

HOW DOES COMMUNITY PLANNING DEFINE A CHARRETTE?

A Charrette is a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all Interested Parties to create and support a comprehensive Community or Master Plan. The term "Charrette" is overused and often misused. CP&CI has defined the following ten strategies, which differentiate an authentic Charrette from other planning processes; work collaboratively, design cross-functionally, compress work sessions, communicate in short feedback loops, study the details and the whole, confirm progress through measuring outcomes, produce a feasible plan, use design to achieve a shared vision and create holistic solutions, include a multi-day charrette, and hold the charrette on site.

WHY DOES A CHARRETTE HAVE TO LAST MULTIPLE DAYS?

One of the unique traits of the Charrette is the series of feedback loops. Three loops are the minimum required to facilitate a change in participants' perceptions and positions. Within these three major feedback loops, designs are created based upon a public vision, and presented within hours for further review, critique, and refinement. Four consecutive days are required to accommodate three feedback loops, scheduled at least a day apart. These feedback cycles foster a holistic understanding of complex problems by all participants and form the basis of a plan that reflects all vital viewpoints. It results in true buy-in by everyone involved, who are thereby inspired to support the plan, allowing it to overcome the inevitable challenges on its path to implementation

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO USE A CHARRETTE PROCESS?

Charrettes are ideal for projects in which development is imminent, and/or when there is a real developer to implement the results. Charrettes are especially useful for projects that have significant community impact and contentious situations that require conflict resolution. For a Charrette to be successful, participants must be prepared and informed about the process, and the information required for a holistic approach must be present. This means ensuring that key stakeholders have agreed to participate and have a shared understanding of the project, the process, and their roles in it. There must be agreement on the nature of the problem and the need to act on it. The information must also be comprehensive. This means all the information that is required for participants to make informed decisions is available and in a form that can be understood by all involved.

DOES A CHARRETTE ALWAYS REQUIRE A THIRD PARTY FACILITATOR?

The third party facilitator is someone who is recognized by all participants as someone who is genuinely committed to protecting the people and the process in the Charrette. The third party role is invaluable for creating an atmosphere of trust for all participants. At minimum, the Charrette requires someone who can play the third party role when necessary. In many cases, local staff members have too much history to effectively be a third party. Although it is a bit of a high-wire act, it is possible for a conscientious Charrette leader to assume a third party role and provide content.

Source: National Charrette Institute (NCI)