

## **The Town of Dumfries, Virginia hosted a community design charrette on September 13 through 15, 2007**

A charrette is a word of French origin that refers to an intensive effort to complete a design. In the context of this charrette, it is an intensive, interactive process that brings the community and planning and design experts together and through a series of exercises, develops concepts regarding a community's strengths and weaknesses, identifies community desires, and develops a broad vision for how the community can get to its desired destination.

Dumfries held a charrette in 1995 that identified the need for the Town to maintain its character as a small, historic town. Central to this concept was the need to develop Main Street as a pedestrian oriented corridor, utilizing Williams Ordinary as an anchor and trying to encourage the development of antique shops and other retail establishments that could capitalize on the Town's status as the oldest chartered town in Virginia. Changes in the Town's structure, the lack of financial resources to implement some of the recommendations, serious traffic issues, and extreme pressure from surrounding development outside the Town limits thwarted efforts to implement the recommendations.

In summer 2006, the Town Council began discussing the need to hold another charrette to examine the issues that it now confronts and to see what could be done to again involve the public in trying to lay the foundation for improving the Town's development and image.

Partnering with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, the Town solicited and received funding from VDOT, Prince William County and more than twenty local businesses, which when combined with Town funds, allowed this event to take place.

A team of eminent planners and designers were employed to conduct the charrette. The team lead attendees through a three-part series of activities. The first day, goals were established, issues were identified, and participants formed working groups. The day culminated in a public input forum soliciting comments from community members who were unable to attend the daytime session. By attending the Thursday evening forum community residents had the opportunity to provide key input into the visioning process for the future of the Town of Dumfries. The second day focused on breaking down the issues to identify those items that the Town desired to change. Specific items for resolution were prioritized. The third day involved the presentation of alternatives for the development of the Town and a selection process to determine the preferred alternatives.

The success of the charrette was dependent upon a significant level of participation by the public. The sessions were open to anyone who wished to attend and the attached report is the result of three days of extensive dialog between the facilitators, residents, businesses, community organizations and our elected officials. We are pleased with the community response to this event and thank all who participated.