

THE PLAN NH COMMUNITY DESIGN CHARRETTE PROGRAM



Program information and application materials

2017



The Plan NH Community Design Charrette Program

A Plan NH *charrette* is a brainstorming exercise to develop planning and design recommendations for town centers or neighborhoods within a community.

The charrette process starts with an application to Plan NH from the community seeking assistance with a planning or design challenge. (For example, the project may be related to making a downtown more walkable, safer, or more appealing. We have had more than one request for assistance in restoring a town's unique identity.)

Once selected, a group of volunteers from Plan NH's membership will visit the community for two days, generally Friday and Saturday. On the first day, the team of volunteers tours at the "target area" and learns from community leaders and citizens. During this process, the team discovers what is important to the community— its values, its dreams, its challenges. On the second day, the team will deliberate their ideas amongst each other—a cross section of viewpoints—and, based on what they have seen and heard, develop *recommendations* as to how the challenge(s) identified by the community might be addressed through the lens of the built environment.

Although the recommendations are tangible outcomes, intangible outcomes like a new "sense of community" or shared purpose among the people who live, work, and/or play within a community are often also created as a result of the charrette process.

Why We Do This

We believe that what we build, where we build, and how we build has a direct impact on the social, economic, and environmental fabrics of a community.

Our work raises awareness of the elements of community design that can contribute to healthy and vibrant towns and neighborhoods. We encourage smart growth principles like walkable streets, choices in where we live and how we get about, and compact design. We also encourage local economies and leveraging historic assets.

Key to our charrette program is the participation of the people who live and work in the community. Their viewpoints and comments are critical in developing recommendations that may be supported—and implemented.

Our volunteers contribute their time and talent to this process because they care deeply about New Hampshire and want a healthy and vibrant future for *everyone*. This is one way of "giving back."

The most powerful aspects of the process are in the *outcomes*. We never know, going in, what will result. It's a time of discovery for everyone – including the community members and their leaders. We may have planning or design recommendations, but it's the renewed (or new) sense of community that we love. We love the "aha" moments, the delight of hearing "we didn't know ..." or "we never realized ...", and the "what can we do to make this happen?"



2017 Application for Community Design Charrette Program

This proposal is hereby submitted on behalf of (Name of Organization Applying):

_____ Date: _____

Name and Title of Officer Authorized to Sign: _____

Signature of Officer Authorized to Sign _____

Mailing Address: _____

Town or City Name and Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ e-mail: _____

What is the date of your latest Master Plan? _____

On separate pages, please address the following:

- **How would you describe the community project for which your group or town is asking Plan NH to provide assistance?** Please provide any appropriate information about the site's or area's geographical location, limits, and historic significance, current uses or unique features. Please indicate who owns or controls the use of the project site or area. *How would the project enhance the health and vitality of your community?*
- **What changes are occurring in your community** that are having an impact on how you think about your future? How could this project address one or more of them?
- **Your town has four distinct, yet inextricably-linked sectors:** Social, economic, environmental, and governance. What vision does your community have for each of these, and what kinds of recommendations (for the target area or project) coming from the charrette process could support these visions – as well as the Vision Statement that is in your current Master Plan?
- **Just as the four sectors (above) are interwoven,** different sections of your community are also inter-related. Looking at your target area/project, what influence might it have on other parts of town, and how do other part of town affect this target area? Further, does this target area have any influence or impact on your bordering towns, or do they have any influence or impact on this target area/project or your town in general?

Please also provide letters of support indicating consensus amongst the leadership and governing boards within your community. Consistent, unified cooperation from your governing Boards (e.g., Select Board, Planning, Zoning, Conservation, Economic Development, etc.,) is critical to the success of the project, and *we cannot consider projects that these governing boards do not support.* Unless otherwise discussed, a fee of \$5000 will be required on or before the first day of the charrette.

Please submit your proposal in PDF format to r_leblanc@plannh.org.

Please do not hesitate to call with any questions, or to discuss a project you have in mind: 603-452-7526.

Community Design Charrette

Sample Checklist and Schedule

Preparations:

- Secure location for event (ADA accessible)
 - Large, well-lit, with wall space for hanging plans, electrical outlets, internet access and with space for:
 - Listening sessions
 - “Stakeholder” – large group (municipal staff, board members, business leaders – as related to the project)
 - Public: small group discussion (chairs in circles OR around tables, 6-8 per group)
 - Team to meet and brainstorm
 - Team to spread out and do the work on Saturday
 - Restroom facilities (ADA accessible)
- Overnight accommodations for team members. (Depending on your location. This will be discussed at the beginning of the planning process.)
- Marketing the event to the community – what works best?
 - Personal invitations to key community leaders AND naysayers
 - Suggestions: Article in local paper; notices in town event calendars, town committee meeting schedules, prominent changeable message sign right downtown a few days before the event, etc.
- Secure donations of food
 - Lunch on Friday for Team
 - Water (it would be nice if this were in cups not bottled water), snacks (healthy) for team in afternoon
 - Supper on Friday (many do a community supper)
 - Breakfast Saturday AM – during team work session
 - Water, snacks AM and PM
 - Lunch on Saturday – during team work session
- Secure funding (\$5000, unless otherwise discussed)

