



# “Building Vision” Educational Resource and Innovation Center (ERIC)

## WHAT IS A PLANNING AND DESIGN CHARRETTE?

“Charrette” is a French word typically used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline. The actual word “charrette” is translated as “cart” – a cart was used to collect the students’ projects.

A planning and design charrette combines this intense work session with public workshops and open houses. The charrette is a planning process that provides opportunities to capture the talents, energies, and insights of all citizens to create and support a feasible plan that will generate the highest probability for significant community change.

### A Charrette is:

- An open process that includes all interested parties
- From 3 to 7 days with an additional series of public pre-charrette workshops (2-3) to develop the project’s initial vision thereby setting the stage for the more work intensive charrette; this initial phase is also referred to as “community focus groups.”
- A collaborative process involving all relevant disciplines in a series of short feedback sessions
- A process that produces a feasible plan  
A general, holistic, inclusive approach

### What a Charrette is NOT:

- A one-day workshop
- A multi-day marathon meeting involving everyone all of the time
- A plan crafted by a select few that will affect many
- A “visioning session” that stops short of implementation
- An exclusionary process guided by experts

The conventional approach to design is exclusive – it does not easily permit stakeholder participation. Even high quality projects with identifiable public benefit may lose support without a collaborative approach like a charrette. A charrette provides a framework for creating a shared vision with maximum opportunity for community involvement, directed by skilled consultants and designers representing all of the relevant disciplines.

## The Anatomy of a Charrette

- Phase 1:** Pre-charrette community-based focus groups leading to a shared community vision
- Phase 2:** The community vision is presented to the charrette design team and they produce alternative design proposals based on this initial information
- Phase 3:** These plans and illustrations are presented in an informal public meeting where anyone interested in the project can voice their concerns
- Phase 4:** The charrette design team takes the public input and refines and narrows their design proposals based on this new insight
- Phase 5:** The refined plans are then presented in another informal public meeting (like Phase 3) to solicit public evaluations of the more refined plans and to share the underlying thinking of the design process to date
- Phase 6:** All of the information gleaned from Phases 1-6 is integrated into the “best” design solution by the design charrette team and presentation illustrations are prepared
- Phase 7:** The final plan is presented for community discussion and confirmation

The process illustrated above outlines seven phases. However, depending on the complexity of a project, the number of charrette design professionals involved, and the number of community participants, the number of phases may increase, (i.e., the number of phases depends on the amount of time a project requires to reach a meaningful and successful conclusion.)

The charrette process uses public workshops, public forums, charrette design team work sessions, and informal walk-in opportunities where the most recent versions of the design proposals are available for ongoing citizen review. The process is dynamic in that it actually takes the form most appropriate to the stakeholders and charrette design team members. And, because these participants are always different, the process employed is sufficiently flexible to maximize participation and consensus building.