Guide To Starting A Business

Town of Cary • Cary Chamber of Commerce

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Introduction

The Town of Cary and Cary Chamber of Commerce are interested in the success of your new business and want to partner with you and help you navigate through the process. You may encounter things along the path to opening a business that will be unexpected, so when it comes to working with the Town, we want to help you understand each step before you get started. Whether you plan to operate your business from your home or a storefront, it is important to familiarize yourself with the Town of Cary regulations.

Home-Based Businesses

Most home-based businesses are permitted in all residential zoning districts within the Town of Cary and may not necessarily require any permits. Generally, if you are having customers/clients come to your home or you have an employee working in your home who does not reside there, an Accessory Use Permit from the Town of Cary is required for your home occupation. If you have any questions on starting a home occupation, please contact Cary's Development Customer Service at (919) 469-4046.

Storefront Businesses

If you are planning to operate your business from a storefront, we encourage you to review this guide thoroughly prior to signing a lease or purchasing property for your new business!

Development Liaison Service

As an added benefit to our business community, the Town now offers a Development Liaison service to help you successfully navigate the development and permitting process. Cary's Development Liaison program primarily focuses on business customers. This service is completely voluntary, and you are not required to participate. If you choose to participate, the Development Liaisons would assist by serving as your primary point of contact with the Town throughout the life of your project. Cary's Development Liaisons have over 50 years of combined experience in planning, zoning, permitting, building code, construction and inspections.

Zoning & Land Use

Step 1: Verify Your Zoning & Land Use

The first step is to ensure the proposed location of your business is consistent with the Cary Community Plan and has the appropriate zoning designation for the type of business you plan to open. The Town has a Future Growth Framework which outlines the community's future vision for growth and development in terms of where residential, office, commercial and industrial uses. The zoning districts provide appropriately located areas consistent with the Future Growth Framework Map for a full range of residential, office, commercial and industrial uses. If you are not sure how your business is classified per Cary's zoning Land Development Ordinance (LDO) or the State Building Code, we recommend you contact a Town Development Liaison at (919) 469-4046. Once it is determined that the zoning district allows the use, you need to check the use-specific standards outlined in Chapter 5 of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) to determine if there are any other specific limitations to consider. Uses in each zoning district are either permitted, not permitted or permitted only with an approved Special Use permit.

To find out if your proposed business is permitted within the existing zoning designation and is consistent with the Cary Community Plan, you can visit Cary's Property Research Map and search property information. Properties can be searched by the parent parcel address, or by the Property Identification Number (PIN). Additionally, you may contact the Town at (919) 469-4046. If you find the zoning is not consistent with your use, you may request to rezone the property or look for another location in Cary that meets your business needs.

The following infographic depicts the zoning districts usually associated with small business uses.

Typical zoning districts consistent with small business uses include:

Office and Institutional District (OI)
The OI district provides for the development of professional or medical offices and community institutions.

General Commercial District (GC)
The GC district generally provides for uses that provide goods and services to residents of the community.

Office/Research and Development District (ORD)
The ORD district provides for a wide range of employment generating office, institutional, research and development, light manufacturing and "flex space" uses.

Industrial District (I)
The I district provides for light and heavy industrial activities such as manufacturing, warehousing and wholesaling activities with limited contact with the general public, but may generate heavy traffic.

Town Center District (TC)
The TC district provides for a variety of subdistricts that permit non-residential uses including High Intensity Mixed Use (HMXD), Mixed Use (MXD), Office/Institutional (OFC/INS), Office/Industrial (OFC/IND), Commercial (COM), Commercial Low Intensity (CLI), Cottage Business and Residential (CB&R) and Institutional (INS).

Planned Development District (PDD)
The PDD district provides for a mixture of uses with innovative design and layout. PDD's may contain a mixture of residential and non-residential uses. Information on Cary's PDD's, including permitted uses, conditions and approved land use plans can be found by visiting Cary's Approved Planned Development Districts.

Mixed Use District (MXD)
The MXD district is only located within Mixed Use Overlay Districts (MUOD). MXD provides flexibility for a mixture of commercial, office and residential uses subject to specific requirements set forth in a Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) or Site Plan.

