

CHAPTER VII

IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR PROBLEMS

7.1 Introduction

Urbanization does not always lead to a creation of a town or a city with equal range of potentiality of growth and development in all aspects. As each urban settlement is plagued with certain deficiencies on various grounds in reality, certain sections of it remain deprived of irreversible inadequacies (Roy and Saha, 2012). Regional disparities in terms of socio-economic infrastructure are evident not only in class-I cities but they are common even in small and medium towns. Distorted urban development coupled with the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources has created many unplanned towns and cities with an uncertain future. Kurseong town faces numerous such problems serious in nature which need to be identified immediately for its inclusion in future planning. With an increase in gap between the existing urban services and their demand in concomitant with resource constraints there is imbalanced distribution of urban amenities. In addition, the capacities of local governments particularly in small and medium towns like Kurseong town with regard to provision of urban infrastructure services are over burdened as their economic bases are not very strong.

7.2 Land use problem

The problems of allocating urban land uses for various functions are fundamentally similar to those of allocating food, clothes and shelter (Hallett, 1979). As Pacione (2001) has stated that further reduction in availability of land for human use due to rapid population growth in urban areas results into re-distribution, intensification and overlapping of various land uses as well as its expansion on surrounding agricultural land (Sharma and Mishra, 2011). Discrepancy can be clearly noticed from comparative figures of distribution of extent of land uses under different categories. “The misuses of land today are a product of the past” (Singh, J. P., 1980). Various existing land use patterns of Kurseong town have evolved through history, the creation and modification of which reflect the outcome of human demands and needs, developmental activities, decisions taken, intensive and extensive utilisation as well as natural and cultural phenomena in the past. With variations in relief the growth has not been uniform in Kurseong town in different directions, mainly due to physical constraints. Moreover, the land uses have been influenced by the pressures associated with increasing population and the consequent developmental activities. At the time of the initiation of the town, attempts were made by the local authorities for its organised

development which, with the passage of time, gradually became a far difficult dream in view of its rapid and high population growth in recent decades. This ultimately has resulted into disorganised development of land uses characterised by emerging haphazard mixed land uses.

The multifarious activities that operate in the town centre are not in compatible relationship with the commercial and residential land uses of the area. NH-55 and the railway line connecting Siliguri with Darjeeling pass through this central commercial area along which shops selling variety of goods are aligned. The parking of numerous vehicles along this highway and the practice of loading and unloading goods make the situation worse. As the shops are found scattered in a haphazard and unplanned manner, scarcity of footpath and lack of parking space is intensely noticed due to encroachment. Some educational institutions are located in a very crowded town centre. The relocation of some of the scattered government offices in an administrative functional area in Wards 18 and 20 in recent years is a significant move by the municipality towards a planned development. But there are many government offices still scattered in different wards of the town. The location of LPG shop on the Hill Cart Road is a misuse in the present context. The loading and unloading of the cylinders creates traffic jam on the already narrow road. It has not been possible to use Chandmari ground in Ward 20 as a public ground owing to reluctance on the part of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India to handover the right of land to the civil authorities and therefore, no further necessary development has taken place here.

Identification of gap between the existing land uses and the recommended standards

The identification of gaps between the existing land use of the town under study and the recommended standards for an efficient land use planning becomes important for curbing the unplanned development of the past and for new development, it is essential to ensure the utilisation of the available land in urban areas in most judicious manner. Here an attempt has been made to identify the gap between the quantum of present land use and the recommended quantum of land use that will assist in optimizing the use of land for further extension of infrastructural facilities to meet the future needs. The percentages of land uses under various categories in Kurseong town have not been in sync with the recommended percentage of URDPFI guidelines. The residential area (81.69%) has already far exceeded the standard recommended (50-55%) and this will continue in future. The intensive utilisation of land in the CBD area has led to congestion and overcrowding. Physical constraints such as steep slopes on the eastern and south- eastern part and difficult terrain on the north and north-eastern part restrict the growth of the town. The western edge with gentle slope, the only possibility of future expansion is limited by extension of tea gardens. Hence a clear picture

of cramped and congested hill town carrying a burden far beyond the town can sustain is observable. Many houses have been constructed without any regard to building regulations.

Table 7.1 Gap between the existing land uses and the recommended standards, Kurseong Municipality

Land use category	Percentage of developed area	
	Recommended land use structure (in %) *	Existing land use structure of Kurseong town (in %) **
Residential	50-55	81.69
Commercial	2-3	1.00
Industrial	3-4	0.20
Public and semi-public	8-10	8.26
Transport and communication	5-6	0.40
Ecological/Forest	8-10	8

Source: * URDPFI Guidelines
** Google Earth, 2016

Table 7.2 Occurrences of landslides in Kurseong Municipality

Year of occurrence	Affected wards	No. of casualties
2011-12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	4
2012-13	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	-
2013-14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19	-
2014-15	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	-
2015-16	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19	-

Source: Kurseong Municipality Office

Certain parts of the town such as Sherpa Busty, Dhobi Khola area, Cutlery, Rajbari-Ranicoop, Sudhapatole, Ghandhigram and Buddhagram with moderate to steep slope, witnessing frequent incidents of landslides during the monsoons which are not very suitable for residential purposes, have dense and compact houses. Though the commercial area of Kurseong town (1%) is below the recommended standard (2-3%), this category of land has been replaced by mixed land use comprising of residential cum commercial land use especially in the CBD area resulting in congestion and unhealthy living conditions. Haat bazar set up during the British period have become very narrow and congested today with increased number of inhabitants as no fore-thought was given at the time of its establishment. The CBD area has been experiencing continuous vertical growth in recent years due to dearth of land and very little scope for horizontal expansion. As the shops are found scattered in a haphazard and unplanned manner, scarcity of footpath and lack of parking space is intensely

