The neighborhood is the planning unit for a town.
Traditional neighborhoods have specific sizes usually based upon walking distances equivalent to a quarter-mile radius. When the neighborhood combines with other traditional neighborhoods, it becomes a town. In contrast, sprawl is a series of isolated pods that are not well connected to one another. The amount of land acquired by the developer typically determines the size of the pod. When these pods stand alone in the landscape, it is sprawl. When these pods combine with others, it remains sprawl.
Neighborhood size has been defined throughout planning history. This graphic created by Clarence Perry is entitled “Neighborhood Unit of the 1920 New York Regional Plan”. Clarence Perry defines the neighborhood as a component of a town and defines its size based upon a five-minute walking radius. The radius is measured from the center, and the center holds the cultural uses such as a school. A five-minute walking distance is approximately 160 acres. Clarence Stein expanded the definition of neighborhood center in 1942 by connecting the neighborhoods together to create towns. In the 1920’s and 1940’s, the centers and anchors of neighborhoods were the schools. More recently, the quarter-mile walking radius has been expanded to a half mile with the addition of a transit hub. Traditional neighborhood size works well in the town, village, and urban city scales.
In the 1920’s, Clinton McKenzie created the model town diagram that defines all the components that work within a traditional neighborhood. Rural lands stand at the edge. In Florida, the rural edge could be agricultural lands, preserves, and watershed areas. One to five-acre estate lots line the neighborhood edge. The estate lots define the edge of a town instead of having lots scattered throughout the countryside. The estate lots intrinsically connect to the neighborhood. The bulk of the neighborhood is single-family lots ranging from fifty to 200 feet in width. The lots narrow as the pedestrian moves closer to the center of the neighborhood. The block structure becomes more ridged at the center and more organic as the pedestrian moves out from the center. A system of neighborhood greens connects throughout the neighborhood. The highest density areas are located near the center—townhouses and multifamily units. Because of their size and resilience, the higher density areas surround the neighborhood green or main street. In this diagram, the 1,350-foot radius encapsulates most of the neighborhood. The traditional neighborhood, by definition, allows it to be part of a central business district or a series of other neighborhoods to create a small town or village.
The definition of the five-minute walking radius neighborhood is part of the American Institute of Architects Architectural Graphics Standards which is an industry standard for dimensional criteria for buildings and site planning.

In the early 1990’s, the firm of Duany Plater-Zyberk reproduced the Clarence Perry diagram to demonstrate how the diagram is still effective in planning today.
Florida has a long history of planning by the twentieth century town planner John Nolen. He created plans throughout Florida including Sarasota, Fort Myers, and St. Petersburg.
Nolen also developed an early master plan for the City of West Palm Beach. This slide shows the City Center with the five-minute walking radius.
The neighborhood benefits from an enormous city park along its western edge. A public community center, educational and cultural facilities, and neighborhood services are embedded within the neighborhood. Commercial and office uses are located at the perimeter of the neighborhood. A regional convention center is part of the northern portion of the neighborhood. All of these components fit within the five-minute walking radius, and all the components work well within this neighborhood.

This neighborhood holds over 400 dwelling units including both single and multi-family. There are both owner-occupied and rental units, and prices range from the middle $100,000 to over $400,000. This neighborhood in downtown West Palm Beach demonstrates how a traditional neighborhood continues to serve its residents.
Residents enjoy many intangible benefits living in this neighborhood. Defined neighborhood boundaries engender feelings of ownership in both homeowners and renters. Feelings of ownership automatically give way to spontaneous policing. The five-minute walking radius is the perfect size for neighborhood organizations. It is easier to manage a compact neighborhood, and it makes it easier to have a more unified political voice. When the neighborhood association raises funds, the physical improvements made with these funds are more noticeable since the funds are spread over a small geographical area. Finally, the diversity and character of these neighborhoods create uniqueness and give these neighborhoods a lasting sense of identity.
The Urban Land Institute recently worked with the City of Port St. Lucie on their western annexation areas. Many conclusions brought forth by the Urban Land Institute were consistent with traditional planning. The Urban Land Institute suggested the following:

- creating a unique identity in the neighborhoods that do not currently have a unique identity
- creating individual neighborhood plans
- breaking down the large neighborhoods into smaller components
- creating more interconnectivity
- developing neighborhood guidelines and logos

The Urban Land Institute put forth the concept of “cradle to grave” neighborhoods. If a person can be born, raised, go through college, return to the neighborhood, and live out his or her life in the neighborhood, it implies sustainability, longevity, and history. The Strategic Regional Policy Plan tells how to create “cradle to grave” neighborhoods.
To recap, the scale of the traditional, sustainable neighborhood is based upon a five-minute walking radius (1/4 mile). When combined with other neighborhoods, it becomes a town thus a city. The neighborhood, therefore, is the planning unit of the town, city, and village.