid interests but don't necessarily represent the general public view. Stakeholders are generally someone who has a prime interest in a particular area. I think sometimes politicians see stakeholders as not representative of the general public. (CONS2, 2002, p.14)

So, what you end up having, and I think the whole round table stakeholder approach plays into this, is that you have self-appointed opinion leaders and elites engaged in discussion and the interaction with everybody else is media relations. ... And I often wonder where the citizen is reflected in this. You have a whole series of people representing sectoral interests that are engaged in their own special pleading - and I am not trying to cast aspersions on the values of any of those perspectives, they are all important things. But I don't believe that the public interest is necessarily going to emerge from that kind of a forum. (P8, 2002, p.20)

Two respondents suggested that consensus processes work less effectively with the general public as opposed to elected officials or government jurisdictions.

When you are dealing with citizens it is tough. Citizens don't have that same political embarrassment. Yes, you involve me in a process, and yes I agree that should happen, but today is today and now I want that. It is tougher with citizens. I think with citizens you do good consultation processes. But you are not as likely to really get consensus partly because of the larger numbers and the larger the group the more difficult consensus usually is. You are probably not really hoping for real consensus, you are hoping for a larger level of acceptance or buy-in than you would normally get. You really are, I think, just talking about a good process and are hoping for a high level of acceptance of the outcome. But you are not really looking for a long-term commitment. (PGOV2, 2002, p.15)

What is different is that we are seeking consensus between jurisdictions rather than working towards full public involvement. Then it is for the different jurisdictions to ensure that they are representing their citizens or residents as they come to the table. (PGOV1, 2002, p.4)

One respondent questioned whether an individual can realistically represent a single interest and suggested that stakeholder approaches are divisive rather than consensus-building.

You are a stakeholder. Why? Because you are a member of WC² and you are representing an environmental interest and there is your hat. You are
not a citizen that has a whole variety of interests. And in and of yourself you have to balance out your own conflicting goals and aspirations.

They found, in the Kootenays for example, they found the LRMP processes to be very divisive experiences in the community because it puts people into camps. ... A lot of the planners that I have talked to, that have worked in some of the regional rural districts, have found that process to be very divisive in the communities. And they felt that a more traditional approach where you try to get people together and try to step outside their roles a bit and try to see themselves as somewhat bigger people than they really are; as citizens that also understand the point of view of the other person; that this kind of approach may have been a more productive process and led to an awful lot less pain and anxiety in the communities. It is somewhat ironic in a sense because you look at those processes and the intent was to try to get to consensus. But the way they approached it, it simplifies people into these very stark polarized roles and forces them to speak from that perspective and then get to a consensus, which isn't really a consensus, it is more a hammered out agreement. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.8)

One respondent noted the concern about the lack of accountability of consensus processes and challenged their democratic nature.

One of the resistances that politicians have to these things is: These people who do they think they represent? I had to stand for office and get voted in. This person claims to represent a constituency. They are self-appointed. They have no accountability. Nobody voted for them. Why should I pay attention to their opinion? They are just one voice. I think, from a democratic decision making perspective, that has been a real problem for me about that whole approach. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.19)

4.1.3 Reluctance to Give Up Decision-Making Power

Seven respondents discussed various aspects related to the issue of giving up decision-making power. Three respondents specifically emphasized the reluctance of politicians to give up decision-making power suggesting that this could be an obstacle to the use of consensus processes.

It is difficult to put a pure process in place. Elected officials are reluctant to give up decision-making power to a process. (INT9/P8, 2002, p.1)

There are very few things you can do in local government. You have control over land use and certain amounts of infrastructure. Any pleasure that you are going to get out of the job is being involved in political debate around those issues. If you don't have an opportunity to do that, what's to do? If
You have consensus processes where you have all sorts of other stakeholders involved and politicians are merely one voice at the table or are a peripheral component of that and simply receive the results of a process like that and ratify it, they are out of the loop, they are out of the power game and out of the fun of the job. These are people that like to move and shake for the most part, the ones that last in any case. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.10)

You have a consensus process that doesn’t take into account the realities of political power and that is setting itself up for trouble. There is the issue of the politician’s desire to hold power and not wanting to give that up to a process that is consensus or seeking. Part of that is a reflection of the fact that there are differential levels of power out there and those that have more — why do they want to give it away? (INT10/P8, 2002, p.18)

I think regarding advising and being involved in discussions with decision makers, there is no problem up to that point. Seeking consensus, I think that most local politicians would not want to do something that flew in the face of what they perceived to be the general broad public interest, however you define or get a feel for what that is. There would certainly be a willingness to have the consultation and involvement but in terms of saying to a group of people you develop a RGS, I don’t see that that is going to happen. I think elected officials would feel that nobody else could protect their municipal interests as well as they can as elected officials. (CONS2, 2002, p.16-17)

... council would be less likely to leave the project up to whether or not there was a consensus. They would be less likely to commit solely to a consensus approach. So if you said, whether or not this project is successful will completely depend on a consensus being achieved. Now, if it is a really critically important project, we are not going to do that. We are going to have some discussions, some consultations but in the end we are going to make a decision about this. (MC1, 2001, p.6)

Two respondents noted as a possible obstacle the lack of willingness of interested parties to give up direct political influence in favour of a consensus process.

Also, people are reluctant, when their property rights are at risk, they are reluctant to enter into these consensus seeking approaches because I think they would only go that way if they found themselves at the losing end of a decision and they might want to go there as a fall back position. But if you have the opportunity to directly lobby an elected official who is sitting at a table making decisions so that your interests are going to be 100% protected or furthered, what is your incentive to do something else? (INT10/P8, 2002, p.1)
Two respondents suggested that the population might not want the politicians to be, or to be seen to be, giving up their decision-making role.

... so why don’t the politicians just make up their minds because that is what they have been elected to do. (PUB1, 2002, p.16)

But to say that we are able to convene some sort of a process whereby we involve the property owner, the affected residents, the proponent, the council, the advisory committees, no, because it doesn’t happen in a municipal setting because of the fact that people are electing people to make decisions on their behalf. They are not electing people to convene processes. ... I have done quite a lot of thinking about this, in particular after doing the mediation, negotiation and work in the Northwest Territories such as convening processes and doing consensus processes, and also doing the CORE work. Then coming here and asking myself why don’t you do consensus-decision making at a municipal level? That is why: because people are elected to make those decisions. (RR2, 2002, p.5)

4.1.4 Lack of Commitment or Buy-In to Process

Four respondents identified the lack of commitment to a consensus process as an obstacle to its use.

When you start off with a regional board that didn’t really buy into the whole thing and were doing it somewhat reluctantly, and when you have a very strong level of local autonomy that didn’t really bode well for developing a regional vision on things - I think they had a pretty tough job. (PGOV2, 2002, p.12)

A lack of willingness to be open about where they are coming from. That is a political thing that you don’t show all your cards. So how can we meet everybody’s interests and get to consensus when we don’t really know everybody’s interests. How do we get people to open up? (PGOV1, 2002, p.16)

... the whole process has been one of defining issues and developing solutions. But it all breaks down if there is no buy-in and ownership because
you can do all the informing, consulting, advising and seeking consensus that you want but if people have made up their minds beforehand that this is no good and they don't intend to be apart of it then the whole thing breaks down. ... It is a balancing act between believing in consensus and operating in a consensus fashion but not allowing people who have no attention to really honour the process or the integrity of the process from word go. Unfortunately there are those kind of people. (RR1, 2002, p.18-19)

Mediation is great and I think it is a wonderful opportunity and I think sometimes it should be used, but it is not the end all when people are not willing to compromise. ... I think if it becomes so time-consuming and you can see that there isn't to be a consensus reached or that someone is not buying into the process and it is just being given lip service then I don't think it is valid. (P7, 2001, p.12-13)

4.1.5 Political Context in the Capital Regional District

Four interview respondents illustrated how the political context of the Capital Regional District would be an obstacle to using consensus processes. Included among the discussions of the political context was the issue of lack of buy-in to a regional approach to planning. In response to a question about the use of consensus processes in regional planning, P8 stated:

... we could have maybe done it differently here and we weren't really able to do that here because of the hardball politics of the region. ... A lot of people, even though they would never say so in public, don't want this to happen and they will do everything they can to prevent it from happening. A lot of people were not being clear and above board about what their real intentions were. There was a lot of suspicion. There were some people that were involved only because they were afraid that the Province could force them to do it because there was this little clause in the legislation that said the Minister could order a growth strategy and they didn't want that. They wanted to appear to be doing it out of their volition but they really didn't want to do it. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.17)

In the CRD, the term Greater Victoria is problematic and is widely perceived as Victoria aggrandizement (perhaps masking an amalgamation agenda). There is greater sense of identification with the sub-regional level (the core, the peninsula, the western communities, Sooke) than with the region, which notwithstanding the facts of work and life is perceived as an artificial construct by a great many. (INT9/P8, 2002, p.1 memo4)
As well as being illustrative of the lack of commitment or buy-in to a consensus approach, the following excerpt also highlights the political context and lack of interest in a regional approach to planning.

*I think they had a pretty tough job to do. When you start off with a regional board that didn’t really buy into the whole thing and were doing it somewhat reluctantly, and when you have a very strong level of local autonomy that didn’t really bode well for developing a regional vision on things - I think they had a pretty tough job.* (PGOV2, 2002, p.12)

*The complexity and magnitude of the jurisdictions. This is a very complex region compared to many. Nanaimo did their RGS including Ladysmith and a few other municipalities, Parksville I think. But compared to us with all these jurisdictions, we have a very complex set-up to even try to arrive at consensus. So the complexity of the region is an issue. ... There are individual politicians within the region who have never agreed with the concept and therefore have never taken ownership nor encouraged their community to take ownership and that is major in terms of difficulty. In fact it is a miracle in a sense that there is so much consensus among the public of the region given some of the recalcitrant and fixed attitudes of certain politicians of the region.* (RR1, 2002, p.13)

*This is a regional growth strategy and if I have a municipality and if my municipality has an official community plan, then you use that to inform your regional growth strategy. You don’t start with this “wouldn’t it be wonderful if every municipality had this and we had commercial sectors within this distance of everything else?” That may not be the way that my municipality was founded. And who are you, sitting downtown, to tell me what to do in my municipality? If you want a say in my municipality you either live there or you run there, until then, keep your hands off it.* (RR2, 2002, p.7)

During the Regional Growth Strategy bylaw public hearing one member of the public expressed his views:

*...the West Shore Chamber of Commerce does not support the Regional Growth Strategy, nor do the majority of members of Langford and Colwood council. Each municipality has a stringent set of controls to allow and control development. If there were cohesive workings between the municipalities there would be amalgamation. ... Langford, in its own developments, goes out of its way to get green space and trails. It does not need someone from another municipality tell them where, how and when to do it. If a municipality decides not to accept the Regional Growth Strategy, it will be forced upon it, which does nothing in the long-term other than*
create contempt between the areas in disagreement. (Capital Regional District, 2002, p.6)

4.1.6 Decision Quality Suffers

Three respondents raised the issue of decision quality and expressed a concern that a consensus process can lead to watered down decisions or at least not contribute to better decisions.

The question then becomes what kind of value do you get at the other end for all this time and money spent? And I am not sure, and other colleagues agree with this I think, if after you go through all this, a decision, that may not be exactly the same one but equally effective, could have been arrived at in a different way. (P7, 2001, p.4)

You have thirteen local governments that make up the RGS and they all have to agree; that is part of the RGS process, they are forced to agree. ... But the plan is now so watered down as to be virtually meaningless. Some parts of it will be virtually meaningless. ... We have two communities, Colwood and Langford, who have said no problem we will support urban containment boundaries but the urban containment boundary will be around our whole municipality. So what is the use of that? So yes we will have consensus, but it will be meaningless consensus. (MC1, 20021, p.14)

Respondent P8 noted the risk of reaching general solutions in an attempt to avoid conflict, but further suggests that good facilitation should be able to address this.

People backed off to a higher level of generality to find common ground. People were not pushing the envelope enough. They brought in a “hard-nosed” facilitator. Be aware that some conflicts are not being aired. At least, they should identify the issue for later resolution. You need to get at the underlying interests and meaning. Facilitation pushed buttons and a better consensus was achieved having done this. (INT9/P8, 2002, p.1)

On the other hand, one respondent noted that consensus processes can lead to better decisions.

I think it does lead to better decisions on the part of the final decision makers because they have had an opportunity to hear from a variety of positions. It also forces you to look at new ideas, when you use the consensus approach as opposed to being just stuck in the box or following an ideology or following a set group of ideas. That alone is really important and that is one of the exciting things that really does come out of this. (RR1, 2002, p.14-15)
Respondent RR2 speaks to both sides of the issue noting, in response to a question of whether there is a risk of achieving a watered down solution with a consensus process:

*Sure. Sometimes you do. The trade-offs are that you can get something that isn't objectionable to anybody and it isn't objectionable to anybody because it isn't doing anything.* (RR2, 2002, p.16)

Implying that this should not be an obstacle to their use, RR2 also noted:

*... for the most part a good consensus process should mean that at the end of the day you have a good result that people can live with.* (RR2, 2002, p.14)

PGOV2 noted that the nature of a consensus process brings benefits in terms of creating implementable plans.

*So you can say it is watered down or say broader acceptance. The experiment we have going in BC is these don't look like tough plans; they are consensus plans to a large extent. They look more watered down but they are probably more implementable than plans that don't have buy-in from the people who end up making the day-to-day development decisions.* (PGOV2, 2002, p.11)

### 4.1.7 Emotional Attachment to Peoples' Homes

Three respondents identified emotional attachment to property as a possible obstacle to engaging in a consensus process that is perceived as potentially jeopardizing property rights.

*Maybe it has got something to do with the nature of the disputes. What we are talking about very often are peoples' homes and their major investment in their life. So there is the whole emotional part about their home. It is where they have their children, where they live their lives. And it is every penny they have very often. And people are not going to be able to say readily I am so benevolent that I am going to give up these rights or I am going to put my children at risk because we are going to increase traffic down the street. They are not going to be willing to do that. Now if you are talking about an environmental problem, where the round table consensus processes have been used so often, maybe you are looking at the Fraser River Basin or something similar where everybody is a couple of steps back. Or their children are not going to be at risk, now that is not always true. But it is not this really immediate threat to their homes, children or lives. There may be a longer term threat or threat to fish stocks in twenty years or somebody else. So maybe it has something to do with the nature of the*
disputes, because people will fiercely protect their homes. And I would too. (MC1, 2001, p.17)

Also, people are reluctant, when their property rights are at risk, they are reluctant to enter into these consensus seeking approaches because I think they would only go that way if they found themselves at the losing end of a decision and they might want to go there as a fall back position. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.1)

In response to a question about the appropriate application of consensus processes RR2 replied:

It is very complicated when you are dealing with municipal issues because you are dealing with what is probably the single largest investment that most of us are ever going to make, which is purchasing your home. You are talking about peoples’ hopes, dreams, concerns, and fears. You are talking about peoples’ families. And so it is very tricky to then say, your neighbour wants to do something. You work with your neighbour on it and when you guys agree then come to me. They don’t want to do that. And that is where you will get the same people who say, “Who are you to be making decisions on my behalf?” saying “You were elected to make these decisions.” (RR2, 2002, p.13)

4.1.8 Other Obstacles

The following obstacles were identified by fewer than 3 respondents. Two respondents identified cynicism and lack of understanding on the part of the public about their role in local government.

Cynicism is a big challenge. People, the public, are cynical about being asked to participate or to provide input. You just can’t believe how cynical people are about elected officials, and bureaucracy, government. (MC1, 2001, p.11)

There is an incredible amount of cynicism out there and you have to address that somehow. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.19).

Two respondents identified too large and diverse a population as an obstacle.

With regional planning it is pretty hard to deal with the size of the population and ensure that they have a hands on involvement all the way through. (PGOV1, 2002, p.17)

I would have to say that the region is probably too big and the interests too diverse. (RR2, 2002, p.7)
One respondent identified the existing local government structure as a possible obstacle or challenge to the use of consensus processes.

In the end we are dealing with bylaws, whether it be regional growth strategy or OCP or zoning bylaws. And this gets you back into the "normal" local government practice. So how do you take this consensus approach and move it into the normal local government machine. (PGOV1, 2002, p.16)

One respondent identified as an obstacle a lack of willingness to confront a neighbour with whom one has a conflict and preference for third party to resolve it.