Building Classification

Step 2: Verify Your Building Classification

Once you determine that the location you are interested in has the appropriate land use and zoning designations for the type of business you plan to open, the next step is to find out if the building you want to house your business in will require renovations to meet the building safety standards set by the North Carolina State Building Code. The Building Code was established by the State to create minimum building requirements to safeguard the public health, safety and general welfare.

While it is not required, it is recommended that you work with an architect or contractor to assist in determining whether the space you wish to operate your business out of already meets these minimum requirements and if not, the renovations required to bring the building up to code.

Public health, safety and general welfare standards are maintained through the proper use of building materials, by regulating the size and the height of buildings, by ensuring a minimum number of exits and limiting the maximum distance one would have to travel to safely exit the building in an emergency and by determining when a sprinkler system or fire alarm system is required. The Building Code also sets the minimum requirements for lighting, ventilation, number and type of plumbing fixtures, (i.e. bathrooms, water fountains) and energy conservation measures.

Many of the minimum requirements in the building code are based on the type of business that will occupy a building. The Building Code refers to this as the occupancy classification(s) of the business. Once the occupancy classification is determined, the other portions of the code can be applied. An infographic of the most common occupancy classification groups can be found on page seven.

Occupancy Classification Groups

Assembly Group A

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social, religious, recreation or for the consumption of food or drink. Examples include theaters, restaurants, churches, martial arts studios, dance halls or sporting areas.

Business Group B

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for office, professional or service transaction or the storage of record and accounts. Examples include banks, beauty shops, dry cleaners, laboratories and professional offices.

Educational Group E

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) intended for educational purposes of 6 or more persons up to the 12th grade.

Factory Group F

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for assembling, disassembling, fabricating, finishing, manufacturing, packaging, repairing or processing operations.

Institutional Group I

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) in which people are cared for or live in a supervised environment, having physical limitations, because of health or age are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment. Examples include assisted living facilities, convalescent facilities, group homes and social rehabilitation facilities.

Mercantile Group M

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for the display and sale of merchandise and involves stocks of goods or merchandise accessible to the public. Examples include department stores, drug stores, motor fuel-dispensing facilities and sales rooms.

Residential Group R

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for sleeping purposes but not one or two family dwellings. Examples include boarding houses, hotels, apartments, dorms, live/work units and other residential care facilities.

Storage Group S

Spaces (a building structure or portion thereof) used for storage that is not classified as a hazardous occupancy.

