

Celebrating the People Who Are Shaping Charlotte's Future



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Letter from the Director



Charles Thomas
Director / Charlotte

Dear Stephen,

The Knight Charlotte office recently had the honor of hosting Knight Foundation's Board of Trustees and our President and CEO, Maribel Pérez Wadsworth, for a weekend of reflection, learning, and celebration. For me, it wasn't just about [announcing \\$17 million in new investments](#). It was about connecting our leadership with the people and projects that make this city special.

To kick things off, we enjoyed a fireside chat with **Mayor Vi Lyles** and former Secretary of Transportation **Anthony Foxx**. They spoke about what it took to reimagine and rebuild after the COVID shutdown and about what they see for the city's future. Transportation, housing, economic mobility and inclusive economic growth were themes they covered and these were repeated throughout the visit.



Mayor Vi Lyles, former Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx and Knight Foundation President & CEO Maribel Pérez Wadsworth. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

We spent time with with **Marcellus "MT" Turner**, CEO and Chief Librarian of **Charlotte Mecklenburg Library**, **Jenni Gaisbauer**, Executive Director of the **CML Foundation**, and local developer **Clay Grubb** who shared plans for the new state-of-the-art, technology-focused New Main library branch which will enhance the city's vibrancy and connectivity in new ways. We discussed how the library is a central hub for the community, with leadership aiming to further strengthen civic engagement, advance economic opportunities and connect residents to resources as part of their multi-year Public Commons strategy.



From left; Knight Foundation's Lilly Weinberg, in conversation with Marcellus "MT" Turner, Jenni Gaisbauer and Charlotte developer Clay Grubb. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

Afterwards, Knight trustees and staff were treated to a driving tour of the Historic West End narrated by **J'Tanya Adams** of **Historic West End Partners** and **Ralphine Caldwell** of **LISC Charlotte**. Our first stop was the site of four affordable housing units being developed by the **West Side Community Land Trust (WSCLT)**. The trust's executive director **Charis Blackmon** shared how they are partnering with communities to ensure residents in the West Side have access to long term affordable housing.



Knight Trustees and staff members toured a new housing development in the Historic West End neighborhood, with Charis Blackmon of the West Side Community Land Trust. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

We next stopped at [Archive CLT](#), the Historic West End's newest coffee shop and hang out spot. The owner, **Cheryse Terry**, shared her amazing journey from selling Black memorabilia online to opening a store with capital raised through crowdfunding.



Cheryse Terry owner of ArchiveCLT welcomes Knight Trustees and staff to her newly opened location. From left: Charles Thomas, Cheryse Terry, Maribel Pérez Wadsworth. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

For lunch Historic West End Partners and the [Five Points Community Collaborative](#) helped Knight to organize a popup food market representing the cuisine of the corridor. I want to thank **Original Chicken 'n Ribs**, **The Pauline Tea-Bar Apothecary**, **West End Fresh Seafood**, **Bite Your Tongue**, **Tropical Goodies**, **Archive CLT**, **Weaver St. Market**, and **Sweet & Elegant Bites** for providing an amazing lunch for Knight staff and our trustees.



Home cake studio owner, Tasha Boone, displayed her sweet treats for the crowd. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

Sunday evening, we hosted a reception and dinner at the [Mint Museum](#) which featured performances by the [Charlotte Ballet](#) and six Charlotte residents telling their stories. Thank you to the Charlotte Ballet and our storytellers, **Giovanna Torres Nieves**, co-founder of [Cine Casual](#) and Charlotte's first Latin American Film Festival, **Charles Bowman**, former president of Bank of America; **Alesha Brown**, founder and executive director of [For The Struggle](#), **Greg and Subrina Collier**, co-owners and founders of [Bay Haven Restaurants](#) (Leah & Louise and Uptown Yolk); **Dena Diorio**, Mecklenburg County manager – for sharing their journeys and helping us experience and celebrate Charlotte Mecklenburg in a new way.



Karsen Gresham and Luke Csordas of the Charlotte Ballet perform for guests. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)



Giovanna Torres Nieves, co-founder of Cine Casual and Charlotte's first Latin American Film Festival, spoke about what it took for her to become a true Charlotteen. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)



Community storytelling participants and Knight staff. (Photo credit: Jon Strayhorn)

A resounding thank you to Knight staff and our partners in Charlotte who have made this work possible, particularly those in Historic West End – LISC Charlotte, Historic West End Partners, West Side Community Land Trust, [Johnson C. Smith University](#), Five Points Community Collaborative, [NC Local News Lab Fund](#) and For the Struggle, Inc. I encourage you to take a look through all the photos captured during our [community visit](#) and [evening celebration](#).

This experience has left me energized and ready to take on our next steps as we work to breathe life into these new investments. Our future in Charlotte is bright – a future more vibrant and inclusive than ever before. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

Let's continue working together to make Charlotte a city of opportunity for all.

Charles Thomas

Charlotte Program Director
Knight Foundation

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