



Plan NH is a membership organization of design professionals, planners and others related to the building industries who care about the impact of the built environment on the fabric of a community.

In the Plan NH Community Design Charrette Program, interdisciplinary teams of volunteer professionals work with communities (selected through an application process) to assist them with downtown or neighborhood design challenges such as safety, walkability, or overall revitalization. Often, the town wants its identity back, its unique sense of place.

The outcome is an overview of recommendations of what could be done to reach their vision.

At the same time, there is also often an outcome of a new sense of community and shared purpose among the residents and people who work there.

Contact Us

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For more information about this program, go to www.plannh.org and click on the Programs tab. Or give us a call!



Community Design Charrette Program

Assisting communities of all sizes across the state with planning and design challenges since 1996



2024 Program Information & Application Materials





What is a Charrette?

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 from the community seeking assistance with a planning or design challenge.

Ex.: 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 will visit the community for two days to address the challenge, generally on 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 challenges identified by the community might be addressed through the lens of the built environment.



Sense of Community

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.

The most powerful aspects of the process are in the *outcomes*. We never know, going in, what will result. It is a time of discovery for everyone—including the community members and their leaders. We may have planning or design recommendations, but it is 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?”



Residents & others in Rye share their thoughts in small group discussions (2019)



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 and demonstrates the elements of community design that 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 and natural 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 will be supported—and implemented.

Our volunteers contribute their time and talent to this process because they care deeply about the Granite State and want a healthy and vibrant future for everyone. This is one way of “giving back.”

Since the first charrette in Belmont in 1996, Plan NH has conducted over 70 charrettes in 65+ communities across the State.



Charrette Program

How much does this cost?

There is no fee to apply. Unless otherwise discussed, the fee for the service of the charrette program is \$6,500, 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).

\$6,500—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 (legal) means. Note: no matter the source, the Municipality is our client.

What do we get for that money?

Depending upon the project, you will receive between \$25,000 and \$80,000 worth of consulting services. We will provide a fresh, objective look at your challenge—and at your community. It provides a great opportunity to bring community members together in a facilitated dialogue. The recommendations that we provide will 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. We will also provide you with a report that captures the highlights of the charrette, and the recommendations we have prepared with graphics and other visuals as applicable.

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 solutions, but can serve as a beginning of more conversations about the vision your community has and how to achieve it.

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.



Charrette Program FAQs (cont.)

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

We do not work for private developers. Our clients are almost 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.

Can a Regional Planning Commission submit an application for a community?

Absolutely! Regional Planning Commissions (and other consultants) often have a strong role in a charrette, which we welcome! But please remember: the Municipality is (almost) always our client.

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

You are more than welcome to call (or email) us with any challenges you want to talk through to determine if your project is a good charrette candidate. And we can assist in the framing of the project if you are not sure. It is not unusual, for example, for Plan NH to broaden the scope of the charrette, or work with a community to shift focus.

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 serve, so it behooves a community to get an application in as soon as it can. If your community does not have the resources to write an application, please call us. We can work with you on that.

To see some reports from past charrettes, please visit our website at www.plannh.org and visit the Programs tab.

We are here for YOU. Please do not hesitate to call Plan NH to discuss a possible project.

Tiffany Tononi McNamara, Executive Director
(603) 452-7526 | tiffany@plannh.org



Application for Community Design Charrette Program

This proposal is hereby submitted on behalf of:

Name of Organization Applying: _____ Date: _____

Name & Title of Officer Authorized to Sign: _____

Signature of Officer Authorized to Sign: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Town/City Name: _____ Zip Code: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

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 your community** that are having an impact on how you think about your future? How could this project address one or more of them? (Ex.: changing weather patterns, demographic changes, economic challenges, more)
- **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 (Ex.: 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 \$6,500 will be required on or before the first day of the charrette.

Proposals can be submitted to Plan NH in PDF format. Please do not hesitate to call with any questions, or to discuss a project you have in mind.

Contact: Tiffany Tonomi McNamara Executive Director • (603) 452-7526 | tiffany@plannh.org



Community Design Charrette

Sample Checklist & 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
 - 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 upon 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: Articles 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 (cups vs. bottled water), snacks (healthy) for team in afternoon
 - Supper on Friday (many do a community supper)
 - Breakfast Saturday AM—during team work session
 - Water and snacks—AM & PM
 - Lunch on Saturday—during team work session
- Secure funding (\$6,500, unless otherwise discussed)

For Event –

- Sign-in table for listening sessions, name tags, and someone to staff the table
- Tables for the Team to work at on Saturday
- For “stakeholder” session: chairs arranged in large circle
- Plenty 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 is ideal
- Old photos of the project area and buildings
- Maps for the project area—tax maps, topography, wetlands/natural features, and recent aerial photos. These should all be at the same scale (1”=100’ would be great). Topography 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, and 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, especially if a hybrid model is being used

Friday –

- 10:30 Team gathers. Introduction of team members, review of project/challenge.
- 10:45-12:15 Walking or bus tours of target area, led by key town leaders and other stakeholders.
- 12:15-1:15 Team lunch. *While community members are welcome to observe, this is a 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 the project/target area. This is a time to gather technical information and data pertinent to the 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, site, etc.—break into smaller functional work groups and develop one or more plans.
- Mid-day Lunch
- 2:00 or 2:30 Wrap up of charrette work
- 3:00 Presentation to the community about what the team saw and heard, recommendations.