Utility Group U

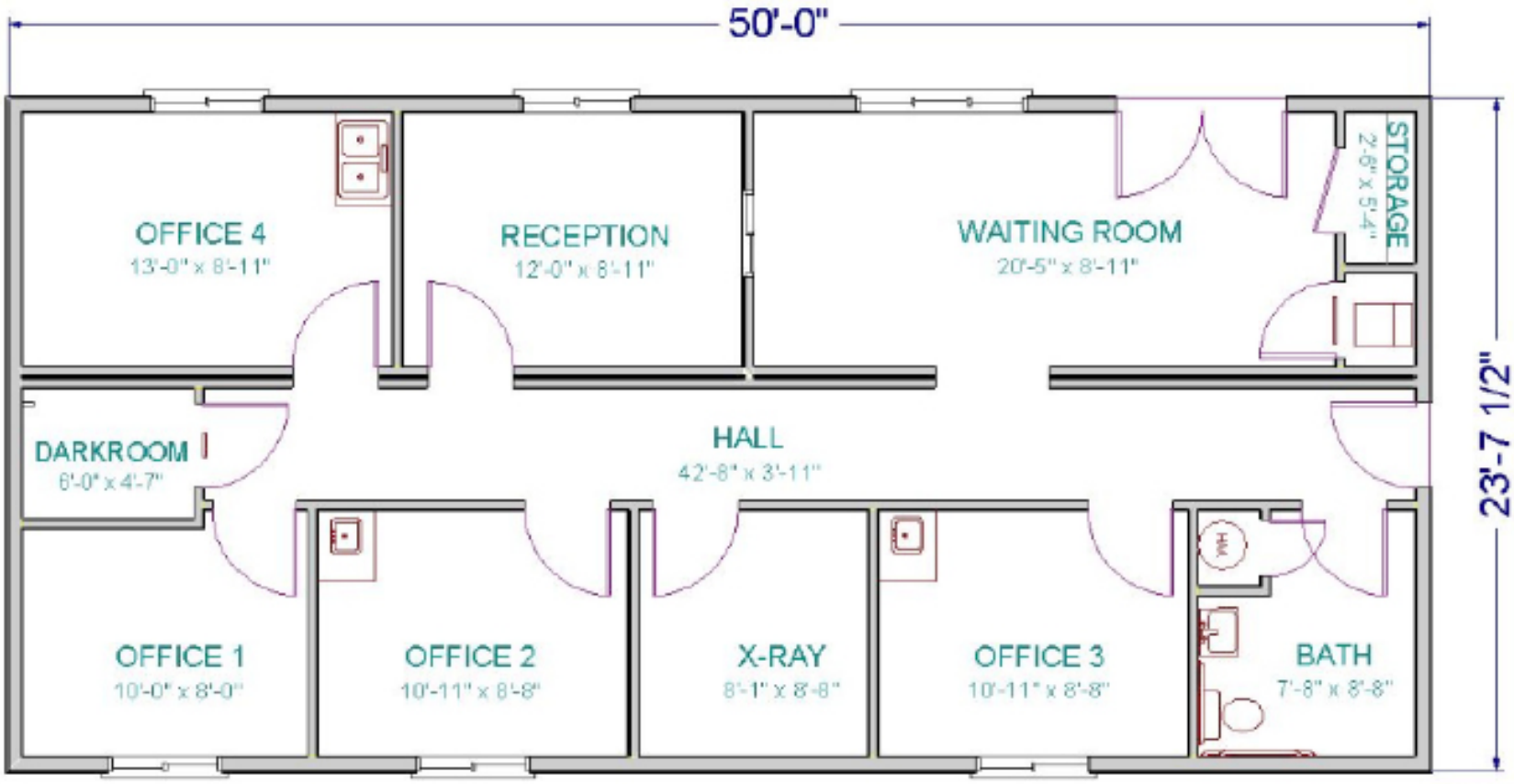
Building or structures not classified as any specific occupancy. Examples include agricultural buildings, carports, grain silos, private garages, retaining walls, sheds, tanks and towers.

