EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Township of Auroville with a Community Participation Framework that will allow for a consistent and transparent collaborative planning process. The framework is based on a set of guiding principles and it functions as a step-by-step guide to involving the community in the planning and development process. A pilot study, using a local planning issue, was conducted to test the framework. Findings from the pilot study resulted in modifications to the framework and recommendations concerning both the pilot study topic and participation more generally.

Prior to the project team's arrival in Auroville, an extensive literature and document review was conducted. This included research on: community participation techniques, framework best practices, and community participation theory, Aurovilian planning documents, and planning research from Auroville. Through this analysis, the project team was able to gain an understanding of Auroville's current community participation practices, its governance structure, as well as an awareness of previous research on community participation in Auroville. Preliminary research was conducted in the form of six semi-structured interviews and a brief questionnaire, which was dispersed through Auroville's Intranet. The cumulative results of this research provided the team with further insight into Auroville's context, and allowed for the development of an initial community participation framework to meet the needs of the community. In consultation with the client, this framework was used to create a preliminary plan for the pilot study that incorporated a high degree of flexibility, as significant changes to the strategy were expected once the team arrived in Auroville.

Upon the team's arrival in Auroville, a focus group was conducted with key individuals in the planning and community participation fields. The purpose of the focus group was to receive feedback on both the framework and the pilot study. Semi-structured interviews and systematic self observations were also conducted in Auroville. This research greatly influenced the framework and led to direct changes in its content. The breadth of the pilot study widened through focus group discussions and in-situ interviews; its scope grew into a broader visioning study.

The community participation framework underwent a number of changes as a result of the interviews, focus groups, and the pilot study. Multiple sections were added to the report including, "What is a framework?" and "Who is this framework for?" The need for more focused public meetings was identified during the interview process, which prompted the addition of a section that includes tips for effective facilitation. The wording of the document was also changed to include plain language. For example, the types of engagement were renamed to "Tell", "Listen", "Discuss", and "Work Together" rather than the more technical "Inform", "Consult", "Involve", and "Collaborate". The "Choosing Techniques" section was expanded to better reflect the importance of using a variety of participation techniques in order to hear from diverse groups and identify which techniques are most appropriate for a given situation.

The proposed community participation framework is designed to be a stand-alone tool that can be pulled out of the report if desired. The framework starts by establishing context; who should be using it and when it should be used. Seven guiding principles form the basis of the framework, which were derived through research and through discussions with Aurovilians. These guiding principles are: be inclusive, build capacity, be proactive, make it enjoyable, provide structure and be transparent, be accountable, and be adaptive. Guiding Principles are foundational values that must guide each step when developing a community participation plan. This section is followed by tips on facilitation. The community participation toolkit represents the "how-to" portion of the framework and is presented in seven steps:

Step 1. Setting Intentions
Step 2. SWOC Analysis
Step 3. Identifying Impacted and Interested Groups
Step 4. Choose the Type of Engagement
Step 5. Choose Techniques
Step 6. Communicate and Implement the Plan
Step 7. Evaluate the Community Engagement Process: Monitor, Report, Feedback

The community participation framework has the potential to standardise the way planners interact with residents and contribute to re-establishing trust. As a result, the implementation of the proposed framework is our primary recommendation, as it will lead to the creation of a structured and predictable participation process. Other recommendations for the implementation of the participation framework in Auroville include: 1) make the framework an online tool, in order to build capacity, 2) the framework should be first used for several small scale projects before it is applied to larger community-wide projects, and 3) ensure that the framework adapted as circumstances in Auroville change.

The pilot study, a test of the proposed framework, occupied the majority of the team's time in Auroville. The participation exercise centred on the question: "What community features do you envision in Residential Sectors 1 & 2?" As recommended by the framework, a multi-method approach was used to gain community feedback. Aurovilians were informed about upcoming events through multiple platforms including radio, emails, posters, and newsletter advertisements. Major events conducted by the project team included three information kiosks, two focus groups, an online questionnaire, a workshop, and 1 on 1 interviews with underrepresented group.

Information kiosks were held at three locations across the community. The kiosks engaged Aurovilians in informal conversations about community features, and generated over 140 responses, which were categorised into four themes and twelve sub-themes. These sub-themes were then listed in an online survey that asked Aurovillians to select their preferred community features. Additionally, a focus group on community features sought out the perspective of Auroville youth, an underrepresented group in the community.

The project team led a workshop that used 2 engagement techniques: "dot democracy" and "open spaces". The team presented a number of potential discussion topics to the group. These topics were generated using data gathered from previous engagement events. Participants each cast 3 votes to narrow down the choices to 4 topics, which were then dicussed using the open spaces technique. Each theme was given a facilitator to guide discussion and a note taker to accurately record the discussion. This exercise resulted in in-depth conversations that centred on feasibility and implementation, which yielded more focused data than previous participation events.The intention of the pilot study was not only to test the proposed community participation framework, but also to act as a fruitful participation exercise for Auroville within the limited time that the team was in the township. The team developed a portrait of the sort of features and amenities residents desire in their neighbourhoods. Six recommended next steps were developed for the pilot study to ensure a strategy for community feature management in Residential Sectors 1 & 2 is implemented. These next steps are:

1. Clarify and communicate intentions for how this data will be used.
2. Analyse participation data and synthesise with planning knowledge.
3. Create an implementation strategy.
4. Create a rough draft report that includes information about how participation data was used.
5. Utilise feedback to refine documents into a final report.
6. Implement the plan.

Five general recommendations on conducting participation events were also generated as a result of the pilot study and our research.

1. Ensure all events are accessible.
2. Be transparent throughout the entire process.
3. Use a diversity of events, methods, and techniques.
4. Be mindful when choosing location and techniques.
5. Set roles and intentions.