They don't want to damage their relationship with their neighbours. They have a relationship with their neighbours and they don't want to damage that. They don't have a relationship with me. So they come to Mom and say "Tell this guy to go away." Meanwhile they are carpooling with that guy to the meeting because "well you know it is up to Council and god knows what they are going to do." (RR2, 2002, p. 13)

One respondent identified resistance to change.

More and more as I look at it, I think most people buy their homes in a neighbourhood that looks a certain way and they want to work to keep it that way. And most times when you have a process it is because you are talking about change. And most times people are reluctant to do that. That is a realization that I am just coming to. You might have had very different answers from me six years ago coming off the consensus stuff. The more I look at it, people rarely elect you to do anything in municipal government. They usually elect you to stop something. (RR2, 2002, p.13)

One respondent identified resistance to change.

It is difficult to guarantee that you will gain consensus. You may go through the process, feel you have consensus, then it comes to a specific decision and the consensus is lost because there has been a lot of public input, or there is a lot of opposition to something and so Council changes its mind or a couple of councillors are not willing to support the consensus that was reached. There is no guarantee. It shouldn't be stagnant. Once you reach a consensus, maybe things do change. New information comes available and things go off the track. (P7, 2001, p. 11)

One respondent identified irreducible value differences.

I think you can overdo the consensus thing. If the issue is important, it may simply be that there are some irreducible differences. I certainly believe that
you have to get the very best facts possible available. You have to get everybody to see them, understand them and discuss them. But, the world is not only made up of facts. It is also made up of values. Where do you want to end up and what importance do you lay on these things? And if there are real differences there, consensus may not be such a good thing. Consensus may end up being the worst of all worlds. (PUB1, 2002, P.15)

One respondent identified tyranny of the minority where one voice can derail the process.

The only weakness of consensus processes, and it has more strengths than weaknesses as far as I am concerned, is that if you have somebody who is determined to screw the process, putting it bluntly, if you insist on absolute consensus then you can have the tyranny of the minority. (RR1, 2002, p.4-5)

4.2 Summary of Respondent Views on the Obstacles to Using Consensus Processes in Local and Regional Planning

The largest number of respondents (9) identified resources including lack of time, money, skill, knowledge, and willingness to participate as obstacles to using consensus processes. Similarly, nine respondents mentioned as obstacles aspects of a stakeholder approach to representation including not ensuring full representation, ineffectively representing the view of the general public or citizenry, not being accountable, and promoting divisiveness by expecting individuals to represent a single interest. Seven respondents identified as an obstacle the reluctance on the part of politicians and interested parties to give up decision-making power to a consensus process.

Four respondents cited the lack of commitment/buy-in to a consensus process as an obstacle while four others identified the political context in the Capital Regional District characterized by a lack of mutual trust among municipalities, lack of a vision and a will to work together as a region.

Interview respondents were divided on whether decision quality suffers in consensus processes. While three suggested it would, three others pointed out the benefits of a consensus decision. Three respondents considered emotional attachment of people to their homes to be an obstacle to using consensus processes.
Each of an array of obstacles was identified by one or two respondents including: cynicism, too large a scale, local government structure, lack of willingness to confront neighbours, resistance to change, no guarantee of consensus success, irreducible value differences, tyranny of the minority.

The above chapter has presented in detail and summary, the views of the interview respondents to the question of what are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional government. Chapter 7, Discussion, provides a commentary on these views in light of the varying understandings of consensus and consensus process and in the context of the related literature. Chapter 7 also discusses how the literature on consensus methodology provides answers to and counter argues some of the obstacles that were noted by respondents. In sum, it attempts to present a current picture of what the real challenges are to using consensus processes in local and regional government.

Before arriving at the discussion, Chapter 5 follows with a presentation of the views of the respondents on the question of what planning tasks are suitable for consensus processes.
CHAPTER 5: PLANNING TASKS FOR CONSENSUS PROCESSES

The academic literature identified a gap in the research on the use of consensus processes in planning: a lack of knowledge about the kinds of planning tasks that are well suited to consensus processes (Innes, 1992, p. 441). Innes explored the types of planning tasks to which consensus processes could be applied within the domain of state level growth management programs, including for example developing legislation on growth management and preparing state-wide growth management plans. The thesis continues the exploration by asking: “What kinds of local and regional planning tasks are well suited to consensus processes?” Interview responses, drawing on the experience of planners, elected and government officials, provided insights into the possible applications of consensus processes to various planning tasks. These results are presented below. A discussion of these results and insights from the literature regarding tasks suited to consensus processes can be found in Chapter 7.

5.1 Results: Planning Tasks

The results from the interviews that pertain to the question of planning tasks suited to consensus processes identified three categories of specific planning related tasks including developing plans at the neighbourhood, community and regional levels; resolving planning-related conflicts; and negotiating agreements at the regional level. The interview responses also revealed a set of characteristics that describe the kinds of tasks in planning that would work well with this approach.

5.1.1 Developing Plans at the Neighbourhood, Community and Regional Level

Nine respondents identified planning exercises, or “proactive processes,” as appropriate to consensus processes. Respondents identified different scales at which consensus planning approaches would be suitable, including community, neighbourhood and regional scales. On a general level, respondent RR1 noted:

...we are looking for public consensus on major planning issues and policy issues. (RR1, 2002, p.15)
Five respondents identified planning at the community level as a suitable application for consensus processes.

Establishing a community vision is well suited to that, partly because it is easier to get people on the same page that way. When you are getting down to some of the more operational types of things where real money is involved and real choices are being made about where things go, it becomes much more difficult I think. (P8, 2002, p. 16)

For major planning initiatives, for example developing the Official Community Plan, zoning changes. (P3, 2002, p.4)

I think you can do that more in the policies, whereby you are trying to get buy-in for things like: How do you want your community to develop? Do you want your community to expand, grow overnight, accommodate big box retail and huge residential? Do you want to get rid of land in the agricultural land reserve? Or do you protect your values that you have. That I can see as being really good for that type of process. ... It would work better earlier in the process, when there is more of a philosophical mandate for overall planning of the area. For example, how do you foresee the community evolving? (P7, 2002, p.16)

Local area plans, official community plans. These are the proactive processes. It is really important to have that kind of participation. (MC1, 2001, p.14)

While focussing on the community scale, respondent P3 indicated that consensus processes would be appropriate for major decisions that affect the very character of the community or for “hot” political issues.

For decisions that affect the very character of the community in terms of land use and institutional structures. For major decisions about land and resource use, use of tax dollars, accumulating major debt, amalgamation – changing the structure of the municipality. Otherwise, it depends on what is a hot political issue in the community. For example, in Metchosin, changes to the Agricultural Land Reserve would be an issue for community involvement in this form. (P3, 2001, p. 4)

Two respondents emphasized that the neighbourhood scale was appropriate for use with consensus planning processes.

Neighbourhood planning and zoning – those are the two areas where it could be used. (P5, 2001, p.12)
I think it is important when you are talking about a neighbourhood plan to have a consensus process. Let’s look at neighbourhood plans because they are about things like “What’s your density? Where is your park? What is your transportation network?” It is kind of your growth strategy for your neighbourhood. ... it is awkward when you look at what these processes are usually for. And that is why when you asked where they are appropriate, I think well maybe when you are talking about the future of a neighbourhood. And then that is where it becomes what can I do to make it even more like what it is now? (RR2, 2002, p.12)

Two respondents identified planning at the regional level as a suitable task for consensus processes.

...certainly in the case of a growth strategy, if you are going to invest a million dollars in a process to develop a regional plan and three or four or five years, at the end of the day the plan is useless unless the municipalities deliver the density, the uses, the re-zonings and the infrastructure where you need it. You need BC Transit and the Port Authority and others to do things consistent with the strategy. You need the buy-in to it. You need a long-term relationship and long-term buy-in. In that case, you need a consensus process (PGOV2, 2002, p.14)

Referring to the process of developing a regional growth strategy PGOV1 noted:

I think the visioning stage is a good one, developing the framework that everyone wants to try and work towards. With respect to developing the strategy, it is important that opportunities be provided for the public to be involved all the way through. It is not as easy at the drafting stage, but you have to have it and you do need to negotiate acceptance. (PGOV1, 2002, p.19)

On a dissenting note, respondent P6 indicated that planning was not a suitable task for consensus processes.

We are in the process of doing a Rural Saanich Local Area Plan. We designed an advisory process and a committee, because it is a huge area and we didn’t think it would be reasonable to get all of the community together. So we have a committee, we’re doing workshops, open houses and will have a document for public to comment on. But to do this (consensus process), who do you choose and what are you going to talk about? It may not be the best place to use it. I think it is where there is conflict, an issue based on conflict. It can’t be about a concern that there is going to be another car down my street, in general. It has to be something focused. (P6, 2001, p.14-15)
5.1.2 Planning-Related Conflicts and Disputes

Six respondents identified planning-related conflicts, or “reactive processes” as suitable candidates for resolution by consensus.

*Development proposals are good candidates. These are the more reactive processes. ... the kind of planning disputes that we have just talked about.*

*dispute between the district and a property owner about the location of the building.* ... One person wanted to cut down all the trees at the back of his property. The neighbours said that it is going to affect their privacy.

*Then you go and ask the developer if he really has to cut them down, or can you site the house differently? Can we do something different? Let’s negotiate between the two.* (MC1, 2001, p.13-14)

*Probably when you have to do some conflict resolution or try to reach some compromises in a planning process or project, such as a controversial rezoning.* (P7, 2001, p.4)

*Comparable situations at the local level might be around neighbourhood disputes and things like that where there is an element of remove. That might be a place, for example I think Kamloops has set up some alternative neighbourhood mediation processes that try to deal with things before they get into the Council chambers.* (P8, 2002, p.1)

*We have used it in Gonzales neighbourhood planning. In Gonzales, it was a dispute between the private school and the neighbours, about the impact of the school.* ... Yes, the private school and neighbourhood. There are other examples of that kind of dispute going on right now at St. Michael’s school in Saanich where they want to rezone part of their property up in Saanich. *In Saanich, they actually have to rezone whereas in Victoria they don’t need to right now. So, there is a different kind of power shift, balance there. And then of course in Vancouver there is St. George’s school.* ... *Mediation could work in zoning disputes.* (P5, 2001, p.3, 5 & 12)

In particular, disputes arising from small lot infill policies were highlighted as candidates for consensus processes.

*Small lot infill is a hotly contested issue in neighbourhoods. Decisions end up being a popularity contest, on the basis of who wants it and who doesn’t, rather than being judged on the land use merits of the case.* CAN, the Community Association Network, is looking to formalize a mediation process around this issue. They are looking at alternative dispute resolution as a means of addressing it. There is a small group looking at starting this as a pilot project. (P4, 2001, p.1)
We’re talking about using it in our small lot policy and that may be a place where council would like to try it out and have a policy for that particular approach. The policy would suggest that the applicants take it through a mediation process with the neighbours to see if any clarification of issues come forward. (P5, 2001, p.9)

Specific issues. ... For example, we are talking about infill right now. In the Regional Growth Strategy they are suggesting that there be infill in the areas that are already serviced. What we are hearing from the public, our community; some are saying we accept infill, but when it gets down to it they don’t want it next door to them. So would you have a consensus process around the question of infill? I don’t think trying to teach people about it, do you support it, do you want to have it around all urban villages that have been identified, would work too well. I think it has to be much more focused on a particular situation.... Consensus processes can’t necessarily be around a zoning application but they do have to be around specific issues. (P6, 2001, p.14)

Presenting an opposing view, respondent RR2 argued against using consensus processes to resolve neighbourhood disputes because of the reluctance of neighbours in conflict to confront one another.

    In a perfect world yes, but in a municipality it doesn’t work that way because what ends up happening is that the neighbours will come out to a meeting and say ‘It is not that I have anything against this kind of development, however when I went into the investment with my home I purchased it on the understanding that my investment would be in this area and now I see that this is changing and therefore I have to say no to this.’ Well, what they are saying is in a pig’s eye do it somewhere else. They don’t want to damage their relationship with their neighbours. They have a relationship with their neighbours and they don’t want to damage that. ... And so it is very tricky to then say, your neighbour wants to do something. You work with your neighbour on it and when you guys agree then come to me. They don’t want to do that. And that is where you will get the same people who say ‘Who are you to be making decisions on my behalf?’ saying ‘You were elected to make these decisions.’ (RR2, 2002, p.12-13)

5.1.3 Negotiating Agreements at the Regional Level

Two respondents discussed the use of consensus processes for negotiating agreements on matters at a regional level. Respondent PGOV2 noted that the growth strategies
legislation in British Columbia gives regional districts the authority to enter into implementation agreements and formalize the partnerships.

We go a step further in our growth strategies model. We not only involve people in our process, but we also provide what is unique in legislation, or so we understand, and that is implementation agreements. So we develop a plan but we also negotiate, usually in parallel, agreements required to implement the plan. (PGOV2, 2002, p.14)

Respondent PGOV1 identified two “negotiating-agreement” tasks related to the Regional Growth Strategy that would be suitable for a consensus approach, including negotiating context statements and monitoring processes.

Another point is that once you have a context statement in your own OCP, then you are bound. A zoning bylaw that doesn’t comply with your OCP and context statement is illegal. Regional context statements could be really critical in this region. ... So they are going to be really critical here. The process where those context statements get discussed and negotiated at the Board is where a lot of the details of what is going to actually happen will be seen. It might be legitimate to have one municipality taking one approach and another taking a completely different approach.

I understand that some municipalities are very concerned about the monitoring process. I think there is scope for working that issue through, in some sort of consensus way with the municipalities. (PGOV1, 2002, p.19&20)

Respondent PGOV2 discussed a particular application of the use of consensus processes to reach agreements on regional service review and withdrawal disputes.

On a related matter, our dispute resolution work for regional services is continuing to expand as more local governments see that this mechanism to resolve disputes over services is an option. The dispute in the Comox-Strathcona Regional District, which was in progress when we last spoke, was resolved after four meetings. (PGOV2, personal communication, 2002)

5.2 Characteristics of Consensus Planning Tasks

In addition to identifying specific planning tasks that were considered to be suited to consensus processes, seven respondents described the kinds of planning tasks that would be suited to consensus processes.
5.2.1 Tasks That are Specific and Narrow in Focus

Four respondents noted the importance of concentrating on specific tasks with a narrow focus.

Specific issues. This case was specific in terms of geography and the issues. For example, we are talking about infill right now. ... So would you have a consensus process around the question of infill? I don’t think trying to teach people about it, for example, Do you support it? Do you want to have it around all urban villages that have been identified? would work too well. I think it has to be much more focused on a particular situation. (P6, 2001, p. 14)

At the regional level, I think it is easier to get more true consensus procedures put in place if you are focusing on fewer topics. ... You can also get more involvement from the different stakeholders when the focus is more narrow, rather than trying to cover the whole range of issues that may arise when considering the future of the region. (PGOV1, 2002, p.18)

Neighbourhood disputes, working on a particular development to try and find a building form or design that is going to work for people. You have the opportunity to say if you change the roof alignment what is that going to do. You can tinker because the task is detailed and small. (INT10/P8, 2002, p.16)

5.2.2 Tasks That Involve the General Public at a Small Scale

Two respondents highlighted the size of population to be involved as an issue. Two respondents suggest that using consensus processes at a regional scale would be less effective than at a local or neighbourhood scale.

If you define people as meaning the general public, I do think that these processes can be effective. However, I think the two levels of planning are very different. Local planning can be much more involving at the grass roots level. You can bring them in to work through the process. With regional planning it is pretty hard to deal with the size of the population and ensure that they have a hands on involvement all the way through. ... The more local, the more you can have the public involved in the consensus process. (PGOV1, 2002, p. 17-18)

I would have to say that the region is probably too big and the interests too diverse. I think you use consensus-based processes on things like, within a municipality you would use them within a neighbourhood kind of thing. ... I just don’t think they work real well on the region to say what do you want this liveable region to look like in thirty years. (RR2, 2002, p.7 & 15)
5.2.3 Tasks That Don’t Involve the General Public

Two respondents suggested that using consensus processes with the general public is difficult and work with organizations may be better suited to consensus processes.