Building Permits

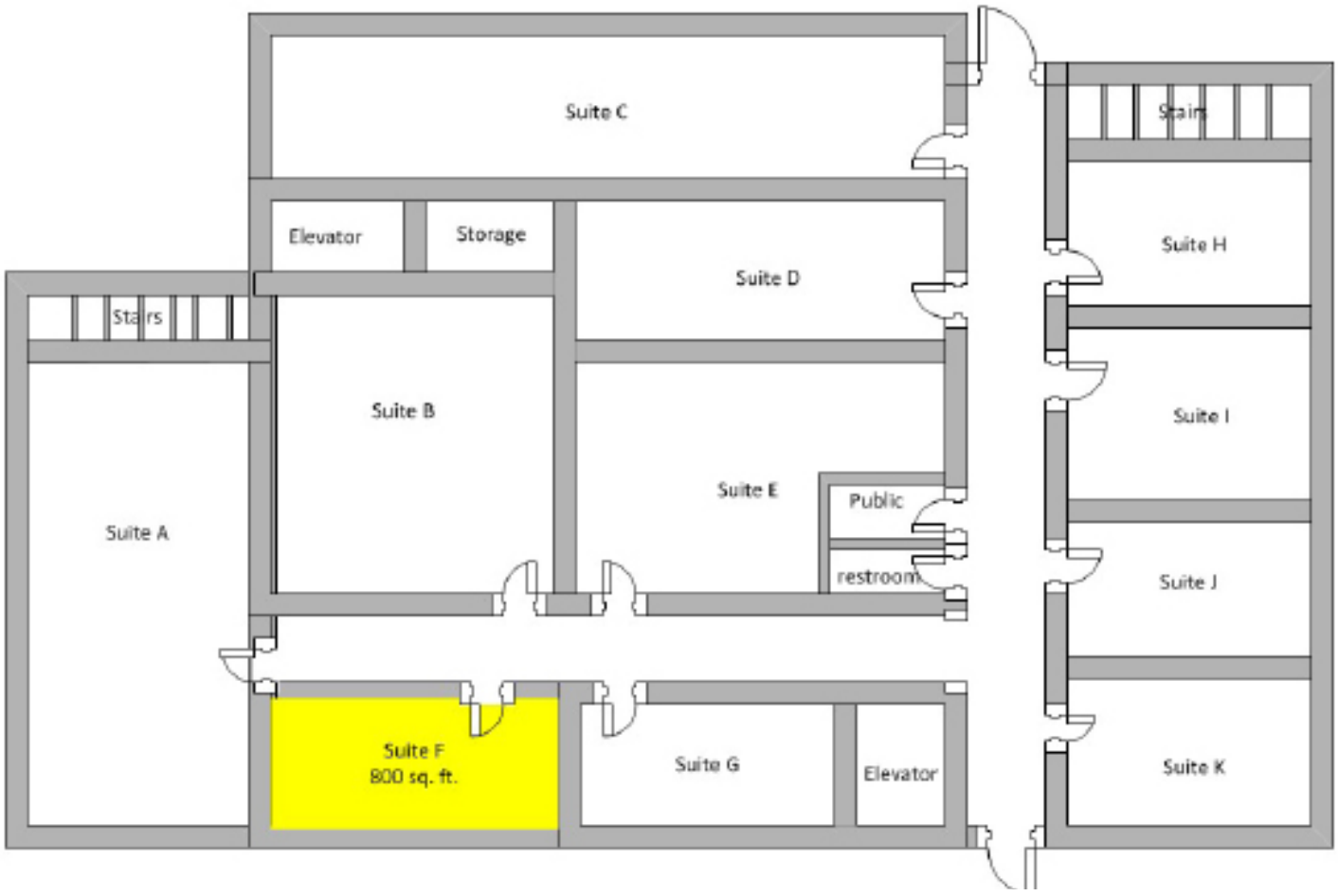
Step 1 Verify Your Zoning & Land Use | Step 2 Verify Building Classification | **Step 3 Applying for a Building Permit** | Step 4 Signing Your Lease | Step 5 Establishing a Utility Account | Step 6 Getting Your Signs | Step 7 Ready to Open

Step 3: Applying for a Building Permit

A permit from the Town of Cary is required anytime a new tenant moves into a space or if any plumbing, electrical, mechanical, sprinkler, fire alarm or structural changes are made to the building. In cases where a new tenant moves into a space, these permits are classified as either a change of tenant (moving into a space that was previously permitted for the same building occupancy type, such as Business to Business) or a change of occupancy (moving into a space that was previously approved for a different building code occupancy type, such as from a Business use to an Educational use). As part of the application process, you will need to submit both a layout of your proposed floor plan and a key plan (see samples below). Please use these graphics for key plan and site plan.



Sample Floor Plan



Sample Key Plan

Businesses that are changing occupancy types (i.e. Business to Mercantile) will also need to complete either a 2012 Building Code Summary, or in some cases, an abbreviated version of the Building Code Summary. Again, while not necessarily required, we recommend you work with an architect or contractor to assist you in determining the occupancy classification, space layout, occupancy load, exiting requirements and other requirements based upon the new use (occupancy classification). For instance, it is common that certain business uses will require additional improvements such as larger ventilation and/or exhaust systems, a fire alarm, additional plumbing fixtures, and if you are opening a food service business the approval of fats, oils and grease systems. Your architect or general contractor should be familiar with the State Building Code requirements and offer advice with options and the costs associated with these improvements. In addition, a change of occupancy to a more intense use may trigger unanticipated costs such as development fees. It is recommended that you contact the Town at (919) 469-4046 to determine if your proposed business would require development fees.

