New business improvement initiative to propel economic growth in Charlotte’s Historic West End with $1.5 million from Knight Foundation

Charlotte Center City Partners to lead initiative, ignite businesses along upcoming Gold Line streetcar corridor

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – (June 30, 2015) – To expand economic opportunities and advance revitalization in Charlotte’s Historic West End neighborhood, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is investing $1.5 million to help create a new business improvement initiative along the upcoming Gold Line streetcar corridor. The effort is being led by Charlotte Center City Partners.

The Historic West End, anchored by Johnson C. Smith University, has made important contributions to Charlotte’s history, culture and growth. Over the years, however the neighborhood has experienced economic setbacks, leading to blight in commercial corridors and lower income levels.

However, the area is on the cusp of positive transformation through a concentration of public investment. The City of Charlotte has identified the neighborhood as a cornerstone for future growth and opportunity, and has invested $20 million over the next five years in the area through its Comprehensive Neighborhood Improvement Program. The largest driver of new opportunities for the district will be the CityLYNX Gold Line streetcar, a $160 million project to be completed in 2019 that will link this historic area to Uptown.

Capitalizing on this potential, Charlotte City Center Partners will help launch a business improvement initiative to revitalize the Historic West End, benefiting its residents, property owners and businesses. Knight Foundation joins the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, the Northwest Corridor Council of Elders, Johnson C. Smith University and Charlotte Center City Partners to support the initiative.

Funding will be used to work with the community to expand economic vitality in the Historic West End on the Gold Line corridor along West Trade Street and Beatties Ford Road. It will support strategic recommendations for this area outlined in the Center City 2020 Vision Plan and the Urban Land Institute’s Corridor report.
Charlotte Center City Partners will further work to build strong connections between Charlotte’s thriving uptown neighborhood and the Historic West End, which will be linked by the Gold Line. The organization will host events, create public awareness campaigns, recruit business and retail, and lead efforts to attract private investment.

“The Gold Line streetcar will create a physical link between Charlotte’s diverse neighborhoods and the city center. The business improvement initiative can leverage this power to connect to make Charlotte more successful,” said Susan Patterson, Charlotte program director for Knight Foundation. “By igniting small businesses and diverse ideas it will help foster economic growth in the corridor, create spaces where diverse groups people can come together and encourage young talent to live and stay in the city.”

Business development in the corridor has the potential to expand economic opportunity. It will contribute to attracting and retaining talent in Charlotte. The process of mobilizing the community to leverage the coming growth will also help to build a culture of community engagement.

“The CityLYNX Gold Line will eliminate real and perceived barriers between the university and Uptown,” said Charlotte Mayor, Dan Clodfelter. “We believe these investments, market conditions, and the streetcar will strengthen and attract additional investment. The time to activate our plans for Historic West End is now.”

“The professional capacity and experience of Charlotte Center City Partners are critical to the revitalization of the Historic West End,” said Dr. Ronald Carter, President of Johnson C. Smith University. “Charlotte Center City Partners is uniquely missioned to provide our mosaic of neighborhoods, businesses and institutions with the expertise we need to create critical mass for economic and community development.”

Charlotte City Center Partners envisions and implements strategies and actions to drive the economic, social and cultural development of Charlotte’s center city. The organization will support an extension of its work to Charlotte’s Historic West End, much as it has done along the Blue Line in South End. It will hire a director of Historic West End and begin collaborating with neighborhood and business leaders to create an Historic West End strategy.

“It begins with listening,” said Michael Smith, president and CEO of Charlotte Center City Partners. “We look forward to working with our Historic West End partners to create a plan that captures the unique qualities of this neighborhood and builds upon the resolve of the people and businesses who make Historic West End great.”

Support for this initiative is part of Knight Foundation’s efforts in Charlotte to attract and keep talented people, expand economic opportunity and create a culture of engagement. Knight has also invested in a plan to re-energize uptown Charlotte’s North Tryon corridor, and recently supported Foundation For The Carolinas’ efforts to revitalize the historic Carolina Theatre at Belk Place.
The planning process will begin over the summer. For more information about this initiative, visit CharlotteCenterCity.org.

**About Charlotte Center City Partners**
Charlotte Center City Partners envisions and implements strategies and actions to drive the economic, social and cultural development of Charlotte’s Center City. Our goal is a viable, livable, memorable and sustainable Center City with modern infrastructure, a tapestry of unique neighborhoods and a diversity of thriving businesses. For complete information about Charlotte Center City Partners, visit our website CharlotteCenterCity.org

**About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**
Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. We believe that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged. For more, visit knightfoundation.org.