

# In Florida, Clearwater's Public Charrettes Produce Strong Support for Roundabouts

## Location

**Clearwater, Florida**  
(Southeastern United States)

## Implementation Stage

- ✓ Planning
- ✓ Design

## Roundabout Type/Setting

Single-lane and multi-lane roundabouts in suburban settings

## Target Audience

- ✓ General Public

## Strategies Employed

- ✓ Public meetings (utilizing the Citizen Design Charrette structure)

## Charrette Publicity Outlets

- ✓ Television stations (public and cable channels)
- ✓ Newspaper advertisements
- ✓ Electronic message boards within interested communities
- ✓ Automated phone messages sent to residents' home phones
- ✓ Announcements at neighborhood committee meetings
- ✓ Hand-delivered flyers and/or direct-mail letters to neighborhood residents



**Figure 1:** A Clearwater man proudly signs the conceptual traffic calming design (including roundabouts) that he and his neighbors collaborated to create.



## Background

In 1999, the City of Clearwater, Florida, opened its first roundabout on New Years' Eve to much fanfare. The new roundabout replaced several signalized intersections and promised to alleviate congestion and improve pedestrian flow along a nine-intersection loop corridor. However, during construction and after opening, the local media gave extensive coverage to controversy over the project, with many residents liking the project and many not. Public concerns were further raised by numerous minor fender-benders at one of the two-lane exits (modifying the geometry, signage, and lane markings reduced the problem).

Given the mixed reaction to the first roundabout, public support for future roundabouts could have been a problem. Yet, 17 more roundabouts have been built in Clearwater and all were proposed by residents and strongly supported by the public. The City decided to involve local residents early in subsequent roundabout projects through "Citizen Design Charrettes" as part of its public outreach efforts, which succeeded by producing successful, "win-win" roundabout projects over time.

## Approach

The City of Clearwater uses a public engagement technique called the "citizen design charrette" in the planning and design phases of most roundabout projects. According to Ken Sides, senior professional engineer for the City, a citizen design charrette is a "compressed, highly interactive experience that involves the public at the very beginning of the design process," directly engaging the local community in the development of a proposed roundabout. This consensus-based meeting helps ensure that all stakeholders are informed, involved, and supportive of the proposed improvements, thus empowering them to become proponents of the planned improvements. The City thoroughly publicizes the charrettes through many outlets (see list to left under *Charrette Publicity Outlets*).

"The public doesn't just ... react to alternatives put before it, but actually performs a constructive, pro-active role in generating their traffic calming plan themselves."

– Ken Sides, P.E.  
City of Clearwater, Florida

The charrette process follows a proven and repeatable format that helps to reduce the planning time needed. Each day of the 6-day process focuses on a different aspect of the roundabout planning and design process, as explained below:

- *Day 1:* The charrette facilitation team visits the neighborhood where residents requested traffic calming and examines intersections where roundabouts may be proposed.
- *Day 2:* The team conducts a series of focus groups with project stakeholders, including emergency responders, elected officials, and public works staff to address any concerns they might have and garner their support for the project.



**Figure 2:** All residents' traffic safety concerns were recorded on flip charts. Charrette participants use a technique called "dot voting" to rank their concerns, to guide them in the next phase of the charrette: conceptual design.



**Figure 3:** The public charrettes attract citizens of all ages, including families with small children and older adults who were interested in making their streets and intersections safer.

## Related Products

### Charrette Participant Resources

*Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars, a Citizens Guide to Traffic Calming* (Reference Book provided to participants at charrettes to guide discussion)  
[http://www.lgc.org/freepub/community\\_design/guides/streets\\_and\\_sidewalks.html](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/community_design/guides/streets_and_sidewalks.html)

Traffic Calming Intersection Treatment Matrix (provided to participants to help show the benefits and costs of various intersection traffic calming treatments during charrettes)  
<http://www.walkable.org/assets/downloads/intersectiontools.pdf>

Traffic Calming Intersection Treatment Matrix (provided to participants to help show the benefits and costs of various intersection traffic calming treatments during charrettes)  
<http://www.walkable.org/assets/downloads/midblocktools.pdf>

### Learn More

#### Ken Sides, P.E., PTOE, AICP

Senior Professional Engineer  
City of Clearwater, Florida

727.562.4792

[ken.sides@myclearwater.com](mailto:ken.sides@myclearwater.com)

#### Jeffrey Shaw

Intersections Program Manager  
FHWA Office of Safety

708.283.3524

[jeffrey.shaw@dot.gov](mailto:jeffrey.shaw@dot.gov)

- *Day 3:* The team conducts a half-day training session with the community, educating them on traffic flow and various traffic calming measures, including roundabouts, and a candid session where residents and the team discuss the benefits and concerns associated with design options (see Figure 2).
- *Day 4:* The team analyzes the input collected during the first charrette session and prepares for the second session.
- *Day 5:* The team conducts an evening public charrette in which participants develop a collaborative vision for the new intersection. Breakout groups develop and present a conceptual traffic-calming design, using a large map of the neighborhood, colored markers, and a large version of the *Street Doctor's Guide to Traffic Calming* (see Figures 1 and 3). Participants note similarities/differences between the other groups' conceptual designs.
- *Day 6:* The consultant team synthesizes the results of the second public session resulting in a consensus-based design. At the end of this last session, citizens can self-nominate to be a part of a small technical team that works with the city to implement the design or a larger public outreach team that continues to engage the community in the construction of the safer intersection.

After the charrette process concludes, the City employs engineering firms to prepare engineering plans from the community-approved conceptual plans, followed by construction.

## Results

Engineer Ken Sides said that, as a direct result of Clearwater, Florida's use of the public charrette process, the City has successfully developed and implemented 16 roundabouts in the past 10 years. By involving the affected communities from the beginning of the planning process, residents feel comfortable with and are supportive of the roundabout design, and are able to convince other community members who have not attended the meetings of the value of the design. When concerned residents call the City, staff can point to the proceedings of the charrettes and demonstrate that the proposed roundabout was proposed by residents and strongly supported by residents.

## Lessons Learned

- Engage affected communities and elected officials early and often, and allow them to provide input on key design considerations. Resident-based conceptual design of roundabouts is a powerful tool for increasing public support for roundabouts.
- The "citizen design charrette" process is a proven method for successfully educating and engaging the public in roundabout design, and increasing public support for proposed roundabouts.
- If challenges can be identified and addressed quickly with community input on a proposed roundabout, public perceptions of roundabouts can be swayed in a positive manner.
- Hiring a skilled, neutral facilitator can help ensure that charrette participants feel comfortable contributing freely.

## Outreach Investment

According to Sides, the outreach investment to implement the public charrette process for a given roundabout costs relatively little, accounting for a portion of the design cost, which in turn is typically 15 percent of the roundabout's total construction cost.