





# Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Renewing the Action Agenda Handbook

CommUniverCity San José  
for the  
City of San José Strong Neighborhoods Initiative

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# Background

## THE STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE

The Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI), formally launched in 2000, is a partnership between the City of San José, the Redevelopment Agency (SJRA), and San José's residents and business owners. SNI aims to strengthen the City's neighborhoods by building clean, safe, and strong neighborhoods with independent, capable, and sustainable neighborhood organizations.<sup>1</sup>

The 19 SNI areas encompass about 10,000 acres that include older downtown and first-tier suburban neighborhoods (see Figure 1, Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Areas). The SNI is modeled after earlier citywide community development and planning efforts, such as the Project Crackdown<sup>2</sup> and the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy.<sup>3</sup> SNI builds on neighborhood assets and public resources to develop the capacity of communities to become agents in enhancing neighborhood quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

## SNI PROCESS: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Strong Neighborhoods Initiative process consists of two phases: planning and implementation. The **planning** phase entails the development and the update of *Neighborhood Improvement Plan (NIP)*. Originally, each SNI area developed a *NIP* through the collaborative efforts of city agencies, citizen groups, community-based organizations, and community members. The process for creating each *NIP* took approximately eight months to one

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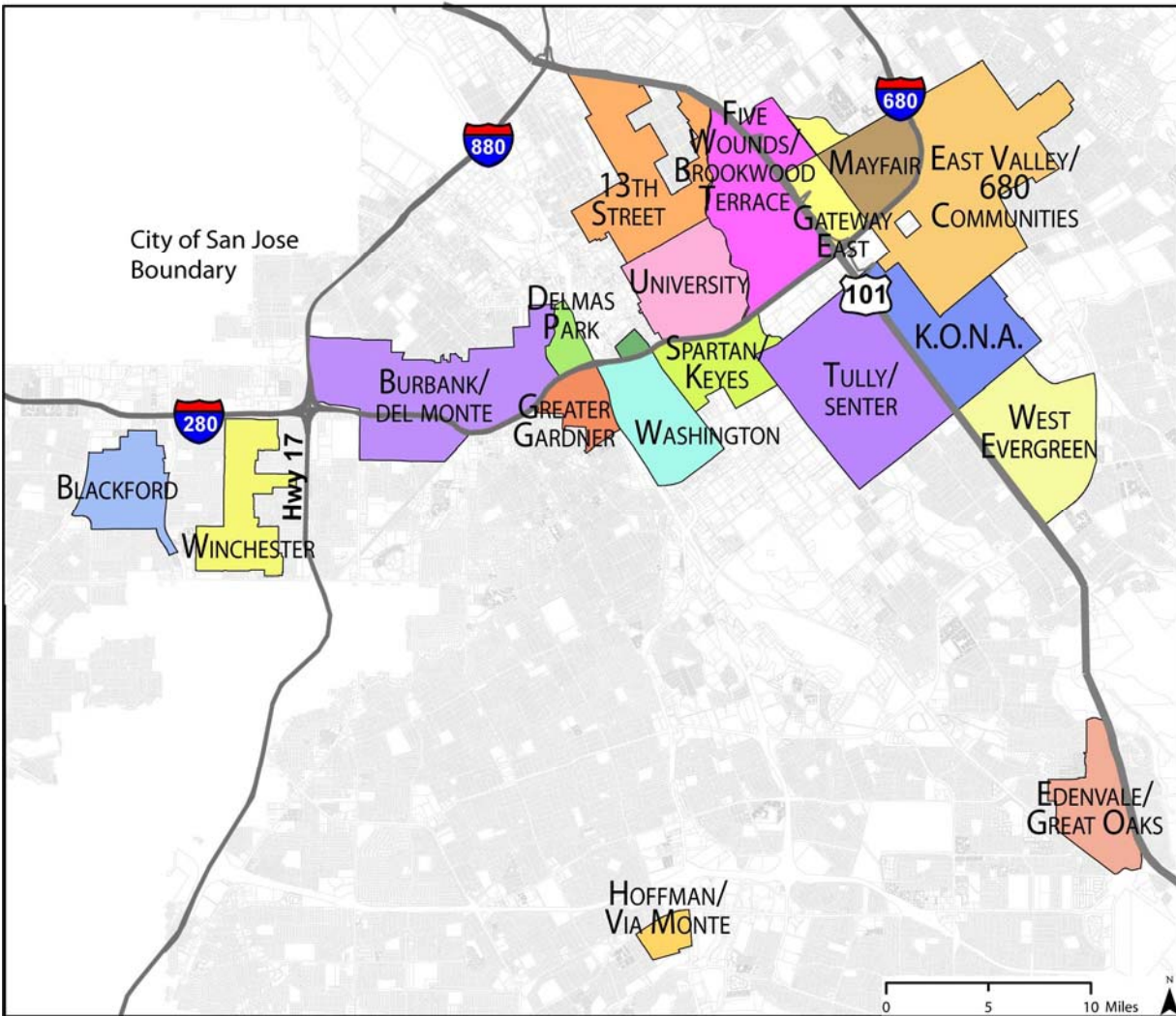
<sup>1</sup> City of San José Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, *City of San José Planning Divisions Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Home* (SNI website), <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/planning/sni> [accessed 12-1206].

<sup>2</sup> San José's Project Crackdown emphasized community policing, providing alternatives for youth, and eradicating gang activity. It became the model for the nation wide Weed and Seed program run by the Department of Justice.

<sup>3</sup> The Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy (NRS) was a participatory planning process spearheaded by the City's Planning Department.

<sup>4</sup> SNI website.

Figure 1 Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Areas



Source: Adapted from City of San José, Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, "Neighborhoods," 15 March 2006, <http://www.strongneighborhoods.org/Neighborhoods06.asp> [31 January 2007].

year, and involved public monthly Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC)<sup>5</sup> meetings and multiple community workshops.

An essential component of the *NIP* is the **Action Agenda**, a comprehensive list of community projects identified in the participatory planning process. Each *NIP* also includes a detailed **Top 10 Priorities** list, where the ten most important neighborhood projects are presented in detail and order of priority.

While the mix of neighborhood priorities is unique to each SNI area, they have generally tended to focus on affordable housing, cleaner neighborhoods, safer and more attractive residential streets, and vibrant neighborhood business districts. Taken altogether, the *NIPs* have become a checklist of projects to foster stronger neighborhoods in the City of San José.

The **implementation** phase focuses on implementing the proposals and recommendations identified through the planning process. During implementation, the *Neighborhood Improvement Plan (NIP)* serves as a road map to guide public investment decisions and to mobilize residents to work on community development projects.<sup>6</sup>

The implementation of the *NIP* depends primarily on community residents, property owners, and other stakeholders acting as advocates for the projects identified in the plan. The NAC's responsibilities during implementation include organizing and leading of community activities, overseeing and monitoring the progress of the priorities included in the *NIP*, providing input on design and development of public and private projects, completing

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<sup>5</sup> Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NAC) were formed early in the original SNI Planning phases to represent the community at large. The NAC membership includes residents (both owners and renters), business owners, and other community stakeholders.

<sup>6</sup> The 19 SNI *Neighborhood Improvement Plans* are available online at <http://www.strongneighborhoods.org>.

specific *NIP* tasks for which it is responsible, and acting as liaison to the community at large.<sup>7</sup>

The SNI is rooted in the steady commitment to engage communities in determining their own development priorities, and partnering with the City to implement them. Each neighborhood has received technical and financial assistance from the City and the Redevelopment Agency, as well as from private sources and public-private partnerships. In an era of limited public resources, the implementation of neighborhood priorities relies on a firm partnership between the City, residents, businesses, volunteers, and community-based organizations that have a stake in enhancing the quality of life in the neighborhoods.

