



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

January 20, 2026

## 2025-2026 Board Members

President Patrick Baker  
Pres Elect Bill Bartee  
Past Pres Kim Brattain  
Secretary Bill Gill  
Treasurer Craig Field  
Exec Dir Christine Cipriano

### Directors 2024-2026

Benton Bragg  
John Cantrell  
Tish Atkins Charles  
Dena Diorio  
Jesse Hite  
Virginia Owen

### Directors 2025-2027

Byrd Bergeron  
Karen Calder  
J Hill  
Ayo Johnson  
Lori Keeton  
Michael Orzech  
Robert Shaw  
Elizabeth Teagarden  
Mike Wollinger

### Membership Co-Chairs:

Linwood Bolles &  
Shelley Dean

### Programs

Elizabeth Teagarden



## *Blair Stanford and The Business of Connecting*

by Marilynn Bowler

Recognized for her role as a leader in planning, strategizing, collaborating, connecting and facilitating, *Blair Stanford* is a key advocate for Charlotte and is instrumental in making great things happen which have long-term benefits not only for our city but also regionally and beyond. Her official title is Executive Director of the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC). That Council is a vital arm of the Foundation For The Carolinas and focuses on ~ but is not limited to ~ developing and bettering Charlotte in the areas of Education, Workforce Development, Healthy Communities, and Community Engagement. The magic word, we heard from Blair today, is "connecting" ... connecting leaders in business, education, healthcare and politics to find solutions to improve Charlotte's vitality and quality of life for everyone.

Using what she experienced as COO of the (now) Charlotte Regional Business Alliance (formerly Charlotte Chamber of Commerce), it was a surefire fit when she joined CELC five+ years ago. She brought with her all of those excellent connections combined with her public relations savvy and her management talent, and that impressive combination has positioned her to successfully lead such incredible challenges as ~ in the words of **Karen Calder** who took the MIC at Rotary to introduce Blair ~ "the Chamber-Regional Partnership merger, the Democratic National Convention, the 2006 CEO search and several long-term economic planning efforts."

Pointing out CELC's official mission as that which "accelerates solutions that position Charlotte as a national leader in economic vitality, equitable opportunity

and quality of life for all," Blair gave kudos to CEPC's Chairs: Lynn Good, Brian Moynihan, Mike Lamach, Gene Woods, Tom Nelson, and JB Brown ... a mighty collaboration of itself. Their priorities ~ and the jobs of their individual committee members ~ are to provide a forum for the discussion of key issues and to take actions, as well as to advocate, actively work with, and maintain strong relationships with local and state government leaders.

The list of key accomplishments to-date is intriguing and speaks volumes for what has been done and what's coming soon. Ranging from improved finance processes to securing county funding to expanding Pre-K support to building a new HUB in support of community partnerships to launching meaningful medicine, our school system (CMS) is the beneficiary of all of that. Blair shared a roster of fulfilled missions, already integrated into the CMS system and the families it touches, since the program began in 2022. We applauded, as well we should have.

CELC's collaborative efforts have spawned - and will continue to spawn - an amazing growth in all areas of our city as leadership and professional partnerships and sponsorships realize the power and strength of teamwork. As undeniable proof, CMS has outperformed North Carolina in overall grade-level proficiency with significant increases in Reading, Math, and Math III ... thanks to the supreme efforts of CELC. And there's more to come in the areas of Transportation, Uptown Safety, Non-Profits, Housing, and Elective Leadership Programs.

Thank you, Blair Stanford, for leading the pack. Your leadership skills have worked overtime, and we can all see the rewards.

During an interesting Q&A session following Blair's presentation, the following information was shared:

**Bill Bradley** asked, "Does the CELC allow their reviews to be made public ... adding credibility to such reviews as with CMS's and the light rail expansion?" Blair responded, "The Council typically keeps its reviews private so as to keep those reviews from being used as 'props.' "

**Bill Gill** asked, "How can organizations such as Rotary assist in the accomplishment of CELC's objectives and projects?" Blair replied, "CELC would connect Rotary with one of the working groups and from there go on to develop a strategy."

**Byrd Bergeron** asked, " I'd like a better understanding of how a small business could get involved with the community, knowing that it was geared towards very large businesses." Blair answered, "CELC has five small business CEO's on the Board, so we can easily relate and work together."

**Chase Saunders** asked, "Police Chief Estella Patterson reported at an HTA meeting that she welcomed police recruitment and retention efforts as there were openings. Does the CELC work with the police department to assist in recruitment and retention efforts to strengthen our community?" Blair answered, "While the CELC does not have direct funding or management

involvement with this issue, they have met with the DA upon occasion and intend to meet with her to gain insights into community issues and help at the state policy level."

We all left the meeting impressed with Blair's presentation *and* with Blair.

Unfortunately, due to technical difficulty, this meeting was not recorded.