Meaningful Public Involvement: Charrettes for Community Change

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The Charrette Process:
A better way to design community plans

Urban Design Associates
Public involvement is a great American tradition.
The New England Town Meeting

• Famously portrayed by Norman Rockwell, a tradition of people working together to solve problems to improve their communities
People are getting involved in response to growth issues

- In many communities there is an atmosphere of distrust for planning and development projects

In Building New Ski Resort, Developers Face Avalanche of Obstacles

By Jim Carlton and Jonathan Friedland
Staff Reporters for the Wall Street Journal

Tensions have been rising between community members and developers regarding plans to build the WestRock resort, a year-round resort on West Mountain in Idaho. There has been considerable opposition from environmentalists and a coalition of local residents and state politicians called the Citizens for Valley County, who claim that the project will become an economic burden to taxpayers. Of primary interest to
Limited opportunities to participate

- People are increasingly dissatisfied with their options to participate in decisions that affect their communities

- Typical involvement options:
  - 3 minutes in a public hearing
  - An endless series of workshops
People respond with petitions and protest

Home Plan Pits Residents against Developers in Antioch, Ill

Nov. 23—With suburban sprawl lapping its borders, Antioch has become one of Lake County’s last outposts in a classic battle that pits citizens worried about losing their way of life against developers.

The Village Board gave preliminary approval to Nexxan Homes for the 1,240-unit housing development, to be located on 635 acres just south of Illinois Highway 173.

The Village Board could vote on the plan as early as December, which is why a new 100-member citizens group, Antioch Coalition to Rescue the Environment, has been turning up the heat against the plan.

More than 600 residents have packed a series of Village Hall meetings to think people look at the traffic, the openness they’ve moved out to get, and the next development that comes in feels like a threat.

‘When this is finished, you’re talking about another 5,000 people living here. It’s going to impact our schools, our roads, our services. We need time to adjust.’

— Antioch Mayor Tasos Maravelias

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How can we make it easier to build better communities?

- Good community involvement processes, such as Charrettes, help get visions built.
The Charrette turns planning into a community building event
What is an authentic Charrette?

- The Charrette is a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a buildable Smart Growth plan.

Roger K. Lewis
What is an authentic Charrette?

An authentic Charrette is:
- At least 4 consecutive days
- An open process that includes all interested parties
- A collaborative process involving all disciplines in a series of short feedback loops
- A process that produces a buildable plan
- A generalist, holistic approach
Misconceptions about the Charrette Process

An authentic Charrette is not:

− A one-day workshop
− A multi-day marathon involving everyone all the time
− A plan authored by a select few that will affect many
− A “visioning session” that produces non-specific results
Origin of the term “Charrette”

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

• At the École des Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th century, proctors circulated with carts to collect final drawings while the students frantically put finishing touches on their work.
What can a Charrette do?

Charrettes result in feasible plans for:
- Revitalization areas, such as Main Streets
- New development plans
- New annexations
- Community-wide visions
- Comprehensive plans
The Charrette supports community

- The Charrette makes community planning a combination of a town meeting and a barn raising

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Steve Heckeroth
The Charrette creates a town meeting atmosphere

- The whole community is involved in a fun, engaging design workshop that spans many days – a town meeting atmosphere.
The Charrette provides many opportunities for participation

- In a Charrette, everyone interested helps out in a team effort that taps their unique contribution
- Professionals provide design and strategic input
- Citizens provide local information, feedback, and critique
Why do Charrettes work?

• The Charrette brings decision makers together in one place for a concentrated effort to create a detailed, feasible plan.
Why do Charrettes work?

• The Charrette involves everyone in a facilitated process so everyone is heard and no one dominates.
Why do Charrettes work?

