

To the Citizens of Charlotte:

We all love a good story don't we? To me, one of the best stories are told through the inner workings of community; and every community has its book of stories. As a long time resident of East Charlotte, I have come to learn that East Charlotte has a particularly interesting story; but, as it turns out, most people don't know anything about it.

The reason people do not know this particular story might be because it is clad in a rough and neglected dust jacket, making it unappealing and uninteresting. Or, maybe it is because people have lost their voice over time and never really knew the whole story to begin with. Regardless, as this story resurfaces, people have an opportunity to rediscover East Charlotte for what it really is, what it was, and what it is on the way to becoming.

The building known today as the "Varnadore" has always been a cornerstone to East Charlotte's story and a point of intrigue for the overall Charlotte community. The building's genesis materialized from a pressing need for a new headquarters and a deep-seeded adoration for the City of Charlotte. Charles Ervin, the largest community builder in North Carolina for over two decades during the 50's and 60's, and one of the top builders in the nation, felt inspired to utilize his business success to a construct something that could be practical to his needs while serving as an inspiring tribute to the community he lived and worked in. The building was designed to serve as an ever evolving and futuristic "gateway property", full of the latest technologies and innovations. Ervin's efforts and original vision was inspiring and gave the entire Charlotte community a peek into what the future could be when people work together.

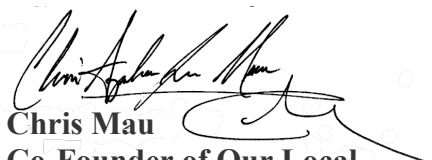
Over the decades, building ownership, community leadership, and city priorities changed and, like all stories, there has been struggle. Having survived the aftermath of continual thoroughfare expansions and conversions, the consequences of poorly planned and unrestricted growth in the late 1970's and 1980's, and a problematic housing strategy that left the area socioeconomically unbalanced for years, East Charlotte became a community in survival. People in the community moved, passed away, or were overwhelmed into silence. A narrative of blight, ruin, and crime stifled its voice; inspiring disinvestment at all levels. The landscape of the community was fractured by outside forces and remaining residents were forced to look inward and endure a hard fought journey to get to the present day.

In spite of its issues, and behind the blight and labels, something very special remained: the unrelenting soul and spirit of the community. Residents refused to abandon their spirit or relinquish their community's soul despite the will of others. Today, there is an army of people from all walks of life and parts of the community working together to drive positive change in East Charlotte. From neighborhoods and businesses, to city staff and elected leaders, interest and potential are visibly surfacing and the area is rising out of survival mode.

A quiet metamorphosis driven by determination, soul, and spirit is taking hold and blending traditional heritage with growing and diverse cultural assets. People are discovering that these elements give context, depth, and meaning to allow people to connect deeply, and ultimately forge a new identity together. A new chapter to this story is unfolding with a potential to bring opportunity, inspiration, and connections to a new generation.

There is a long road ahead and it is still possible that the Varnadore redevelopment project may not succeed. I hope this will not be the case. Regardless, it is my hope that no matter the outcome, a great spark will be imparted to the community. I feel that Charles Ervin would be proud of the community and that people are investing more of themselves. I have personally invested myself in every way I can and am happy to call East Charlotte home. I feel Charles would be pleased with the redevelopment plans for his building, and happy it is again serving as an inspiration to the community. Personally, I couldn't be happier to help the community.

With Sincere Appreciation,



Chris Mau
Co-Founder of Our Local
East Charlotte Resident