

## The Power of the Design Charrette Method

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This impact story describes three applications of the design charrette method in practice. To illustrate the power of this method, the article is organized by programming purpose, processes used, outcomes and impacts, capacity building considerations and scholarship.

### **Programming Purposes:**

Three applications of design charrette methodology illustrate the significant impact of this planning and community development method. Stories are provided for the Crawfish River Park Design Charrette, the Carnes Park Farmstead Charrette, and the Grantsburg Community Design Charrette. In early 2014, I was asked by the Parks Director and Parks Committee to help design a planning process for a newly acquired County Park, the Crawfish River Park. There was not a budget for this project so a low or no-cost master planning project was requested. Initially, the Parks Director and the Crawfish River Friends Group had hoped that either a graduate student from the UW Department of Landscape Architecture or a student doing a year-long Senior Thesis/Capstone project could provide the professional services needed for this master plan. I prepared proposals for both of these options, but no student selected our project. The Parks Director and I then agreed that the design charrette method, using local designers and staff, would be the way to go for the Crawfish River Master Plan. While developing the Crawfish River Master Plan, the Parks Staff and I thought it would be useful to monitor the progress at Carnes Park since the 2011 design charrette process. This could provide further rationale for using the design charrette method in Jefferson County park project designs. And finally, the UW Extension Community Vitality and Placemaking (CVP) Team members were invited to participate in community design charrette process in Grantsburg, Wisconsin to pilot adaptations of the Minnesota Design Team (MDT) methods for the first time in Wisconsin. CVP Team member Todd Johnson had been contacted by MDT members and the community to develop this process in Wisconsin, and Todd was the Team Leader for this project.

### **Processes Used:**

All three design charrettes are based on processes developed by the National Charrette Institute (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006), the American Institute of Architects' Minnesota Design Team, and a Community Design Team Approach (Mehrhoff, 1999). All three programs included learning processes and adaptations of research-based, interactive and dynamic community design process. In addition, operating and supervising processes were used to monitor and assess implementation activity resulting from the Carnes Park Farmstead project.

**Crawfish River Master Plan:** The Crawfish River planning process design included the solicitation of three local landscape architects willing to participate with just a modest honorarium

(at a fraction of the cost of typical consultant's professional service fees). Key process steps included: development and distribution of an online survey about potential activities and functions on the site, a visioning workshop with broad stakeholder invitations, an all-day interactive charrette with the design and park professionals, development of an implementation plan (Activity/Gantt Chart) and a plan review and approval session with the Parks Committee.

**Carnes Park Farmstead:** This monitoring and assessment process (in 2014) consisted of a technical review and documentation of project elements proposed in the 2011 implementation plan.

**Grantsburg Community Design:** This process generally followed the Minnesota Design Team method with enhancements resulting from significant involvement of UW Extension/CVP Team faculty using this as a pilot for Wisconsin.

### **Outcomes and Impacts:**

**Crawfish River Park Master Plan:** The design charrette process is still underway, but several steps have been completed. The online community interest survey was distributed and input was received. The visioning workshop was facilitated by this agent and a "Proceedings Report" was compiled and distributed. The day-long interactive design charrette was held and this agent as facilitator compiled and distributed a "Proceedings Report". A master plan concept is being drawn by one of the participants.

**Carnes Park Farmstead:** The monitoring and assessment demonstrates that the design charrette process and implementation plan has yielded significant results. The Parks Superintendent reports 1,000 volunteer hours valued at \$23,000. Key components of the implementation plan have been completed. An original log cabin from the farmstead has been recovered and restored with volunteer labor, Parks staff labor and some contract work with a value of \$90,000. Other identified projects in the implementation plan were barn renovation, out-building demolition, site work, landscape restoration and other projects valued at another \$160,000. Most of the projects have been implemented in-house with Parks staff and volunteer labor with the total value estimated at \$270,000. The community energy from this initiative has also resulted in significant fund raising.

**Grantsburg Community Design:** A videographer documented the entire visit, including pre-program interviews with community leaders; community presentations; community working lunches; bus and walking tour; community potluck/workshop; post workshop interviews; design team visioning; final presentation; and post-program interviews with community members. Program outcomes include (25) presentation boards assembled into a slideshow. Evaluations found the process to be very effective in bringing the community together (two evening workshops drew over 200 people each) to share and explore ideas that could be expressed in drawings. The plans have inspired the community to take immediate action towards realizing its shared vision. A leadership structure has begun implementation of near-term "boots on the ground" ideas. Regarding large scale impacts, a banker and the school superintendent have agreed to purchase a closed-down hardware store to create a teen center and community facility at a key location.

### **Relationships and Capacity Building:**

**Relationships:** This educator's professional relationships were enhanced with a Parks Director, Parks Staff, Parks Committee, and other community participants through these two Parks processes. Participants who are not familiar with the design charrette process have gained appreciation of UW Extension processes, and how they help reach a shared understanding in reaching decisions. The credibility of UW Extension and its objective, research-based processes contributed to trust in the process-leader by the participants. The Grantsburg project has gained

state-wide attention and interest by major associations interested in community vitality including the League of Municipalities, Wisconsin Rural Partners, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and others.

**Capacity Building:** Participants in both Parks design charrette processes were fully engaged in a research-based, interactive community design process. The UW Extension processes facilitate participatory decision making skills and use multiple techniques to help participants generate ideas, synthesize ideas and reach decisions. The excitement from the design charrette process attracts professional designers. They essentially donate their time for the opportunity to experience this unique, high energy process. The monitoring and assessment of the Carnes Park project demonstrates there are major initiatives contributing to broad community capacity building. Obtaining 1,000 hours of volunteer time to implement the plan illustrates this well. The Friends of Crawfish River Park have stated that they intend to use the implementation plan as a “roadmap” for volunteer involvement. The outcomes and evaluations from Grantsburg demonstrate a community energy and capacity to lead change in a way never seen before in this community.

### **Scholarship:**

The two Parks processes used the research-based for community design charrette described by the National Charrette Institute (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006), and the UW Extension Community Vitality and Placemaking Team (draft curriculum available on the CVP Team Blog). Formal and informal evaluations show that these initiatives were valued by those for whom it was intended. If approved by UWEX Administration, the CVP Team intends to provide a two-day training on the Foundations of Community Vitality which contains two segments related to community design charrette methods.

Source: Steve Grabow, Professor and Community Development Educator, UW-Extension, Jefferson County Office. Summarized from a “2014 results Narrative” report.