The regional growth strategy works well in terms of consensus when you are dealing with other organizations because government-government or organization-organization relationships are used to things like MOUs, (Memorandum of Understanding, a sort of agreement) and those sorts of things. That is why internationally you have agreements, like the Free Trade agreement. You can walk away from them but it is hard to do it. It is hard to walk away from a treaty because it is embarrassing politically. When you are dealing with organizations, consensus process is useful because at the end of the day if they buy into the process it is politically difficult to change direction. (PGOV2, 2002, p.14-15)

When you are dealing with citizens it is tough. Citizens don’t have that same political embarrassment. Yes, you involve me in a process, and yes I agree that should happen, but today is today and now I want that. It is tougher with citizens. I think with citizens you do good consultation processes. But you are not as likely to really get consensus partly because of the larger numbers and the larger the group the more difficult consensus usually is. You are probably not really hoping for real consensus, you are hoping for a larger level of acceptance or buy-in than you would normally get. You really are, I think, just talking about a good (interviewee’s emphasis) process and are hoping for a high level of acceptance of the outcome. But you are not really looking for a long-term commitment. (PGOV2, 2002, p.15)

What is different is that we are seeking consensus between jurisdictions rather than working towards full public involvement. Then it is for the different jurisdictions to ensure that they are representing their citizens or residents as they come to the table. (PGOV1, 2002, p.4)

5.2.4 Policy Versus Operational Level Tasks

Two respondents emphasized that the policy level is appropriate for consensus processes as opposed to the day-to-day operational tasks that might require specific knowledge and expertise.

Probably more policy issues rather than day-to-day applications. (P7, 2001, p.13)
At the community level, the more you are dealing with legal nitty-gritty the harder it is to implement consensus processes because you are talking about potential legal challenges to wording of zoning bylaws. I think the public interests can get more involved in working on solutions where we are talking about what is the policy we are trying to achieve here. Not to the point that it is really general, but “What is it that we are actually trying to do here?” and not “How are we going to word this bylaw?” You want to avoid that. “What is it you are trying to achieve?” as opposed to “What are the words on paper?” (PGOV1, 2002, p. 18)

5.2.5 Concrete Versus Abstract Tasks

Finally, respondent RR2 made the distinction between concrete and abstract issues, noting the success of consensus work with specific concrete issues.

...the CRD has done some very good consensus work in things like solid waste issues. ... I think it may well be (related to something being concrete rather than abstract). I think you are inclined to get more and better stakeholder representation in a defined process than in a fuzzy process. (RR2, 2002, p. 15)

5.3 Summary of Responses to the Question: “What Planning Tasks are Suited to Consensus Processes?”

Nine respondents identified proactive planning at the community, neighbourhood or regional level as suitable tasks for consensus processes. One planner suggested consensus processes are not suitable for planning exercises. Six identified the resolution of specific planning disputes as a suitable task for consensus, including the resolution of conflicts associated with development proposals, controversial rezonings, and small lot infill developments. One elected official disagreed noting that consensus would not be suitable when neighbours had to confront each other. Two respondents, both Provincial Government officials with experience in consensus processes, identified the negotiation of agreements as a suitable task for consensus. Such agreements could include negotiation about implementing a plan or sharing and delivering services on a regional basis.

In terms of the characteristics of suitable consensus tasks, four respondents emphasized the use of specific tasks with a narrow focus and one identified concrete as opposed to
abstract tasks. Two respondents identified tasks that involved a constrained number of members of the general public while two others stated that tasks that did not involve the general public are better suited to consensus processes.

The discussion of these results is found in Chapter 7. It reflects on the findings of Chapter 3 that indicated that there is an uneven understanding on the part of respondents of consensus processes. It also examines examples of actual consensus applications found in the literature. Chapter 6 follows with the presentation of respondent responses to the subject of actions that can increase the use of consensus processes.
CHAPTER 6: ACTIONS TO SUPPORT THE INCREASED USE OF CONSENSUS PROCESSES

Chapter 6 explores the question of actions to support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning. Interview respondents were asked to identify action steps that would achieve this end. Their responses are presented below, first in detail and ending with a summary of their views.

6.1 Results

The most frequently cited action that would support the increased use of consensus processes was: convincing politicians of the value of these approaches followed by the formalization of policies, programs and legislation. Training and education of planners, politicians, the public and students of planning were also cited as supportive actions. Respondents noted the need to change existing systems of decision making in order to strengthen the integration of consensus processes. The results are presented below in order of decreasing number of respondent mentions.

6.1.1 Convince Politicians of the Value of Consensus Processes

Seven respondents identified the need to convince politicians of the value of consensus processes through education, demonstrated successes or by enabling elected officials to experience a successful consensus process for themselves. Respondent P6 noted generally the importance of increasing the acceptance of these approaches by politicians.

   More acceptance by politicians and administration that this is a good, valuable and worthwhile approach. (P6, 2001, p. 15)

Respondent PGOV1 emphasized the need for leadership at a political level to promote consensus processes to decision making.

   I think it also relies on an advocate, politically: somebody who keeps the process going. Otherwise you end up with everybody just arguing with one another. So you need leadership politically and if you don’t have that you wind up in a situation where you might be worse off than you were before because everyone is arguing even more, rather than getting to that sense of ‘we have a common vision, and yes even if we don’t agree we can work
these things through.' Instead of that you can end up arguing more than you were before. (PGOV1, 2002, p.12-13)

One respondent has credited the political leadership of Darlene Marzari, a Minister in the provincial government, for the development and successful passage of the growth strategies legislation in British Columbia, noting also the near unanimous support for the bill.

...Darlene Marzari, is the author of the legislation on regional growth strategies and has had a very large influence on the relationships between the region districts and municipalities in this province. I believe that the legislation got unanimous consent but one in the legislature, that all parties agreed to it (CONS2, 2002, p.19).

Three respondents discussed the value of educating the politicians on consensus processes.

Some sort of training, through UBCM for example, where local officials get trained not in mediation and facilitation, but how to be a participant and how to work with people in a process if they are starting a process, including how to encourage people to participate. (PGOV1, 2002, p.20)

But here I think one has to educate the elected officials because I believe this sort of process is valuable. I guess what you have to do is show that the processes really do come up with valid results. You have to do some convincing, then elected officials have to arrive at some understanding that there really is something valid in all of this. (PUB1, 2002, p.16)

I think it is more the politicians, the elected officials that could use the education. I think the planners are reasonably well-informed. It is the decision-makers, the ultimate decision-makers, the politicians, who probably need the most education. (CONS1, 2002, p.11)

Three respondents identified demonstrated successes as ways to promote the use of consensus processes.

First, we need to have some key successes that we can show elected officials. Show them where it worked well, and didn't cost that much more or cost more at all, and the problems that those elected officials were having dissipated because of it. Doing it well a few times. And that is certainly the way we are approaching the service review facilitation. (PGOV1, 2002, p.20)
You just have to continually advertise the success of consensus processes. We certainly try and do it. For example, where a regional district is thinking about doing a growth strategy, we bring in elected and staff people from other districts who have gone through the process. We try and facilitate exchange of ideas and experiences. We try to make sure the processes work well because the best sales person for a new process is success. We try and make sure that if a process is in trouble that we do all that we can do including bringing in professionals and paying for them out of our pocket to solve someone else's problem, because at the end of the day I want to have headlines in the UBCM News and all over the place that says they came to agreement by consensus. (PGOV2, 2002, p. 18)

Some demonstrated successes might help including ideas about situations where it might be best used, the experiences of other people that have used it, what worked really well, what didn't work, best practices kind of stuff. That would help. (CONS2, 2002, p. 15)

One respondent noted the importance of experience as the best way to learn the value of consensus processes.

We are hoping that if people go through a consensus process and it is a positive experience, then the next time they get bogged down in the next dispute and it comes to a vote, they are going to question: "Why the vote? Why can't we go the step further and try to come to agreement on this?" We are hoping that people will compare votes with consensus and then later on be able to say that we have to make the effort to come to a consensus on this. ... You hope that you have some converts among the people who have gone through consensus processes. When they go back to their regular lives and when another issue comes up they might say well why don't we try to get agreement. ... The solution doesn't come through legislation but through experience, doing it and learning the value of it. ... Ultimately the solution is people appreciating understanding the nature of the decision, matching the right process with the decision and understanding the value of consensus models and when and when not to use them. ... That comes through training and experience. (PGOV2, 2002, p. 10, 18, 19, 20)

6.1.2 Formalize Support Through Policies, Programs and Legislation

Four respondents identified the need to formalize support for the increased use of consensus processes through means such as policies and programs. The suggested actions recognize and support the existing public hearing process rather than replace it and focus primarily on resolving disputes. Respondent P4 described discussions in progress about
implementing an alternate dispute resolution program for conflicts arising from small lot infill initiatives.

Small lot infill is a hotly contested issue in neighbourhoods. Decisions end up being a popularity contest, on the basis of who wants it and who doesn’t, rather than being judged on the land use merits of the case. CAN, the Community Association Network, is looking to formalize a mediation process around this issue. They are looking at alternative dispute resolution as a means of addressing it. (P4, 2001, p.1)

Two respondents identified or illustrated the creation of policy as an action to support the use of consensus processes.

We're talking about using it in our small lot policy and that may be a place where council would like to try it out and have a policy for that particular approach. The policy would suggest that the applicants take it through a mediation process with the neighbours to see if any clarification of issues come forward. (P5, 2001, p.9)

I think actually the action that needs to be taken by individual municipal governments and the region as a whole is at the policy level. You have to put into policy your commitment. In my opinion if you don’t have policies on any number of topics they are ignored. Staff do not see them as being very important or legitimate. (RR1, 2002, p.15)

Formalizing municipal councils’ support in implementing consensus processes was also identified as an action step. Respondent P5 recognized Council’s role in supporting consensus processes and further suggested that Council could make the use of consensus processes in certain situations a requirement.

Staff's role is limited in terms of decision-making, but as part of mediation I think if they (Council) see staff having a role to play that could facilitate making public hearings a little less difficult they would probably support it. They need to find the resources for staff to do it. (P5, 2001, p.16)

Also, it may be made a requirement. I don’t know if they would do this but there are a certain number instances where this could work. But whether people would participate. ... Council could do that. I think other councils have done that. I think Kamloops is busy doing that. Calgary has a process now, especially on infill development. (P5, 2001, p.9)
One respondent specifically emphasized that a consensus approach for resolving land use disputes would serve to support, rather than replace, the existing process of public hearings and Council decision-making. Respondent P5 noted that consensus processes would take place before the public hearing stage and before a final decision by Council, who would not be bound by the outcome of a process.

... involving council at an earlier stage, or the stage before they go to a public hearing which could be easily done. I'm thinking about a committee of the whole, before they even send it to a public hearing they could do the report and go to committee of the whole and council could decide whether or not they are going to reject the project right there or send it on to a public hearing. (P5, 2001, p.10)

Two respondents suggested legislation as a possible action to support consensus processes, while a third respondent argued that legislation is not necessarily the answer to encouraging their use.

That is in the legislation now, this mediation process, trying to seek consensus in our regional planning. So it would make sense to bring that down to the municipalities as well, if that is the direction that government thinks that planning should go. (P5, 2001, p.14)

The Growth Strategies Act itself sets out the idea of the consensus Growth Strategy but I don't know if it ever spelled out the level of public involvement. Provincial legislation is one way, because some municipalities would rather not be bothered. (PUB2, 2002, p.8)

It wouldn't really be appropriate for us to have detailed legislation saying municipalities must follow this kind of process when making a local re-zoning decision. The Municipal Act/Local Government Act is not really a best practices manual. It is legislation and sets out minimum requirements. I don't think legislation is the problem. We sometimes do things in legislation to encourage things and in the Growth Strategies Act we certainly outlined more process than we had to because it was so new. The solution doesn't come through legislation but through experience, doing it and learning the value of it. (PGOV2, 2002, p.19)

6.1.3 Train Planning Staff in Consensus Processes and Skills

Three respondents highlighted the need to train planning staff in the use of consensus processes, and in particular in skills of mediation and negotiation. Understanding when it
is appropriate to use consensus processes was identified as an important element of this learning.

Staff's role is limited in terms of decision-making, but as part of mediation I think if they (Council) see staff having a role to play that could facilitate making public hearings a little less difficult they would probably support it. They need to find the resources for staff to do it. ... I know Jack and Doug are taking courses, but still there is a fair bit of training to be done. (P5, 2001, p.16)

I think we need more planners who have skills in these areas too, from a land use perspective. I think a lot of planners have really good technical skills but are not trained in this. And it is not easy. It is hard stuff to do. The definition of planner has been changing and it is no longer just doing maps and bylaws. (PGOV1, 2002, p.20)

We have to do more in terms of training. People are not trained in terms of consensus processes. We are training our staff because they are very good at avoiding disputes. When they hear about an issue they can get involved and stop a dispute escalating by helping people think through their interests and back off their positions and help them think through alternative solutions.... We have our staff trained at two levels. We have basic interest-based negotiation for staff who deal with client groups. Then we have a higher level of mediation training for people who are actually going to be out in the field with people who are actually going through a process. We are using professional mediators to co-mediate or co-facilitate processes until we have enough skill and experience to do our own for large and more complex issues. We are trying to develop a positive track record and advertise that. At the same time we work with other organizations to promote training. (PGOV2, 2002, p.19)

6.1.4 Educate People About Consensus Processes

Three respondents identified education generally as an action to support the use of consensus processes. Respondent CONS2 noted that information is needed about:

... how it works. I don't know that everybody would understand how it works. (CONS2, 2002, p.15)

You have to build capacity. First of all people have to learn, understand and then decide what consensus processes are and how they are going to work for them ... There are the obvious actions: education, training, resourcing, building in, at the beginning of the project, a realistic timeframe. I would say that part of the education has to be the recognition that they are not going to be appropriate everywhere. (Education) of everybody; of all of us just as a general population. (RR2, 2002, p.9 & 15)
Respondent MCI spoke of educating the public about their role in local government, in order to address the issue of cynicism.

*Education of the public to deal with the cynicism. I think if people had a better understanding of the process, of the decision-making process in government in general, local government specifically, they would have a better ability to participate (MCI, 2001, p.15)*

6.1.5 Ensure Encouragement and Support From Other Levels of Government

Three respondents indicated that support from other levels of government would serve to increase the use of consensus processes. Referring to the Province of British Columbia guidelines on how to reach agreement on a Regional Growth Strategy, respondent P8 stated:

*That should have come out with the legislation and they should have been offering training sessions and the Ministry could have come down and talked to the Board saying something like when you are embarking on it this is the sort of thing you are getting involved in. ... Maybe they could have put a little more direction in the Act as to how to do these things. There isn't much in there. There is only so much you can put in legislation but certainly if that document had been published parallel with the legislation, here is a guideline document about how you go about doing it, I think that would have been really useful. Some of the regional districts that are starting these processes up now, Squamish-Lillooet, I hope they are taking at look at this because I think it would help them do that more effectively than we did. (P8, 2002, p.18)*

*Maybe there are some grants that could come somehow from the federal or provincial to encourage the municipalities to undertake these processes. (P5, 2001, p.14)*

*...they (the Province) could come out with, and I am reluctant to say a how-to book because it might well be different in different regions. But at least some suggested guidelines or some alternatives that there should be so many meetings of a certain type, and certain kinds of notifications given to certain sections of the community and that kind of thing. (PUB2, 2002, p.9)*

6.1.6 Increase Funding to Support Consensus Processes

Three respondents identified the need for greater financial resources to support the increased use of consensus processes while one respondent emphasized the challenges of
getting more money and the need to work within existing means rather than relying on more funding.

*I think funding could be, it could be actually made into a kind of program. It would have to be resourced. Maybe there are some grants that could come somehow from the federal or provincial to encourage the municipalities to undertake these processes. Cities right now are very strapped for funding.* (P5, 2001, p.14)

More money. (P6, 2001, p.15)

*You need to have money to do this. It is a lot more costly to do this than take a vote and have a majority decision.* (MC1, 2001, p.15)

*There really isn’t a lot of money there for good consultation process. On the other hand, you could go on forever on this so you work with what you have and try to do the best job you can within the means. ... So more money would be nice but I don’t know where that will come from today. At one stage in the early 90s the government was putting a lot of money into consensus processes and consultation and public process. But, there was more money around.* (CONS1, 2002, p.11)

6.1.7 Change Existing Systems of Decision-Making and Government

Two respondents identified the need to change existing systems of decision-making to support the increased use of consensus processes to planning. Respondent P8 proposed the inclusion of neighbourhood councils in the political structure and MC1 suggested making political service a requirement for citizens.

