



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?"