

## A Vibrant Downtown

Cary's vision for Downtown is a "unique, vibrant, dynamic, pedestrian friendly location; a regional destination and a place to live, work, and recreate", according to the 2001 Town Center Plan. Downtown Cary, defined broadly as the area within Maynard Loop, and bounded by Harrison Avenue, Walker Street, Chapel Hill Road, and Dry Avenue, is the heart of Cary. Civic facilities, commercial businesses, an arts center, residences, neighborhoods, and a park create the potential for a lively, vivacious center. Cary's current planning strategies for downtown revitalization include bringing higher densities to areas close to the existing Cary Depot Amtrak Station, as well as increasing the mix of uses by attracting more shops, restaurants, entertainment, and offices. Additional planning studies (Town Center Civic & Cultural Arts Plan) recommend a cultural arts district along Academy Street.

Public investment in line with this revitalization strategy began with the redevelopment of the old Cary High/Elementary School at the southern end of Academy Street into an Arts Center, followed by the acquisition of a vacant building on Chatham Street for a film and performing arts theatre. Cary recently hired a Downtown Development Manager to refine the downtown vision and oversee future private and public investment. One idea under consideration is the transformation of Academy Street into a boulevard from the Town Hall in the North across Chatham Street to Dry Avenue, emphasizing the southern vista of the Cary Arts Center. Other ideas include converting the public library building for an arts-related use, expanding the park near the Cary Arts Center, and constructing a new cultural arts building as part of an overall cultural arts district. Existing destination places in and around the town center also contribute to Cary's downtown. Public art plays an important role in these revitalization strategies by animating the streetscapes, emphasizing gateways, and connecting public spaces and destination places for a unique, walkable experience.



### A Burgeoning Art Scene in Cary

Seven public art projects already exist within Cary's downtown, enhancing the experience of visitors and residents. Together these projects represent an exciting burgeoning art scene.

In this section the public realm was explored in order to determine overarching strategies that could maximize the impact of public art projects within the heart of Cary.



Fig. 26 Existing Art inTown of Cary, North Carolina

## Themes and Opportunities

Public art plays a prominent role in the vision for revitalizing downtown Cary. Strategic placement and appropriate themes and types of art can enhance the streetscape, improve wayfinding and legibility, attract and engage people, and contribute to the destination qualities of downtown. Public art has already been installed in some downtown locations, including the Town Hall, businesses on Chatham and Academy, the railroad station, and the Cary Arts Center. New art projects should build upon recent and past investments, and improve the overall quality and experience of downtown Cary. Public art themes should be inspired by the history and stories of the town creating an authentic place unique to Cary. Public art themes generated during this master plan process include the history and geography of Cary, water, technology, the digital gaming industry and natural phenomena in Cary.

## Procession Arrival



## Procession + Arrival

There are multiple ways people find their way downtown and then navigate the town center. The main entry points to downtown should be emphasized through art projects at a scale for vehicular movement, serving as a landmark and signaling arrival. Public art is important in transition areas to serve as wayfinding objects and signal the entry into unique spaces. Transition areas are places where pedestrians and cyclists begin their journey into downtown, either from parking lots, greenways, or bus stops.

Landmark objects, repeating elements and integrated art in sidewalks, crosswalks, and adjoining plazas augment the downtown experience, and connect the experience from one site to another. Public art can enliven “dead areas” within the public realm, such as parking lots and blank walls.

The Diagram at left shows the main public realm and the locations at which public art can enhance the experience of arrival and procession downtown.

## Destinations, Culture + Commerce



## Destinations

Public art at downtown destinations adds a sense of identity that creates a memorable experience, attracts visitors, and encourages return visits. The Cary Arts Center, theatre, town hall, and rail station all include existing or planned public art as freestanding pieces on the site or integrated in the building architecture.

Downtown’s destination places should include public art that enhances the visibility and grandeur of the place. The diagram to the left shows the location of destination places and their proximity to one other.

## Ceremonial Space

Programmed events such as Cross Currents, Monumental Fire Sculpture project, Lazy Daze, Dreamfest, and Wheels on Academy, bring creative vitality and excitement. Special events reframe the gathering places at the centers of town, activating the public realm. Public art projects should be located to attract people to gathering places where events are held, and should coincide with existing Town traditions and events. By conveying the significance of these civic places, public art can create meaningful landscapes that will contribute to memorable experiences.