noticed due to encroachment. Heavy concentration of shops (60%) as well as location of wholesale godowns in the CBD makes the situation worse. Further, some of the inefficient land uses under commercial category are exemplified by the location of godown of FCI near Supermarket, a municipality shopping complex in the CBD and taxi stand near Railway Station, all of which have occupied huge space. The INA Bus Terminus located at nearly a kilometre away from the heart of the town, remains isolated with a very little utilisation. The Sub-divisional Hospital being located in the heart of the town at Burdwan Road suffers from tremendous noise pollution. In the absence of any large industries, Kurseong town is far from industrial development. The tea industry, the sole industry is plagued by labour unrest, competition in the international market and frequent closures due to Gorkhaland agitation in recent years. The cottage industries which have come up in recent years suffer from sufficient incentives from the government and a very limited market. The percentage of land under forest (28.55%) to total area though fulfils the recommended standard, is apparently open to exploitation in near future. There is a much more possibility of the problem of already limited parks and playgrounds to get aggravated in the near future due to increase in population.

7.3 Problems associated with the pressure of population

The replacement of old wooden single storied light houses by multi-storied RCC buildings especially in the CBD area to accommodate more population resulted into congestion in the urban core and also the mushroom growth of slums characterised by many substandard houses in the central and in-hostile parts of the town.

Slums

Kurseong town, like any other towns of India is also afflicted by the problems of slums where a considerable portion of urban population live without basic essential services and amenities. At present slums exist in fifteen wards with a population of 9,907 making it 23.34% of the total town population. Continuous illegal infiltration both in the past and recent years from neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh on the one hand and on the other, a pull factor of the town to its nearby surrounding rural people has given birth to many slums in the recent past. According to Draft Development Plan, 2008-09 to 2012-13, Kurseong Municipality has a total slum area of 0.43 km² (6% of the total municipal area), which is much larger than the commercial, industrial and transport and communication area. The slum areas are found in Sanatorium Busty in Ward 1, Upper Tekbir Busty in Ward 2, Lower Tekbir Busty in Ward 3, Upper Dumaram Busty in Ward 4, Lower Dumaram Busty in Ward 5, Upper Sherpa Busty in Ward 6, Lower Sherpa Busty and Subedar Busty in Ward 7,

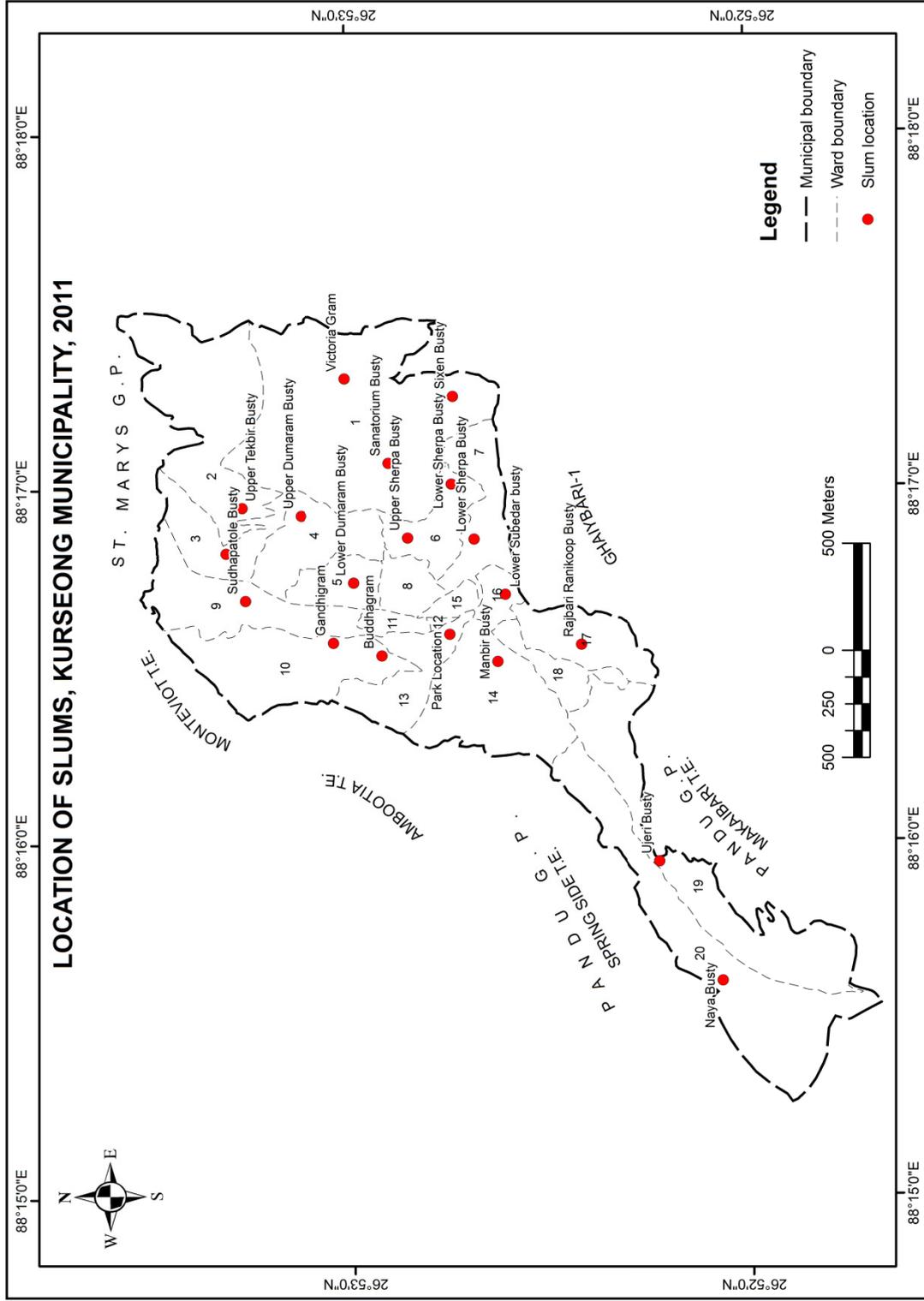


Figure 7.1 Location of slums, Kurseong Municipality, 2011 (Source: Kurseong Municipality Office)

Sudhapatole Busty in Ward 9, Buddhagram and Gandhigram in Ward 10, Park Location in Ward 13, Manbir Busty in Ward 14, Lower Subedar busty in Ward 16, Rajbari Ranikoo Busty in Ward 17, Ujeri Busty in Ward 19 and Naya Busty in Ward 20.