*I would be quite happy if we had neighbourhood councils or neighbourhood organizations that were established as part of the formal political structure of the community, where if you wanted to be a representative for your particular neighbourhood you actually had to get elected to hold that office. I think that would open up an awful lot more.* (P8, 2002, p.20)

*I think if people had a better understanding of the process, of the decision-making process in government in general, local government specifically, they would have a better ability to participate. I am advocating, by the way, elected officials by conscription. I think everybody should, as with jury duty, I think everybody should have a turn as an elected official in their lifetime. I think we would have a softer gentler government and a much better appreciation of how the system works.* (MC1, 2001, p.15)
6.1.8 Train Future Planners in Consensus Processes and Skills

One respondent identified the need to incorporate training in consensus processes into the curricula of planning schools.

_This should be a mandatory part of the planning curriculum, not just training in dispute resolution but in choosing the right process and understanding consultation, consensus process, and decision-making. Understanding all the processes that are out there, the criteria, the choices you make and the implications. They have to understand the tool to choose, even if they don't have the skills to run the process._ (PGOV2, 2002, p.19)

6.2 Summary

Six respondents identified as a desirable action, convincing politicians of the value of these approaches through education, demonstrated successes or personal experience of a consensus process. Four respondents advocated for the formalization of policies, programs and legislation to increase the use of consensus processes. In total 7 respondents emphasized the need for greater understanding and knowledge of these processes through the training and education of planners, politicians, the public and students of planning. Six respondents identified the need for more resources whether through support from other levels of government or specifically for more funding of such approaches. Finally, 2 respondents noted the need to change existing systems of decision making in order to strengthen the integration of consensus processes.

Chapter 7 discusses these results in the context of the literature and presents conclusions related to the issue of actions to support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

Chapter 7 interprets and discusses the findings of the research in 3 sections, one for each of the original three research questions. The findings are discussed in the context of the literature and key finding and conclusions are introduced at appropriate points throughout the text.

7.1 Research Question 1: What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?

The respondents identified a number of obstacles to the use of consensus processes. While the respondents have identified valid obstacles, the literature on consensus processes acknowledges many of the obstacles and identifies actions and arguments to counter them. The following discussion on the question of obstacles aims to identify what remain as the key unanswered challenges to using consensus processes in local and regional planning and draw out pertinent conclusions.

7.1.1 Resources

Nine respondents identified time or money as an obstacle to the use of consensus processes. The literature recognizes that consensus processes take time and cost money. Cormick et al. state that a consensus process addressing sustainability issues typically takes many months (1996, p.90). Dorcey notes that by the mid-1990s in Canada, the perception that multistakeholder consensus processes were lengthy and produced less than satisfactory results led to the questioning of their use (2002, p.4).

Cormick et al. and Dorcey accept this characteristic of consensus processes but support their increased use in appropriate circumstances. Both authors emphasize the importance of making a strategic and considered decision about whether a consensus process is suitable before embarking on such an approach. Dorcey predicts the increased use of multistakeholder processes with an accompanying refinement and development in their application. An important refinement will be the inclusion of an initial step: making
strategic and discerning choices with regard to when and how to use multistakeholder approaches most effectively (Dorcey, 2002).

Cormick et al. stress the importance of giving consideration to whether there is sufficient strength of purpose for the parties to enter a consensus process. They also emphasize that alternatives to consensus negotiations should be explored and a careful assessment of the pros and cons carried out. In their words:

The parties should have a common concern and believe that a consensus process offers the best opportunity for addressing it. This belief requires an informed understanding of consensus processes and a realistic view of the alternatives. If the parties conclude that consensus processes offer a better option to pursue their interest, then a greater commitment to the process and its outcomes will be generated" (1995, p.15).

Cormick et al. identify examples of purposes that bring parties to a consensus process, reasons why a consensus process should not be used, questions to assist groups to determine if there is sufficient strength of purpose and pros and cons to consider including whether future relationships are important and whether precedent and formality are preferred over flexibility and informality (p.15 –22).

With respect to the issue of time frames, Cormick et al. recommend that once the parties have agreed that there is reason to embark upon a consensus process participants should recognize and acknowledge that these processes can take time, take steps at the outset to develop, as a group, time lines for the process and be flexible about time lines since external factors can cause unforeseen delays (1996, p. 88-94).

Thomas argues that if public involvement is required to ensure a well-informed decision and successful implementation, a time constraint is not a valid justification for limiting public involvement. He makes the argument that the time saved in making a decision by limiting public involvement can result in increased public opposition and put the decision at risk. He further argues that time spent to involve more actors can gain time in the implementation stage because the actors develop support for the decision. Any analysis
of time as a constraint must weigh both the decision-making and implementation aspects (Thomas, 1995, p.90).

Interview respondents identified cost as an obstacle, including the cost of developing and maintaining a staff skilled and knowledgeable about the design and management of such processes. Elaborating on the issue, two respondents raised the question of who should pay for them and a third noted that it might be necessary to subsidize some participants who would not otherwise be able to afford to participate. The literature provides some assistance in addressing these questions. One source identifies three examples of how the costs related to a consensus mediated conflict might be distributed in a municipal context:

- the developer whose proposal is at issue pays but a multi-party process selects a mediator
- all parties contribute equally
- the municipality pays and charges a surcharge on zone and municipal plan change applications to cover the costs (City of Kitchener, 1996a, p.12-13).

Dorsey recognizes the problematic situation where parties of greatly differing levels of resources would equally bear the impacts of an outcome. Dorsey argues for new governance models that are progressive by which he means models that take ethical responsibility for those who may be disadvantaged as a result of lack of knowledge or resources (2002, p.11). Thomas also notes, in particular with respect to the use of mediation that the question of how such services will be paid is pressing. He goes on to identify a range of possible sources of funds for payment of the services (1995, p.130). Cormick et al. outline techniques for equalizing resources among consensus groups including providing “block” intervenor funding, having project proponents reimburse direct meeting costs, and providing honoraria to compensate for lost work/business time (1996, p.62).

In summary, the literature emphasizes the importance of recognizing the associated costs and time for consensus processes and offers ways to take those into account realistically. More importantly, the literature highlights the need to carry out consensus processes only
when the circumstances are suitable. The implication is that if a consensus process is found to be necessary, the application of resources will be justified. A situation-dependent application of consensus processes resonates with Thomas' (1996) contingent model of decision-making, which is discussed in more detail later in the chapter and forms the basis of a key conclusion of the thesis.

7.1.2 Stakeholder Approach

7.1.2.1 Full representation

On the issue of ensuring full representation, 7 respondents raised concerns about how to ensure full and avoid self-selected representation. There is ample evidence in the literature supporting an open and inclusive approach to consensus processes that addresses the issue of ensuring full representation (Cormick et al., 1996; Innes, 1995 and 1992; Healey, 1997). The literature however often promotes this kind of approach without offering suggestions about how to achieve full representation. Cormick et al. and Thomas offer guidance. In addition to ensuring that all key stakeholders should be welcome to participate without exclusion, the process should anticipate and be prepared for the addition of interests along the way. Additionally, the first question a consensus group should ask themselves is who should be here that is not (Cormick et al., 1996).

Thomas advocates in favour of being too inclusive rather than too exclusive, in particular at the early stages of a public process (1995, p.60). He promotes a broad exploration of who the possible relevant interested parties might be including all organized and unorganized citizens who could provide relevant information about preferences of the public or affect the successful implementation of the decision (1995, p.56). He provides guidance about how to identify as many as possible of the relevant groups including thinking broadly about who might be involved, consulting available lists of organizations, doing a rough historical analysis of groups previously involved, brainstorming with agency staff and calling key contacts in the community (1995, p.59-60). He emphasizes not forgetting the unorganized groups and like Cormick et al. suggests that in addition to attempting to identify all possible groups through a top-down approach, managers of
public process should anticipate the late emergence of “latent” or self-defined groups (1995, p.64).

Thomas argues that the risks can be mitigated by doing a thorough investigation of who the relevant groups might be. Part of this process of investigation includes allowing maximum opportunity for the public to voice their opinion, which could reveal an issue around which a group might coalesce (1995, p.62). These strategies for ensuring full representation emphasize the importance of the skill and quality of the implementation of the process and the availability of resources. In this context, the thesis proposes that a situation in which there is uncertainty about whether the identified groups fully represent the views of those impacted or whether new groups will form, exposes a consensus process to an element of risk.

7.1.2.2 Adequate representation of the public view

Six respondents raised the question of adequate representation of the public view, an issue that is of particular concern to local and regional governments. Two respondents suggested that working with government agencies and elected officials is likely to bring about more success than trying to incorporate the general public in a consensus process. At the regional level in British Columbia, consensus processes that directly involve municipal representatives and impacted government agencies are promoted for developing regional growth strategies and regional service agreements. In these situations, the negotiation process takes place one step removed from the general public. Elected officials are seen to represent the broader public, with whom they consult for input. In such a situation, the public view would generally not be a negotiated mutually agreed upon or commonly articulated view, but rather a collection of views that an elected official must weigh in his or her assessment of a decision. This approach avoids the pitfalls of having to deal with an ill-defined body with quite probably no clearly and commonly articulated interests.

Thomas highlights the difficulty of adequately representing the public in his discussion of how to identify and represent unorganized groups and offers advice about how best to
anticipate and attempt to identify possible “latent” groups (p. 60). Cormick et al. also raise this issue. They offer two views of how the public interest can be adequately represented. In the context of consensus processes, the first view suggests that the public interest is represented by the merged or negotiated sum of the various interests in a community. By ensuring that the interests are adequately represented in a consensus process the public interest has a voice. The second view presented by Cormick et al. is that elected officials are best placed to understand and represent the public view and they, or an appointed representative, should be at the negotiating table (Cormick et al., 1996, p. 84). Cormick et al. further acknowledge that representation of the public is a complex issue and emphasize the need for transparency and links to existing legal and political institutions as ways to maintain credibility, accountability and public confidence in consensus processes (Cormick et al., 1996, p.84).

Innes supports Cormick et al.’s first view and argues that consensus stakeholder processes can approximate the public view effectively, as a “unitary” public view rather than as the accumulation of individual interests (1996, p.465). She emphasizes that in order for a consensus process to speak for the public view it must be widely representative of the views held among the members of the public (1996, p. 465) and goes on to describe research that indicates how this can be achieved, including an open inclusive policy to participation, active seeking out of stakeholders to ensure full representation, and accommodation for the inclusion of previously inactive interests. Her arguments are grounded in research based on eight in-depth case studies of consensus processes applied to growth and environmental issues in California and the New Jersey state planning process. It is important to note that 4 of the 8 processes for which Innes provides information about their duration, lasted more than 2 years, three of them lasting 5 years. These are large scale undertakings, unlike a neighbourhood dispute resolution, and would require the accompanying resources to adequately support them.

Dorcey challenges the second view of Cormick et al.’s. He provides evidence of the public’s dissatisfaction with existing governance systems and argues for changes to those institutions including for example, improved electoral representation and accountability
processes (2002, p.13). Dorcey notes that along with the increase in public dissatisfaction there has been a parallel rise in the use of innovative multi-stakeholder approaches that have introduced greater citizen involvement into complex decision-making tasks. He argues that the time is ripe, particularly in the Greater Vancouver region, for the emergence of a new model of governance that will support greater citizen involvement in the governance process through the use of multi-stakeholder approaches (2002, p. 13). Both Innes and Healey also call for the redesign of planning and decision-making institutions to support the use of consensus processes. In particular, Healey emphasizes the need to make decision-making more participatory and democratic (1997, p.288).

As illustrated in the paragraphs above, the data and the literature offer three approaches to the challenge of inadequate public representation in consensus processes: find ways that do not involve the public directly; address the issue within existing systems; change the existing governance systems. The first acknowledges the associated difficulties and continues in a practical vein to develop consensus methodology and expertise, but sidesteps the issue by not attempting to involve the public directly. Such an approach represents an important advance in the development of consensus methodology and in the increased exposure of these processes to government and elected officials, although it does not provide insights into how best to represent the public.

The second approach is represented by Cormick et al., Thomas and Innes, who provide guidance on how to address the issue within the context of existing systems of governance. Their observations suggest that involving the public in a consensus process is possible, but can be complex and lengthy, requiring an appropriate level of investment of resources that reflects this complexity. Municipalities and regions involve the public in community-based planning processes. These processes incur costs whether they are consensus or not, however by design, consensus processes rely on the existence of organized groups. The need to support equitable participation by ensuring that groups have adequate organizational support introduces an additional cost factor. If the public is not adequately represented by existing interest groups and requires the formation of many...
sub-groups for effective participation, there will be an increase in logistical complexity, time, cost and in the risk to the process. It will also take particular effort to provide maximum opportunity for yet-to-be formed groups to come forward so subsequent risk to a decision does not undo the work of the consensus process. The thesis takes the view that to ensure adequate involvement of the public, and more broadly to ensure success of a consensus approach to other planning-related activities, skilful design and management of the process is critical. An appropriate level of resources will also be required. The thesis also finds that more research is required to better understand how the public can be effectively involved in consensus local planning exercises and that this research must be based on the practical implementation, documentation and evaluation of such consensus applications.

Finally, the third approach to adequately involving the public in consensus processes is to change the existing governance system. Along with Innes and Healey, Dorcey reflects this more far-reaching approach to make decision-making processes more democratic through his recommendation for a process to explore governance reform. A Citizens’ Commission on Greater Vancouver Governance would employ a multi-stakeholder approach in the design of its membership, procedures, financing, mandate and would then examine two key issues: alternative systems for urban governance and the role of multi-stakeholder processes in the emerging governance system (Dorcey, 2002, p.20-21).

Respondents also described the obstacle of adequately representing the public in terms of the democratic nature of the processes: consensus processes are no more democratic that other systems of decision-making and governance because they do not succeed in effectively representing the public view. The implication of the critique is that consensus processes should resolve the democratic issue and Healey and Dorcey argue that consensus processes do hold promise for such an aim.

Using an example from the respondent interview data, the following paragraph explores the challenges that existing electoral models present to maximizing the strengths of consensus processes.
One respondent suggested that the creation of a neighbourhood scale of government could improve the democratic-ness of a consensus process. While refining the scale of representative groups may encourage more voices to come forward, this is not guaranteed; and without increased participation such an approach is simply an extension of the existing form of governance that has been criticized for not being sufficiently representative of the public view. A smaller forum has the potential to increase the quality of the discussion within a governance unit that remains fixed, but does not offer the flexibility and support to issue-specific groups coalescing around an issue of relevance that is not geographically driven. A greater number of groups would have to be accommodated by a consensus process and this could easily increase the complexity and cost. If both neighbourhood electoral groups as well as interest-specific groups are eligible for inclusion, this also has the potential to expand the scale of the process. The question arises for what issues should consensus processes be used, and would all neighbourhood and interest groups be expected to participate each time. It is not clear that adding another level of government would accommodate consensus processes significantly better than the existing system.

Consensus processes have many strengths to offer an improved system of governance, including the possibility of generating well-considered, innovative and responsive solutions, and cementing long term relationships that are important to successful implementation and future resolution of problems. However, a revised governance system must be able to accommodate a consensus approach in a way that takes advantage of their strengths. The thesis concludes that a process to explore a revised system of governance will benefit from a rigorous consideration of the role consensus processes can play to help achieve this aim and how they can be integrated into a new system in such a way that their strengths are maximized.

Exploring a revised system of governance will necessarily entail a study of how best to involve the broad public in consensus processes, an issue which has not yet been fully
resolved in the literature, in particular with respect to broad-based planning exercises at the local level. Further research that is grounded in the practical application of consensus processes at the local level is required.