### RENEWING THE ACTION AGENDA

Six years into the SNI, each neighborhood is reviewing what has been accomplished since the release of its original *NIP*, reaffirming the vision for the community, and determining the direction to be followed in the next three to five years. The interest in renewing the *NIPs* emerges from a variety of reasons ranging from the formidable success in implementing many community-identified priorities, in some cases, to gradually shifting priorities following the realization that some projects may no longer be relevant or of interest to the neighborhoods, given changing local conditions. Over the next two years, each of the 19 Strong Neighborhoods will renew its Action Agenda and Top 10 Priorities.

In addition to generating an updated list of priorities, the Action Agenda renewal process should also aim to re-energize the neighborhood leadership in each SNI area. SNI neighborhoods are encouraged to use this process to examine the organizational capacity of their NAC and the overall community. Thus, the Action Agenda renewal process serves as a vehicle to strengthen and expand the network of SNI neighborhood leaders.

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<sup>7</sup> SNI website.

This handbook is designed to serve as a template for each SNI area as it embarks on the process of renewing its Action Agenda and documenting it in a *Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment (NIPA)*.

This handbook is organized into five sections:

- This section, **Background**, presents the history and evolution of the SNI, its process and the need for renewing each SNI neighborhood's Action Agenda.
- The **Roadmap** details a step-by-step process for renewing the Action Agenda.
- A **Roadmap Summary** provides a matrix outlining the specific steps of the planning process as well as a timeline for both the full-track and the short-track.
- The **Lessons Learned** offers advice for engaging in the process of renewing the Action Agenda.
- The **Glossary** provides definitions for technical terms and acronyms used throughout the handbook.



# Roadmap

This handbook provides a step-by-step guide to renew the Action Agenda for SNI neighborhoods. While the overall process presented here is useful as a starting point, it must be adapted for the particular conditions of each neighborhood and community stakeholders.

The Action Agenda renewal process is organized into the following five phases:

1. Project Initiation
2. Progress Assessment
3. Development of the Renewed Action Agenda or Alternatives for the Top Priorities
4. Prioritization
5. *Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment (NIPA)* Review and Approval

The following section provides general guidelines for each step in each phase, with specific guidelines for particular tasks within those steps. Figure 8 through Figure 13 provide an overview of each phase with specific tasks and responsibilities.

## 1. PROJECT INITIATION

The initial phase of the process comprises three steps (See Figure 8):

- Convene key **participants** of the Action Agenda renewal process
- Fully define work plan, and determine whether to employ a **full-track** or a **short-track** process (see section Short-Track or Full-Track?)
- Analyze current neighborhood conditions and identify **emerging neighborhood planning themes**

Figure 2 Sample Progress Assessment

ACTION #	PRIORITY #	COMMUNITY PROJECTS (2002 N/P)	PROJECT STEPS, COMPONENTS, AND GOALS	PROGRESS RELATED TO ACTION STEPS, ACTION COMPONENTS AND ACTION GOALS	RESOURCES INVESTED / ALLOCATED TO-DATE	ESTIMATED TIME-LINE FOR COMPLETION	PROGRESS STATUS OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS			
							INITIAL ASSESSMENT Complete To be Completed Partially Complete Incomplete Ongoing	RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	COMMUNITY VERIFIED ASSESSMENT Complete To be Completed Partially Complete Incomplete Ongoing	COMMUNITY VERIFIED NEXT STEPS
3	3	Improve Traffic and Pedestrian Flow and Control at 33 <sup>rd</sup> St. & McKee Rd.	<b>ACTION STEPS</b>		\$105,000		P	Modify and Place in New Action >>>	P	Modify and Place in New Action >>>
			a) Maintain use of crossing guards during peak student use.	Maintained and continued.			C	No Action Required	C	No Action Required
			b) Separate northbound and outbound movement on 33 <sup>rd</sup> St.	Completed 2004.	\$5,000		C	No Action Required	C	No Action Required
			c) work with community to design long-term improvements to the intersection.	Visioning work completed in 2003.	\$100,000	Jul-07	I	Modify and Place in New Action >>>	I	Modify and Place in New Action >>>
			d) Acquire property required to make space for median island on McKee Rd	Studied by DOT in 2002-03.	Staff time		C	Do Not Pursue (Not Feasible)	C	Do Not Pursue (Not Feasible)
			f) Acquire property on 334d St from Gas and Shop to old Arco Station to accommodate new traffic signal on 33 <sup>rd</sup> St.	Studied by DOT in 2002-03; placed on hold in 2003.	Staff time		I	Modify and Place in New Action >>>	C	Do Not Pursue (Not Feasible)
			<b>COMMUNITY GOALS</b> (not listed as action steps) Maintain McKee as a four-lane road rather than expanding to six lanes as called in DOT's policy.	Requires change to DOT traffic policy adopted for McKee Rd.			I	Place in New Action >>>	I	Place in New Action >>>
6	8	Expand Housing & Rehabilitation Programs, and Outreach	<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	Over 18 housing rehab projects.	\$365,000		O	Consider for Renewal	O	Place in New Action >>>
			a) Streamline the process of acquiring home improvements grants and loans	Outreach done in 2002; reduced in 2004.			O	Consider for Renewal	O	Place in New Action >>>
			b) Encourage common property management for 4-plexes in Jeanne/Forestdale area.	Completed Jeanne/Forestdale "Source Book".	\$365,000		C	No Action Required	C	No Action Required
40	Medium	Complete Lower Silver Creek Trail Network	<b>COMPONENTS</b>		\$0		I	Place in New Action >>>	I	Place in New Action >>>
			Explore feasibility to build a trail along Lower Silver Creek to connect with Coyote Creek Trail system.	No plans for this trail within City of San José's Creek Trail Network.			I	Place in New Action >>>	I	Place in New Action >>>

Source: Adapted from City of San José, *Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment* (November 2006).



## Participants

The strength of the SNI rests firmly on its ability to form and sustain partnerships between key community stakeholders and the City. In order to follow in the footsteps of previous SNI successes, the following groups and individuals must be convened to play an active role in the Action Agenda renewal process:

### *The SNI Neighborhood Team*

The SNI **neighborhood team** staff serves as a conduit between the community and City government, as well as between the various City agencies and community organizations that play roles in implementing neighborhood projects. The neighborhood team's structure is supported by a **core neighborhood team** and a **full neighborhood team**.

The **core neighborhood team** orchestrates the overall process for renewing the Action Agenda. A neighborhood team manager leads the core neighborhood team of City staff from the SNI (San José Redevelopment Agency and City Managers' Office) and the Planning Department. The core team may be further supported by a consultant, who is responsible for producing the background analysis and much of the content of the plans.

The core neighborhood team expands to a **full neighborhood team** at key phases of the process when specific technical advice and input on the feasibility of proposed community projects is needed from City staff and staff from partnering community development organizations. City agencies that generally form part of the full neighborhood team include the departments of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services; Police; and Transportation.

In addition, other regional and community-based organizations with the capacity to implement neighborhood actions are also called to support the neighborhood team. A wide range of potential community partners may be called to support these efforts, including county social service agencies, school districts, non-profit organizations, universities and community colleges, and family and corporate foundations, among many others.

The core neighborhood team typically meets once a month, requiring the full neighborhood team to be present once or twice during the planning process (see timelines and milestones in Figure 14 and Figure 15). Full neighborhood team meetings, however, may be more effectively replaced by meetings with individuals or small groups to discuss specific issues (this may be the case, for instance, of discussing a park design with the Police Department's Environmental Design specialist).