The highest percentage of slum population is found in Ward 7 (66.32%) consisting of Lower Sherpa Busty and Subedar Busty followed by Sanatorium Busty in Ward 1 (59.15%) and Upper Sherpa Busty Busty in Ward 6 (37.62%). The percentage of illiterates, non earning members, families with woman earning member and drop out children is 75%, 20.01%, 85% and 45% respectively (Source: DDP, Kurseong Municipality). Like any other slum area, slums in Kurseong Municipality is also characterized by poor housing, insanitary conditions, and acute shortage of drinking water as is revealed from the fact that 78% of the slum population have remote access to drinking water, 82% of slum population have their houses connected by *kutch*a road and 88% of slum population have *kutch*a houses built with roof made up of C.I./Asbestos sheets, brick or stone wall and earthen floor. 35% of slum populations do not have toilets as a result of which they either defecate in open or use community toilets (DDP, 2008-09 to 2012-13, Kurseong Municipality).

The British, the early settlers of the town settled down in the most favourable parts of the town. Later, the available favourable sites were occupied by the elite Indian class, business men and later on by the local inhabitants. In recent years, though slow but steady flow of poor or low income group rural people, who have no option but to occupy unfavourable sites with very limited building materials in an overcrowded area with congestion and insanitary conditions, have contributed in the mushrooming of slums in different wards. Rural migrants, being attracted to the town for improving their economic status despite of the fact that physical infrastructure in terms of sanitation, drainage, housing, water supply, etc. is not adequate, still have settled down in Kurseong permanently. The slum people particularly the second generation is of the opinion that the slum environment is probably tolerable and better than the harsh conditions of rural life. Another important contributing factor for the proliferation of unauthorized slums in Kurseong town is rapid urbanization. The municipality has witnessed a very high population growth rate in recent years i.e. 48.59% (1981-91) and 49.56% (1991-2001).

The major problems found during the field survey associated with the slums in Kurseong town are unhygienic sanitary conditions, social problems, poor health and child labour. The percentage of slum population identifying use of toilet as others is 65.01%, which means 35%, owing to very overcrowded and congested environment and poverty are not able to build latrines (Source: DDP, Kurseong Municipality). Many slum dwellers, therefore, are

Table 7.3 Percentage of different categories of slum population to total slum population, Kurseong Municipality, 2011

Categories	% to Total pop
Total slum pop	100
BPL	80.00
Illiterate pop	75.01
Number of Drop out children	45.01
Number of non earning Population	20.01
Number of families having woman earning members	85.01
Number of slum population remote access to Drinking water source	78.01
Slum population having access road to house as Kutcha road	82.00
Slum population identifying use of toilet as others	65.01
Slum population identifying their houses as Kutcha & Other	88.00

Source: Draft Development Plan: 2008-09 to 2012-13, Kurseong Municipality

Table 7.4 Income level of BPL families, Kurseong Municipality, 2001

Income level	Percentage of BPL population to total population
Below 1,000	39.13
1,000-5,000	15.07
5,001-10,000	6.67
10,001-20,000	0.15
Above 20,000	0.69

Source: Kurseong Municipality Office

compelled to defecate in open in and around *jhoras* which is awfully unhygienic. It is observed that the slum environment with very low income level and high illiteracy rate in Kurseong town are the root cause of many social vices. Frustration particularly among men being unemployed with worsening poverty lure them to take drugs and alcohol which are so common in Kurseong town. According to the report of Narcotics Anonymous, Kurseong, there were 31 and 35 persons above 18 years of age taking drugs in 2017 and 2018 respectively most of whom belonged to the BPL families. Another report by Darjeeling Childline Kurseong Sub-centre run by an NGO named Kanchanjunga Uddhar Kendra Welfare Society reveals that there were eight drug abuse cases below 18 years of age. With the percentage of BPL families in the slum area with income less than Rs 1000 per month, the possibility of improper food security, inappropriate child feeding practices and poor child care is also higher. Most of the slum dwelling units being located adjacent to the *jhoras* and in unfavourable steep slopes are affected by landslides annually during the monsoons for example Upper and Lower Sherpa Busty, Upper and Lower Tekbir Busty, Buddhagram, Gandhigram.

Further, different wards of Kurseong Municipality exhibit population density far above the maximum level as per URDPFI guideline which indicates that the study area is under much pressure with regard to its carrying capacity. As the area lies in the geologically

and ecologically fragile zone of Darjeeling Himalayas, the unscientific vertical expansion gives way to slope instability. This is exemplified by the fact that the area is frequently hit by landslides and associated phenomena of different intensities and dimensions which has hindered its development. The tremendous pressure of population on land as well as on the civic amenities is well noticeable from the acute water scarcity, waste disposal problem, traffic congestion, poor sewage and housing condition, lack of parking space, narrow roads etc.

7.4 Socio-economic problems

The living conditions of Kurseong town in terms of water supply, services of hospitals, roads and parking space is continually under strain due to very high population growth rate caused by natural increase and in-migration.