For event:

- Sign-in table for listening sessions, name tags & someone to staff the table
- Tables for the team to work at on Saturday
- For “stakeholder” session: chairs arranged in large circle
- Lots of chairs – arranged around tables in groups of 6-10 for public listening sessions/discussions Obviously enough to seat whatever you anticipate for turnout
- Easels and flip charts – one for each listening group ideal
- Old photos of the project area and buildings
- Maps of the project area – tax maps, topography, wetlands/natural features, and recent aerial photo: These should all be at the same scale – 1”=100’ would be great. Topo with

property lines, and air photo with property lines superimposed would be great if available/applicable. If town or regional planning does not have good air photos, NHDOT may. We should have two copies each of topo/property lines/air photos. *Note: team leader(s) will confirm exactly what maps will be needed.*

- Copies of relevant studies, reports, zoning ordinance, master plan, etc. that the team can refer to as they are working
- Copy of your most recent Master Plan
- Do you have a videographer or photographer?

Tentative Schedule (actual start and end times may vary)

Friday

- 10:30** Team gathers. Intro of Team members, review of project/challenge.
- 10:45 – 12:15** Walking or bus tour of target area, led by key town leaders/other stakeholders
- 12:15 – 1:15** Team lunch. *While community members are welcome to observe, this is team time.*
Team leaders to review project once again, schedule, expectations (during charrette and post).
- 1:30 – 3:00** Team meets with community leaders and other stakeholders related to project/target area. This is a time to gather technical information and data pertinent to project.
- 3:30-5:00** First Public Listening Session
- 5:15-6:15** Dinner (with-residents?)
- 6:30-8:00** Second Public Listening Session
- 8:00 -** Team (and interested community members) debrief and brainstorming.

Saturday

- 8:00 – 3:00** Breakfast; meet for brainstorming of issues, sites, etc. – break into smaller functional work groups and develop one or more plans.
- Lunch (mid-day)
- 2:00 or 2:30** Wrap up charrette work
- 3:00** Presentation to the community about what team saw and heard, recommendations.



FAQ's

1. How much does this cost?

There is no fee to apply. Unless otherwise discussed, the fee for the service of the charrette program is \$5000.00, due on or before the first day of the charrette. In addition, the community will provide meeting space, food, beverage and even lodging in some circumstances. (See checklist).

2. \$5000 – that's a lot of money. What if the Town does not approve the funds?

Yes, it is a lot for some communities. The funds do not have to come from your community budget. Funding may be from grants, donations, or other means. (Note: no matter the source, the Municipality is our client.)

3. What do we get for that money?

- Depending on the project, between \$25,000 and \$80,000 worth of consulting services
- A fresh look at your challenge – and at your community
- A time to bring community members together in (facilitated) dialog
- Recommendations that reflect current ideas and practices in disciplines such as planning, engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, economics, historic preservation, and more – as well as the values, dreams and needs of the community.
- A report capturing the highlights of the charrette, and recommendations with graphics and other visuals where applicable.

4. What if we don't like the recommendations?

The recommendations are just that – recommendations, not mandates. Although they will be based on best practices and current thinking in the planning, design, and development worlds, AND on what the team saw and heard from the community itself, sometimes you may not like some of them. That's okay. We intend for them not to be THE solution, but can serve as a beginning of more conversations about the vision your community has and how to achieve it.

5. We have an old building in town that we'd like to re-purpose but are not sure what that might be. Can you help with that?

We do not look at individual buildings by themselves. However, we can look at one as part of a larger context. For example, if it is in the middle of your town center or other significant part of town, what is the vision you have for that area? If you do not have one, we could conduct a charrette to find that out, and recommendations for re-purposing of that building would support the vision. If you do already have a Master Plan or other vision for the area surrounding the building, we recommend you hire an architect or other consultant to help determine a future use.

6. There is a developer in town who needs help figuring out what to do with a large parcel of land. Can we send her your way?

We do not work for private developers. Our clients are always the municipality. The target area may have some private ownership, but what happens to it needs to be under the jurisdiction of the community.

7. Can an RPC submit an application for a community?

Sure! RPC's (or other consultants) often have a strong role in a charrette, which we welcome! But remember: the municipality is always our client.

8. We have a challenge in town that might be a charrette candidate. Can we call you to talk about it?

Absolutely. And we can assist in the framing of the project if you are not sure. (It's not unusual, for example, for us to broaden the scope of a charrette, or work with a community to shift focus.)

9. When are applications due? What is the timing for your charrettes?

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Once an application is received, it is reviewed by the Charrette Committee. Usually then there is a follow-up in-person "interview" with the applicant and any key players in the community. This is a time to clarify (for both sides) and confirm commitment. Shortly thereafter, the application is (usually) accepted and a date set for the charrette. The date is mutually agreed-upon according to the project and community. We recommend at least 10 -12 weeks for the community to prepare.

Scheduling is first come, first served, so it behooves a community to get an application in as soon as it can.

To see some reports from past charrettes, go [here to our Village Library](#) , and click on *Information by Town*.