The public park and bank plaza are examples of existing or potential gathering places. Public art should be included in other sites where activities are programmed, such as farmers markets, arts festivals and parades. The Ceremonial Space diagram, at right, identifies the location of existing or potential ceremonial spaces, and how they are interconnected.



## Priority Places for Public Art in Downtown Cary

### Academy Street

Academy Street is the main street of downtown Cary, with the significance of the Town Hall at the north end, and the Arts Center as a visual culmination to the south. Public art along Academy Street should provide visual interest for both pedestrians and drivers. A series of works by one artist, or following a particular theme or concept would bolster the town's boulevard concept and define Academy Street as the center of the cultural arts district. The theme of the serial art could be based upon the history of Cary; water resources and management, cultural diversity; and the arts in Cary. In addition, there are opportunities for public art to be incorporated in benches and other streetscape elements; wayfinding maps and kiosks, and a future vest pocket park - an idea generated during the public art workshops.

### Train Station

The Amtrak Train Station and the "bus shelter" along the tracks near Harrison Street provide public art opportunities to relate to the history of Cary, while serving to welcome and orient visitors. An artist-designed Welcome sign to Cary could be located where the train pulls into Cary, while inside the station building there might be an installation of historic artifacts and information. The entrance to the train station could additionally be accentuated by public art in order to direct passengers into the downtown district. The "bus shelter" closest to Harrison Street is a great opportunity to provide a unique shelter that serves as protection, but also is a special experience, and visually notable from Harrison Street.

### The "Cary Theatre" Block

The area around the renovated Cary Theatre should be inviting and encourage visitors and citizens alike to stay in town and enjoy local events, activities, and shops. Opportunities include strategic locations for both planned and impromptu performances, such as music, readings, and story telling. Paving and/ or "downtown" lighting designed by an artist may be part of creating a sense of place.

## Temporary Art

Temporary public art offers opportunities for art projects that are only possible in a specific space and time frame. The scale and excitement of these art projects can provide a riveting sense of excitement and discovery. Opportunities include performances (dance, theater, story telling, music) in specific locations, such as the steps of the Art Center, or, for example, the open green space across from the Arts Center. Other opportunities in interesting locations might be lighting, sound, and video projections. A "Movie Night" with movies shown on the side of a building is a great way for people to come together and experience Downtown in an exciting new way. Possible sites along Chatham Street include the Gothic Revival house, which might either serve as a backdrop for a performance, or renovated as a restaurant, or gallery. Other possibilities are the blank walls of buildings on Chatham Street and the bank plaza at the intersection of Chatham and Academy, which might become an opportunity for a mini park/seating area. Food is always a crowd pleaser, and snack wagons could be designed by artists for special evenings, like "Final Friday."

## Academy Street and Dry Avenue Site

A downtown park, the Cary Arts Center, and numerous civic facilities surround the corner site at the intersection of Dry Avenue and Academy Street. Its prime location makes this site suitable for a wide range of public art. With its juxtaposition to the Arts Center on Academy Street, this site warrants a highly visible art project that defines this end of downtown as the cultural arts district. Public art should also be integrated into paths connecting the site to the park and other adjoining public places. This location could be a magnet destination place, bringing both visitors and citizens to downtown activities such as performances or a Farmer's Market. Public art should be incorporated into the early planning and development stages of this site so that work on both can proceed in tandem, saving time and money.

## Gateways to Cary

There are many entrances and approaches to Cary from a range of arrival points. Public art should herald the gateways through a cohesive message for both arrival and departure, signage or other projects. Examples of gateway art types include lighted sculptures as beacons and artist-designed wayfinding signs. Major downtown intersections are a prime location for public art because they welcome the visitor to downtown and orient the visitor to downtown and orient the traveler through wayfinding or landmarks. The Harrison Street and Academy Street intersections on Chatham should be priority areas for public art.



- 27. *Lazy Daze* annual festival organized by the Town of Cary
- 28. Art Vendors line Academy Street during the *Lazy Daze* festival
- 29. During *Lazy Daze* Academy Street is full of activity, becoming a ceremonial space.
- 30. *Lazy Daze* festival poster showing festivities on Academy Street and the Cary Arts Center at the Southern end.