7.4.1 Medical facilities

The current infrastructure of Kurseong Sub-divisional Hospital is inadequate to serve the town population and the surrounding rural settlements. The problem of overcrowding is evident from the fact that admission of two and sometimes three patients per bed is a common scene especially during the vulnerable seasons which is practically illogical, unhealthy and unhygienic. Further, many of the beds are old and not in a condition to be utilised due to which some of the wards are overcrowded. Though the present staff strength of the hospital is satisfying, as 77% of the doctors are from other places than the district, majority of them are found to be on leave most of the time. As a result, the total health care system receives a blow and the patients are frequently referred to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital in Siliguri. It is evident from the fact that the number of total cases referred out in 2017 was 1183. The hospital suffers from shortage of physicians with specialization, modern techno-based machineries and instruments. Owing to such deficiencies, the people are compelled to head for Siliguri town or other metropolitan cities for better treatment.

Like the Sub-divisional Hospital, S. B. Dey Sanatorium, a tuberculosis hospital is not devoid of multifaceted problems. In the late seventies, though the Government of West Bengal took over the Sanatorium from the trustees of Calcutta Medical Aid and Research Society, except increasing the number of staff and raising their salary, no measures were taken to enhance its infrastructure. Owing to poor maintenance of hospital the condition of the wards and toilets are in a miserable insanitary condition. The patients are compelled to make their own cooking arrangements, due to inferior quality of food served in the hospital. The hospital lacks essential infrastructures and equipments. The incinerator which was

destroyed during a devastating fire in 1995 has not been replaced till date. The health sub-centres based in a rented room and with only one general physician, visiting once a week are not adequate for the entire town population covering twenty wards.

7.4.2 Postal and Telecom services

The developments in the communication and IT industry in the last quarter of 20th century have challenged the significance of written communication which has resulted into the sharp decrease in the transaction of number of letters, both ordinary and registered and selling of stamps in recent years. Likewise, there has been a decline in the number of land line subscribers in recent years. The town had 1526 subscribers in 1999 (Pal, 2000) which decreased to 530 in 2011 (BSNL Office, Kurseong). The decline is attributed to the growing cable theft and the increasing use of cell phones with its more advanced technology, easy maintenance, utility and accessibility. The expansion of roads acted as a major hindrance, as cables are needed to be laid down on the side of the road with specific depth. The already laid optical fibres and copper cables were damaged and even destroyed during the process of road expansion and yet to be completely repaired.

7.4.3 Trade and commerce

Most of the shops are aligned on both the sides of Hill Cart Road, which being National Highway is plagued by heavy traffic movements and grave traffic congestion. Further, the running of the railway line parallel to this road makes the situation worse. *Haat bazar*, an old market set up during the British period to cater to the needs of few people has become congested today due to increased customers, with very narrow lanes along which numerous shops dealing in variety of goods have come up. Most of the single storied structures in the CBD area have been replaced by multi-storied buildings, housing a greater proportion of the retail business of the town, government offices and banks. This continuous vertical expansion has created much congestion. The front spaces of the existing shops are encroached upon by the vendors, selling vegetables and miscellaneous goods especially along the railway line and the interior lanes of commercial area. In the absence of footpath, the pedestrians are compelled to walk on the road aggravating the traffic problem. Due to lack of parking space, vehicles both private and public carry out loading and unloading of goods on the National Highway. One of such traffic congestions is exemplified by the unloading of LPG cylinders on the National Highway. Further, the location of such shop in the heart of the town can result in fire or explosion hazards like the one that occurred in 1996 which engulfed the major portion of the commercial area. Reoccurrence of such disaster means an irreversible harm to the town hitting its economy adversely.

7.4.4 Transport and communication

Transportation is an essential component of urban infrastructure on which the growth of a town and its trade and commerce is dependent. In Kurseong town, transport and communication occupies very little space. Besides, this very little road space is encroached upon by the shopkeepers and vendors for displaying their goods. Consequently, there is hardly any space for the pedestrians. According to URDPFI guidelines, the width of a single lane without kerbs in hilly areas should be 5m. Although 15% of the total roads in Kurseong town have width ranging from 7.57m to 12.1m and 55% from 4.84m to 7.57m there are many places within the town where width of the road is less than 3m. 30% have width ranging from 2.42m to 4.84m (Table 7.5) which makes the flow of traffic very chaotic. Though the NH 55 has been expanded in various parts of the district, through an encouraging initiative from the government, most of the roads within Kurseong town are narrow and winding that hinders smooth traffic movement. The roads lack in footpath for pedestrians except a short stretch of 250m built in 2012 extending from Kurseong Tourist Lodge to St. Alphonsus' School.

Kurseong, being a sub-divisional headquarter and an important railway hill station is getting busier day by day. The railway line runs parallel to the National Highway and passes through the heart of the town, along the area of maximum commercial activities, causing severe traffic congestion, whenever the Toy Train enters the town. The unsystematic parking on the main road and arterial roads like Hill Cart Road, Pankhabari Road and Dow-Hill Road makes the situation worse. The encroachment of roads by unauthorised shops along Pankhabari Road, Burdwan Road and Hill Cart Road arbitrarily is the major reason behind daily traffic jam and road congestion creating nuisance. This is a regular scenario in Wards 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17 and 18. There is no segregation of pedestrians and vehicular traffic, which can lead to fatal accidents. Further, there is a very little or no scope for widening of roads due to absence of insufficient land and encroachment paralleling the roads. The Kurseong Motor Stand is situated at a very overcrowded and congested area near Railway station on the one hand and the I. N. A. Bus Terminus, located at nearly a kilometre away from the heart of the town, on the other hand, remains isolated with a very little utilisation. The town therefore, lacks a proper taxi stand for parking of taxis and private vehicles as well as two wheelers. The construction of parking cum shopping complex with a capacity of 357 vehicles on the Captain Suraj Sharma Road, started in 2010 is yet to be completed. Likewise, the conditions of the walkways which form an important component of transport system in Kurseong town are not satisfying, as some of them have developed cracks and characterised by pits and depressions and are completely flooded during the monsoons. Further, these