Participants work in a series of short feedback loops:

1. Concepts
2. Alternatives
3. Refinement
4. Plan

Public review is integrated at each step.
A Sample Charrette
The Charrette is the center of a larger process

- Careful preparation and follow-through is essential to a successful Charrette
Pre-Charrette: Getting Charrette-Ready

The Preparation Phase

• Project Set-up and Organization
  – shared team understanding

• Stakeholder Involvement
  – establishing trust
  – getting all the right people there

• Base Information
  – getting all the right information there

• Feasibility Studies
  – working toward a buildable plan

• Logistics
  – maximizing resources
During the Charrette: Charrette Roles and Process

The Charrette Design Team
- The Charrette Design Team works uninterrupted to produce the plan
During the Charrette: Charrette Roles and Process

Stakeholders
The stakeholders provide vision, input and review at key moments

Stakeholder Meeting  Public Meetings  Gallery
Charrette Work Cycles

1. Public vision
2. Phase 1
3. Public input
4. Phase 3
5. Public review
6. Phase 5
7. Public confirmation
8. Phase 7

- Alternative plans
- Refined plans
- Final plan
Day 1: Public Vision

Stakeholder tours and a public, hands-on visioning workshop
Day 2: Alternative Plans

The team meets with key stakeholders and develops concept alternatives
Day 3: Public Input

Stakeholders give input and feedback
Day 4: Refined Plans

Team refines and synthesizes concepts
Day 5: Public Open House and Review

Public open house –
Participants review concepts and give feedback
Final Products are created at many scales and levels of detail.
Day 7: Public Confirmation – Public meeting

Public presentation by team members. One more opportunity to get input from the public.
Charrette Products

Codes

Hand drawn renderings

Computer Renderings

Environment Analysis

Urban Advantage/LCA Town Planners

Seth Harry/LCA Town Planners

Geoffrey Farrell

CommunityViz ™
Charrette follow-up: Implementation Phase

• The goal of the Plan Implementation Phase is to refine and finalize Charrette products to guide the project through adoption and development.

• Tasks include:
  – Team Debriefing
  – Plan Implementation Strategy
  – Document Review and Feedback
  – Document Revision
  – Final Project Public Meeting
  – Project Closeout
Key differences between the Charrette and other planning processes

- Compressed work sessions
- Communicate in short feedback loops
- Work collaboratively
- Work for at least 4 consecutive days
- Study the details and the whole
- Work on-site
- Produce a buildable plan
Keys to the Charrette Process

Compress Work Sessions
• Time compression facilitates creative problem-solving by accelerating decision-making and reducing unconstructive negotiation tactics.
Keys to the Charrette Process

Communicate in Short Feedback Loops
• Regular stakeholder reviews quickly build trust in the process and foster true understanding and support of the product.
Keys to the Charrette Process

Work collaboratively

- Create a long-lived plan based on each individual’s unique contributions. The Charrette process gives a plan a mutual authorship and vision shared by all who participate. Having contributed to it, they are in a position both to understand and to support its rationale.
Keys to the Charrette Process

Work for at Least 4 Consecutive Days

- The best results come from 3 feedback sessions, scheduled at least a day apart.
Keys to the Charrette Process

Study the Details and the Whole

- Lasting agreement is based on a fully informed dialogue.

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Keys to the Charrette Process

Work on Site
• Working on-site fosters participants’ understanding of local values and traditions and provides easy access to stakeholders and information.
Produce a Buildable Plan

- The success of a community’s work to plan and build together depends on implementation tools such as codes and regulating plans.
Benefits of the Charrette process

- Creates public trust through meaningful public involvement and education
- Creates a better plan through diverse input and involvement
- Creates a shared vision by turning public opposition into support
Frequently Asked Questions

1. When is the right time to use the Charrette Process?
2. How do you know when you are Charrette-Ready?
3. How can you assure that the right people participate?
4. How much do Charrettes cost?
5. What happens after the Charrette?
Charrettes have proven successful for all parties

“… Several League members attended the Charrette in February and felt that it successfully encouraged public participation in the design process. They also felt that the Charrette increased the understanding of participants when compromises had to be made because some requests could not be accommodated without conflicting with others.”

–Leslie Stewart, Action Chair, League of Women Voters of Diablo County
Charrettes have proven successful for all parties

“The Charrette epitomizes public empowerment in the planning process. By allowing the design team to work with the public (usually reserved for developers), the public is able to combine their unique knowledge of the community with the skill and expertise of the design team.”

–Donna Gerber, Former County Supervisor, Contra Costa County, California
“The Charrette process provides the forum for a reasoned discussion among all of the stakeholders, representing all viewpoints, both public and private, within a productive framework. The goal of the charrette is a result that melds these viewpoints into a viable project. The most important factor in the success of a Charrette is the full participation of all of the stakeholders.”

– Mark Farrar, Principal, Millennium Partners