### *The NAC*

The Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) represents the community at large in the planning and implementation process. The NAC is typically comprised of 16 to 24 volunteer residents (both owners and renters), local business owners, and other community stakeholders. The NAC provides early and ongoing input to the planning process, monitors its progress, reviews all proposals, and gives final approval to the Action Agenda and the Top 10 Priorities. More importantly, the NAC serves as liaison to the community, and assists with all outreach, recruitment, and dissemination activities related to the renewal of the Action Agenda.

During the Action Agenda renewal process, the monthly **NAC meeting** agenda regularly includes progress reports and full community planning workshops.

A critical step conducted early in the process by the NAC entails the ratification of the progress made on the Action Agenda presented in the *NIP*. This is a careful and detailed revision of comprehensive data pertaining to each of the action items. This step is accomplished in a half-day **retreat** with the NAC facilitated by the core team (see NAC Confirmation of Progress Assessment).

### *The Community*

The neighborhood at large is asked to review the progress report and action item alternatives, and to provide input on the renewed Action Agenda during two public forums open to the entire community. The Action Agenda renewal process presents opportunities to recruit community members to participate in regular NAC meetings and to join its leadership.

The public workshops are also a platform for residents to not only learn about and celebrate what has been accomplished in their neighborhoods, but to also become actively engaged in their community. Supporting the participation of working families and individuals makes community workshops – as well as NAC meetings – inclusive. This is achieved by conducting concerted outreach, scheduling the meetings at times and in places that are accessible to the community, translating materials and presentations to the languages spoken in the neighborhoods, and providing meeting-time activities for children.

### Full-Track or Short-Track?

The status of implementing the projects presented in the *NIP* varies from SNI area to SNI area, with some neighborhoods having completed over 8 of their Top 10 Priorities, and others having completed fewer than 4 items. In order to ensure that the process matches the specific conditions of each SNI area, the community must determine at the beginning of the process whether to follow a **full-track** or a **short-track** for renewing its Action Agenda (Figure 14 and Figure 15 illustrate timelines and milestones for the full-track and the fast-track).

While the two processes follow the same general framework, the **full-track** process considers the entire list of action items provided in the original Action Agenda, while the **short-track** focuses specifically on a review of the Top 10 Priorities.

The **full-track**<sup>8</sup> process is recommended for SNI areas where 4 or more of the Top 10 Priorities have been completed, or are near completion (see Figure 3 for a detailed definition of thresholds of completion). Neighborhoods on the full-track reconsider not only the Top 10 Priorities list, but the entire Action Agenda, in addition to the planning issues that emerge through the analysis of current neighborhood conditions.

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<sup>8</sup> The full-track process presented in this handbook was developed and tested in 2006 by the Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace SNI area for renewing its action agenda.

The **short-track** process is recommended for SNI areas where fewer than 4 of the Top 10 Priorities have been completed (see Figure 3 for a detailed definition of thresholds of completion). The short-track focuses primarily on the Top 10 Priorities, along with an analysis of emerging planning issues.

The decision of whether to follow a full-track or a short-track ultimately rests on the community, and is informed by a careful review of the implementation status of its Top 10 Priorities (see Analysis of the Action Agenda for guidelines to evaluate the status of completion of each *NIP* action item).

While the process and specific steps that provide the underlying structure for the two approaches are essentially the same, the tracks differ significantly in the time and effort required of the neighborhood team to review and provide alternatives for either the entire Action Agenda (in the case of the full-track), or the Top 10 Priorities only (in the case of the short-track). While the progress evaluation of the entire Action Agenda may require a full week, or 40 staff-person-hours to complete, the evaluation of the progress made on implementing the Top 10 Priorities may require half that time. Moreover, the staff time required to develop a renewed full Action Agenda (in the case of the full-track), may be also be twice that of producing alternatives for the Top 10 Priorities list (in the case of the short-track).

### **Emerging Neighborhood Planning Issues**

An analysis of demographic data (such as population, housing, income, and crime data) and interviews with key community stakeholders and City staff are conducted in this phase to recognize the current conditions of the neighborhood. This analysis also includes an evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that have an impact on the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Out of these analyses emerge neighborhood concerns and issues of importance to the community that were not apparent during the original planning process (*NIP*), and need to be considered in the renewal of the Action Agenda.

## 2. PROGRESS ASSESSMENT

A thorough and objective assessment of the degree of completion of the action items (or projects) presented in the *NIP* is a critical step in the renewal of the action agenda process, and calls for additional discussion in this handbook.

The progress assessment is a two-step process that includes:

- **Analysis** of the progress made in the original **Action Agenda** and recommendations for next steps.
- **Confirmation** of the progress assessment and next steps for each individual action.

**Figure 3 Thresholds of Completion**

**Complete (C)** action items (or projects) are those that have been fully funded and built, or implemented (examples include a new park that is already in use or new traffic signals that are in operation). This category also includes projects that have been classified as not feasible or the community has decided not to pursue. Therefore, these can be considered “resolved,” or “off-the-table.” Generally, complete projects require no future action, with the exception of ongoing service-type items that must be included in the renewed Action Agenda (for example, while efforts to limit alcohol sales may have been concentrated in the neighborhood, the community may decide to continue supporting a heightened level of intervention in the future).

**To Be Completed (T)** action items are those for which needed resources are already committed. There is high confidence these projects will be completed in the near future (for example, a new community facility that has funding, a master plan and design in place, and for which a construction contract has been awarded). While these generally require no future action, the community may decide to place them on a list of action items that require close monitoring, or a “watch” list.

**Partially Complete (P)** action items are those for which resources have been invested. However, the projects are not yet complete. The community must determine whether to include each partially complete project in the renewed list of projects in its original or modified form.

**Incomplete (I)** projects are those that have demonstrated little progress since the publication of the *NIP*. Some stalled because they were found to be unrealistic or unfeasible. The community must determine whether to place each of these incomplete projects in the renewed Action Agenda in modified form, or to remove it.

**Ongoing (O)** projects are a special category that relates specifically to social and service action types (see Action Types). Many SNI communities have identified a need for enhancing services such as after school programs for youth, traffic speed enforcement, or tree trimming, above and beyond the levels normally provided by the City. The community must determine whether there is a need for these enhanced levels of service to continue in the renewed Action Agenda.

## Analysis of the Action Agenda and Next Steps

The neighborhood team is in a unique position to collect information and analyze the level of completion for each of the Top 10 Priorities. If a sufficient number of the Top 10 Priorities (4 or more) are deemed “complete” or “to-be-completed,” a full-track process is followed, and the analysis is expanded to include the entire original Action Agenda (see Figure 2 for a sample progress assessment and Figure 3 for definitions of thresholds of completion).

The analysis of completion of each action item includes:

- A thorough **review** of the original action steps, goals, and components contained in each action item presented in the *NIP*. It is important that the neighborhood team take into account not only the “letter,” but also the “spirit” of each action item in order to assess whether the intent of the community’s goals has been met.
- A **description** of the progress made since the release of the *NIP*, as it relates to each action’s goals, components, and steps.
- A list of **resources** invested and/or allocated to date. This includes not only dollar amounts, but also in-kind resources such as staff time.
- An estimated **timeline** for completion.
- An initial **assessment** of level of completion, provided by the neighborhood team and based on the information collected. This assessment must be confirmed by the NAC.
- Recommended **next steps** based on the initial assessment. Next step recommendations are especially relevant for “partially complete” or “incomplete” actions (see Figure 3 for definitions of thresholds of completion). The neighborhood team presents the recommended next steps to the NAC for verification.