Table 7.5 Width of roads, Kurseong Municipality, 2011

Sl. No	Name of the roads	Width in metre
1	Dow-Hill Road (Bloomfield to S.D.O. Bungalow)	4.84 – 7.57
2	Dow-Hill Road (S.D.O. Bungalow to Kurseong College)	4.84 – 7.57
3	Dow-Hill Road (Kurseong College to Dow-Hill)	4.84 – 7.57
4	Father Wery Road (Alphonsus School to Purnanarayan Road)	2.42 – 4.84
5	Father Wery Road (Purnanarayan Road to Dow-Hill Road)	2.42 – 4.84
6	Hill Cart Road (Dhobi Khola to Petrol Pump)	7.57 – 12.1
7	Hill Cart Road (Petrol Pump to Station)	7.57 – 12.1
8	Hill Cart Road (Station to one way)	4.84 – 7.57
9	Hill Cart Road (one way to Picture Hall)	4.84 – 7.57
10	Hill Cart Road (Picture Hall to Alphonsus School)	7.57 – 12.1
11	J. M. Goenka Road (Station to Sunshine School)	2.42 – 4.84
12	J. M. Goenka Road (Sunshine School to T. V Tower)	2.42 – 4.84
13	J. M. Goenka Road (T. V Tower to Eagle’s Crag)	2.42 – 4.84
14	M. V. Road (Bata shop to G.D.N.S. Hall)	2.42 – 4.84
15	M. V. Road (G.D.N.S. Hall to Gumba)	4.84 – 7.57
16	M. V. Road (Gumba to M. V. Tea factory)	4.84 – 7.57
17	Pankhabari Road (Station to Basnet Press)	4.84 – 7.57
18	Pankhabari Road (Basnet Press to A.I.R.)	4.84 – 7.57
19	Pankhabari Road (A.I.R. to S.D.O. Office More)	4.84 – 7.57
20	Pankhabari Road (S.D.O. Office More to Phatak/Chandmari)	4.84 – 7.57

Source: Office of the Additional District Sub- registrar, Kurseong

Table 7.6 Volume of traffic, Kurseong Municipality, 2015

Location	Two-wheelers	Light vehicles	Heavy vehicles
Towards Darjeeling	56	354	6
Towards Siliguri	64	328	32
Total	120	682	38

Source: Field survey, 2015

walkways in the interior parts of the Wards (2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 14) are devoid of street lamps and are therefore not safe to walk at night.

A Classified Traffic Volume Survey was conducted by the researcher near Kurseong Tourist Lodge on the National Highway from 8 am to 10 am to find out the traffic volume and traffic composition of vehicles. It is evident from the Table 7.6 that heavy traffic flow is a common scene in Kurseong town especially during the rush hours, where intercity traffic mixed with local traffic and also traffic associated with the daily commercial activities operate. With the present traffic scenario, therefore, the town under study faces a lot of traffic problems due to increased population as well as large volume of daily floating population as the roads are overloaded beyond their capacity.

