The Charrette Process

The charrette is a method of design and planning which Moule & Polyzoides has adopted and developed to support our campus and town planning practice. The term is derived from the French term for "little cart" and refers to the intense, hectic work effort often expended by architects to meet a typical project dead-line. At the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris during the nineteenth century, proctors circulated around the city with horse-drawn carts to collect final drawings from the students. While the carts were moving on their way to this first School of Architecture in the world, some students would jump on these "charrettes" to put the finishing touches on their drawings minutes before they were handed in. Architectural practice has changed little since then.

The charrette method was rediscovered by New Urbanists in the 1980s, and has become one of the key instruments in our tool box. It has been actively used in practice for about thirty years. Our office alone has led and completed over 100 of them. Charrettes provide a forum for ideas and offer a unique, extraordinary ad-vantage: They provide designers both initial input and on-going feedback on their work by clients and the community. While affording client institutions full access to the creative process, including the ability to direct it through constructive and time-effective criticism.

A primary feature of a charrette is that it can be specifically organized to encour-age the participation of everyone who is interested in the making of a great campus and / or neighborhood, whether they represent the interests of the students, faculty, administration, private stakeholders, municipalities and the

community at large. Exactly who participates and how is a subject unique to every project and every client. In every case, the degree to which a charrette is private, partially opened to the public or fully public, is subject to client choice at the inception of every project. And this will be the case in the design of the University of Redlands TOD district.

The pre-charrette process begins with community education, program assess-ment and charrette planning. We work in advance with a client team to discover the root ideas and ongoing histories of the design of their campus and adjacent neighborhoods. During this time, we are also informed by them on the political impacts that our work may eventually generate. Project data, preliminary devel-opment programs and building/ zoning regulations are collected and reviewed. Based on the above, a design direction and a strategy for political approval is set.

On the evening preceding the charrette, a public lecture can be delivered on traditional campus planning and community development. On the morning of the charrette, the team goes on a field trip and is thoroughly briefed on various issues relevant to the project. Following, the team is also informed by various ex-perts on the relevance of site data and key project design parameters. Formal and informal meetings are held intermittently with various approving agencies and interest groups. Every day at noon, a member of the design team may deliver a lecture to the University community and city staff, centering on a key campus planning topic.

The charrette itself is planned for a room on or near the project site. A team of design consultants is set up in a working office, complete with drafting equipment, supplies, computers and a digitizer/ copier. The client and design teams, and invited guests as necessary, then assemble to work and interact over the course of five or more working days. The client group participates mostly during presentations and discussions at the beginning and end of each day. There are at least ten hours of mostly uninterrupted work time by the design team during each day.

During the charrette, various design studies are undertaken, examining the ongoing project as a whole and in various of its parts. Client team design reviews are organized both in small groups and in larger caucuses. Often there are simultaneous meetings with periodic briefings or presentations of what was gleaned from each sub-group. At the end of the charrette, a series of comprehensive technical documents is produced and presented. Including all kinds of drawings, such as plans, sections, elevations and perspectives. As well as technical sketches and studies on such items as traffic, parking, open space, landscape, civil and sustainability design, codes and guidelines.