Your Commercial Building Permit Application, including floor plan, key plan and a building code summary, can be submitted to the Development Customer Service counter on the first floor of Town Hall. Once reviewed and approved, you will receive an email informing you (or your contractor) that your permit is ready to be picked up. This email will outline the fees (including development fees, if applicable) associated with your approved application. If the building you are moving into requires improvements, you must pay for and pick up your building permit before you begin the work. At the appropriate times during the renovation, it will be necessary for the Town to inspect the progress to verify compliance with the Building Code. You can schedule inspections online, or by calling (919) 469-4046. Once the improvements are completed and approved, you will receive a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) or Certificate of Completion (CC) from the Town.

Note: Additional Licensing or Permitting Agencies for Consideration

In conjunction with or in addition to your Building Permit, other permits, approvals or licenses may be required to start your business. For example, if your business serves alcohol (even temporarily), you will need to obtain a permit from the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission and a Town of Cary beer and wine permit. Food establishments require a Food Service Establishment Plan Review Application through the Wake County Environmental Services with the exception that bakeries, frozen ice cream and yogurt, poultry and dairy businesses require NC Department of Agriculture approval. The Town's Utilities Department will need to make a grease interceptor determination during the building permit process. If you have questions you can check with your design professional (architect or engineer), contractor or contact a Town Development Liaison at (919) 469-4046.

Making Changes or Additions to the Building Façade or Property's Exterior?

If there are any improvements to the outside of the building (other than signage), you will likely need to receive Town approval for a Minor Alteration or other approval to the site. Minor Alterations are required when you change the exterior color or material of a building, relocate windows, doors, dumpsters, landscaping or anything else external to the building. Prior to proposing any changes to the inside or outside of the building, contact the Town at (919) 469-4046 to determine what approvals, if any, are necessary.

Signing a Lease

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Step 4: Signing Your Lease

Steps 1-3 (above) outline some of the due diligence that the Town recommends you complete before you sign a lease. Before entering into a contract for a property, it is important to verify that the land use and zoning allow your type of business, and what alterations or repairs will be necessary for the building to meet the minimum requirements of the State Building Code.

Step 5: Establishing a Utility Account

Unless your utilities will be handled through the landlord or management company, you will need to establish services for the property. The Town of Cary provides water, sewer and in some cases solid waste and recycling. To establish these services you can contact the Town's Finance Department at (919) 469-4050. Other utility services provided for the property will also need to be established with the appropriate utility providers. For example, electric service is primarily provided by Duke Energy and can be contacted by calling (919) 781-2851. Gas service is primarily provided by PSNC Energy and can be contacted by calling (877) 776-2427.

Step 6: Getting Your Signs

Whether or not you choose to design and install a sign, you will want to familiarize yourself with the Town of Cary sign regulations. Many forms of advertising, such as wind-blown devices, pennants, sign spinners, etc. are prohibited in the Town. Prior to purchasing a sign or other form of on-site advertising, it is recommended you contact the Town of Cary at (919) 469-4046. The Town of Cary issues permits for two types of permitted signs; temporary and permanent.

Temporary signs are only permitted for a maximum of 30 days and are issued within the first 60 days of the issuance of the Building Permit, Certificate of Occupancy (CO) or Certificate of Completion (CC). Some businesses choose to use a portion of the 30 days to advertise "Coming Soon" and the remainder of the 30 days for "Now Open", while other businesses may choose to use all 30 days to say "Grand Opening" or "Now Open". The Town of Cary does not regulate the content of the sign, but does regulate the size and duration of time. Temporary signs are governed by Section 9.3 of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) and require approval of a Temporary Sign Permit.

Permanent signs are regulated by Section 9.2 of Cary's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) and consist of a wide range of signage types, such as wall, ground, awning, directory, suspended, monument, identification, etc. Permanent signs require an approved Sign Permit application and some permanent signs require a building permit to accompany the sign permit. Electric signs that have internal wiring or lighting equipment, and external lighting equipment that directs light on signs, require an electrical permit. It is highly recommended that you hire a professional sign contractor to help you design, construct and install your permanent sign(s). Questions regarding permanent signs should be directed to a professional sign contractor or the Town of Cary Planning Department (919) 469-4046.

Many non-residential developments in the Town of Cary have Master Sign Plans (formerly known as Uniform Sign Plans), which outline the overall design, number and location for all signs within that development. You can download a copy of the Master Sign Plan at your business location (if applicable) by searching the property on Cary's Property Research Map or search by alphabetical listing of the Master Sign Plan.