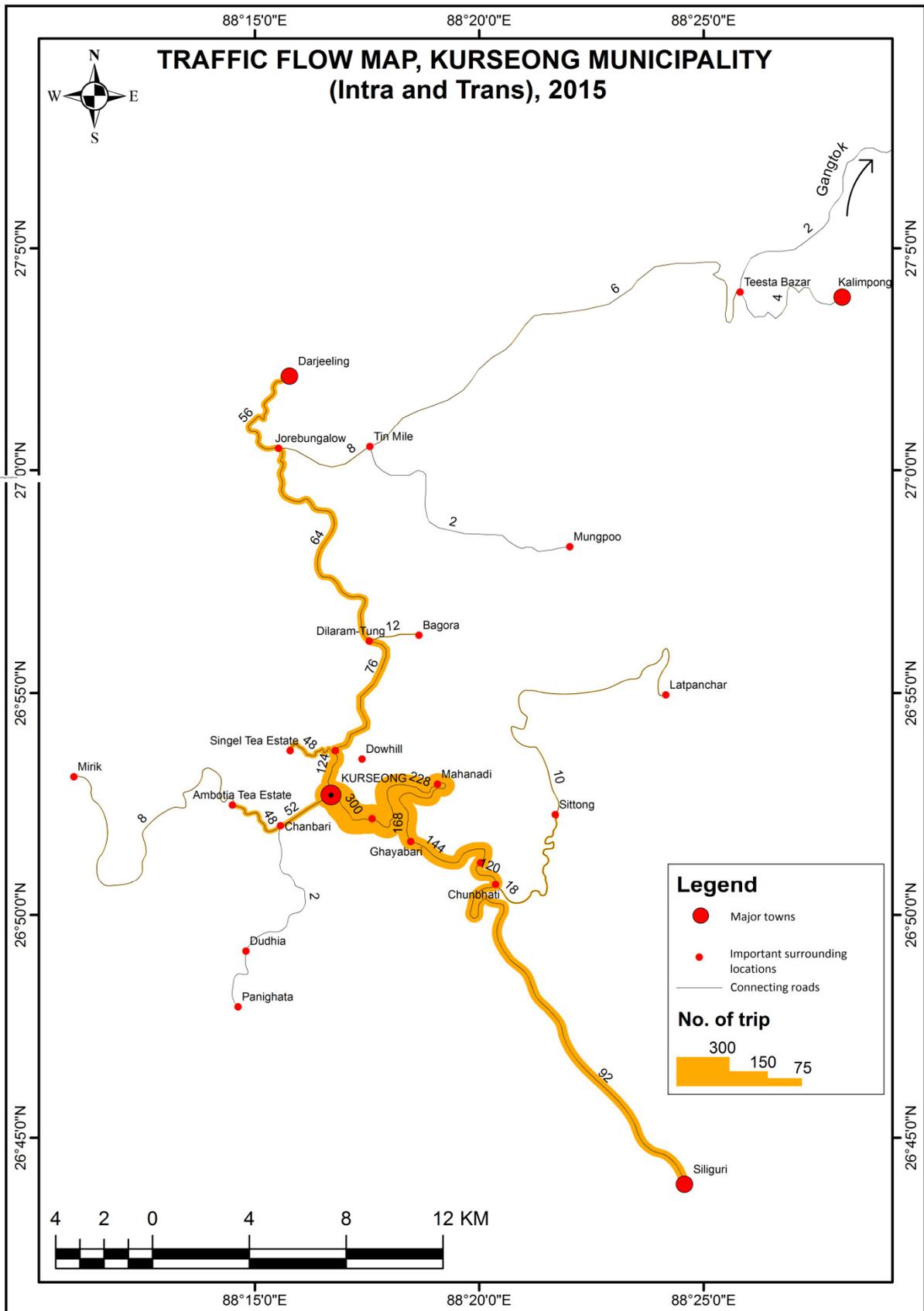


Figure 7.2 Traffic Flow Map, Kurseong Municipality and nearby places, 2015
(Source: Field survey, 2015)

7.4.5 Tourism

Due to its moderate, pleasant and favourable climate Kurseong was a favourable place for a sanatorium in the sixties which is gradually losing its significance in the succeeding years. Despite favourable potentiality for tourism and its location on the National Highway and being the D.H.R headquarter, Kurseong has failed to emerge as a major tourist centre in the region. This is mainly due to its location in the vicinity of Darjeeling, largest hill town of the district and its consequent magnetic pull with more mesmerizing and attractive sites. Further, the policy of state government which does not offer any major incentives to provide facilities for tourism other than the main tourism town has acted negatively in the development of tourism industry in Kurseong town. Another reason for very low development of tourism in Kurseong is because of the fact that the tourists coming for short holidays for site seeing and recreation were gradually replaced by the mercantile tourists who have little or no time for seasonal recreation.

7.4.6 Water supply

The water supply system of Kurseong suffers from numerous flaws. The lack of coordination between the municipality and the P.H.E. Department and difference in their opinion has affected the water supply system adversely. The major feeder conduit pipes stretching from the source to the reservoir, some of them laid during British regime are in dilapidated conditions resulting in numerous leakages and some have become defunct. Hence, the existing capacity of the age old reservoirs and the reservoirs built in recent years is inadequate to cater to the present demand and the mounting town population. In the absence of alternative sources like wells or dug wells, which are common in the plains, water scarcity has become a perpetual problem in Kurseong town. Uncontrolled illegal tapping and water losses in the delivery and distribution networks and disruption of supply by frequent landslides has further aggravated the problem. Even today there is a dreadful shortage of 2628984 litres per day considering the CPHEEO standard for the town population of 42446 (2011 census). Owing to meagre supply of water from the municipality during the lean months, individual households, hotels, restaurants, privately run residential schools and commercial establishments are compelled to make their own arrangements by engaging water carrying vehicles which cost Rs. 400 – 500 per 1500 litres. The field survey reveals that the percentage of surveyed households receiving water on alternate days and two to four days a week is 67% and 14% respectively. The condition of the duration of water supply from the municipality is more dismal as 79% of the surveyed households receive water for less than an

hour. This crisis is mainly responsible for provoking the practice of illegal tapping of pipes coming from the sources and reservoirs by the inhabitants and offensive practice of manipulating water supply for making quick money by some people who look after the distribution network. Some of the municipal wards are not fully covered with proper supply of potable water (Annual Administrative Report 2008-09, Kurseong Municipality) from the municipality.

The lack of coordination between the two chief water supply agencies in the town i.e. the P. H. E. and the municipality is illustrated by the fact that the 16 fire hydrants installed by the municipality in different parts of the town for the department of Fire Service in the past, even after their completion, some of them remain non-functional till date. There is no Waste Water Treatment Plant. There is a lack of extensive practice of rain water harvesting techniques in individual and institutional households. An Indo-Swedish Integrated Water management Project (IWM) started in 2009, although is an assuring and brilliant step on the part of the municipality but due to political unrest in the hills and severe financial constraints, the project has been unable to proceed.

7.4.7 Electricity

The damaged street lamps are not changed on a regular basis along the roads and walkways which consequently remain dark for weeks or even for months. The electricity supply is irregular during the monsoons when the inhabitants suffer from frequent power cuts. The problem of breakdown of transformers is common during the monsoon season. The replacement of these transformers and the repair work requires a good number of technical staff but as the WBSEDCL depends upon the private contractors for these works and in the absence of expertise and proficiency on the part of the contractors, problems get worsened especially during the major faults. Another main problem associated with electricity in Kurseong town is running of Composite Line i.e. HT and LT lines parallel to each other in some localities which are prone to fatal accidents. Some of the lines particularly in the CBD area are in a chaotic and precarious position liable to disastrous mishap. Further, the electricity supply network in the town is mostly not covered with safe and protected AB cable.

