

## What economic development pros and Charlotte insiders are saying about CLT Alliance shakeup



Charlotte Regional Business Alliance office      Melissa Key/CBJ



By Erik Spanberg – Managing Editor, Charlotte Business Journal  
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The Charlotte Regional Business Alliance’s top economic recruiting executive left four months ago and the position remains vacant. On Wednesday, another high-level shoe dropped as CEO Janet LaBar disclosed plans to resign effective next month.

Those changes come on top of a transition started in 2018 that merged the former Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and Charlotte Regional Partnership to form what is now CLT Alliance. Still to come: Appointing an interim replacement within the next two weeks and, eventually, hiring her successor as well as a lead recruiting executive to replace Danny Chavez, the recruiter who departed in December.

“This will be the second high-profile departure,” corporate site selection executive John Boyd told *CBJ*.

Boyd, principal at Boca Raton, Fla.-based The Boyd Company, said that, despite the changes and uncertainty within economic development here in recent months and years, interest should run high for the CEO job at CLT Alliance.

Because of the region’s strong business sector and consistent population gains, Boyd anticipates a national search that will yield blue-chip candidates.

“That position is one of the most attractive economic development positions in the country today given the winning streak the state is on and given the strength of the Charlotte economy,” he added. “That’s a regional organization, so (it includes) the sub-markets with exciting projects. That’s a coveted position.”

Local government, business and nonprofit executives who spoke to *CBJ* on the condition of anonymity after LaBar revealed her plans speculated as much or more on the structure of economic development in the region as they did on personnel changes.

The merger that created CLT Alliance aimed to end years of mission creep and overlapping priorities that often left site selection consultants and companies alike confused about which organization steered various aspects of recruiting and relocation.

“It’s been unfortunate,” Boyd said, referring to uncertainty as the merger occurred and, more recently, with executives’ departures. “The region has had so much success almost in spite of the lack of an effective, sustained leadership team in place.”

Boyd said a coalition among business executives, the real estate community and influential leaders across the spectrum must unite to provide support — financial and otherwise — to stabilize economic development here.

Putting the chamber and the regional partnership together shifted the new organization’s focus in economic development to generating and sharing leads for surrounding counties and Charlotte-Mecklenburg. At the same time, Charlotte city government took charge of directly negotiating with relocation and expansion prospects — a role previously handled by the chamber.

CLT Alliance also presides over areas the former chamber did, including nonpartisan political policy advocacy and overseeing frequent conversations, gatherings and events to generate consensus among diverse businesses and business leaders across the 14-county region.

Jesse Cureton, a former Novant Health executive who played a pivotal role in the 2018 merger, told *CBJ*, “My initial thoughts are that Janet and team did a good job of outreach and broadening economic development (ties).”



*Jesse Cureton, a former Novant Health executive who played a lead role in the creation of CLT Alliance, said this week he still believes in the region's economic development model despite recent uncertainty. Melissa Key*

Cureton, who left Novant last year, said he couldn't speak to the past year or two, when he was no longer involved. He added, "I'm confident in the model" established with the creation of CLT Alliance.

Cureton was part of the five-person panel that worked with Raleigh search firm Elinvar on the four-month search that led to LaBar's hiring in March 2019. LaBar took over the following month.

A longtime observer of Charlotte business practices predicted the likely next steps will be to appoint a former banker or another veteran corporate executive to steady CLT Alliance while board members and other executives determine whether any structural changes may be needed before a permanent replacement is hired.

"I have no comment on the change in leadership, but I would say that often after a leadership change, it's a good time to consider whether there is any change of mission," former Charlotte Chamber CEO Carroll Gray told *CBJ*. "To look at the collaboration between all these related organizations."

Economic development groups, companies and town, city and county governments throughout the region all collaborate with CLT Alliance on various projects and in talks with prospects.

A CLT Alliance spokesperson told *CBJ* on Wednesday that LaBar's departure was her decision. She will lead next week's annual intercity visit — this year's destination is Phoenix — with local government and business executives as planned.

CLT Alliance has a \$10 million annual budget and 35 full-time employees.