Ready to Open

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Step 7: Ready to Open

There are many ways to celebrate your opening including a grand opening event. Events such as grand openings may be approved by the Town through the Temporary Use Permit process. These permits are good for a maximum of seven calendar days or three events per year, whichever is less. The Temporary Use Permit allows you to place temporary structures such as tables, tents, bounce houses, signs, etc. on the property. If you have any questions on ways to help market your new business within the Town's regulations, please contact the Town at (919) 460-4046.

Testimonials

What people have been saying about the Town of Cary's Development Liaison Services

"My team utilized the Town of Cary's Development Liaison Services for our most recent Tijuana Flats in the Town of Cary. Not only did they help guide us through the Town's requirements and processes, they served as our point of contact for any questions or concerns we had throughout our build-out. **I wish more jurisdictions provided these services**, it certainly would make it easier for new businesses to open their doors."

Dominic DeVuyst, Tijuana Flats

"**We found the DLS invaluable** in the whirlwind process of getting our College Nannies and Tutors Learning Center up and running. We went from finding the space to opening our doors in less than two months, and that involved all kinds of questions and interactions with the town. The DLS helped us identify and jump through all the hurdles and provided very clear and helpful information."

Greg Tarsa, College Nannies and Tutors

"Development Liaison Service was instrumental in the opening of our restaurant. We had never done business in the Town of Cary and came to them with numerous questions. Everything from ABC Permitting to Zoning and everything in between. DLS provided prompt and thorough responses or introduced me to the correct department at the Town to find the answer. **I could not have asked for a better resource!**"

Brad Barbour, Shuckin' Shack Oyster Bar

"The Town of Cary Development Liaison service was **extremely helpful** in guiding our school through the permit and application process. Every email, phone call, and meeting was informative and answered our questions and assisted us in getting everything done to help us set up in Cary."

Lissy Wood, Wake Academy

"The Town of Cary Development Liaison Service was extremely helpful with helping to start Pharmacy Bottle + Beverage. **They were a great resource** to turn to when I had questions navigating the process of opening my small business in Downtown Cary."

Tyler Watt, Pharmacy Bottle & Beverage

Resources

Start Your Business

- **U.S. Small Business Association** www.sba.gov
  Phone: (800) 827-5722
  The primary functions of the SBA include delivering loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses.

- **Small Business & Technology Development Center** www.sbtdc.org
  Phone: (800) 258-0862
  The SBTDC provides management counseling and educational services to small and mid-sized businesses. All services are confidential, and most services are free.

- **Small Business Center Network of North Carolina** www.ncsbc.net
  Phone: (919) 807-7217
  The SBCN is a community-based provider of training, counseling, and resource information. The network is made up of 58 Small Business Centers across the state.

Site Selection

- For traditional real estate options you can search for property on the Cary Economic Development Website. Direct any further questions regarding site selection to Kyle Greer at the Cary Chamber of Commerce.

Co-Working Environments

- **Cofounders Capital Lab** www.cofounderscapital.com

Financial Incentive Programs

Town of Cary

Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
Façade Improvement Program	Approved property owners or tenants who improve the exteriors of existing businesses may seek reimbursement for half the cost, depending on the amount.	• Must undertake at least $2,000 of improvements • Project site must be located within the Town Center Area Plan boundary • Tenants must have a minimum of two years remaining on their lease or have option to renew • Improvements must be on the façade of the building facing the primary street orientation
Individual Incentives	The Town of Cary does not have a set policy regarding economic incentives. Each case is evaluated by the Town Council on its individual merits and incentives may be awarded if approved by Council. Items considered are, number of jobs, quality of jobs, capital investment, etc.	• Provide number of jobs, salary of jobs, and amount of capital investment that the project will generate • There are no minimum requirements for the above items, and each project is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Wake County