7.1.2.3 Divisive processes that put people into camps

One respondent reported anecdotal evidence noting that regional land use consensus processes in British Columbia were found to be divisive because they "put people in camps" (P8, 2002, p.8). Based on the literature and the communicative theory behind consensus processes, one would not expect this to be the case. On the contrary one would expect that relationships of mutual trust and respect would lead to a mutually supported consensus outcome. Is this a case of how theory and practice often diverge? Is it possible that the process simply did not work as well as it might have in this particular situation? The answer to that case-specific question is beyond the scope of the thesis, but the example illustrates the weakness of anecdotal evidence since the claim made here that stakeholder consensus based approaches are divisive is countered by other evidence that illustrates the success of consensus processes in strengthening relationships. For example, in the New Jersey consensus state planning process a former head of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce noted: "I originally came loaded with prejudices. Government was bad and we should beat up on them so they can let brilliant people in the private sector do what they do. For me learning how good public servants can be was the most transforming experience" (Innes, 1992, p. 440).

7.1.3 Accountability

With respect to the view reported by one respondent that stakeholder consensus processes are not accountable, Cormick et al. offer some useful advice (1996, p.78-86). They emphasize the importance of group representatives speaking effectively for their interests; having mechanisms for timely feedback and reporting to constituencies; and keeping the public informed (1996, p. 78). Thomas offers a list of ways to assess the legitimacy of groups to gain some understanding of whom they represent (1995, p. 67). Both Thomas and Cormick et al. discuss accountability within the context of having organized groups. It is the question of how to effectively and accountably involve
unorganized groups, including the general public, that presents a challenge to a consensus process. Dorcey (2002) recognizes the lack of accountability and transparency in existing governance decision-making processes and calls for revised governance models to improve accountability. He recommends a reformed urban electoral model that would provide greater voice by the citizenry, and favours a revised governance model that incorporates a strong multi-stakeholder approach.

The literature emphasizes the link between accountability and the existence of well-functioning organized groups. Ensuring the effective and accountable participation of groups as the number of participants increases will potentially increase the cost and time resources required by the consensus process. The thesis concludes that consideration of whether to involve the impacted public in a consensus community planning exercise for example will require an evaluation of whether this approach well deliver sufficient benefit at a possibly elevated cost.

7.1.4 Obstacles: Factors for Evaluating Consensus Suitability
Cormick et al. outlined criteria to assist in assessing whether a particular decision-making situation is suitable for a consensus approach. These include a common strength of purpose among participants and belief that a negotiation-based process will serve their needs better than other possible alternative approaches (1996, p. 15). Respondents identified four obstacles that can be viewed as additional factors for evaluating whether the timing and circumstances are appropriate for a consensus process. The four obstacles can be added to Cormick et al.’s list of questions for doing a suitability assessment and include: the political context in the Capital Regional District, a lack of commitment and buy-in to the process, reluctance to give up decision-making power, and emotional attachment of people to their homes and properties.

In the Capital Regional District, several municipal representatives indicated their disinterest in a regional vision of any kind and a preference to continue solving their municipal problems without a growth management plan. These responses revealed a perception that municipalities were forced into doing a growth strategy. A number of
municipal representatives indicated that they didn't want a regional strategy let alone a process that would force them into closer relationships. On the contrary, they preferred to do things in their own way unless they saw that an initiative met their needs, which as RR2 noted (2002, p.15), it did in the case of regional agreements on solid waste issues. These descriptions highlight the lack of a strong commitment to the process and Cormick et al.'s point is relevant here: strength of commitment to a consensus process is fundamental to the success of a process.

Two respondents noted as obstacles the possible lack of willingness of members of the public to give up direct political influence in favor of a consensus process. Forester (1999, p.7) argues that consensus processes do not always sufficiently acknowledge imbalances of power and therefore may not provide the best option for someone who has access to power in a decision making process. Innes counters that consensus processes can destabilize power relations (1995, p.186) and Cormick et al. support her at least partly, noting that a consensus process temporarily evens out power imbalances (1996, p.35). The literature is not consistent on whether the reluctance to give up power serves as an obstacle to using consensus processes. It is probable that a person or group who finds the alternative of using direct political influence more likely to meet their needs than a consensus process would have a lower level of commitment to the process and would possibly decline to participate. If that were to occur, Cormick et al.'s assessment cautions against proceeding, in particular if they are key players.

The thesis concludes that an assessment of the extent to which the four factors discussed above are present would contribute to an understanding of the strength of the common purpose among participants (Cormick et al., 1996) and whether a consensus process is the best way for participants to meet their needs. Following Cormick et al.'s model for assessing consensus suitability, if these exist in sufficient strength of common purpose there is reason to consider a consensus process (1996, p.15-22).
7.1.5 Decision Quality Suffers

With respect to the obstacle raised by three respondents that decision quality in consensus processes suffers, three other respondents countered that these processes can generate good or even better solutions, as well as implementable ones. A fourth respondent suggested that good facilitation will ensure that the discussion airs underlying interests and does not merely obtain consensus on general, non-contentious issues. Cormick et al. argue that when the participants come to understand each other’s interests sufficiently well, they will be able to devise solutions that benefit all of the parties (1996, p.111). Thomas argues that public involvement can be crucial not only to the quality of the decision made but also to the quality or success of its implementation (1995, p.56). Innes argues that it is the social construction of knowledge through consensus multi-stakeholder processes that generate good decisions that transform readily into action (1995, p.185). Healey talks of the innovative potential of consensus stakeholder approaches to produce creative outcomes and Forester argues in favour of using consensus processes as a practical and realistic way to solve problems (1999, p.84). The literature strongly supports the potential of consensus processes to generate good quality solutions but would benefit from a greater number of examples of actual successful outcomes arising from a consensus process in local or regional planning.

On the subject of the quality of the outcome of a consensus approach, one respondent noted in hindsight as the Regional Growth Strategy process edged closer to an end, that the process might have benefited from spending considerably more time at the beginning discussing how to approach the task. Perhaps this would have included learning about consensus processes, discussions about laying out ground rules, and deciding how participants would decide on the final outcome; all the things that lay the solid foundation for good consensus work. Maybe this would have improved the chances of reaching a consensus before turning to the dispute resolution processes as provided for in the growth strategies legislation, and maybe not, but the comment reveals a recognition of the need for a different kind of process in order to achieve consensus. Research presented in Chapter 3 indicates that a number of respondents do not distinguish between a consensus
outcome and the need to use a specific consensus methodology to get such an outcome. Dorcey makes the point that the success of consensus processes depends to a large extent on the personal approach of the individuals who are facilitating or mediating the process. He notes that research to date is unable to provide an advanced understanding of how such individuals achieve success. Case studies reveal that they do not always follow best practice guidelines nor do in practice what they profess to do (Dorcey, 2002, p.10). Cormick et al. (1996) devote 10 chapters to providing guidance on the successful implementation of a consensus approach. The Province of British Columbia (1999 and 2000) likewise has produced documentation to support strong design and implementation.

The thesis concludes that consensus processes offer potential for good quality innovative solutions, but the quality of the design of the process and its implementation, including skilled facilitators and mediators, is a fundamental element of this success. This aspect of ensuring a successful consensus approach is understated and not sufficiently well recognized.

7.1.6 Existing Local Government System

Respondents noted that the existing local government machine poses its challenges to the use of consensus processes. The literature indicates that these challenges can be overcome and that the existing system does not preclude the use of consensus processes. Diehl shows how consensus processes can address development application conflicts taking into account the existing process of public hearings (1995). He outlines a number of steps that are considered essential for the success of a mediation process within a local government setting. These include:

- obtaining Council’s authorization at the outset;
- not permitting mediation to occur after the public hearing "to avoid legal pitfalls and to ensure that council members do not defer uncomfortable or complex decisions to another body or process";
- replacing the traditional staff report with a mediator’s report;
- obtaining agreement by participants and Council not to discuss the issues during mediation and prior to the public hearing;
- insuring a time-sensitive framework;
- using a non-binding mediation process so that Council is not bound to the outcome of the process (1995, p. 33).

The process as described by Diehl exposes consensus outcomes to possible unravelling by opening them up to the public for input, but as the literature suggests a good inclusive process can be designed to anticipate and include new voices along the way. This should work towards precluding objections that could unravel an agreement. Cormick et al. propose an additional action to secure a consensus decision that could be subject to broad public reaction. Once a consensus is reached, they recommend holding public meetings or hearings to ensure that consensus is broadly acceptable and that no interests or groups have been left out of the process (1996, p. 26-27). It is the view of the thesis that consensus processes can be usefully and successfully integrated into existing systems of local government, in particular for local specific planning-related conflicts such as development permission challenges, noise complaints, or zoning disputes.

7.1.7 Addressing Obstacles with a Contingency Approach

Thomas has articulated a contingent approach for making decisions related to public involvement such as: should the public be involved, to what extent and in what manner? It is a contingent approach in the sense that the decision-making approach and level of public involvement are chosen based on the particulars of the situation. One of Thomas’ 5 decision types is the public decision. While the “public decision” type does not explicitly state that consensus processes are included, they would comfortably fit in this category. The thesis supports Thomas’ contingent approach, although not all elements of his decision-making model. Thomas’ decision-making rule about when a public decision should be encouraged is limiting in its requirement that the public agree with the agency’s goals. In such situations Thomas argues that there is little risk to decision quality but also emphasizes that the manager maintain an active role in decision-making. This aspect of the model can be viewed as a token transfer of decision-making power to
the public, and is hardly an increase in sharing of meaningful decision-making power. The literature and examples from practice have shown that it is precisely in areas of conflict and disagreement (with agency goals for example) that consensus processes have strength.

The thesis supports a contingent approach to determining the suitability of a situation to consensus processes. This means consensus processes should be used where and when they are most likely to achieve an agreement that is acceptable to the parties involved. This view, which draws on the work of Cormick et al. and Thomas, along with the key findings of this and the two subsequent sections, have led to the creation of a framework for assessing consensus suitability. The framework, which has been developed as a practical tool with planners and others in the planning field in mind, draws on the findings from research on the three research questions and is presented in detail in Chapter 8.

7.1.8 Summary of Key Findings About the Obstacles to Using Consensus Processes

To summarize Chapter 7, Section A, the key findings from the research on the question “What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?” are presented below:

- There will be risk to a consensus process if there is little assurance that the participation is broadly representative of the affected constituents and if there is uncertainty or lack of knowledge about the emergence of latent groups.
- The skillful design and implementation, including facilitation, of a consensus process is crucial to its success.
- Assessment of a situation for its suitability to a consensus approach is critical. This leads to the development of a contingent application of consensus to local and regional planning.
- Four factors identified in the research can contribute to an assessment of the strength of common purpose proposed by Cormick et al. as an assessment tool for consensus suitability.
- Applying consensus processes to local and regional planning activities within existing systems of government is possible. For local, small-scale planning-related conflicts the literature provides evidence that this can be achieved.
- The issue of how best to involve the public in consensus broad-based municipal level planning activities is not yet adequately resolved. Such applications are largely untested and will require further research based on actual practice and implementation.
- The thesis proposes a contingent approach to the application of consensus processes to local and regional planning activities. Drawing on Cormick et al., Thomas and key findings, it presents a framework for assessing consensus suitability (see Chapter 8).

7.2 Research Question 2: What kinds of local and regional planning tasks are well suited to consensus processes?

7.2.1 Examples from the Literature
The academic literature suggests that consensus processes are suited to an unlimited range of tasks. Cormick et al. assert that consensus processes can be used in a wide array of circumstances. They identify as suitable to consensus processes the development of policies, regulations and procedures; design of projects and programs; and the resolution of issues that can arise from the implementation of projects and programs (1996, p.6). They further note that consensus processes can be used when conflicts are emerging, or when they have reached crisis proportion including when positions have hardened (1996, p.6). Rather than focusing on specific kinds of tasks, Thomas focuses on the situation. His model of decision making for public involvement asks, for any particular situation, whether there is a need for further information; whether acceptance by the public can be assumed; and whether and how the public is organized. Based on the answers to these questions, Thomas proposes greater or less public involvement and different types of public involvement, from information gathering to public decision-making.
Dorcey notes that consensus-building processes have been used for a wide range of issues, at varying levels of government from local to global, and for tasks ranging from the development of legislation and policies to plans and project implementation (2002, p. 4). He also provides examples of consensus multi-stakeholder processes including regional level management and planning tasks to build consensus among provincial agencies, federal agencies and other stakeholders on environmental and resource management issues (2002, p.15).

On a general level, Innes states that strategies, plans, policies or actions are candidates for consensus resolution (1999, p.11). More specifically, she identifies regional planning tasks for which consensus processes have been used. One examination of existing processes identifies the tasks of writing, overseeing and reviewing legislation on growth management; preparing, adopting and revising state growth management plans; negotiating compliance of local plans with state plans; and negotiating agreement on state plans with counties and municipalities using a process called cross-acceptance (1992, p. 442). Another research study identifies examples of consensus tasks: the development of growth management legislation in California, management plans for large-scale water systems, regional strategies, and conservation plans for endangered species (Innes, 1999, p.464). These examples are proactive planning tasks primarily at a regional (state) level. Innes notes that municipalities seldom use consensus building for comprehensive planning (1999, p. 469). Drawing her examples from the American context, she suggests that existing legislation about public involvement emphasizes other forms of involvement such as public hearings. She also suggests that stakeholders from neighbouring jurisdictions and government agencies have an interest but little legitimacy to participate. Therefore they do little to cooperate in implementation, causing the plan to lose legitimacy, which in turn discourages active involvement. Nevertheless she argues that consensus process can be applied to a municipal context (1999, p.469).

British Columbia’s Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services promotes the use of consensus processes for proactive planning tasks, reactive dispute resolution tasks and tasks that are concrete in nature. Examples include developing regional growth
strategies, resolving disputes in the event of a failure to reach consensus on a growth strategy, and reaching agreements on regional service review and withdrawal disputes (Province of British Columbia, 2000). Consensus processes were being applied to resolve disputes arising from the refusal of municipalities to accept the Capital Regional District's proposed Regional Growth Strategy bylaw during the referral period ending October 31, 2002 (Osborne, A., email communication, 17 Oct. 2002). They have been used to develop implementation service agreements, for example, between the Regional District of Nanaimo and the Ministry of Transportation to deal with access management along the new Island Highway (Capital Regional District, 2002b). They have also been used to resolve a regional service dispute in the Comox-Strathcona Regional District (Osborne, A., email communication, 2002). The development of a growth strategy for the Capital Regional District is legislated by the Growth Strategies Act, which promotes the use of consensus techniques for regional planning and growth strategies in particular. However, one respondent indicated that a rigorous consensus methodology was not used in the Capital Regional District to develop its regional growth strategy (P8, email communication, 24 Sep. 2001). While planning tasks are included in the realm of tasks for consensus application, most of the successful examples cited in the literature and data reviewed include dispute resolution or service agreement negotiations.

Other sources reveal that the use of consensus processes has been considered for dispute resolution of planning conflicts, in particular disputes arising from small lot infill policies:

... distributed the draft Small Lot House Program and referred the group to section 4 in the Appendix which is a proposed shared decision making process to be developed in consultation with the Community Association Network and the UDI. This is proposed for small lot developments where there is not a satisfactory level of support in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood and the developer are to undertake a shared decision-making process prior to public hearing (City of Victoria, 2001).

A number of examples of existing applications of consensus processes to planning tasks, primarily for resolving planning-related disputes, come from areas other than the Capital
Regional District in British Columbia and include Calgary, Edmonton, Kamloops and Kitchener.

The Calgary Planning Mediation Program was developed to test mediation as a means of resolving disputes between stakeholders arising from planning applications. Examples of cases resolved by consensus processes in Calgary include:
- a dispute between industrial and residential parties regarding noise and dust;
- locating a halfway house for mentally ill on parole in a residential community;
- commercial land owners regarding city parking approvals;
- a community opposing new duplex;
- an existing poultry plant opposed by neighbours;
- fence alignment wrong between new condominium and 10 houses;
- bar noise impacting on nearby housing (Lomax, 2000).

In the Edmonton Community Mediation Program, the majority of cases for which mediated solutions were used dealt with dog barking and other noise complaints (Lomax, 2000). Alternate dispute resolution methods are used in the City of Kitchener to mediate appeals after decisions are taken, but the city is also working to introduce dispute resolution at the front end of the process, before decisions are taken (City of Kitchener, 1996a). The City of Kamloops has instituted alternate dispute resolution approaches to resolve development disputes through the use of mediation at the rezoning stage (Diehl, 1995, p.30).