## NAC Confirmation of Progress Assessment and Next Steps

While the neighborhood team collects the information necessary for the assessment and provides a preliminary analysis and recommended next steps, the assessment process is only complete when the NAC, as the representative

of the community, confirms whether each specific action item is considered complete, to-be-completed, partially complete, or incomplete. At this point, the NAC also makes the final decision on the steps to follow for each individual action, based on the recommendations of the neighborhood team.

The results of this discussion determine which of the original action items are taken “off-the-table,” or carried over to the renewed Action Agenda. It is therefore critical that this confirmation process be conducted in a setting that supports focused and extended attention to the task of reviewing complex information, and enables the level of discussion needed to reach full consensus.

Figure 3 provides a definition of the thresholds used to assess the completion of each of the action items included in the original Action Agenda.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FULL RENEWED ACTION AGENDA OR ALTERNATIVES FOR TOP PRIORITIES

The results of the progress assessment, the analysis of the changes that have taken place in the neighborhoods since the publication of the *NIP*, and the new or emerging themes explored in collaboration with the community at NAC meetings and community workshops, provide the basic material to develop a list of action items to be prioritized by the community.

This phase entails the development of either:

- A **full renewed Action Agenda** for neighborhoods on the **full-track**, or
- **Alternatives for top priorities** for neighborhoods on the **short-track**.



## Full Renewed Action Agenda

Neighborhoods on the full-track consider, ratify, and prioritize a full Action Agenda that includes a comprehensive list of the following action items:

- All action items included in the *NIP* that have been confirmed as either Partially Complete (P), Incomplete (I), or Ongoing (O) in the progress assessment phase. Some action items may be presented for consideration in the original form they appeared in the *NIP*. However, the progress assessment process is also likely to uncover the need to modify some action items in order to facilitate their implementation.
- New action items that directly address changing neighborhood conditions and emerging planning themes.

## Alternatives for Top Priorities

Neighborhoods on the short-track consider, ratify, and prioritize an expanded list of alternatives for the top priorities from which residents will choose the new Top 10 Priorities. The expanded list of alternatives includes:

- All top 10 action items included in the *NIP* that have been confirmed as either Partially Complete (P), Incomplete (I), or Ongoing (O). Some action items may be presented for consideration in the original form they appeared in the *NIP*. However, the progress assessment process is also likely to uncover the need to modify some action items in order to facilitate their implementation.
- Action items that directly address key changing neighborhood conditions and emerging planning themes, but were not part of the *NIP*'s original Top 10 Priorities list.

These additional candidates for the top priorities may be based (either in original or modified form) on items found in the full *NIP* Action Agenda but which did not rank among the Top 10 Priorities. They may also be entirely new actions addressing neighborhood issues that were not apparent during the development of the *NIP*.

## Action Types

Ultimately, the Action Agenda and Top 10 Priorities should contain a balance of each of the four different types of actions:

- Neighborhood Action
- Service and Social Action
- Capital Project
- Wow!

This classification of actions into types helps clarify both the scope of each action item and the role of the various organizations, agencies, and individuals who have a primary interest in implementing it. Figure 4 provides icons that represent these four types of actions; the images can be used to help community members visualize the different categories of projects they might consider.

Figure 4 Types of Actions



A **Neighborhood Action** priority is a community-based initiative that can be implemented relatively quickly by the neighborhood residents. Each project demonstrates change in a visible way and often has the greatest potential to involve community members. Examples of projects include neighborhood and creek clean-ups, tree planting, house painting projects, and murals in public spaces.

A **Service and Social Action** is designed to enhance specific community services that are run via governmental programs, non-profit, and/or

community-based organizations. Examples include housing rehabilitation, social services, and law enforcement programs.

A **Capital Action** focuses on major long-term improvement, and typically involves the construction of a community facility or other development, such as a new park, trail, or affordable housing.

A **Wow!** is a potentially transformative opportunity which is also visionary in nature. Such a project inspires immense creativity, and challenges all involved to think and act differently. An example of a Wow! is the Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace SNI community's vision for a town square as part of a new mixed-use development at a future BART station.

#### 4. PRIORITIZATION

Developing an effective list of priorities is a critical factor for the successful implementation of the action items of importance to the community. In order to ensure that a fully inclusive and fair process is followed, the prioritization process entails two primary steps:

- Conduct a **voting** exercise
- Develop the **Top 10 Priorities** list

##### Voting

Once the final proposed Action Agenda (for neighborhoods on the full-track), or the list of alternatives for the top priorities (for neighborhoods on a short-track) is made ready to be considered by the community, a **ballot** is slated (see Figure 5 for a sample ballot).

The ballot is the primary means of assessing the community's priority ranking for each action item. For the full-track process, action items are presented in the form of a full, renewed Action Agenda. A renewed Top 10 Priorities list is used to create a ballot for neighborhoods on the short-track.

To facilitate the identification of action items presented in the ballot, action items are arranged according to overarching planning **themes**, or the common range of neighborhood issues they address. Planning themes may include, for instance:

- Housing
- Neighborhood Retail
- Industrial Uses
- Health
- Parks and Open Space
- Walkability
- Transportation
- Education
- Community and Social Services

Figure 5 Sample Individual Ballot

		<b>ACTION ITEMS</b>	▲ = Original action modified ◆ = New Action	<b>TYPE OF ACTION</b>	<b>PROGRESS STATUS</b> Complete (C) To Be Completed (T) Partially Complete (P) Incomplete (I) Ongoing (O)	<b>PRIORITY</b> Place your dots here
RETAIL	1	Transform Santa Clara-Alum Rock Corridor through mixed-use infill development	▲	Capital	P	●
	2	Create a strategy for outdoor seating at restaurants and cafés	▲	Capital	P	
	3	Encourage public art and art galleries		N'hood Action	P	
	4	Promote a sense of community through events	▲	N'hood Action	P	
HOUSING	5	Expand housing rehabilitation programs		Service & Social	O	
	6	Establish a homebuyer initiative to assist families to buy their first home	◆	Service & Social		●
WALKABILITY	7	Enhance School Zone Crosswalks and Signage		Capital	P	
	8	Complete the trail network through the neighborhood	▲	Capital	I	●
	9	Continue the streetscape improvements along 24th Street from William St to Julian Street	▲	Capital	P	●
	10	Implement a pedestrian corridor along St. John Street	◆	Capital		
	11	Implement a traffic calming strategy along key neighborhood streets and intersections	◆	Capital		●
LAND USE	12	Develop a specific plan for a Town Square in the future BART area	▲	Wow!	I	●
	13	Encourage work/live development at light industrial properties on 24th Street between William and San Antonio Streets	◆	Capital		●
EDUCATION	14	Collaborate with local universities, museums, and other organizations to expand educational and enrichment programs for students	◆	N'hood Action		●
	15	Explore the creation of a "small school" in the FWBT area	◆	N'hood Action		
FACILITIES & SERVICES	16	Expand afterschool programs for youth		Service & Social	O	●
	17	Partner with established non-profit organizations to ensure that neighborhood centers provide needed community services	◆	N'hood Action		●

Source: Adapted from City of San José, *Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment* (2006).

Ballots are filled individually, and each community member is invited to cast a vote on his or her top 10 priorities. In order to promote a truly impartial and inclusive process, it is important to establish a voting environment where each community member is able to fill out his or her individual ballot without undue influence from the overall group.

The voting process is conducted in two formats:

- At a **community-wide workshop**, where the main proposed action items are presented and discussed in some detail, and time is provided for participants to complete and turn in their individual ballots.
- Via **absentee voting**, with ballots widely distributed throughout the community (for instance through individual neighborhood associations, youth and senior groups, faith-based groups, sports clubs, etc.). Some communities may also distribute and submit their absentee ballots by email.

