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Some Charlotte offices are getting these new, 'creative' perks to lure employees



A drone shot of construction at the Edison at Arrowood, a "creative office" building opening this summer. - Courtesy Colliers International

By Ely Portillo

If there's a popular word in the Charlotte office market these days, it's this: "creative."

That's how developers and brokers are pitching new office developments, which are seeking to use design, natural light, indoor-outdoor space and "collaborative" work environments to lure tenants.

Their reasoning is simple: Businesses want to lure employees with cool workplaces and "creative office" buildings. The thinking is that millennial workers — especially highly sought-after employees such as computer programmers — are over traditional office layouts, like bullpens and cubicle farms.

And, just as important, open floorplans with plenty of collaborative workspaces generally offer more density, or a higher number of workers per square foot, which means businesses can fit more workers into smaller footprints and save money. Economics aside, employers are trying to make their office space a statement about the company, real estate professionals say.



A drone shot of construction at the Edison at Arrowwood, a "creative office" building opening this summer.
Courtesy Colliers International

"It comes up frequently," said Brad Grow, a broker with Colliers International, who is marketing a new building called the Edison at Arrowwood. "As opposed to saying, 'Hey, let's pick any building,' it's 'How do you create environments that are conducive to teamwork and collaboration?' We want to rethink 'How do we position our space to be an extension of our brand?'"

The 120,000-square-foot Edison, on West Arrowood Road near Interstate 77, is set to be complete in about two months. It's being developed by Atlanta-based TPA Group on a speculative basis, without signed tenants. Rather than a simple empty box, the Edison is designed as two wings arranged in a "V" around a central space that will include a coffee bar and gym.



Rendering of the indoor-outdoor space at the Edison at Arrowood.
Courtesy Colliers International

"With companies competing for labor and trying hard to retain their workforce and attract the ever-growing millennial workforce, buildings like this can be the differentiation for where millennials choose to be employed," said Grow. The goal is to be "a little edgy."

That's similar to what the developers of another "creative office" building in south Charlotte are seeking to do just south of Interstate 485, off Providence Road. A 154,000-square-foot building called The Nexus is under construction at the Waverly development by a partnership of Childress Klein, Crosland Southeast and the B. Frank Matthews II family.

The six-story building will include exposed ceilings, collaborative work areas, outdoor space with Wi-Fi access, bike storage and a connection to the park at Waverly. The building is also walking distance from the dozens of shops and restaurants at Waverly.

"With millennials now moving to the suburbs in significant numbers, we believe we've created that nexus of the suburban location and the urban experience," said Paul Devine, a partner at Childress Klein.

It's not just new buildings in the suburbs that are getting the creative office treatment. Closer to uptown, a slew of defunct textile mills and factories are being redeveloped into new offices.

The lure there is that the character that makes "creative" offices appealing — high ceilings, reclaimed wood, huge windows, exposed brick, open floor plans — is already part of the buildings. Duke Energy has already leased 80,000 square feet at Tompkins Hall, on Parkwood Avenue, in a mill that's more than a century old.



Rendering of the Gama Goat building at Camp North End.
Courtesy ATCO

A few blocks north, developers Faison and White Point are partnering on another project to overhaul an old mill. They plan to convert 40,000 square feet of the Chadbourne Mill into office space.

And the biggest reuse project underway is at Camp North End, where developer ATCO is starting work on the first of several buildings at an old factory, munitions depot and distribution center off Statesville Avenue.

The 140,000-square-foot office building, called Gama Goat, is planned in a former factory. "We view the Gama Goat building as a unique opportunity for companies to work in inspiring industrial space, just a mile from Trade & Tryon," ATCO co-president Damon Hemmerdinger said in a statement.