



# Georgia Planning Officials Newsletter

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## 10 Strategies for a Successful Charrette

Given the diverse interpretations of what constitutes a charrette, it is important to be clear about what is expected. The National Charrette Institute believes that these 10 strategies should be active in any charrette process:

- **Work collaboratively.** True collaboration is based on valuing each individual's unique contribution. Therefore, anyone who might build, use, sell, approve, or attempt to block the project should be involved before the start of design and throughout the project.
- **Design cross-functionally.** Multidisciplinary teams of architects, planners, engineers, economists, market experts, public agency staff, and others must work together from the beginning of the charrette. This approach can save time by reducing costly reworking.
- **Compress work sessions.** Time compression facilitates creative problem solving by speeding up decision making and suppressing counterproductive negotiations. Time-compressed design sessions in the NCI charrette are full of energy and creativity. Uninterrupted focus on a problem often results in unexpected solutions to difficult problems.
- **Communicate in short feedback loops.** Regular stakeholder reviews build trust in the process, foster support for the project, and minimize rework. A feedback loop occurs when a design is proposed, reviewed, changed, and re-presented for further review. Stakeholders should be continually educated about the process and the plan's progress. They must be brought into the process early and at proper intervals so that they can affect the outcome.
- **Study the details and the whole.** Designing at varying scales reduces the likelihood that the team will overlook a flaw. Looking at the details provides the information necessary for a well-rounded discussion about a proposal.
- **Confirm progress by measuring outcomes.** In this way, the team ensures the transparency of the decision-making process, and people can see that the project is being implemented as planned. Early agreement about measures of success allows the project team to illustrate how decisions are made.
- **Produce a feasible plan.** Feasibility should always be a focus of the discussion. Plans that are built as drawn and agreed upon help build trust in government and collaborative planning processes in general.
- **Use design to achieve a shared vision.** Design is a powerful tool. Drawings help to illustrate the complexity of the problem and can help to resolve conflict by proposing solutions with win-win outcomes. A capable designer can change peoples' positions by altering their perception of the possible solutions.
- **Conduct a multi-day charrette.** The goal of a charrette is to take a project from a vision, to alternative concepts, to a preferred plan, to a developed feasible plan, and on to a final presentation. A minimum of three feedback loops is required to adequately involve the public in this undertaking. It takes between four and seven days to accomplish this work collaboratively.
- **Hold the charrette on or near the site.** Participants can better understand local values and traditions if they work on-site — and stakeholders will have easy access. Charrette studios have been located in empty main street storefronts, community centers, high schools, and armories. The open studio gives stakeholders access to the team and the plan throughout the day and into the evenings, making it possible for those with a busy schedule to stop by even if they missed a scheduled meeting.

## The Charrette Process

Public involvement can be difficult for any city or county, regardless of its size or location. Plans and studies can sometimes be hindered by a lack of involvement early on in the process, leading to frustrations from the public later on.

One way to gain public participation early in the planning process is to conduct a charrette. According to the National Charrette Institute, a "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.

Ideally, charrettes provide a climate that stimulates an exchange of ideas, information, and opinions about needs and solutions. The information exchange serves to educate participants about the needs of other groups, design challenges and the pros and cons of many options. The process promotes consensus-building toward a common vision. It also harnesses the talents and energy of design professionals (as well as citizen participants) to help participants visualize alternatives and to recommend design solutions.

## Additional Resources

**East Lake Sammish (Washington) Parkway Project:** [http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/pdfs/projects/ELSP/Finalv2\\_ELSP\\_flier\\_April05.pdf](http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/pdfs/projects/ELSP/Finalv2_ELSP_flier_April05.pdf)  
This link provides a sample brochure that could be used for advertising both the project and the charrette.

**Duluth (Minnesota) East Downtown, Hillside and Waterfront Charrette:** [http://www.lisc.org/duluth/assets/introduction\\_9387.pdf](http://www.lisc.org/duluth/assets/introduction_9387.pdf)  
This link provides a look into a final report and master plan based on a large charrette process.