The absentee voting process facilitates broader participation, enabling community members, who otherwise might not be able to attend a workshop, to voice their priorities.

### **Developing the Top 10 Action Priorities**

The community responses to the voting exercise are carefully weighed by the NAC and the Neighborhood Team and used to create a refined list of the top 10 most important action items.

In developing a well balanced Top 10 Priorities list, the NAC brings to bear its thorough understanding of the strategic importance of individual action items, potential synergies with neighboring SNI areas, the recent and long-term history of specific projects, and funding opportunities to be potentially leveraged. Therefore, the NAC's long-term, intimate knowledge of neighborhood priorities serves as a refining filter to process the information provided in the voting process.

The Top 10 Priorities list includes the most important projects that not only have the potential of transforming the neighborhoods, but also that the City can achieve. Neighborhoods are strongly encouraged to utilize the criteria provided below for determining which action items to include in the Top 10 Priorities, as the City will make a special effort to support their implementation. In addition to the City, community-based organizations that have a stake in enhancing the quality of life in local communities can also assist in the implementation of action items.

### **Guidelines for Determining the Top 10 Action Priorities List**

In defining its renewed Top 10 Priorities, the community is encouraged to build on the collective wisdom accumulated by scores of community leaders and City staff members who have participated in the SNI planning and implementation processes since its inception in 2000. This advice is in the form of guidelines for developing the Top 10 Priorities provided in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Guidelines for Determining the Top 10 Priorities List

**Ask the following questions to strengthen the Top 10 Priorities list:**

**Do people care about this project?**

Address this question in community-wide meetings and NAC meetings. The more people who care about a project the more community support you will have for achieving your goal.

**Is the project one that the City and partner organizations can and should do well?**

To obtain full support, the action priority must be reasonably within the sphere of influence of the City and/or partner organizations. Give preference to priorities that capitalize on the community's and the City's strengths.

**Will the project have a significant positive effect?**

Focus on projects that provide the most "bang-for-your-buck," and the greatest overall potential to improve the community.

**Is the project description easy to understand?**

If a project description is clear and easy to understand, you will find it easier to get community support for the project. Clearly defined projects will also get more attention from the people who can help you achieve your goals.

**Can the project be successfully completed?**

Does the problem you want to solve have a realistic solution? Is the proposed solution realistic? When and how will you know you have succeeded? Have high expectations, but do not set yourself up for failure with an impossible task.

**What resources are needed to implement this project?**

What resources do you need? How will you gain access to these resources? If you don't know who has the power to change a situation, it will be hard to initiate change. Who can help get the project done?

**How visible will this project be in our neighborhood?**

Will the project visibly improve the neighborhood? Projects with a clear visual impact on the community send a positive message to your neighbors and help you get more community support for other projects.

**Is there support outside of our neighborhood for this project?**

If a certain type of project, such as traffic calming, is an action item in more than one neighborhood plan, you can use this broader interest to strengthen support for your project. City and Redevelopment Agency staff can tell you the priorities you share with other groups. In addition, community-based and other non-governmental organizations may have an interest in investing in your neighborhood projects.

**Is this a short-term or a long-term project?**

You do not want to run out of energy or focus before you've completed a single project. Make sure your list contains both short-term and long-term goals.

**Will this project require major public investment?**

Projects that cost more are harder to fund and often take longer to implement. Your priority list should include projects of different levels of cost. City and Redevelopment Agency staff can give you an idea of how much projects cost.

**Does the final Top 10 Priorities list contain a balanced mix of project types?**

A good list includes a balance of:

Neighborhood Actions (4-6)

Service and Social Actions (1-3)

Capital Projects (1-3)

Wow! (1)



## 5. NIPA REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The results of the process of renewing the Action Agenda are documented in a written report, the *Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment (NIPA)*, which is designed to complement the original *Neighborhood Improvement Plan (NIP)*. This phase includes the following steps:

- Produce the **Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment**
- Complete a **feasibility evaluation** of the action items
- Present the *NIPA* to the **Planning Commission** and the **City Council** for **approval**

### Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment

The neighborhood team coordinates and produces the full review of the *Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment*. The report follows closely the format and content of the original *NIP*, and contains the sections illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7 *NIPA* Table of Contents

1. Table of Contents
2. Acknowledgements
3. Executive Summary
4. Introduction
Vision
Setting
Purpose
Community Planning Process
5. Background
Current Neighborhood Conditions
Emerging Planning Issues
6. Renewed Action Agenda and Top 10 Priorities
7. Renewed Action Agenda Implementation Matrix

### **Project Numbering Convention**

In an effort to maintain consistency in the reporting and tracking of all SNI projects, a uniform nomenclature for renewed priorities must be adopted in all plan amendments. This nomenclature is based on the following code:

*SNI2xxYY*

*SNI* identifies the project as a Strong Neighborhoods Initiative Project.

The numeral "2" refers to the renewed action list.

The two letter code *xx* represents each neighborhood, and *YY* represents the priority number.

Should there be a sub-project it should have a letter attached afterwards, such as *SNI2xxYYa*, *SNI2xxYYb*, and so forth.

### **Feasibility Evaluation**

With coordination provided by the core team, the full team evaluates the feasibility of the action items included in the Action Agenda, with emphasis on the Top 10 Priorities. This incorporates input from the various city and regional agencies, non-profit and community-based organizations with the capacity to implement the neighborhood plan to make sure its action items are clear, sufficiently detailed, and viable. This step culminates an ongoing assessment of the feasibility of each of the action items included in the renewed Action Agenda, which starts during the step of developing the renewed Action Agenda and the Top 10 Priorities.

# Roadmap Summary

Figure 8 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 1 - Project Initiation

1 . PROJECT INITIATION	
FULL TRACK AND SHORT TRACK	
Neighborhood Team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully define work plan for renewing Action Agenda</li> <li>• Convene key participants in Action Agenda renewal process</li> <li>• Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations</li> <li>• Analyze current neighborhood conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze status of completion of the Top 10 Priorities (see Analysis of the Action Agenda and Figure 2 for definitions and sample)</li> <li>• Identify emerging neighborhood planning issues</li> <li>• Recommend to employ full-track or a short-track</li> </ul>
NAC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input on Action Agenda renewal process</li> <li>• Review assessment of Top 10 Priorities</li> <li>• Confirm decision to follow full-track or short-track</li> </ul>	

Figure 9 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 2 - Progress Assessment

2 . PROGRESS ASSESSMENT	
FULL - TRACK	SHORT - TRACK
Neighborhood Team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze status of completion of full <i>NIP</i> Action Agenda, including non-top 10 priority actions (see Figure 2 for model)</li> <li>• Coordinate a half-day retreat with NAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin preparing the expanded list of alternatives for top priorities to be presented to NAC for input and approval</li> <li>• Coordinate a half-day retreat with NAC</li> </ul>
NAC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaffirm <i>Neighborhood Improvement Plan</i> vision</li> <li>• Review and confirm status of completion of <i>NIP</i> Action Agenda</li> <li>• Provide input on current neighborhood conditions and emerging planning issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaffirm <i>Neighborhood Improvement Plan</i> vision</li> <li>• Confirm detailed status report of Top 10 Priorities</li> <li>• Review and provide input on preliminary list of alternatives to the top priorities</li> </ul>

Figure 10 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 3 - Full-Track Renewed Agenda Development