7.2.2 Long-term Relationships and Shaping a Framework for Consensus Suitability
The literature on consensus processes to planning spends considerable time discussing the aspect of social learning and the importance of developing relationships during the consensus process that lead to commonly shared understandings of the problem and solutions that meet the needs of the participants (Innes, 1995; Healey, 1997). An interview respondent experienced in the application of consensus processes at the regional government level emphasized the need to have long-term relationships for the successful implementation of the solution as a criteria for using consensus processes.
Developing further Thomas’ notion of a contingent approach that was introduced earlier, the criteria of building long-term relationships is incorporated into a framework for deciding whether to use a consensus approach (see Chapter 8).

7.2.3 Dispute Resolution and Community Planning Tasks

The distinction between local scale planning-related conflicts and broad-based community-level planning exercises is an important one. Nine respondents identified planning or proactive exercises as suitable for consensus processes, yet the interview data and literature examined, particularly in a Canadian context, reveal few real examples of the use of consensus processes for planning at the neighbourhood or municipal level.

In an American context, Innes’ research indicates that there are few examples of consensus building for planning at the municipal level. She has suggested why there are so few examples of consensus planning exercises at the municipal level including existing processes for public involvement that do not embrace consensus processes and a structure that does not encourage neighboring jurisdictions and government agencies to participate, thereby eroding the successful implementation of any consensus decisions made without them (Innes, 1999). Another source lists 100 case studies of land use mediation in the United States (CBI, 2003). Of these 15 are described as being in the category of comprehensive planning. However, in a related working paper, at least one of the cases that was described as comprehensive planning was upon closer inspection the resolution of a conflict between the state and a local government over compliance of the local government’s plan with the state growth plan (Lampe and Kaplan, 1999). While there may be more examples of consensus comprehensive planning at the municipal level in the United States than Innes suggests, it remains that there appears to be reluctance in the Canadian context to embark upon the use of consensus for planning at the local level.

In addition to Innes’ suggestions, the author proposes that it is also the unresolved challenge of how to effectively involve the public that generates reluctance to embark on the use of consensus for planning at the local level. The regional planning processes
proposed by the Province of British Columbia are designed to work without the public voice represented directly at the table. In British Columbia’s regional planning examples, the public is represented by elected officials who are informed by mandatory consultation processes. The tasks described here avoid the sticky issue of how to effectively involve the general public, who would not necessarily be represented by organized interest groups.

The interview data help to suggest reasons why there appears to be a greater tendency towards using consensus processes for dispute resolution and agreement negotiation tasks as opposed to broader-based planning exercises. The data reveal factors for consideration in identifying consensus tasks: specific versus general, scale, level of public involvement, and concrete versus abstract nature of the tasks. Dispute resolution tasks at the municipal level represent specific issues that target a narrow geographic area. They are also generally concrete in nature and represent a certain immediate conflict rather than an impending one. They lend themselves to an easier identification of stakeholders, and would not generally necessitate the inclusion of a broad selection of public voices, as would a community planning exercise. Innes recognizes the importance of concrete and immediate issues, but rather than seeing this as an obstacle to doing broader-based consensus municipal planning exercises, she views it as a way to root the planning exercise in current issues while developing general policies and plans (1999, p.469). It is worth noting that a concrete and specific task could be a hindrance to the successful resolution of a dispute, for example if the issue directly impacts one of the parties and possibly when home ownership is involved. Judgement will be required to assess the suitability of success for consensus and whether the concrete and specific nature of the task will act against a consensus approach or not.

The thesis proposes that a suitable way for a local government to start to implement consensus processes is to begin with the resolution of planning-related disputes and the literature documenting real cases provides agencies guidance on where to begin. However, the step up from using consensus processes for local planning dispute resolution to using consensus for broader-based planning exercises is a large one, and not
one that is likely to arise naturally from experience in local dispute resolution. Scaling the process up from a finite dispute resolution task to one that deals with the public and issues that are not immediate and concrete will require a deliberate and informed effort. It will be essential to have skilled and experienced people to design the process and carry it out, including strong facilitation and mediation. Because of the lack of well-documented experience about how to involve the public in these local-level processes, there will be an element of learning along the way, and documentation and evaluation of the process will be an important step. The thesis has argued that consensus processes offer valuable benefits for a wide range of tasks and in this light recommends that further research on how the public can be effectively involved in consensus local-level planning tasks be carried out. Such research must be grounded in the practical application of these processes within a learning context and will contribute to the advancement in research on the application of consensus methodology to local and regional planning.

7.2.4 Summary of Key Findings About Planning Tasks Suited to Consensus Processes

A summary of the key findings from the research on planning tasks suited to consensus application include:

- Consensus processes have the potential to be applied to wide range of task types including broad-based planning tasks.

- There is evidence in the literature of the successful application of consensus processes to municipal level planning-related dispute resolution tasks and to broader-based planning and agreement negotiation tasks at the regional level.

- There is little evidence of the successful application of consensus processes to municipal level planning exercises in a Canadian context.

- There is an important distinction to be made in the context of applying consensus processes between municipal level planning-related dispute resolution tasks and broader-based comprehensive planning activities at the municipal level. The former as compared to the latter involves more concrete, focused and specific tasks; tasks that have more immediate impact on those affected; and fewer stakeholders who are more easily identifiable.
The step up from using consensus processes for local planning dispute resolution tasks to using them for broad-based planning exercises is a large one, and does not appear to be a natural progression.

Implementing consensus processes for dispute resolution tasks is a good way to begin to gain knowledge, experience and early successes in consensus application to planning.

The thesis concludes that consensus processes hold potential for successful municipal-level planning tasks but their application in this area will require further research based in practical, learning-oriented implementation that includes documentation, evaluation and sharing of results.

Section C follows with a discussion of results related to the third of the three original research questions "What actions will support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning?"

7.3 Research Question 3: What action steps could support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning?

The interview research indicates that building political support by convincing politicians of the value of consensus processes is an important step in furthering their use in local and regional planning. Other steps to increase the use of consensus processes include the injection of funds; creation of policies, programs and legislation; and support for increased training and education. An additional action suggested by respondents and supported in the literature is a change of existing systems of decision-making to incorporate consensus processes.

The literature is limited in its discussion of possible specific actions to increase the use of consensus processes. A few sources describe demonstrated successes, for example the Kamloops experience (Diehl, 1995) and New Jersey's growth strategy legislation (Innes, 1992). Innes proposes ways for cities to start introducing consensus stakeholder processes into their activities (1999, p.469). Other sources highlight the need to redesign systems of
governance (Innes, 1992; Healey, 1997; Dorcey, 2002). The discussion begins with a review of the literature related to the actions proposed by respondents.

7.3.1 Building Political Support

Innes' research provides an example of the ability of political leadership to encourage the use of consensus processes. To launch the process of developing a state growth management plan in New Jersey, the governor informally agreed to support a consensus bill related to state planning (1992, p. 447). A self-selected group of key stakeholders developed the legislation, which required that agreement on a state growth management plan be negotiated with the counties and municipalities using a process of cross-acceptance (1992, p.447). Cross-acceptance would eliminate a plan approval process and sanctions in the event of non-compliance. It would encourage collaboration among municipalities bringing them together to present county-level reports rather than individual ones, and afford municipalities an opportunity to influence the state plan (1992, p.447). Evidence of the success of the legislation was the unanimous adoption of a state plan by the State Planning Commission and the prevention of the passage of a bill requiring legislative approval of the plan before taking effect. It was argued that the plan was a "remarkable achievement" and more representative of the will of the people than if it had been passed by the legislature (1992, p.449). This example indicates that support for a consensus approach from the leadership has the potential to accelerate the use of these processes.

Dorcey argues that government momentum has played a role in the emergence and retreat of the use of consensus stakeholder processes, usually in response to more or less favourable economic contexts (2002, p.4). An interview respondent noted the key role and political leadership of Minister Darlene Marzari in developing the growth strategies legislation for British Columbia (CONS2, 2002, p.19).

It is the view of the thesis that leadership from the top is a key component in increasing the use of consensus processes. This leadership will be important in lending credence to
the use of consensus processes, in particular if consensus processes are considered to be a challenge to existing forms of governance.

7.3.2 Policies, Programs and Legislation

The literature provides examples of the construction of policies, programs and legislation to support the increased use of consensus processes, many of which have already been discussed in the thesis. Two examples of the use of legislation were revealed:

- creation of legislation to support consensus planning at the state level in New Jersey (Innes, 1992);
- legislation and support to promote the use of consensus processes to develop regional growth strategies and service agreements in British Columbia's regional districts (British Columbia, 1995, 1999 and 2000).

Other examples of policies or programs found in the literature derived from applications of consensus processes to planning-related dispute resolution tasks:

- program of dispute resolution through the use of mediation at the rezoning stage of the planning process in the City of Kamloops, British Columbia (Diehl, 1995);
- policy to support the use of Alternate Dispute Resolution in the planning process in the City of Kitchener, Ontario (City of Kitchener, 1996b);
- mediation programs for development application and other planning disputes in Calgary and Edmonton (Lomax, 2000);
- initial stages of a consensus planning dispute resolution program in Victoria (City of Victoria, 2000 and 2001).

The examples illustrate ways that support can be given to the increased use of consensus planning approaches at the local and regional government levels, within existing systems of governance. The thesis concludes that the development of legislation is reflective of the political commitment to consensus processes and an important element in supporting their increased use. The formalization of programs and policies is also viewed as an important step towards instituting consensus practices into existing systems, in particular for local or regional level planning-related conflicts. By making them part of the system,
opportunities are increased for allocating funds and for introducing an approach that will be new to many, in an on-going and systematic manner. The thesis proposes that a suitable way for municipalities to begin using consensus processes is to develop policies and programs to support their use for planning-related dispute resolution. With respect to the development of policies and programs for the implementation of consensus planning tasks, the thesis reiterates its earlier recommendation that further research be carried out to assess how best to include the broad public in these kinds of planning activities. It is recommended that such research be done on a learning basis using actual trial applications of consensus processes within willing municipalities.

7.3.3 Education, Training, Demonstrated Success and Personal Experience
Innes emphasizes the importance of training future planners in skills of negotiation, mediation and consensus group process (1998, p.61). Forester also acknowledges that education in planning schools about these skills is “right” but adds a cautionary note that we must advance consideration of these skills beyond mere concepts of bargaining and exchange to a more sophisticated level of public, democratic deliberation (1999, p. 111). Cormick et al. highlight the need for workshops on the use of consensus processes for stakeholder groups and a range of ways of ensuring that there is some balance among the stakeholder groups in their level of negotiating skills. Among the ways are identifying “how to” books and holding training workshops (1996, p.21 and p. 65-66).

The thesis has already argued that having experienced and skilled facilitators as well as individuals with the capacity to design successful consensus processes are crucial elements to obtaining a successful consensus outcome. But education of a different nature is also important; education that incorporates awareness and promotes and further develops an understanding of consensus processes. The interview research indicated that while there is a high level of awareness of the existence of the approaches among respondents, there is some resistance to their use and few respondents are actively using consensus processes in their planning and local government decision-making. This suggests that a bottom-up educational process may not translate into action to increase the use of consensus processes, or that it might take some time, possibly a generation, as
one respondent has noted. Respondents also highlighted the importance of demonstrated successes and the power of having individuals participate in and experience successful consensus processes. It will be important for politicians, planners, government officials and even members of the public to gain greater exposure to consensus processes through educational processes such as these.

A bottom-up approach to increase awareness and knowledge of consensus processes is a fundamental component of increasing their use and provides necessary support to the top-down political leadership. The thesis proposes that it is the political leadership that is likely to drive forward their increased use, but this cannot happen successfully without the broader-based educational effort.

7.3.4 Changes to Existing Systems of Governance
The actions described above fit within existing systems of governance. Two respondents proposed changes to the political system with a view to improving the understanding of community decision-making on the part of citizens and enable more democratic public participation. Innes identifies the need to change decision-making systems, specifically to accommodate consensus processes, but her research to date has not provided insights on how this might be accomplished. Healey also presses for institutional changes to support collaborative decision-making, but provided few details on how to implement the changes. She offers guidelines for the re-design of decision-making institutions but leaves the task to individual jurisdictions, noting each must undergo its own process to determine the form best suited to its specific needs. Dorsey provides evidence of the public's dissatisfaction with existing governance systems and argues for changes to those institutions including for example, improved electoral representation and accountability processes (2002, p.13). He too calls for the use of group process to define a new direction. As noted earlier, he proposes the creation of a Citizens' Commission on Greater Vancouver Governance that would employ a multi-stakeholder approach in the design of its membership, procedures, financing, and mandate. It would then examine two key issues: alternative systems for urban governance and the role of multi-stakeholder processes in the emerging governance system (2002, p.20-21).
The role of consensus processes in making our system of governance more democratic has been discussed earlier in the chapter. The thesis takes a practical stand on this issue, emphasizing the use of these processes as ways to generate well-considered, innovative and satisfactory solutions that respond to the voices of those most likely to be impacted and to cement long term relationships necessary to secure the successful implementation and future resolution of problems. Nevertheless, it is the view of the thesis that in order to maximize the effective use of consensus processes in planning, it is necessary for politicians, planners, and the public to be open to changes in our systems of governance that were not designed to support consensus processes. It is also the view of the thesis that a review of existing systems of governance would benefit from a careful consideration of how consensus processes could improve existing systems, not to replace existing systems as the sole approach to decision-making, but by creating a system of governance that offers the flexibility of using consensus processes when they are most likely to provide successful outcomes: a contingent application of consensus.

7.3.5 Summary of Key Findings About Actions to Increase the Use of Consensus Processes

The key findings arising from the research on actions to support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning include:

- Leadership from the top is a key component in driving the increased use of consensus processes.

- The creation of legislation reflects a commitment of political leaders to the use of consensus processes and is similarly a key element in supporting their increased use.

- Research indicates that developing policies and programs is a good way to support the use of consensus processes for local dispute resolution tasks within existing systems of local government. Further practical research should be carried out to identify how best to institute the application of consensus to broad-based planning tasks.
- Education and training provide an increased level of knowledge and skill that is a fundamental requirement for the successful implementation of consensus processes.
- Increased broad awareness and general understanding of consensus processes across the population (public, politicians, planners, government officials) through a bottom-up approach is necessary to support increased use, but leadership is likely to drive the change.
- Maximizing the advantages of consensus process in a wide range of planning situations will require a greater openness to changing the way things are done: changes to legislation and changes to existing systems of government that were not designed to support consensus processes; changes that maximizes the advantages that consensus process have to offer; changes that offer the flexibility of use of consensus processes where there are best suited: a contingent application of consensus.

7.4 Chapter 7 Overview
An overarching theme that emerges from the discussions of the results in Sections A, B and C of the chapter is that consensus processes are best used where they are expected to deliver the most successful results, to the advantage of those impacted: a contingent application of consensus. The strength of consensus processes lies in their ability to bring parties to a common understanding of the issues, the interests behind positions and possible solutions that satisfy to the extent acceptable, all of the parties’ interests. They provide for those involved a greater role in crafting a decision that will impact them. They deliver good quality decisions, they lead to action, and they build relationships, but they are not suitable in every circumstance.

Within the context of a contingent approach, the thesis study supports the view that the effective implementation and successful outcome of a consensus process requires an initial assessment of a situation for its suitability to consensus. Expanding on Cormick et al.’s criteria for assessing the suitability of a situation to consensus, the thesis outlines a framework of factors to consider in deciding whether to use a consensus approach. The
goal of the framework is to provide planners, elected and government officials with a working tool to assist them in an analysis of a possible consensus situation that explores the range of factors from long-term benefits to practical cost. The framework derives from information in the literature, findings from the data, and conclusions of the thesis. It includes a practical dimension outlining areas of risk that receives lesser emphasis in the literature but that was highlighted as important in the interviews responses. The framework is presented in detail in Chapter 8.

In addition to presenting the framework for assessing consensus suitability, Chapter 8 recaps briefly the key findings of the thesis study and links these to recommendations for future action.
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 7 provided a summary of key findings related to each of the three research questions at the end of each of the sections in that chapter. Here, Chapter 8 attempts to provide a global view of the key findings of the thesis as an entity that set out to explore the obstacles and potential for use of consensus processes in local and regional planning. Following the summary of key findings, the thesis presents a framework for assessing consensus suitability that derived from some of the findings of the research. The thesis concludes by making recommendations for further action to support the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

8.1.1 Obstacles

1. There is a large variation in the level of understanding of consensus and consensus process among respondents.

   Among respondents there is considerable range in the level of understanding of consensus and consensus processes and there exists a lack of awareness of the link between consensus as an outcome and the need for a specific kind of process to achieve consensus. A voting paradigm continues to dominate thinking about public decision-making processes.

