Extension Landscape Architecture, and the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning (LAEP) at Utah State University hosts an annual Charrette that often focuses on the planning and design needs of rural Utah communities.

As an innovative, fast-paced educational and Extension strategy, the Charrette relies on the dynamic collaboration of the LAEP students, faculty, and community partners in an intensive, one-week event. Classes are cancelled, and vertically integrated teams of students and faculty work together, uninterrupted by the normal routines of academic life.
During Charrette week, the LAEP department and community partners focus on a broad range of community analysis and design recommendations. These often include:

- history and community character assessment
- open space and agricultural preservation planning
- downtown revitalization and business development strategies
- regional trail system planning and design
- trail head, signage, and parking design
- transportation planning and streetscape design
- mixed-use growth scenarios
- streetscape and urban open space design
- habitat and watershed protection and restoration design
- community park and play design
- identity and way-finding recommendations
- farmer’s markets, farm to school programs, and agritourism planning
- sustainable design
- design for the arts

The Charrette is a fundamental service-learning experience for LAEP students through all cohorts, and fosters design innovation, by facilitating a dynamic collaboration between the design teams and the community partners, by employing compressed work sessions and short feedback loops, and by encouraging solutions tied to an understanding of community need.

The combined strengths of the students, faculty, and community partners produces a range of feasible planning and design tools. These tools help to build community awareness and support, and advance grant proposals and fundraising strategies.

Team leaders from the senior class are assigned a specific focus area, and each team has a faculty advisor and vertically integrated team of students. During the fall semester, before the Charrette in January, the sophomores prepare a detailed inventory and analysis of the key community planning and design needs. This allows them to serve as experts on the existing opportunities and constraints that will influence the Charrette teams.

The Charrette begins with a site visit and interviews with community stakeholders, followed by an intense design week. Clients are invited to visit the studio during the week and to participate in a final student-led presentation. Following the Charrette, the seniors carry the work forward in their Capstone Studio, and produce a comprehensive planning document, based on a semester-long exploration of the issues identified during the Charrette. This planning document is a digital and hardcopy reference for the citizens to use as the community adapts to change.

The impacts on students and the rural communities they serve are noteworthy. Students advance their leadership, management, communication, and collaboration skills, add real-world projects to their portfolios, and learn the value of public service in their discipline. Communities receive a professional document they can use as a touchstone for immediate and long-range planning needs, and as a tool to raise public awareness and funding.

Over the thirteen-year history of the LAEP Charrette, a number of rural Utah communities have benefited. Among these are the communities in the Bear Lake Region, Cedar City, Providence, Richmond, Tooele, Cache Valley, and Kanab.

**OGDEN VALLEY CHARRETTE**

Ogden Valley is home to three iconic small towns: Liberty, Eden, and Huntsville. The valley boasts ski resorts, a Trappist monastery, diverse wildlife and habitats that include streams, wetlands and reservoirs, active agriculture, year-around recreation, and breathtaking vistas.

Among the variety of planning and design issues identified in Ogden Valley, the following is representative of the detailed analysis and design work typically produced during a Charrette. In Ogden Valley, the students, faculty, and community partners addressed the following key planning and design issues.

**Community Identity**

Fundamental to working with the citizens of Ogden Valley is an understanding of the unique identity of the place. In Ogden Valley, as with all LAEP Charrettes, the early stages of the process focus on identifying the spirit of the place, and what makes the community unique. The community identity is
the sum total of all of the historical, natural, and built features of the environment, and how the world perceives the unique, identifying qualities of the valley. This understanding is key to making informed planning and design recommendations that fit the community character.

**Agricultural Lands**
Ogden Valley is a beautiful, isolated valley on the eastern edge of the rapidly growing Wasatch Front. Among the many unique qualities of the valley are the active agricultural lands, that ties the valley together visually and provides winter pasturing for wildlife. Strategies were developed to create a transfer of development rights for agricultural lands to protect the valley character. Also, the open space plan featured the agricultural landscape as central to valley history and character, and developed strategies for agritourism and sustainable agricultural practices.

**Transportation Corridors**
Another unique quality of Ogden Valley are the entry road corridors that dramatically reveal the valley’s rural character at key points of arrival into the valley. Design recommendations were prepared for the character of roads throughout the valley, with a specific focus on the Ogden River Scenic Byway Plan. The view from the road throughout the valley was key to the transportation corridor and scenic byway recommendations.

