

**Rotary**  
Club of  
Charlotte



# THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

August 3, 2021

## 2021- 2022 Board Members

**President** Carol Hardison  
**Pres Elect** William Bradley  
**Past Pres** Jerry Coughter  
**Secretary** Colleen Brannan  
**Treasurer** Edwin Peacock  
**Exec Sec** Christine Cipriano

### Directors 2021-2022

Patrick Baker  
Bill Bartee  
Suzanne Bledsoe  
Kim McMillan  
Rex Reynolds  
Ranjay Sarda  
John zumBrunnen

### Directors 2021-2023

Ann Clark  
Ellison Clary  
Jesse Hite  
Christopher Jackson  
Warren Kean  
Vanessa Stolen  
Travis Vance

### Membership Laura Little

### Foundation Joe Morris

### Programs Elly Clary



## Laura Smith, EVP, Foundation for the Carolinas, Carolina Theatre

By Bill Bartee

Charlotte Rotary continued learning about the evolution and expansion occurring on Tryon Street with Laura Smith's presentation on the renovation of the historic Carolina Theatre. The Carolina Theatre is located directly across the street from the new Public Library, of which we learned about last week with Marcellus Turner and Jenni Gaisbauer.

**Catherine Bracey** introduced Smith, the Executive Vice President of Foundation For The Carolinas, overseeing marketing and communications, as well as Finance, Operations and real estate projects. During that introduction we learned about her education at Davidson College, Queens University, and Georgetown University, as well as her management of her own project management and consulting firm. That firm's focus on large community-based projects and other parts of her career with the Arts and Science Council have prepared for her leadership of the \$160+ million renovation of the Carolina Theatre by the Foundation For The Carolinas.

The Carolina Theatre opened in 1927 and was one of five Theatres in downtown Charlotte and the only one that has survived. It seated 1,450 and featured vaudeville shows and silent movies along with live acts such as Elvis Presley (1956) and a 79-week run of the popular live musical The Sound of Music (1965).

However, The Theatre, located at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and S. Tryon Street, closed in 1978.

After its closing, other Carolina Theatres in other parts of the state, were being renovated (Durham, Wilmington, Winston Salem) but Charlotte's sat in disrepair.

The Foundation For The Carolinas (located next door) purchased the Theatre for \$1 from the city and with inspiration from the repairs done on the historic Ohio Theatre, located in Cleveland. The reason? It is a critical piece of real estate, history and matches the community-based mission of the Foundation For The Carolinas.

They are investing \$73.3 million which includes \$4 million and \$4.5 million from the City and County, respectively.

The Foundation's portion of the renovation takes up 6-floors and will then continue with the partnership with the Intercontinental Hotel that will rise 32-stories above it and include 256 rooms. That portion of investment from the Hotel is an additional \$112+ million

Once complete, the theatre will be a place for the community to come together for: Town Hall Meetings, TED Talks, Symposiums, National Speaker Series, along with smaller art shows, brunches and Sunday choirs and more.

The architecture is complimentary to the Public Library across the street and the open, glass lobby will be connected with the neighboring Foundation headquarters.

The Theatre portion is due to be complete and open in the fall of 2022. The final challenges are handling parking, described by Smith as a "nightmare" and the continued impact of the Pandemic, which has delayed the Hotel project.

Partnerships are being pursued and money raised to alleviate the challenges and the community support has been strong. Both the City Council and Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously when the Project first came to them.

\*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/582689885>

Ms. Smith's presentation begins at 14:50 minutes.