

Charrette

Background: A **charrette** (pronounced [shuh-ret], sometimes called a **design charrette**) consists of an intense period of design activity around a community development, redevelopment, or construction project.

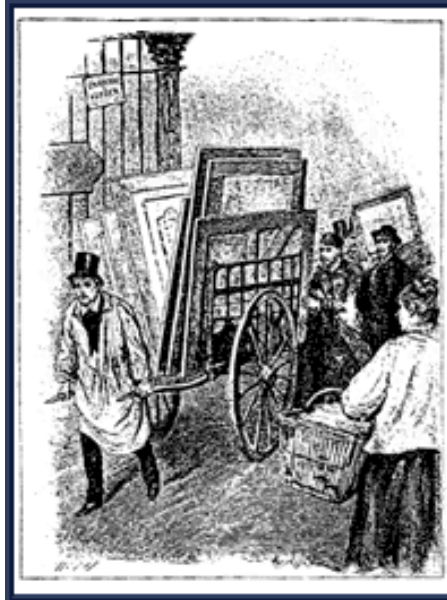
The word *charrette* can refer to any collaborative session in which a group of designers drafts a solution to a design problem. The group of "designers" can include all manner of individuals, usually from the community itself. A charrette workshop provides local officials and concerned citizens with resources and a process that help educate and involve the community in the decision-making process.

While the structure of a charrette varies depending on the design problem and the individuals in the group, charrettes often take place in multiple sessions in which the group divides into sub-groups. Sub-groups present their results to the full group. Charrettes serve as a way of quickly generating design solutions while including the interests of a diverse group of people.

In urban planning, the charrette has become a technique for consulting with all stakeholders. These charrettes involve intense, multi-day meetings, involving municipal officials, developers and local residents. A charrette promotes joint ownership of solutions with an attempt to defuse confrontational attitudes between residents and developers. For developers and municipal officials, charrettes achieve community involvement and may satisfy consultation criteria and, hopefully, avoid costly legal battles.

In fields of design such as architecture, landscape architecture, industrial design,

interior design, or graphic design, the term *charrette* can refer to an intense period of work by one person or a group of people prior to a deadline. The period of a charrette typically involves not only a focused and sustained effort, but also "all-nighters" or sleepless nights.



The French word, "charrette" means "cart" and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline.

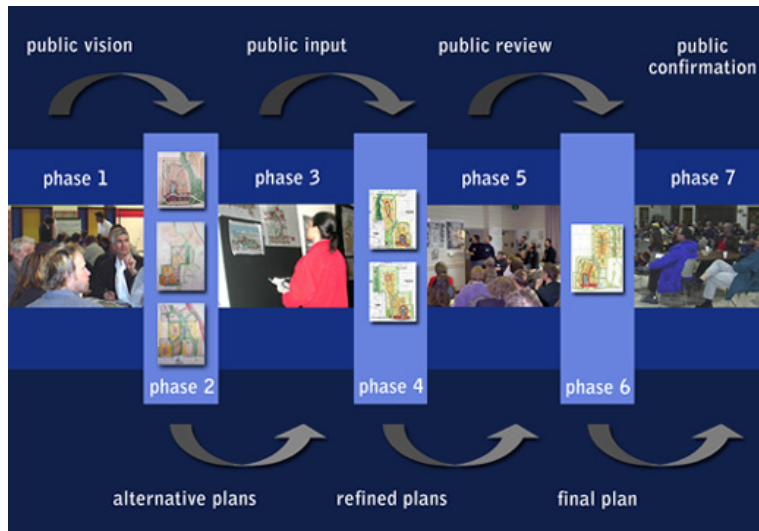
The workflow of the charrette involves a series of collaborative design and public input cycles for multiple, consecutive days. Everyone – from city planner

to local business owner– becomes aware of the complexities of development and design issues, and everyone works together to arrive at the best possible solution.

The Charrette Team: A central element of the charrette is the "design team," a multidisciplinary group of professionals that provide the necessary expertise to create a feasible plan that considers all relevant input. This team is the constant of the charrette, working day and night on site in the charrette studio to develop a holistic, feasible plan.

The charrette stakeholders, anyone who is impacted by the project or has interest, are involved at a minimum in scheduled meetings, including at least two public meetings. Stakeholders are also welcome to visit the charrette studio throughout the charrette during open hours. In this way, it does not consume large blocks of time for residents or officials.

Once the design team completes its set-up procedures, including a team kick-off meeting and site tour, a public hands-on workshop is conducted for the purposes of creating a clear understanding on the part of all participants about the purpose and process of the charrette and to solicit the public's project vision. The next day the design team creates a series of alternative plans based on all information



gathered to date, including the public vision, and then solicits input at another public meeting. This input is used to refine the alternatives and create more detailed plans that are again reviewed and critiqued by the public during an open house. The design team further refines and narrows the feedback into a final plan and set of implementation documents to be presented for public confirmation on the final night of the charrette.

It is important to note that the project is not complete when the charrette is. Document refinement and further feedback occur through stakeholder discussions and a follow-up meeting approximately a month after the charrette. This allows everyone to check in on the refined charrette plan and to allow for one final feedback loop.

Three Stages: There are three stages to a Charrette: Info Gathering, Design & Review, and Presentation.

The charrette is the most efficient way to bridge the stages of Info Gathering and Implementation; both in terms of time and economics.

The Charrette process is an exercise of transparency, where information is shared

between the design professionals and the stakeholders of a project area. In this way, trust is built between the parties involved and the resulting vision can be based predominantly upon the issues that stakeholders feel are most crucial to them.

Charrettes are increasingly used by public and private sector groups and agencies as the chief design event in the urban design or town planning process.

There are infinite schedule combinations that can be used for a design event, from a one day workshop to a multiple month long smattering of workshops and presentations and reviews. A charrette itself has numerous scheduling options. Four days is the absolute minimum length of time it takes to do a charrette that will generate a usable level of detail worth the investment of time. The length of time a charrette should take is related to the size of the project and the number of stakeholders.

Application: Facilitators are extremely important to the success of a charrette. It is important that we know about and are intimately familiar with the models, methods, and tools used by facilitators to conduct charrettes.

Resources

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charrette>

<http://www.charretteinstitute.org/charrette.html>

<http://www.charrettecenter.net>

<http://louisville.edu/org/sun/planning/char.html>