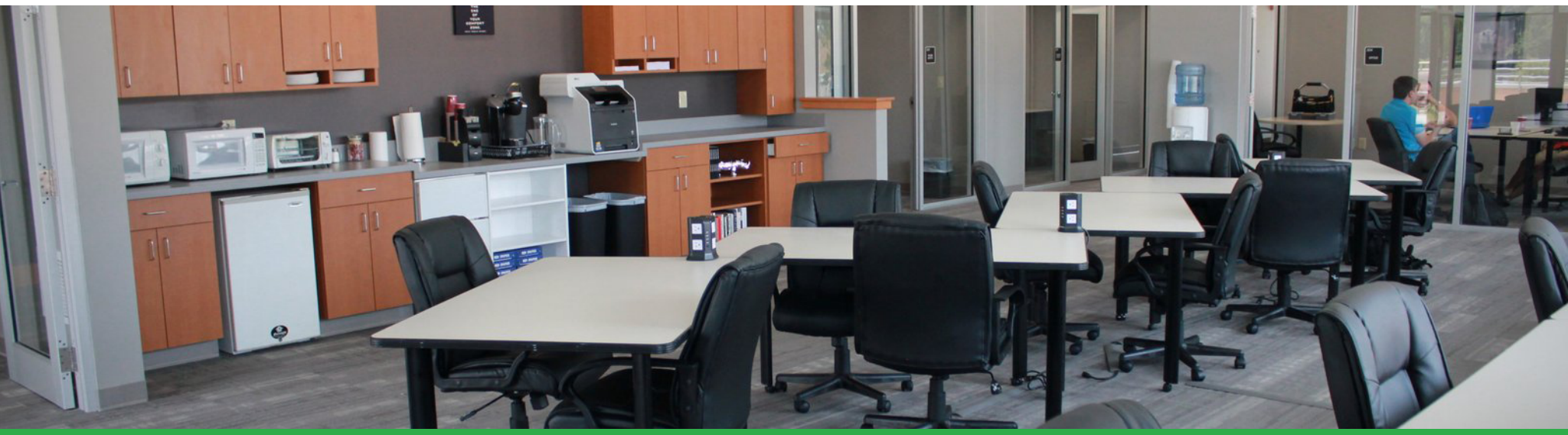
Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
Business Investment Grant	The county will award a grant worth up to 2.25% of the new investment that will be paid over a period of up to eight years.	• Must meet either New Investment Threshold and/or New Jobs Threshold

State of North Carolina

Financial Grant	Description	Requirements
Job Development Investment Grant	A discretionary incentive that provides sustained annual grants to new and expanding businesses measured against a percentage of withholding taxes paid by new employees.	• Project results in a net increase in employment • Project increases opportunities for employment and strengthens the state's economy • Project is consistent with the economic development goals of the state and of the area in which it is located • Project is competitive with another state(s) or country • Grant is necessary for the completion of the project in North Carolina
One North Carolina	Helps recruit and expand quality jobs in high value-added, knowledge-driven industries. It also provides financial assistance to those businesses or industries deemed vital to a healthy economy that are making significant efforts to expand in North Carolina.	• The company must agree to meet an average wage test. • Local units of government (city or county) must agree to match financial assistance to the company.
Small Business Technology Transfer	A program that expands funding opportunities in the federal innovation research and development arena. Central to the program is expansion of the public/private sector partnership to include the joint venture opportunities for small businesses and nonprofit research institutions.	• Organized for profit, with a place of business located in the United States; • At least 51 percent owned and controlled by one or more individuals who are citizens of, or permanent residents of the United States, and; • No more than 500 employees, including affiliates.
Tax Credits in North Carolina	North Carolina is consistently ranked among the best business climates in the nation by Forbes, CNBC, Chief Executive and Site Selection. Several tax credit programs contribute to this business environment that makes North Carolina a place where companies Thrive.	Examples: • Interactive Digital Media • Renewable Energy • Technology Development

Entrepreneurial Organizations

Organization	Description	Contact
Cofounders Capital Lab	Cofounders Capital, who operates Cary Co-founders Lab, tends to invest in software companies providing solutions to pressing problems with measurable value. Before investing, they spend a lot of time helping founders build their venture. The lab provides office space and resources to enable entrepreneurs to grow their ideas.	**Mailing Address** 122 E. Chatham Street Suite 301 Cary, NC 27511 **Email** David Gardner david@cofounderscapital.com