2. There is a lack of documented experience and knowledge of how to effectively involve the public in consensus community planning tasks, in particular at the municipal level.

   Such tasks introduce logistical complexity, increased time and cost, and risk to the outcome of the process. Other risks include situations where i) there is little assurance that the participation is broadly representative of the affected constituents; ii) there is uncertainty or lack of knowledge about the possible emergence of latent groups; or
iii) much support is required to ensure the accountable, equitable and effective functioning of groups, a structure on which consensus processes rely heavily.

3. The skilled design and implementation of a consensus process is fundamental to its success.

Skilful, knowledgeable design and implementation, in particular facilitation, may be able to attenuate risks as outlined in point 2 above.

4. Assessing a situation for its suitability to a consensus approach is critical.

The thesis strongly supports the view in the literature that emphasizes the importance of doing an initial thorough analysis of a decision-making situation to determine its suitability to consensus processes. In response to this view, the thesis presents a framework for assessing consensus suitability that expands upon the criteria introduced in the literature using findings from the interview data and conclusions from the thesis.

5. Research, grounded in practice, is required to better understand how to effectively involve the public in consensus broad-based community planning exercises.

8.1.2 Planning Tasks for Consensus

6. Consensus processes have the potential to be applied to a wide range of task types including broad-based planning tasks.

7. It is important to distinguish between specific, locally situated planning-related conflicts and broader-based community planning activities.

The former as compared to the latter involves more concrete, focused and specific tasks; tasks that have more immediate impact on those affected; and fewer stakeholders who are more easily identifiable.
There is evidence in the literature of the successful application of consensus processes to municipal level planning-related dispute resolution tasks and to regional level broader-based planning and agreement negotiation tasks. There is little evidence of the successful application of consensus processes to municipal level planning exercises in particular in a Canadian context. These two findings suggest that experience in the former does not naturally lead to applying consensus processes to the latter.

8. Implementing consensus processes for dispute resolution tasks is a good way to begin to gain knowledge, experience and early successes in consensus application to planning.

9. The step up from using consensus processes for local planning dispute resolution tasks to using them for broad-based planning exercises is a large one. It will not arise naturally from experience in applying consensus processes to planning-related dispute resolution. Further practice-based research is required.

10. Municipalities are encouraged to implement consensus community planning activities using a “grounded-in-practice” research approach that documents, evaluates and publishes the experience. Interaction with schools of planning is recommended.

8.1.3 Actions to Increase the Use of Consensus

11. Leadership from the top, and the creation of legislation, are key components that drive the increased use of consensus processes.

Such leadership will be important in lending credence to the use of consensus processes, in particular if they are considered to be a challenge to existing forms of governance.

12. Skills education and training, as well as broader-based awareness education are necessary to support the increased use of consensus.
13. Policy and program development are effective mechanisms to support the use of consensus processes, in particular for local dispute resolution tasks, within existing systems of governance.

14. Maximizing the advantages of consensus process in a wide range of planning situations will require a greater openness to changing the way things are done: changes to legislation and changes to existing systems of government that were not designed to support consensus processes; changes that maximize the advantages that consensus process have to offer; changes that offer the flexibility of use of consensus processes where they are best suited: a contingent application of consensus.

8.2 Framework: Assessing Consensus Suitability

One of the key conclusions of the thesis is that a contingent application of consensus processes, using them in suitable situations, is important to their eventual success. Thomas (1995) advocates for such an approach in the broader context of public involvement, and Cormick et al. (1996) stress the importance of this initial assessment as well. The framework presented here is based on the work of Cormick et al. (1996) and to a smaller degree draws elements from Thomas’ model of Effective Decision Making (1995). It explores the range of factors from long-term benefits to practical cost, integrating findings from the interview research that are considered to be relevant and additional reflections based on analysis and synthesis of the research. The goal of such a framework is to provide planners, elected and government officials with a working tool to assist them in determining whether a consensus approach makes sense in a given situation.

Under the “Conditions for Consensus Application” section of the framework, Cormick et al. (1996, p.15-22) provide the criteria for condition a) “when there is strength of purpose among groups.” The parties must share a common concern and desire to find a solution using a consensus approach. It is important to emphasize that in order to make this assessment, the groups involved need to have an informed understanding of consensus
processes so they can determine whether other processes would offer them better options to satisfy their interests. The thesis supports the view that if there is a better way for the groups to meet their needs, then those options should be pursued before a consensus approach. The interview data suggested additional specific criteria that round out the assessment of strength of purpose, such as a receptive political process and little evidence of reluctance to give up decision-making power. Note that positions taken by individuals based on their emotional attachment to homes or properties might change over time, in particular if the status quo is not found to be satisfactory and no progress has been made. In such circumstances, people may be more inclined to participate at a later date.

The thesis emphasizes the importance of participants understanding consensus processes and being willing to learn about them. This education is necessary for participants to be able to commit to a consensus approach and know that it is a better option than other approaches. Condition b) of the framework therefore outlines criteria related to an understanding of consensus processes and how they work.

The third condition c) "when there is acceptance by the impacted groups and long term relationships are needed" is inspired by Thomas as well as interview data. Thomas underscores the need for a public decision when acceptance by the impacted parties cannot be assumed and is required to ensure a decision is not put at risk and the implementation of the decision is successful. However, these circumstances alone do not require specifically that a consensus approach be used and Thomas proposes other means of arriving at a public decision, including public meetings. Interview data indicated that a consensus process specifically would be appropriate if there was an additional requirement for long term relationships to ensure successful implementation and effective on-going resolution of problems.

Interview data and thesis conclusions drive the forth condition for consensus application d) "when adequate representation can be reasonably assured", which might be a difficult one to assess. Understanding how unidentified or yet-to-be-formed groups (the public) might respond to an issue is not likely to be easy. This is why it is important for a process
to be able to accommodate latecomers. It also suggests that for issues that are focused, concrete, specific and geographically contained, it is likely to be easier to identify who the impacted groups and individuals will be, lessening the risk of less than full representation. A survey of existing groups, and possibly the public might help to answer the first two criteria in this part of the framework.

The second component of the framework, “Elements of Risk,” addresses some practical concerns including the issue of scale and numbers of participants. At what point does a process become sufficiently large that its successful management is at greater risk than a smaller process? And what is the “optimum” size of a consensus group. While two sources suggest the figures “anywhere from 12 to 30” and “around 17” as manageable for consensus groups, one source qualified the suggested range, noting that assessing a process by size alone is misleading (A. Dorcey, email communication. 24 Feb. 2003; PGOV2, 2002). A small group that is “manageable” but fails to include all representative views risks failure. Furthermore, the manageability of a group based on size will depend on the skill of the particular facilitator. Cormick et al. and Dorcey have noted that any size of group can be accommodated by an appropriately designed process. For example, Cormick et al. (1996, p.31) note that large numbers can be accommodated by ensuring that all significant interests are at the table, but not necessarily every party; by forming caucuses or groupings of groups whose interests are sufficiently similar; or by assigning tasks to sub-committees or working groups. While the literature indicates that large numbers can be accommodated, the thesis nevertheless takes the view that a significant increase in scale will present greater risk in terms of the level of organization, cost and time required to deliver a successful outcome. For issues of particular importance to a community, the risks and costs associated with a larger scale process may be found to be worthwhile. It is nonetheless important that the possible risk be factored into an assessment of an organization’s capacity to successfully carry out a consensus process.

Interview results highlighted factors related to the type of issue or task that may introduce an element of risk to a consensus process. The thesis proposes that tasks that tend towards the abstract rather than concrete, are ill-defined or uncontained in scope, or do not have a
direct or immediate impact may present a greater risk to a consensus process. Note that concrete specific tasks such as conflicts between neighbours may present an obstacle to a successful consensus process. In either case, the nature of the tasks is a factor that should be given some consideration in assessing whether to proceed with a consensus approach. The inclusion of the general public is also considered to present risks to a consensus process. This is because of the lack of documented experience including the broad public in consensus planning at the municipal level and the high reliance on consensus-experienced and knowledgeable facilitators to ensure success.

The thesis research indicated that knowledge of consensus processes and skill in their implementation is critical to their successful resolution. The thesis emphasizes this finding in the framework of assessment by identifying the lack of sufficient understanding and knowledge of how to participate in and carry out consensus processes as possible risks if adequate efforts are not made to accommodate these weaknesses.

Finally, there may be strategic reasons for wanting to undertake a consensus process. For example, to build long term change in attitudes and behaviour towards increasing the use of consensus processes; demonstrate the strengths of consensus processes; build political support for the approach through direct experience; or provide a means of developing knowledge and skills in the implementation of consensus processes. These reasons are valid ones for undertaking a consensus process but success will nevertheless be maximized if a given situation complies with many of the criteria outlined in the framework and if the areas of risk are minimized.
FRAMEWORK: Assessing Consensus Suitability

Conditions for Consensus Application: A consensus approach is suitable, and most likely to succeed, under the following circumstances.

a) When there is strength of purpose among groups including when:
   - parties have a common concern (Cormick et al., 1996)
   - parties share a common desire to find a solution (thesis analysis)
   - parties believe that a consensus process offers a better option to pursue their interest than other approaches (Cormick et al., 1996)
   - political context is receptive to the process (interview data) — understanding the history of the parties’ relationships is important (A. Osborne, personal communication, May 23/03)
   - there is buy-in and commitment to the process (interview data)
   - parties are willing to participate (A. Osborne, personal communication, May 23/03)
   - there is little evidence of reluctance to give up decision-making power (interview data)
   - the emotional attachment of people to their homes and properties is not an overriding element (interview data)

b) When there is sufficient understanding of the nature of consensus processes and how they work including when:
   - parties have an informed understanding of consensus processes and a realistic view of the alternatives (Cormick et al., 1996)
   - parties are familiar with consensus processes and understand how decisions will be made (A. Osborne, personal communication, May 23, 2003)
   - parties understand that consensus processes can take longer and they are prepared to spend the time (A. Osborne, personal communication, May 23, 2003)
   - parties understand that they may require some education about consensus processes to help process proceed effectively (thesis findings)

c) When acceptance by the impacted groups and long term relationships are needed to:
   - ensure successful implementation of decisions and actions arising from the process that requires the parties to work together;
   - ensure effective on-going resolution of future problems (Thomas, 1995 and interview data).
d) **When adequate representation can be reasonably assured:**
   - when there is a degree of confidence that the directly impacted stakeholder groups can be identified (thesis findings);
   - when the emergence of many newly formed and unorganized groups is unlikely or can be reasonably well-anticipated (Thomas, 1995 and thesis findings);
   - when the process has the capacity to include some late forming groups (Cormick et al., 1996).

**Elements of Risk:** Other elements that may pose a risk to the successful outcome of a consensus process should be assessed for possible level of risk they present.

a) **Size and increased cost might be a risk factor when:**
   - the number of impacted groups and individuals is large (sources suggest 12-30 is “manageable” but also emphasize that good process design can accommodate any size group);
   - the level of organizational support to groups that is required to ensure equitable participation is high;
   - broad public involvement is required.

b) **Issue(s) to be discussed may be a risk factor if:**
   - the issue tends towards the abstract rather than concrete (interview data);
   - the issues are not clearly defined, and/or are not limited in number or scope (interview data);
   - the issue does not have an immediate, pressing or direct impact on the parties (interview data);

c) **Lack of knowledge and skill may be a risk factor when:**
   - the participants do not have a sufficient understanding of consensus processes and time is not dedicated to providing some level of education about the processes (thesis analysis);
   - the facilitators and/or mediators are not sufficiently skilled, for example when volunteer facilitators are used (thesis analysis);
   - planners or others designing consensus processes do not know enough about them (thesis analysis);
   - parties do not acknowledge longer time needed to carry out consensus processes and are not willing to allow extra time for it (thesis analysis).
8.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed as ways to increase the use of consensus processes while at the same time maximizing the success of their implementation.

1. Continue to develop and refine tools to support the effective assessment of local and regional planning situations for suitability to consensus processes.

As already noted, the thesis recommends using a framework to determine the suitability of a situation to a consensus approach. The Framework for Assessing Consensus Suitability presented in the previous section has been developed based on the research done in this study. Practice-based research into the application of consensus processes to local and regional planning should be integrated into the further development of such tools.

2. Create a network of planning professionals to support the integration of consensus processes into local and regional planning.

The findings of the thesis suggest the need for some mechanism to support such endeavours as increasing the level of understanding of consensus and consensus process; developing programs and policies to resolve local planning disputes within the existing local government system; and initiating practice-based research to better understand how to involve the public in consensus broad-based planning tasks. The thesis proposes as the mechanism, the creation of a network or association of planning professionals who would be interested in exploring and promoting the integration of consensus processes into local and regional planning. Such a network could be of benefit at the provincial or national level. However, given the few examples of Canadian applications that are widely known, it is proposed that a national level network would reveal undocumented examples, tap into broader experience and knowledge base, and enrich the exchange of information. It would be important that the network include students and professors of planning schools researching in this area so that the practical challenges of the profession would inform
academic research strategies, and conversely, that the documented research would assist planners in advancing the implementation of consensus processes. Linkages between planning school researchers and municipalities interested to jointly carry out and mutually support research in this area is encouraged.

Following up on the theme of leadership to drive the increased use of consensus, identify individuals in Canada who have experience with consensus processes at the municipal or regional level and would be interested in spearheading the initiative. Such individuals would potentially be able to generate names of other interested participants. A forum for sharing information at a distance would be an economically feasible way to launch the network. Canada’s national planning body, the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) could serve as additional vehicle to support the creation and development of the network. Plan Canada, CIP’s quarterly publication, could be used as a vehicle to publish findings related to the application of these uses as well as on-going calls for expressions of interest in participating. The annual CIP conference could provide the opportunity for interested parties to meet (for example, by means of a session on the topic) and might eventually support an annual face-to-face exchange of information and discussion about how to best apply these approaches to the planning field.

In addition, explore ways to increase awareness, education and dissemination of information about consensus processes among municipal politicians through such avenues as the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

3. Strengthen the research capacity and develop courses at the University of British Columbia’s School of Community and Regional Planning that are dedicated to the application of consensus processes to municipal and regional planning.

At the University of British Columbia’s School of Community and Regional Planning, existing courses in multistakeholder approaches for land and sectoral planning tackle the issues of using consensus processes in a very broad range of
planning contexts. However, the application of consensus processes to municipal and regional planning raises particular issues that would be usefully explored in courses dedicated to their application in these specific areas of planning. The courses might address: guidelines about how to assess the suitability of a situation to a consensus approach; issues related to applying consensus processes to a range of different local and regional planning tasks; and the experiences of individuals who have implemented, facilitated and experienced, perhaps for the first time, instances of local and regional consensus planning activities. Consider offering the courses to practicing planners on a continuing education basis. Such courses would strengthen the School's knowledge base in this area and would serve to merge two previously parallel components of the school, municipal planning and multistakeholder consensus processes.

These courses would serve to support a strengthening of the research capacity in this area. The building of strong links with municipalities to mutually support and carry out jointly research in the application of consensus processes is also recommended.

4. Carry out research to better understand how to effectively involve the public in consensus community planning tasks in particular at the municipal level.

To do this use research approaches that are rooted in practice and that encourage joint initiatives between municipalities and schools of planning. Document and share research results in appropriate planning journals, including local publications such as the PIBC News. In particular, encourage municipalities to embark upon practice-based research initiatives that explore the application of consensus processes to local broad-based community planning tasks. This could be done through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. Note that the step from using consensus processes to resolve local planning disputes to using them for broad-based planning exercises is a large one and will require commitment by a municipality and its leaders. Taking the step to embark on a local consensus planning exercise, it is recommended that a municipality will need to:
5. Carry out research to explore how existing systems of governance might be changed to incorporate and take advantage of the strengths that consensus-building processes offer.