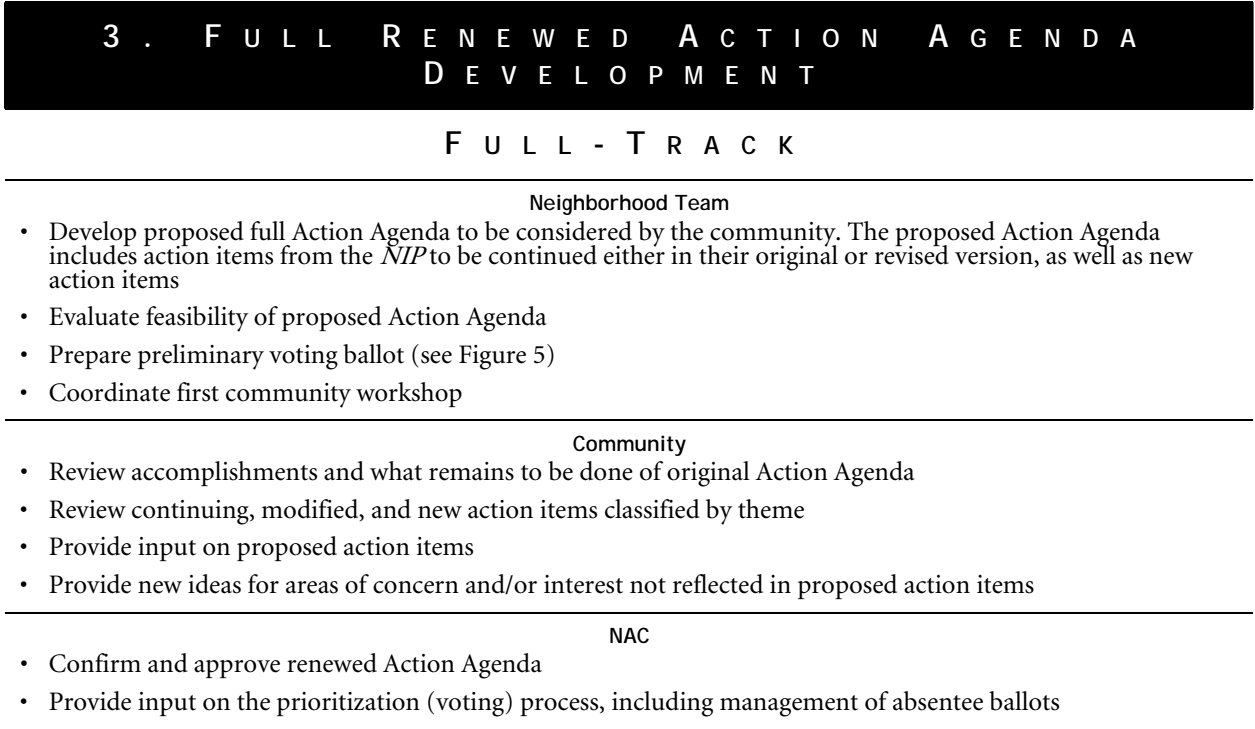


Figure 11 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 3 - Short-Track Alternative Top Priorities Development

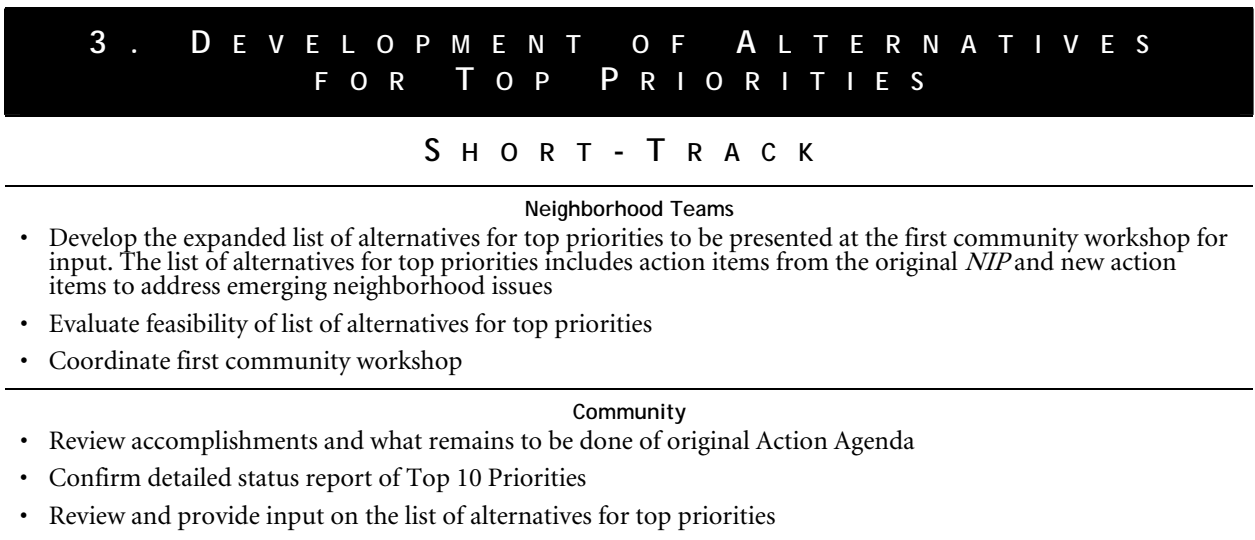


Figure 12 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 4 - Prioritization

4 . P R I O R I T I Z A T I O N	
F U L L - T R A C K	S H O R T - T R A C K
Neighborhood Team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare final version of renewed Action Agenda to be presented for prioritization at community workshop</li> <li>• Prepare final ballot and coordinate absentee voting (see Figure 5 for a sample ballot)</li> <li>• Coordinate community workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare final version of list of alternatives top priorities to be presented for prioritization at community workshop</li> <li>• Prepare final ballot and coordinate absentee voting (see Figure 5 for a sample ballot)</li> <li>• Coordinate community workshop</li> </ul>
Community	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review renewed Action Agenda</li> <li>• Vote in person at second community workshop</li> <li>• Assist with distributing absentee ballots</li> <li>• Submit absentee ballots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review list of alternatives for top priorities</li> <li>• Vote in person at second community workshop</li> <li>• Assist with distributing absentee ballots</li> <li>• Submit absentee ballots</li> </ul>
NAC	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the voting results</li> <li>• Develop, refine, and approve the renewed list of Top 10 Priorities</li> </ul>

Figure 13 Action Agenda Renewal: Phase 5 - Review and Approval

5 . N I P A R E V I E W A N D A P P R O V A L	
F U L L - T R A C K	S H O R T - T R A C K
Neighborhood Team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write draft report of <i>NIPA</i></li> <li>• Conduct the administrative review of draft report</li> <li>• Complete feasibility evaluation of renewed full Action Agenda</li> <li>• Coordinate presentation of <i>NIPA</i> to Planning Commission and City Council for approval (includes writing Planning Commission Agenda Item Description and submitting City Council memo)</li> <li>• Produce and distribute final <i>NIPA</i> document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write draft report of <i>NIPA</i></li> <li>• Conduct administrative review of the draft report</li> <li>• Complete feasibility evaluation of renewed Top 10 Priorities</li> <li>• Coordinate presentation of plan to Planning Commission and City Council for approval (includes writing Planning Commission Agenda Item Description and submitting City Council memo)</li> <li>• Produce and distribute final <i>NIPA</i> document</li> </ul>
NAC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve <i>NIPA</i></li> <li>• Present <i>NIPA</i> to Planning Commission and City Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve <i>NIPA</i></li> <li>• Present <i>NIPA</i> to Planning Commission and City Council</li> </ul>
Planning Commission and City Council	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve renewed Action Agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve renewed Top 10 Priorities</li> </ul>