There are ongoing presentations at the end of each day and a major final public review at the end of the charrette. During this presentation, the design team presents their combined efforts to the campus and public constituencies, including all of the documents generated during the preceding week, and setting up goals and a time schedule for completion of the project in the weeks and months to follow.
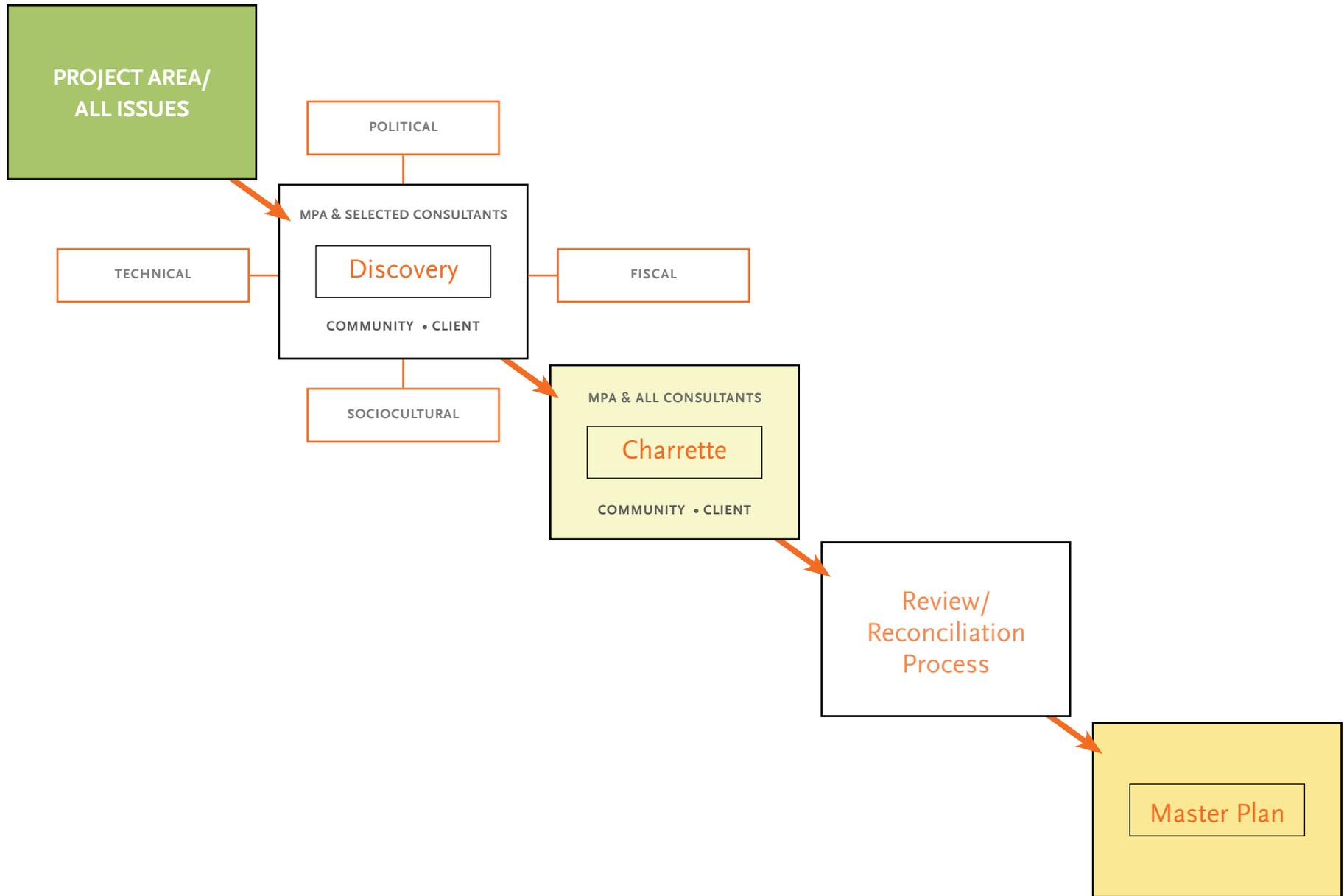
Moule & Polyzoides charrettes involve this kind of time-limited, highly participatory, iterative creative design, subject to continuous adjustment. During their course, many key project goals are accomplished: 1) Client and design team members develop a vested interest in the evolving work and end up supporting its vision; 2) Design team participants representing various fields of design produce a set of finished documents that are fully coordinated across all of their disciplines; 3) The client and designer teams interact in a manner that ensures deep communication and eliminates the time-indefinite and unfocused nature of conventional planning projects; and 4) Like any process of design open to constant and incisive adjustment, charrettes often produce better projects and more cost-effective services.
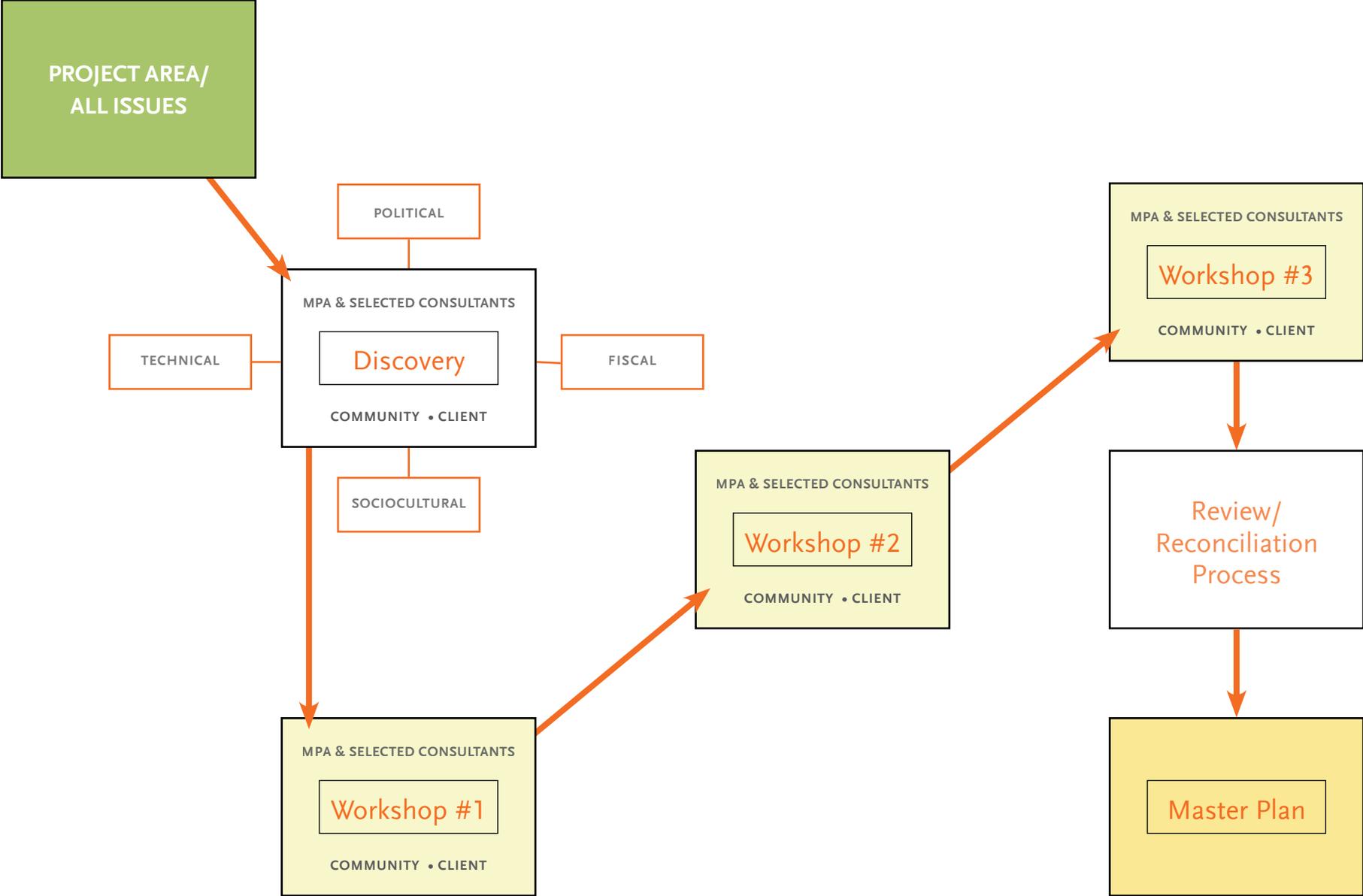
Keys to a Successful Charrette