While the thesis research shows that there is reluctance to use consensus processes for some planning tasks, evidence of a level of awareness among respondents and consensus activities that are being undertaken in planning supports the view that there is a base upon which to build and a gentle momentum towards increasing the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning. The thesis study, including the research findings and the recommendations for action described above, has attempted to illustrate how the momentum for the use of consensus processes in local and regional planning in a British Columbian context could be strengthened.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: DEFINITION OF A CONSENSUS STAKEHOLDER PROCESS

A consensus stakeholder process is a process where:

1. Consensus is an essential component; decisions are made only by consensus;

2. All the impacted and directly affected parties are at the table; this could include representatives from business, other levels of government, environmental interests, residents, neighbouring municipalities, and First Nations.

3. The emphasis is on plenty of discussion where:
   i. all parties feel they have equal opportunity to contribute
   ii. different kinds of information are incorporated and considered (for example technical reports, accounts of personal experience, stories, visual information, etc.)
   iii. participants are encouraged to challenge, question and probe the information;

4. The process is supported by professional facilitation and training for participants in group-process.

5. The process aims to build a mutual understanding and agreed upon solutions as opposed to bargaining from fixed positions.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Consensus Stakeholder Processes in Local Government Planning

Date:

Interviewee:

Organization:

Location:

Code:

Introduction to Process

My thesis asks the question “Are consensus stakeholder processes being used in local government planning?” and, in cases where consensus stakeholder processes are not used the thesis asks: “What are the obstacles to using consensus stakeholder processes?” and “What actions would support their increased use?”

I would like to begin the interview by asking some demographic related questions.

Demographic Information

1. Gender: M ___ F ___

2. In what year were you born?

Educational Background

3. What is your educational background? (qualifications, from where…)

4. In what year did you obtain your qualifications?
5. Was public involvement in planning activities taught during your planning education? (Follow-up: how was it taught?)

Planning Position

6. How long have you worked as a planner or in a planning related position?

7. How long have you worked with ________________ (name of municipality)?

8. What is your present position with ________________ (name of municipality)?

9. How long have you been in this position?

10. To what extent does your job deal with public involvement activities and issues?
Establishing a Definition for Consensus stakeholder Processes:
Based on the planning literature I have put together a definition of a consensus stakeholder process. This approach to reaching agreements is also referred to in the literature as alternate dispute resolution, mediation or mediated negotiation.

I would like to share this definition of a consensus stakeholder process with you and arrive at a common definition for the purposes of the interview.

A consensus stakeholder process is a process where:
- Consensus is an essential component; decisions are made only by consensus;

- All the impacted and directly affected parties are at the table; this could include representatives from business, other levels of government, environmental interests, residents, neighbouring municipalities, and First Nations.

- The emphasis is on plenty of discussion where:
  - all parties feel they have equal opportunity to contribute
  - different kinds of information are incorporated and considered (for example technical reports, accounts of personal experience, stories, visual information, etc.)
  - participants are encouraged to challenge, question and probe the information;

- The process is supported by professional facilitation and training for participants in group-process.

- The process aims to build a mutual understanding and agreed upon solutions as opposed to bargaining from fixed positions.

Discuss

11. Does this definition fairly represent what you understand to be a consensus process? (Elaborate).

12. How do you define consensus?
Establishing Use of Consensus Processes in the Local Planning Department:

13. Does your planning department use consensus stakeholder approaches, as defined above, to involve the public in local planning activities?

   Follow-up: How often are they used?

14. In what situations do you use consensus processes?

15. How do you decide when to use a consensus approach?

Evaluating A Specific Case

For this next series of questions, I would like to focus on a consensus stakeholder process that you are familiar with.

1. Can you identify a specific case that you feel meets the criteria of a consensus process?

2. Can you briefly describe the case?
Consensus:
3. Were all decisions made only by consensus?

4. Was the concept of reaching consensus made explicit and agreed to by all of the participants at the outset?

5. Would you say that consensus was an essential part of the process?

Stakeholders:
6. Who were the stakeholders that were involved in the process, in other words who were at the table?

7. Were any interests missing from the process?

8. Did the process include any representatives from:
   - other levels of government (provincial, federal)
   - business (commercial or industrial interests, developers)
   - local government (other departments)
   - environmental groups
   - neighbouring municipalities that could be affected
   - First Nations
   - neighbourhood groups

Facilitation
9. Was professional facilitation used during the process?

10. Were the participants trained in negotiation or group process skills, as part of the process?
11. What role did you and/or other planners play in the process?

**Time for Plenty of Discussion:**

12. How long did the process last?

13. Did the time line for the process allow ample opportunity for participants to come to understand the issues?

14. Did the time line allow participants to understand the underlying interests of the other participants?

15. Would you say that the final decision or product was a true joint product of the members of the group?

16. Did the final product or decision arise from the group's deliberations, or was it an acceptance of options previously outlined? (Elaborate: innovative element, new ideas arose)

17. Did any new, innovative ideas arise from the group’s deliberations?

18. Would you say that all of the participants were supportive of the decision or final product?

**Nature of Discussions**

19. Were people encouraged to challenge information that was presented to them?
20. Did people feel at ease in asking questions about the information used?

21. In your view, did all participants have equal opportunity to make their points of view understood?

22. What kinds of information were used by the participants (for example: reports, stories, personal experience, visual information)?

**Outcome**

23. Was the final decision a consensus?

24. In your view, did any of the positions or attitudes of the participants change as a result of the process?

25. What happened to the final decision or product after the group’s work was complete?

26. Did action result from the decision made?
Incorporating Consensus Stakeholder Processes into Local Planning

The next and final set of questions attempts to understand some of the obstacles and the potential for incorporating consensus stakeholder processes into local government planning.

27. What do you see as some of the obstacles to using consensus stakeholder processes in local government planning?

Possible examples:
   a. lack of resources: takes time and money,
   b. infringes on duty of elected officials to make final decisions,
   c. lack of awareness or knowledge of process,
   d. lack of skills to carry out the process,
   e. lack of public interest in participating

28. Do you think that the Local Government Act's requirement for councillors to not fetter their discretion is an obstacle to using consensus stakeholder processes in local government planning? OR Do you think these processes interfere with the duty of elected officials to make final decisions, to not fetter their discretion?

29. If this is an obstacle, how might it be overcome? In other words: How might these processes be used in local planning without interfering with councillors' unfettered decision-making responsibilities?

30. In your view, are consensus stakeholder processes effective ways of involving the public in local planning issues?

31. What kind of planning tasks are best suited to consensus stakeholder processes?
32. Is there room for the increased use of consensus stakeholder processes in local government planning?

33. What actions could be taken to support increased use of consensus stakeholder processes in local government planning?

34. Using a scale of 1 through 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high, how would you rate your planning department's level of:
   a. awareness of consensus stakeholder processes
   b. skill for the implementation of consensus stakeholder processes

35. Using the same scale, how would you rate your level of:
   a. awareness of consensus stakeholder processes
   b. skill for the implementation of consensus stakeholder processes.
End of Interview Questions:
That is the end of the interview. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

Jennifer:
1. Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.
2. I will forward a transcript of the interview to you and ask you to verify its accuracy.
3. In the event that some follow up questions arise would it be possible to contact you again?
4. Don't forget to take signed consent forms with you.
APPENDIX III: METHODS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

A) Establishing definitions of consensus and consensus processes.

METHODS: LITERATURE & INTERVIEWS
- Presenting a definition of consensus process derived from the academic literature and asking interviewees for comments;
- Asking interviewees to define consensus;
- Asking interviewees questions about how closely the Capital Regional District’s Regional Growth Strategy process (or other suggested case studies) resembled a consensus process;
- Reviewing responses to all other interview questions for comments related to the definition of consensus and consensus processes.

ANALYSIS:
- How are the participants’ descriptions of consensus processes, and consensus, similar?
- How do the participants’ descriptions of consensus processes, and consensus differ?
- What are the some of the recurring concepts in descriptions of consensus and consensus processes?
- Are there any inconsistencies in the data?
- Does a clear definition of consensus process and consensus arise from the data?
- Is there a commonly shared definition of consensus process and consensus?

B) Research Question 1: What are the obstacles to using consensus processes in local and regional planning?

METHODS: INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENT REVIEW, OBSERVATION & LITERATURE
- Asking interviewees.
- Reviewing documents
- Attend public hearing to gain understanding of political context of RGS process
- Returning to the literature to interpret findings and relate them to the literature

ANALYSIS:
- What obstacles to the use of consensus processes have been identified in the data?
- What are the most commonly cited obstacles?
- Are there any conflicting views with respect to the obstacles?
- Are there any related concepts or issues recurring in the data?
- What does the literature or document review tell us about the obstacles to using consensus processes?
C) Research Question 2: What kinds of planning tasks are well suited to consensus processes?

METHODS: INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENT REVIEW & LITERATURE
- Asking interviewees
- Reviewing the documents
- Reviewing literature

ANALYSIS:
- What planning tasks suited to the use of consensus processes have been identified in the data?
- What are the most commonly cited tasks?
- Are there conflicting views on the suitability of tasks?
- Are there any related concepts or issues recurring in the data?
- What does the literature and document review say about the planning tasks suited to consensus processes?

D) Research Question 3: What action steps would support the increased use of consensus processes in local and regional planning?

METHODS: INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENT REVIEW & LITERATURE
- Asking interviewees
- Reviewing the documents
- Reviewing the literature (references to curriculum design)

ANALYSIS:
- What action steps for increasing the use of consensus processes in planning have been identified in the data?
- What are the most commonly cited action steps?
- Are there conflicting views on action steps to increase the use of consensus processes?
- Have any innovative steps been proposed?
- Are there any related concepts or issues recurring in the data?
- What does the literature and document review say about action steps to increase the use of consensus processes?
### APPENDIX IV: SAMPLE WORKSHEETS

Research Question 2: What kind of planning tasks if any are well-suited to consensus processes?

**Planning Tasks sorted by Task**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLANNING TASKS</th>
<th>RESPONDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major planning initiatives e.g. OCP, zoning changes P3; neighbourhood-level planning and zoning P5; OCP (How do you see the community evolving (philosophical level) and policy level decisions P7; Local Area Plans, OCPs – “proactive processes” MC1; establishing a community vision P8; neighbourhood level plan RR@</td>
<td>P3, P5, P7, MC1, P8, RR2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major decisions that affect the very character of community in terms of land use and institutional structures; major decisions about land and resource use, use of tax dollars, accumulating major debt, amalgamation</td>
<td>P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small lot infill in neighbourhoods – formalize mediation process; alternative dispute resolution to address it P4; Specific issues where there is conflict, e.g small lot infill P6; neighbourhood disputes “where there is an element of remove” (from council ?), smaller scale stuff P8</td>
<td>P4, P6, P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small lot and other re-zoning disputes P5; conflict resolution e.g. controversial rezoning P7; planning disputes MC1</td>
<td>P5, P7, MC1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committees and staff meetings P5</td>
<td>P5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Local Area Plan development – too general.</td>
<td>P6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development proposals or “reactive processes” and planning disputes MC1</td>
<td>MC1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks that deal with a level of government that is removed from day to day concerns, e.g LRMP or CORE processes P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At grass-roots level – it is hard at regional level because of size of population PGOV1</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On focused issues PGOV1</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On policy level not word smithing level PGOV1</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visioning exercises PGOV1</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating context statements</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working out a monitoring process for RGS</td>
<td>PGOV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks where you want to ensure you are reflecting the values and needs of the region and get buy-in</td>
<td>CONS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning tasks as opposed to disputes over services that involve money in which case people are more willing to arbitrate than come to agreement</td>
<td>PGOV2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not with citizens – use good consultation</td>
<td>PGOV2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks that require buy-in for their implementation</td>
<td>PGOV2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at regional scale – too big and interests too diverse</td>
<td>RR2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not for neighbourhood dispute resolution</td>
<td>RR2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things like solid waste issues</td>
<td>RR2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Planning Tasks Sorted by Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONDENT</th>
<th>PLANNING TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INT1/P1</td>
<td>No information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT2/P2</td>
<td>No information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| INT3/P3    | • “For major planning initiatives, for example developing the Official Community Plan, zoning changes. For decisions that affect the very character of the community in terms of land use and institutional structures. For major decisions about:  
  o Land and resource use  
  o Use of tax dollars  
  o Accumulating major debt  
  o Amalgamation – changing the structure of the municipality  
  • Otherwise, it depends on what is a hot political issue in the community. For example, in Metchosin, changes to the Agricultural Land Reserve would be an issue for community involvement in this form.” |
| INT4/P4    | Controversial issue such as small lot infill |
| INT5/P5    | Steering committee work, dispute resolution in neighbourhood planning  
Zoning disputes  
Summary: neighbourhood planning and rezoning |
| INT6/P6    | Specific issues where there is conflict; something focused  
Not for general level planning e.g. local area plan development |
| INT7/P7    | Controversial rezonings, to resolve conflicts  
Policy issues rather than day-to-day  
General issues: how do you see the community evolving – big picture questions |
| INT8/MC1   | Development proposals – “reactive processes”  
LAPs and OCPs – “proactive processes” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INT9/P8</th>
<th>NO INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INT10/P8</td>
<td>For tasks that deal with a level of government that is removed from day-to-day concerns e.g. LRMP or CORE processes (see memo 18) Establishing community vision – easier to get people on same page Broad scale (vision) and specific scale (neighbourhood disputes) but not middle ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT11/PGOV1</td>
<td>Easier at grassroots local level than at regional level Easier if focus on fewer topics; narrow, but at policy not word-smithing level Visioning exercises Negotiating context statements Working out a monitoring process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT12/PUB1</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT13/CONS1</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT14/PUB2</td>
<td>NOT ASKED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT15/P8</td>
<td>Asked in previous interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT16/CONS2</td>
<td>Not asked stupid Jennifer – she interprets c-b process as public consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT17/PGOV2</td>
<td>Where you think you need buy-in and or a long term relationship When dealing with organizations rather than citizens because there is an embarrassment factor if you walk away With planning issues rather than money – based issues in which case people are more willing to arbitrate than make political compromise and come to an agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT18/RR1</td>
<td>Major planning issues and policy issues (p. 15); use referenda; committee work p.15-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT19/RR2</td>
<td>smaller scale – within a neighbourhood kind of thing Neighbourhood plan Not for dispute resolution Talking about the future of a neighbourhood Solid waste issues. More defined rather than fuzzy processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOC1</td>
<td>Land Use Management e.g. Kamloops: support public hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document ID</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOC2</td>
<td>Calgary Pilot Mediation Program: use mediation to resolve disputes between stakeholders arising from planning applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc4</td>
<td>Proposals for small lot developments where there is not a satisfactory level of support in the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood and developer to undertake a shared decisions making process prior to advancing to public hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc5</td>
<td>“More complex the dispute the more effective the mediation process can be” – experience from Calgary. Examples of disputes successfully resolved by mediation: industrial residential interface – noise and dust. Development permit application; halfway house for mentally ill on parole in residential community. Dispute between commercial land owners re: City parking approvals. Community opposing new duplex; existing poultry plant opposed by neighbours. Fence alignment wrong between new condo and 10 houses; Bar noise impacts on nearby housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOC6</td>
<td>Edmonton Community Mediation Program: “large majority of cases dealing with dog barking and noise complaints”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOC7</td>
<td>To resolve disputes that resulted in formal appeals to the OMB, after a decision had been made by council. But also: “by providing input and dispute resolution at the front end of the process, conflicts can be identified and resolved early on, before final decisions are made and appeals to the OMB can be avoided altogether.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit: Plan Canada article</td>
<td>Kamloops: resolving development application disputes before public hearing stage e.g. multi-family project contested by residents in danger of having their views of city and river valley obstructed by the development. e.g. halfway house mediation (pers comm); neighbour objecting to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Lit: Innes | Developing legislation on growth management  
Overseeing and reviewing legislation on growth management  
Preparing, adopting, revising regularly state plans for growth management  
Negotiating agreement on state plans with counties and municipalities using a process called cross-acceptance  
Negotiating compliance of local plans with state plans |
|---|---|
| BC Department of Intergovernmental Affairs | Promotes ways local governments can reach consensus in the development of regional growth strategies; presents alternate dispute resolution techniques to resolve disputes during the process; Promotes the use of ADR to resolve disputes arising from regional service arrangements  
GSA – see Explanatory Guide p.2 |