7.4.8 Unemployment

Kurseong is a rapidly growing urban settlement with residential and educational elements as dominating functions. But the economy of the town has not been able to absorb fully the growth of its labour force. As Kurseong town is far from industrialisation, the industrial activities contribute very little for its development. Privately run residential

schools and various government offices are the main sources of employment and the scope of employment generation by some other ways is difficult to match the level of expectation. A comparison of economic base of Kurseong town with other towns of the district (Table 7.7) reveals that the index of economic base of the town is much less than those of Siliguri, Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The people who are educated and technically skilled move out to other towns and cities in search of better job opportunities. It is evident from the field survey that the percentage of surveyed households with their children working in other places like New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Shillong, Guwahati, Gangtok, Varanasi etc and in countries like Nepal, Singapore, U.A.E., Qatar, Kuwait etc. is 19%. The problem of unemployment in the town is rather alarming as 37% of the surveyed population are unemployed.

Table 7.7 Total workers (2001 and 2011)

Urban area	Number of total workers	
	2001	2011
Darjiling (M)	33214	40849
Kalimpong (M)	13382	16759
Mirik (NA)	3053	3723
Kurseong (M)	10069	9863
Siliguri (M Corp.) (Part)	96390	108409
Darjiling district hill urban	63831	95169
Darjiling district urban	166203	255148

Source: Census of India

7.5 Environmental problems

The tremendous population pressure on various public utilities and community facilities have been eating the vitality of the town and making it environmentally degraded and polluted. The high-density settlements concentrated in a small area associated with lack of urban services such as running water, good housing, proper sewers and solid waste disposal system, have been continuously polluting the environment.

7.5.1 Housing

The high increase in the population of Kurseong through natural growth and immigration has created an acute shortage of houses especially in the heart of the town. The construction of houses could not keep pace with the growth of population. In some of the localities where the amenities are better, the greater demand for houses makes the housing problem more acute. The problem of housing has resulted into the increasing population to resort to individual, informal provision of shelter, resulting in urban blight with the

proliferation of slums on illegal lands in many parts of the town. Fifteen slum pockets have been identified in Kurseong Municipality where 23% of the total town population reside,

Table 7.8 Household density, Kurseong Municipality (1961 – 2011)

Year	Area	No. of households	Household density*
1961	5.05	1325	262
1971	5.05	3087	611
1981	5.05	3479	689
1991	5.05	4535	898
2001	5.05	6083	1205
2011	7.85	6616	843

Source: Census of India
*Computed by the researcher

mostly occupied by those who have no better housing facilities within their reach.

The census records show that the total number of households increased from 1325 in 1961 to 6616 in 2011 with an increase of 399%. The household density shows an increasing trend except in 2011 which is due to the change in the municipal area from 5.05 km² in 2001 to 7.85 km² in 2011. According to 2011 census, Ward 12 located in the CBD records the highest household density (17,200). Other centrally located wards namely 5, 8, 11, 15 and 16 also record high household density ranging from 2,270 to 3,900. The active functioning of forces of attraction and integration in Kurseong town has resulted in a greater inflow of people from the adjoining rural areas for better social and economic prospects. This has caused a marked vertical expansion of residential buildings. In Darjeeling hills the state government has prohibited the construction of buildings exceeding 11.5m (close to four storeys) in height. Violation of this building norm is a common scene in many wards. The intensive utilisation of available land for residential and commercial purposes has resulted into the high rise, accommodating multiple families. Kurseong, being a hill town and falling under seismic zone IV, as per Bureau of Indian Standards, is geologically very fragile where concrete construction is environmentally not preferable. All these have made the kind of development which is taking place in the town in recent years environmentally unsustainable.

7.5.2 Sewerage

The issue of partial and deteriorated sewerage system in Kurseong town which carry human wastes from community latrines, some private latrines and a few households has been posing a serious challenge to its governing authorities. Many community latrines have no

water supply while the outlets of many others with water supply are not connected to the town's sewerage system. Owing to improper maintenance, the structure of these community latrines is in very poor conditions. The existing sewer line of 4.50 km length is not connected with households in many places. As a result the effluents and the night soil from most of the households are directly discharged into the nearby *jhoras* without treatment, thereby polluting the already limited water bodies and resulting into health hazards. Though sewer lines are presently cleaned manually as per requirement, regular inspection and maintenance of existing lines becomes very difficult in the absence of sufficient labour and adequate equipments. The municipality, at present, does not have a single cesspool emptier, night soil tanker or any other type of carrier for collection, transportation and disposal of night soil. Although the DDP report of Kurseong Municipality (2008-09 to 2012-13) shows that 60% and 40% of the total households have night soil type and individual septic latrines respectively, with no town dweller using public latrines but the field survey reveals that 7% of the total surveyed households use public latrines. The households having night soil type latrines have to make their own arrangements for disposing the night soil and those having individual septic latrines but not connected to central sewage system discharge their septic effluents into open surface drains and *jhoras*. The water supply pipes running through these drains in many residential areas are adversely affected. The existing number of staff for cleaning and maintaining the public latrines, vats, roads and sewers is inadequate and thus the sewage cleaning is done on an irregular basis. As 12% of the total surveyed households have their sewage line directly connected to nearby *jhoras*, these raw sewage and human waste make their way through open drains polluting the areas where they run through, ultimately polluting the streams. Households located along the banks of the *jhoras*, thus, regularly pollute the channels through their service privies. The municipality lacks a Waste Water Treatment Plant and a proper Sewage Treatment Plant. Encroachment by the squatter settlement over the drainage further hampers the cleaning work. Therefore, during rainy season when the magnitude of storm water discharge is very high, the overflowing roads, streets and lanes along with water and waste clogged drains are a common scene in the town.