Figure 14 Full-Track Timeline and Milestones

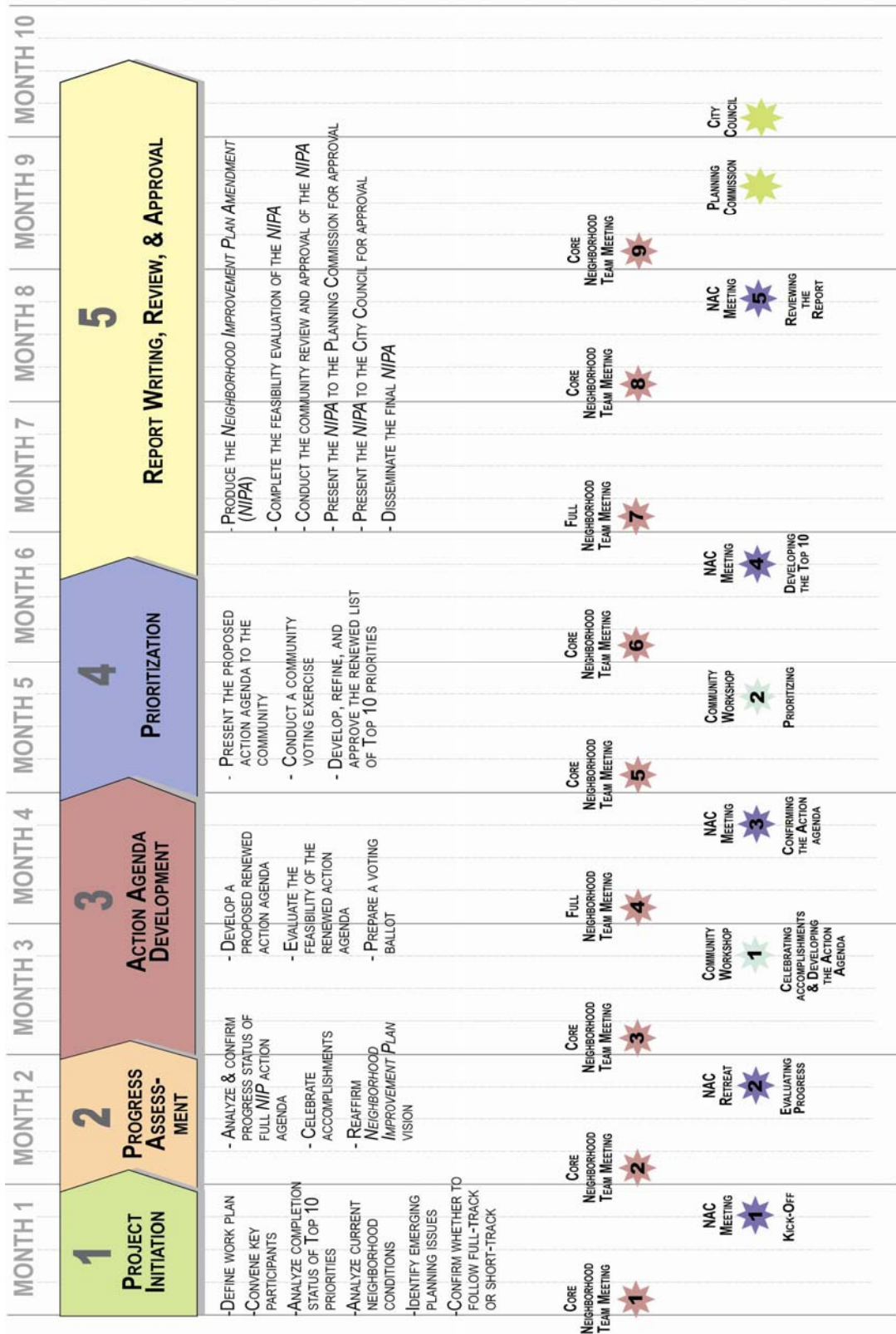
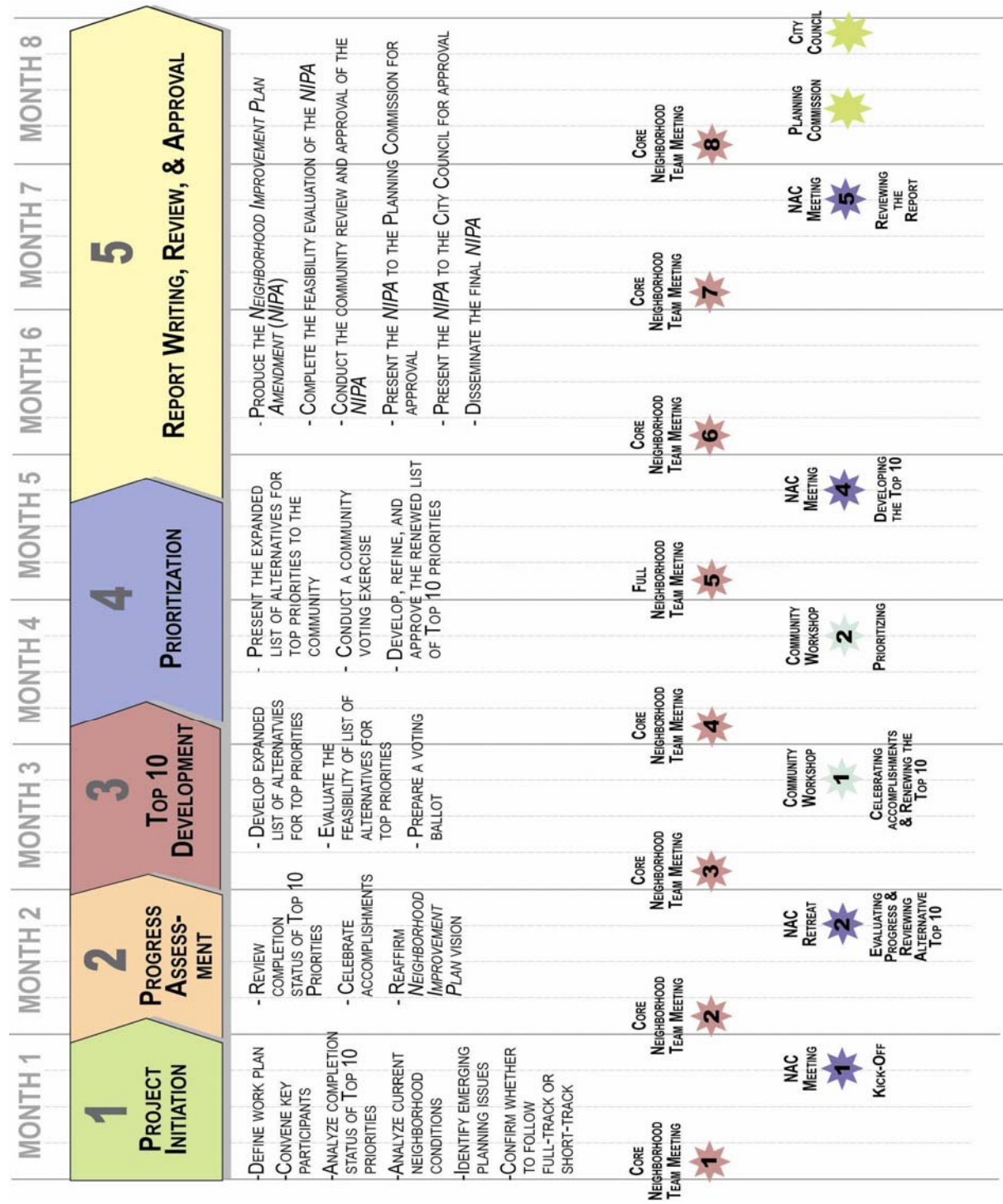






Figure 15 Short-Track Timeline and Milestones





# Lessons Learned

SNI embraces the concept of neighborhood-driven priority setting and is committed to responding to neighborhood needs. The following are nine key lessons learned through the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) experience. The approaches presented below have resulted in solid and long lasting partnerships with neighborhoods and the effective implementation of community projects.

