

## How a small North Carolina city transformed its downtown into one of the country's best parks

Downtown Cary Park, a new North Carolina park by OJB Landscape Architecture, is a winner of Fast Company's 2025 Innovation by Design Awards.

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BY NATE BERG

After more than 20 years of patient planning, Cary, North Carolina, has turned a 7-acre section of its downtown into one of the country's most multifaceted public parks.

**OJB Landscape Architecture** designed a mix of active recreation areas, botanical gardens, pavilions, event spaces, cafés, bars, and cleverly camouflaged floodwater retention basins. Those basins—including several rain gardens and a central pond—play one of the park's more important roles by holding back flooding that regularly ravaged neighborhoods to the south.



[Photo: courtesy OJB]



[Photo: courtesy OJB]

Built for \$65 million in bond funding, the park has created a gathering space for Cary's 150,000 people. It's also an investment in place. As OJB was designing the park, the firm worked with the city to strategize future development opportunities around its edges, including housing, retail space, and offices.



Now a development boom is underway. The local chamber of commerce estimates that the city saw nearly \$300 million added to its tax base in the year after the park opened. “It becomes [like] oceanfront property,” says Cody Klein, a partner at OJB Landscape Architecture.

*This story is part of Fast Company’s **2025 Innovation by Design Awards**. Explore the full list of companies creating products, reimagining spaces, and working to design a better world. Read more about the **methodology behind the selection process**.*



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Nate Berg is a staff writer at *Fast Company*, where he writes about design, architecture, urban development, and industrial design. He has written for publications including *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Wired*, *The Guardian*, *Dwell*, *Wallpaper*, and *Curbed More*