7.5.3 Solid waste

The total amount of solid waste collected by the municipality is less than that produced by the town population, which reveals the inefficiency of the municipality to collect garbage, lack of sufficient number of municipal vats and location of some in interior parts of residential areas and lack of awareness among the inhabitants which impel them either to burn or dispose off these wastes at illegal dumping sites. In the absence of regular collection,

a significant portion of wastes is dumped in nearby *jhoras*, trenches and low levelled areas which have an alarming effect such as clogging of drains and triggering of landslides. As the municipality is not equipped with adequate number of skilled manpower, finance and machinery, the garbage is kept open at the collection points causing foul smell, water and air pollution and unhygienic conditions. The largest municipal vat located at the heart of the town near the Community Hall is always characterised by overflowing garbage with foul smell, huge army of flies, scavenging dogs and monkeys making it difficult for the pedestrians to walk. As per the guidelines of CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) the best sweeper-population ratio should be between 1:25 and 1:500 (Siddiqui and Siddiqui, 2010). There are only 69 sweepers to serve a population of 42446 which has resulted in one of the uncomfortable ratios (1: 615) in such a hill town. Further, the collection efficiency ratio for disposing the estimated total waste generated is only 26%. The municipality lacks an incinerator for burning wastes.

7.6 Financial problem

Finance constitutes the backbone of the workings of an urban local body in the absence of which the urban local body becomes non-functional and inoperative. Improper and unwise management of finances defames the government isolating it from its people and even threaten its very existence (Sachdeva, P., 2011). The existing finance pattern of Kurseong Municipality, the main source of revenue being the tax from holdings, mobile towers, imposition of fees, tax on trade license, entertainment tax etc. and grants from the central and the state governments, has not been able to meet the required expenditure. A huge gap exists between the actual and collected amount of property tax. The total annual amount of collection from property tax during 2016 – 2017 was Rs 43,16,113 whereas the total annual amount of actual tax was Rs 76,73,325 which leaves a yearly deficit of Rs 33,57,212. Further, many ongoing projects in the municipality are far from completion on account of partial transfer and devolution of grants from the government and also due to the political unrest in the hills. Kurseong, being a small town with scarce financial resources depends significantly on the Central and the State governments to meet its expenditure requirements.

Table 7.9 Actual and collected property tax, Kurseong Municipality (2016 – 2017)

Property tax	Demand (in Rupees)	Collection (in Rupees)
Arrear	32,45,048	16,98,879
Current	44,28,277	26,17,234
Total	76,73,325	43,16,113

Source: Kurseong Municipality Office

7.7 Problems associated with spatial variation in the level of development

A spatial variation in the level of development in terms of socio-economic infrastructure is an undesirable phenomenon that can have adverse impact on social, economic and cultural growth of the entire town and its inhabitants. The distribution of urban amenities across the wards of Kurseong Municipality shows a wide variation which indicates that many wards are insufficient in different urban amenities. The rapid population increase has surpassed the expansion of such facilities in Kurseong Municipality as is evident from the analysis of service gap between the population and the available amenities. This has led to the deterioration in the quality and distribution of various services. With regard to the facilities of health care services such as hospitals, health sub-centres, nursing homes, dispensaries, primary health centre and veterinary centres and civic amenities such as post offices, police stations, police posts and playgrounds, the town possesses amenities far below the standard requirements. The unequal distribution of urban facilities in the study area has led to the emergence of regional disparities in socio-economic development and consequently having serious impact on the overall development of the town. The amenities generally decrease from the town centre to the peripheral areas of the town. The unevenness in the distribution of civic amenities in Kurseong Municipality has led to the concentration of these facilities not proportional to the population size in different wards of the town which has further led to the utilization of the available resources in an injudicious manner. If such disparities are not mitigated they will further widen the service gap between the developed and undeveloped wards which are already prevalent in Kurseong town.

7.8 Conclusion

Like metropolitan cities, Kurseong town also faces a great challenge of handling various dimensions of urban problems with the multiplying needs and demands of its ever-increasing population. The basic services available have not been able to keep pace with the growth of population and constant increase in population density in different wards of the town. This has resulted in the deterioration of housing conditions, proliferation of slums pockets, frequent traffic congestion, acute water scarcity, health hazards caused by improper solid waste management and strained health and recreational facilities. Continuous illegal infiltration both in the past and recent years from neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh on the one hand and a pull factor of the town to its nearby surrounding rural people on the other, has created an acute shortage of houses resulting in the proliferation of slums in many parts of the town. Having a sub-divisional status, Kurseong Sub-divisional

Hospital with inadequate modern infrastructure has to serve the people of entire Kurseong Sub-division. The town lacks a proper taxi stand for parking of taxis, private vehicles and two wheelers. Peak hour traffic congestion on narrow roads, unsatisfying provision of public transport facilities and absence of adequate pedestrian and parking facilities are the most problematic areas. The reluctance on the part of the State Government policy in providing any major incentives for the development of tourism other than the main tourist town and replacement of tourists by mercantile tourists acted negatively in the development of tourism industry in Kurseong town. There is a lack of coordination between the P.H.E. Department and the Municipality which are responsible for the maintenance and distribution of water supply in the town. The existing capacity of the age old reservoirs and the reservoirs built in recent years is inadequate to cater to the present demand and the mounting town population. The solid waste management system and sewerage system of the town suffers from various shortcomings such as inadequate number and improper location of vats, inadequate number staff and inadequate infrastructure. Kurseong, being a small town with scarce financial resources depends significantly on the Central and the State governments to meet its expenditure requirements. Many ongoing projects are far from completion on account of partial transfer and devolution of grants from the government.

Spatial variation observed in the availability of urban amenities in Kurseong Municipality indicates that the concentration of these facilities is not proportional to the population size in different wards of the town which has further led to the utilization of the available resources in an injudicious manner. If such disparities are not mitigated they will further widen the service gap between the developed and undeveloped wards which are already prevalent in Kurseong town. But before doing so, the evaluation of past and present development plans is essential for identification of gaps between the sectors/areas of ongoing development and the sectors/areas in need of development which will further aid in the planning process.

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