

A Brief Overview of the Charrette Design Process

What is a charrette?

The charrette is a collaborative method of planning that brings together citizens, planners, engineers, environmental consultants, accountants, architects, town staff and local officials for design workshops in the style of a traditional town meeting. Typically taking place within a concentrated time period, charrettes ensure that all parties work together to produce a set of documents that address every aspect of project design and program.

Benefits of the charrette process:

1. ***Creates public trust*** through meaningful public involvement and education:
 - Community members get immediate feedback on technical questions from experts, as opposed to answers from Town Council members and staff during a conventional public hearing, improving the quality of information exchange.
 - Community members see how their comments and suggestions have been integrated into the plan.
 - This immediate feedback loop and education process is unusually responsive and strengthens public confidence in local government.
2. ***Creates a better plan*** through diverse input and involvement:
 - With a compressed timeframe and a multi-disciplinary team, brainstorming and negotiation during a charrette can change minds and facilitate unexpected solutions to problems.
 - The number and variety of solutions and ideas generated is far greater than with conventional planning processes.
 - The charrette is an alternative to the time-consuming linear and sequential process of submittals and re-submittals that typically occurs.
3. ***Creates a shared vision*** that builds public support for the project:
 - Everyone who is interested in the project can participate.
 - The educational process of a charrette helps everyone who participates understand the rationale behind the preferred design, and they in turn can become advocates for the plan.

Key differences between the charrette and other planning processes:

- Compressed work sessions
- Communication in short feedback loops
- Collaborative work across technical disciplines and community interest groups
- Opportunity to consider both the details and the big picture
- Work occurs on-site
- Produces a buildable plan