

January 16, 2017

To Whom it May Concern:

As President of the Eastway-Sheffield Park neighborhood in East Charlotte, I have witnessed first-hand how the demise of the Independence corridor has affected East Charlotte and, in particular, my neighborhood. This community is ready for that to change and is more than deserving of efforts to promote growth of the area. For the past ten years, in my role as President, I have strived to and succeeded in minimizing neighborhood crime, establishing a strong neighborhood association, and have seen how property values continue to rise. In this capacity, East Charlotte is craving projects that parallel our city's commitments to the key ambitions of growth, especially when there is an elevated potential for improvement in the quality of life of our community.

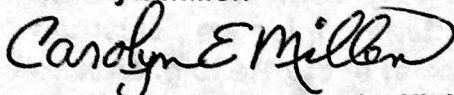
This is why I, on behalf of myself and the Eastway-Sheffield Park neighborhood residents as well as East Charlotte as a whole, support the efforts of an organization called "Our Local" to redevelop properties at the corner of Independence Blvd. and Pierson Drive (Varnadore Properties et. al.). These currently vacant properties act as a buffer between Eastway-Sheffield Park and Independence Boulevard. Thus, Our Local's plans to redevelop the historical properties would offer my neighborhood, East Charlotte and, most importantly, all of Charlotte an exciting opportunity to stand out on a world stage, demonstrating our city's progressive attitude, agility, and forward thinking.

Eastway-Sheffield Park neighborhood residents as well as East Charlotte as a whole would surely benefit from the campus-inspired project envisioned by Our Local and like that it is planned to include: a state-of-the-art, aquaponic biotechnology research and development center that would: 1. serve as a home to a new international aquaponics school, offering education and community gardening opportunities, 2. serve as a pick your own produce grocery store, and 3. provide a platform for scientific research. We want the community engagement spaces that Our Local has included in their planning and crave the retail elements, restaurant/cafe, and business incubator/accelerator and are supportive of their alignment of education and real world training programs. Perhaps most notably, we are supportive of the revenue generating, arts-based, LED installation that is a key part of this redevelopment project. We have had considerable dialogue both in and out of community meetings about this feature and it is clear that the folks at Our Local have listened to the community and have repeatedly demonstrated that they respect and value our wants, concerns, and desires regarding this feature. As a result, we view the LED installation as an arts medium that would enhance our community and therefore support this element being included in this project as proposed.

I believe that projects like this are sorely needed in our community. Organizations willing to take the risk with private money to soundly redevelop areas regarded as undesirable by most deserve our support. This is especially true when such efforts are community inspired and would likely spark further development, engage and uplift the surrounding community, create new jobs, improve the area's tax-base, and strengthen connections.

We know cities around the world are competing for projects like this. Because of this fact, we must remain vigilant and open-minded to shepherd this project forward. It is not everyday that such a community oriented project presents itself without seeking public funding.

Carolyn Millen



President, Eastway-Sheffield Park