## **Organize with neighborhoods as the building block**

For both community leaders and City staff, the neighborhood (or coalition of neighborhoods) provides an effective organizing structure. The Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NAC) strengthen neighborhood identity and citizen engagement. The NACs serve as a guiding coalition that is instrumental in creating and effectively implementing the neighborhood plans. Similarly, the structure of the Neighborhood Teams has been an effective tool for City staff to experience firsthand the results and impact of their work. Effective project delivery requires on-going collaboration between City staff and the NACs to ensure that the priorities of the neighborhood are achieved.

## **Build on existing neighborhood strengths and assets**

Organize an initial guiding coalition (NAC) for each neighborhood, and map the assets and strengths of each area. The NAC should bring together neighborhoods, businesses, schools, the faith community, and service providers in a single forum.

## **Develop clear priorities through a collaborative neighborhood planning process**

It is critical that the neighborhood priorities be driven by the community and that clear, measurable objectives be set through the planning process. City staff must work hand-in-hand with neighborhood leaders to provide technical assistance in the development of those priorities to ensure that the desired project deliverables are achievable.

### **Write clear and measurable actions and action steps**

Actions to be included in the *NIPA* should be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Broken into individual deliverables.

In the *NIPA*, write the description of each action priority in such a way as to clarify what will be accomplished once the action is implemented. For the Top 10 Priorities, several action steps are written which break the action into discrete parts. When drafting these actions steps, write them in a way that each action step is a deliverable unto itself.

### **Establish accountability**

Assign project managers and recruit community liaisons for each priority action. Work to develop well defined project scopes, cost estimates, and action plans for each priority. A system for tracking and evaluating the performance on a regular basis is an important tool to ensure that projects proceed on time and on budget.

### **Adopt a system for tracking and evaluating the progress of each action item**

The progress assessment model shown in Figure 2 of this handbook is a tool for tracking the status of every action and its corresponding components, or action steps, in the case of the top 10 priority items. A tracking system facilitates thorough and up-to-date progress reports to the community. Measuring the progress of all components or action steps of an each individual action item enables all project stakeholders to be informed, therefore facilitating decisions regarding the steps needed to advance the implementation of an action.

### **Connect priorities to resources**

This connection can be achieved by integrating priorities into existing City Service Areas (CSA) business plans and departmental work plans. Work with

project managers to identify appropriate funding strategies for each priority. Bring together a project team with the needed internal resources for each priority. Immediately launch implementation focusing on quick victories such as clean-ups, housing rehabilitation, traffic calming, service changes, and small capital projects. Celebrate results and build momentum for larger capital projects and service change goals. Intentionally seek to change both policy and service delivery methods to meet issues emerging in multiple neighborhoods. Some changes in service delivery emerging from the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative include Code Enforcement's Driveway Team, the Vehicle Spotters program and improved street sweeping enforcement.

### **Develop neighborhood and City leadership**

Identify new and support existing leaders. Celebrate wins. Train, network, and seek to create true city-community partnerships. Create an ongoing leadership network that connects leaders to each other, helps train and support them, and provides a forum for dialogue and growth.

### **Engage residents as citizens rather than customers**

While organizing neighborhoods is normally viewed as outside the purview of local government, the experience of the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative in San José suggests otherwise. Engaging with residents as citizens rather than customers places local government in a stronger position to work with them toward the vision of building strong neighborhoods. When residents are engaged as partners and are seen – and see themselves – as part of the solution, a collaborative relationship is possible.



# Glossary

**Action Agenda:** The Action Agenda is a comprehensive list of the neighborhood projects identified by the community in a collaborative planning process. The Action Agenda is documented in the *NIP* and the *NIPA*.

**Action Types:** Each action item contained in the Action Agenda falls under one of the following action types: Neighborhood Action, Service and Social action, Capital Project, and Wow! Action types help clarify both the scope of each action item and the role of the various organizations, agencies, and individuals who have a primary interest in implementing it.

**Full-Track:** Communities must determine whether to follow a full-track or a short-track for renewing their Action Agenda. Communities where at least 4 of the original top 10 priority action items have been completed or are near completion are advised to follow a full-track. The full-track entails an evaluation and revision of not only the Top 10 Priorities but the entire Action Agenda.. For comparison, see the **short-track** definition.

**NAC:** Neighborhood Advisory Committee. NACs were formed in the early phases of the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative to serve as the official body that represents the community at large. Most NACs encompass a coalition of neighborhoods, and their membership includes a broad spectrum of the community including residents (both home owners and renters), businesses, schools, the faith community, and community-based organizations.

**Neighborhood Team:** The group of City staff who serve as liaison between the SNI communities and City government, and between City agencies that provide services to neighborhoods. Neighborhood teams can be **core** or **full**. During project implementation phases, **core neighborhood teams** are generally led by SNI staff from the San José Redevelopment Agency and the City Managers' Office, and

expanded to include Planning Division staff during neighborhood planning activities. The **full neighborhood team** expands further expands the core team to include staff from City agencies (including Department of Transportation; Police Department; Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services) regional agencies (such as Santa Clara County’s social service agencies and school districts), as well as non-governmental organizations (such as non-profits, citizens groups, and community foundations) that have the capacity to implement neighborhood priorities.

**NIP:** *Neighborhood Improvement Plan.* The Strong Neighborhoods Initiative developed 19 neighborhood plans during its first two years (2000-2002). The central component of the *NIP* is the Action Agenda, which lists all the neighborhood’s projects, including its Top 10 Priorities. The *NIP* has been used as a blueprint to direct resources to neighborhood-identified priorities.

**NIPA:** *Neighborhood Improvement Plan Amendment.* The *NIPA* document presents the renewed Action Agenda and the renewed Top 10 Priorities, as well as a summary of the community planning process. The *NIPA* complements the original *NIP*.

**NRS:** Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy. The NRS focuses on improving neighborhoods where substandard housing, crime, blight, and other forms of decay are common. Revitalization Plans produced as part of the NRS contain practical recommendations for physical changes that can improve security and enhance the overall livability of the neighborhood, as well as upgrade individual housing units.

**Planning Theme:** Action items included in the Action Agenda are arranged under overarching planning themes according to the common range of neighborhood issues they address. This classification facilitates the identification of individual action items. Examples of planning themes include housing, transportation, community services, and health among others.



**Project Crackdown:** Project Crackdown focuses City services to address problems with drug sales, youth gangs, substandard housing, and blight in neighborhoods experiencing high levels of assault, violence, and crimes against property.

**PRNS:** Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services.

**Short-Track:** Communities must determine whether to follow a full-track or a short-track for renewing their Action Agenda. Communities where fewer than 4 of the original top 10 priority action items have been completed or are near completion are advised to follow the short-track. The short-track focuses primarily on evaluating and revising the Top 10 Priorities. For comparison, see the **full-track** definition.

**SNI:** Strong Neighborhoods Initiative. The Mayor and City Council officially launched the SNI in San José in 2000. The program's goal is to work collaboratively with residents to address effectively the neighborhood priorities and to develop community leadership.

**SJRA:** San José Redevelopment Agency.

**Top 10 Priorities:** The 10 most important neighborhood improvement action items, as identified by the community.