**Habitat, Wildlife, Stream Corridors, and Biodiversity**
The diverse wildlife and valley streams that support biodiversity in the valley also help to ensure the water quality of Pineview Reservoir and the natural habitats of the animal and native plant populations. As a part of the Charrette recommendations, key habitat locations were restricted for development, potential habitat easements were identified, and setbacks and buffers were established for Pineview Reservoir, wetland areas, and the stream corridors that recharge the reservoir.

**Recreational Opportunities**
Ogden Valley offers year-round recreational opportunities. In addition to the ski resorts of Wolf Creek, Powder Mountain, and Snowbasin, the valley offers recreation at both the Pineview and Causey Reservoirs. The valley also has an amazing collection of trails and campgrounds, and offers a variety of concerts, festivals, markets, and recreational events throughout the year. Plan recommendations addressed business development, fundraising strategies, marketing, improved access, and social networking. These recommendations are aimed at the valley’s recreational opportunities and community events, as the centerpiece of business growth and community branding.

**Heritage, History, and Town Centers**
An understanding of the unique historical character and heritage of the valley, and of the towns of Liberty, Eden, and Huntsville is fundamental to assessing its unique character. The Huntsville Square, Blacksmith Village in Eden, and The Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity, combined with the unique character of each village center, is fundamental to understanding Ogden Valley, and planning in a way that respects the integrity of these identifying places.

**Regional Development and Change**
To preserve the rural and natural character of the valley, in the face of growth and development pressure, the charrette team recommended the adoption of centralized smart growth principles. In addition, building on community identity and the key environmental features of the valley, the plan identified the locations best suited for future development, points of interest and cultural hubs, and an understanding of historical development trends.

**Private Lands, Ownership, and Property Rights**
Understanding the effects of development on critical habitats is fundamental to smart growth, and to an understanding of the inherent property rights that exist in the valley. In the interest of balancing habitat protection and development rights, the Charrette plan calls for residential development guidelines that identify sensitive lands and encourage appropriate site selection for new development. These guidelines will assist in the preparation of Ogden Valley development ordinances that are specific to its unique character. Charrette recommendations included the identification of Conservation Easements, the preservation of critical habitats, and sustainable development that is sensitive to the public infrastructure and unique environments of the valley.
**Open Space Planning**
The future of development in the valley is directly correlated to the character, preservation and enhancement of open space. The assessment of habitat, rural character, and the natural and geologic influences on development is critical to open space planning. Among a number of strategies to preserve open space were recommendations for the Transfer of Development Rights, the Purchase of Development Rights, and Installment Purchase Agreements.

**The Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity**
The Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity is an approximately 1800-acre site that includes both monastic and agricultural buildings located in the southwest quadrant of the valley. The abbey serves as a retreat center and houses an order of Trappist monks. Agriculture is central to the life of the abbey. In addition to agriculture, the site is key to water quality in the valley, contains numerous trail and respite locations, represents open space conservation opportunities, and the potential to model a sustainable development scenario.

Building on the work of the Ogden Valley Charrette, the Weber County Supervisors authorized $100,000 for professional consultants to advance the Charrette recommendations. As a planning tool, the Ogden Valley Charrette summary document, prepared by the seniors in the Capstone Studio, will continue to guide community decisions as Ogden Valley plans for change.

Pen Hollist, the Chairman of the Ogden Valley Planning Commission offered the following remarks regarding the Charrette: “I think the Charrette will have a remarkable impact because I think people will begin to see, number one, what can be done to make the valley very interesting for visitors and the associated businesses. There was just a wealth of information there, and it was great to see such a broad range and depth of thinking.”

The LAEP Charrette serves the prosperity of rural communities and forms the cornerstone of Extension Landscape Architecture at Utah State University. It is emblematic of our commitment to community service, innovation, design excellence, and the education of LAEP students. The Extension specialists that plan the Charrette, and the dedicated students and faculty of the LAEP Department are enhancing the future of Utah’s rural communities, and building an important service-learning legacy.∗

PICTURED: Stream and Reservoir Character Ogden Valley/D. Evans.