1. **Work collaboratively.** Create an environmentally, economically, and politically sustainable plan based on valuing each individual's unique contributions.

2. **Design across all disciplines.** Multi-disciplinary teams work concurrently to rapidly devise a smart and feasible solution.

3. **Use design to identify a shared vision and holistic solutions.** Through design, all participants are able to understand the true complexity of the problem and can be used to resolve conflict by proposing previously unexplored solutions that represent win/win outcomes.

4. **Work in detail.** Lasting agreement is based on a fully informed discussion.

5. **Constrain work schedules.** Time compression facilitates creative problem solving by accelerating decision-making and reducing unconstructive negotiation tactics.

6. **Communicate in short feedback loops.** Regular stakeholder reviews quickly build trust in the process and foster true understanding and support of the product.

7. **Work over consecutive days.** Several days are required to accommodate three feedback loops, scheduled at least a day apart. Three cycles are the minimum required to effect a change in participants' preconceived perceptions and positions.

8. **Work on-site.** Working on-site fosters participant's understanding of local values and traditions, and provides the necessary access to stakeholders and information.

9. **Produce concrete plans.** The success of a community's work to plan together hinges on implementation tools such as codes, regulating plan and action-oriented, phased implementation strategies.

10. **Evaluate the plan with objective measures.** Determine the appropriate economic, social and environmental measures to qualify and quantify the plans, from concept development to the final plan to implementation.

Charrette Work Flow

PROJECT AREA/
ALL ISSUES

POLITICAL

TECHNICAL

MPA & SELECTED CONSULTANTS

Discovery

FISCAL

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

SOCIOCULTURAL

MPA & ALL CONSULTANTS

Charrette

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

Review/
Reconciliation
Process

Master Plan

Conventional Workshop Work Flow

PROJECT AREA/
ALL ISSUES

POLITICAL

MPA & SELECTED CONSULTANTS

TECHNICAL

Discovery

FISCAL

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

SOCIOCULTURAL

MPA & SELECTED CONSULTANTS

Workshop #1

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

MPA & SELECTED CONSULTANTS

Workshop #2

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

MPA & SELECTED CONSULTANTS

Workshop #3

COMMUNITY • CLIENT

Review/
Reconciliation
Process

Master Plan

Charrette Schedule

DAY 1
- Morning Client Meeting
- Lunch Lecture by Consultant Team on key project issues
- Focus teams begin work from results of Discovery Workshop
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Evening Community Review

DAY 2
- Morning Client Meeting
- Lunch Lecture by Consultant Team on key project issues
- Technical Evaluation and Refinements
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Evening Community Review

DAY 3
- Morning Client Meeting
- Lunch Lecture by Consultant Team on key project issues
- Focus teams incorporate community direction into work
- Focused Technical reviews and design
- Development Program
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Evening Community Review

DAY 4
- Morning Client Meeting
- Lunch Lecture by Consultant Team on key project issues
- Focus teams incorporate community direction into work
- Focused Technical reviews and design
- Form-Based Code draft
- Stakeholder Meetings

DAY 5
- Preparation of Final Presentation documents
- Each team member records the results of five-day collaboration with the community
- Final gallery Community review
- Discussion and Comments