

MICHAEL WATKINS ARCHITECT, LLC

Urban Design & Architecture

What is a Charrette?

The term “charrette” has been popularized largely by new urbanist planners and architects, and refers to the intense, inclusive design process that is often used to design many new urbanist communities. While with DPZ, Watkins led dozens of charrettes and participated in countless others. Watkins has received the National Charrette Institute’s Charrette System Certificate Training, and Management and Facilitation Certificate Training.

The charrette process is a collaborative design event that lasts five to ten days depending on the complexity of the issues to be addressed and the level of stakeholder involvement; most run about seven days. The key is to allow time for three feedback cycles between the stakeholders and the consultant design team. Stakeholders include those who can influence the approval of the project as well as those affected by its design. They need not all be present for the entire charrette, but are asked to participate as they are able, most important during design reviews, to provide their feedback. Through their participation, consensus can be built around an excellent plan. Gaining stakeholder support through building consensus becomes invaluable during the approval process. It also results in a place that the stakeholders love and cherish long after the developer and municipal leaders are gone.

Ideally a charrette is held on or near the site to make participation by stakeholders as easy as possible, and to allow constant verification of design decisions through frequent field checks. Typically, a public meeting is held at the beginning of the charrette to share and establish common values and vision. Most of the design team will quickly begin to develop ideas, while a few will meet with stakeholders to draw out their thoughts and ideas, which are then shared by the design team with the stakeholders, in real time or during public “pin-up” reviews. These short feedback cycles build confidence that the process results in a plan that actually does incorporate stakeholder input. As the designs are critiqued, the best ideas are synthesized into several schemes and ultimately a single scheme that is developed in greater detail and further tested for economic, design and political feasibility. At the end of the charrette, a summary of the week’s work and the results are shared in a public presentation.

Following the charrette, drawings are refined and completed, and, typically, an application prepared for submission to the governing municipality. It is worth noting that the charrette is most often in addition to the required public review process, however, the consensus behind the plan frequently results in a much smoother municipal review and approval.



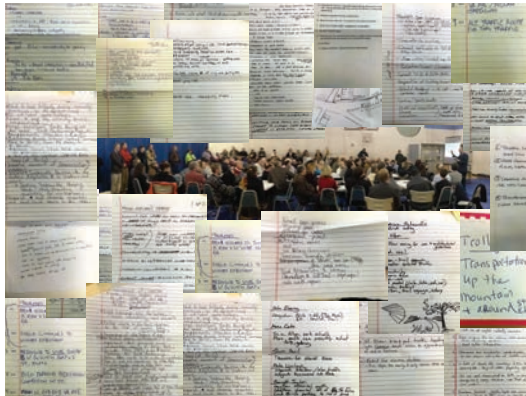
Origin of the term “Charrette”

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. This use of the term is said to originate from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th century, where proctors circulated a cart, or “charrette,” to collect final drawings while students frantically put finishing touches on their work.

~ The National Charrette Institute

www.charretteinstitute.org

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St. Elmo Charrette, Chattanooga, Tenn.



Tuckahoe Charrette, Tuckahoe, Va.