Business Organizations

Organization	Description	Contact
Cary Chamber of Commerce	Serves as the unified business voice of the Cary area. It provides leadership to support and facilitate a thriving business environment. The Chamber believes that such an environment is characterized by the strength and growth of resident businesses, by the quality and stability of their workforces and by the attractiveness of our market to businesses whose presence would be a positive influence on our community.	**Mailing Address** 307 North Academy St Cary, NC 27513 **Phone** (919) 467-1016 **Email** info@carychamber.com
Association for Corporate Growth	A global organization with 14,000 members comprising 55 chapters in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Asia. By bringing together business leaders and middle market deal-makers, the organization assists in growth and business-building by ensuring member access to data, content, and networking opportunities.	**Mailing Address** 1404 Sky Hill Place Wake Forest, NC 27587 **Phone** (919) 453-2997
MCNC	A nonprofit organization committed to building partnerships among academic, research, government, and business communities for more than a quarter of a century. These partnerships enable and advance education, innovation, and economic development throughout North Carolina by delivering the world's foremost information technology services through the North Carolina Research and Education Network.	**Mailing Address** 3021 E. Cornwallis Road PO Box 12889 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 **Phone** (919) 248-1900
National Association of Women Business Owners	Provides support to women entrepreneurs in social, economic, and political arenas. NAWBO focuses on promoting economic development, creating innovation and effective change, building strategic alliances, and influencing public policy.	Susan Stanhope President **Mailing Address** 1204 Village Market Place, Box 193 Morrisville, NC 27560 **Phone** (919) 218-4783
Research Triangle Institute	A not for profit corporation established by leaders in academia, business, and state government, which provides contact research to federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as to private industry and foundations. Capabilities span the physical, life, and social sciences including survey research, behavioral studies, chemistry, energy, and environmental research, population, education, health systems, economics, statistics, state planning, engineering, technology applications, virtual reality applications, toxicology, and toxic wastes.	**Phone** (919) 541-6000 **Email** Listen@rti.org

Training & Education

Capital Area Workforce Development Board
www.capitalareawdb.com

- Capital Area Workforce Development is a public-private partnership that focuses on economic development by ensuring the local workforce has the skills, training and education to meet the needs of local employers. Read More

- **Contact**
  Stephen Barrington
  Director of Business Engagement
  stephenbarrington@wakegov.com

Wake Technical Community College
www.waketech.edu

- **Workforce Development - Customized Training Program**
  The Customized Training Program provides training assistance that supports full time production and direct customer service positions created in North Carolina. The growth potential of NC companies is enhanced while simultaneously preparing NC's workforce with the skills essential for successful employment in emerging industries. Read More

- **Course Listings**
  Wake Tech offers a broad selection of courses and degrees that will prepare students for whatever field they choose to pursue. Students at Wake Tech receive an education that is high-quality and very affordable. See Them Here

- **Small Business Center** www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/small-business-center
  The Wake Tech Small Business Center (SBC) is a state-funded organization which is part of the Small Business Center Network of North Carolina (SBCN). The SBC provides a multitude of free resources for small business owners, whether they are starting or expanding their business.

- **Continuing Education** www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit
  Wake Tech provides a wide range of workforce training and lifelong learning classes for professional and personal enrichment, offered at a variety of campuses and community sites throughout Wake County.

- **Entrepreneurship Initiatives** www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-your-business/center-entrepreneurship
  Wake Tech's Entrepreneurship Initiatives department places a dual emphasis on information and activities on campus and in the community.

- **Contact**
  Western Wake Campus
  3434 Kildaire Farm Road
  Cary, North Carolina 27518
  (919) 335-1000

Contact Us

Town of Cary

316 N Academy Street

Cary, NC 27513

- Dan Matthys
  Development Liaison
  (919) 380-2774
  dan.matthys@townofcary.org

- Jeph Allen
  Development Liaison Supervisor
  (919) 469-4336
  jeph.allen@townofcary.org

Cary Chamber of Commerce

307 N Academy Street

Cary, NC 27513

- W. Kyle Greer
  Vice President of Economic Development
  (919) 319-4281
  kgreer@carychamber.com