What is a Charrette?

Architects know the concept of a “design charrette” all too well: long days and late nights in the studio, trying to complete a design project within a short, intense period of time. A charrette, in its simplest form, is a period of intense design and planning for solving a design challenge.

Dating back to the glory days of the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris, the charrette became synonymous with students working feverishly to complete a project on a cart pulled by a friend on the way to a professor’s home (the cart in French is “charrette”).

Today, the charrette has become one of the most powerful and effective tools for creative and collaborative problem solving in communities. Whether designing a community master plan, designing a park or solving housing challenges in urban neighborhoods, the charrette provides a physical framework for a community to implement its visions and engage its citizens.

The soul of a charrette is found in bringing together design expertise with a broad and diverse segment of the community to address their challenges collaboratively. The charrette is like a chameleon taking on the spirit and purpose of the community. It is also highly adaptive—enabling each community to meet its unique needs.

The Charrette Process

The charrette process is straightforward and simple. First, a team is assembled that has the expertise needed to address the issue at hand.

Then, over the course of several days, a series of public input sessions are held to gain an understanding of the issue from the perspective of local citizens. All of these charrette sessions are open to the public. Some sessions are targeted to particular groups or constituencies that have a stake in or knowledge of the issue.

Next, the charrette design team formulates responses to the issue based on what they have heard and their knowledge and expertise.

Finally, at the end of the charrette, the design team makes a public presentation where they may offer solutions to the problems at hand or present different options for the community to consider.

Why the Charrette process works

The charrette process is effective because it marries local knowledge, concerns and values with outside expertise. It is the community that drives and guides the answer.

Invariably, every community has the answer to its issues. What they lack is the ability to find that answer. The charrette is simply a process that allows the answer to emerge and use expertise to help refine the answer so it works.

Why a Broad River Road Complex Charrette?

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) campuses on Broad River Road present unique challenges in defining a community, designing a community, or creating a “sense of community” in a juvenile prison.

Public safety and the perspective of the larger community cannot be ignored—nor can the real need for the life-long rehabilitation of young men and women. The question then is "How can the Broad River Road Complex become a contributing community to the greater Columbia area and the state, while also pursuing its goals as a juvenile prison that promotes the healthy development of the mind, body, and spirit of youth?"

The Broad River Road Complex (BRRC) charrette will address the inward design of a
juvenile prison—of a community—while addressing the physical and perceived connections of DJJ to the community beyond the fence.

The spacious grounds behind the fence at the Broad River Road Complex total 210 acres and features a pond, wooded areas, Alpine Climbing Tower, outdoor track, and large open spaces. DJJ has been working with Clemson University and other partners over the past year to develop a plan to effectively utilize the natural resources available within the complex.

Although numerous innovative ideas have been generated, the department still lacks a comprehensive plan on how to make the best use of the available natural resources and space. The conducting of a charrette at this facility would provide DJJ the detailed plan needed to create a holistic learning environment at the Broad River Road Complex that would support the department’s educational and rehabilitative services, programs, and activities.

The BRRC Charrette will be a three-day intense collaborative process that results in a conceptual plan for the department to use in the redevelopment of the Broad River Road Complex. Through the charrette process, state agency partners, agency staff, community stakeholders, higher learning institutions, families and youth opinions and ideas are solicited and incorporated into the development of the physical master plan.

It is hoped that each person who participates in this charrette process will feel a sense of ownership for the future of DJJ and the youth they serve.

Goals and Objectives

The main goal of the BRRC Charrette is to develop a detailed conceptual plan to redevelop the Broad River Road Complex. The objectives of the plan are to:

- Assist with the development of a recreational and therapeutic “Community Behind the Fence” for the committed young men and women in the custody of DJJ.
- Develop a holistic approach to therapeutic recreational activities through experience-based learning.
- Utilize the Broad River Road Complex’s natural environment to expose juveniles to experience-based opportunities that extend beyond the classroom and create a passion for learning.
- Design and develop a seamless continuum of innovative activities that provide juveniles the opportunity to practice responsible behavior while in DJJ institutions, as well as upon their re-entry into their home communities.
- Create opportunities for meaningful community service activities for youth committed to giving back to their community (restorative justice).
- Engage in partnerships with diverse groups, to assist the juveniles with their personal growth and life skills development.
- Develop a strong research component to support the department’s efforts to appropriately address the individual rehabilitative needs of the youth committed to our care, custody and supervision, in our efforts to protect the public.

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