



**CLEVELAND COUNTY
RECOVERY PROGRAM**



Cleveland County joins City of Norman in partnership with Norman Economic Development Coalition (NEDC) to expand *Startup 405* Incubator

Commissioners commit \$1 Million in ARPA funds to support local business incubator

NORMAN, OKLA (April 3, 2023) - Today, Cleveland County Commissioners voted to allocate \$1 million to the Norman Economic Development Coalition (NEDC) to assist with the purchase of additional building space for their *Startup 405* program, joining the Norman City Council that voted in October 2022 to allocate \$1 million in ARPA proceeds as well.

“Startup 405 is a business incubator certified by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce that helps startup companies grow, prosper, and develop within the state by providing a supportive environment and access to tools, resources, and technical assistance through tailored programming,” said Lawrence McKinney, President and CEO of NEDC. *“We help businesses achieve long-term success by offering encouragement, expertise, and access to a wide variety of resources and connections to the community.”*

NEDC’s mission is consistent with Cleveland County’s commitment to invest ARPA funds to support the economic success of the county and its residents.

“Although many jobs and businesses were negatively impacted by the COVID pandemic, we’ve also seen a significant increase in start-up activity in our community,” said County Chairman Rod Cleveland. *“Due to the increase, Startup 405 is at capacity in their current building, with a waiting list of new startups that meet the criteria for their incubator program. This additional space will allow the NEDC to significantly increase their capacity, ultimately improving the quality of life for all Cleveland County residents through the creation and retention of jobs.”*

After receiving \$55 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding, Cleveland County Commissioners led an extensive community engagement process to identify which projects would provide critical support for our residents while also improving infrastructure and mitigating the economic impacts of the pandemic.

“Workforce development was a theme heard across all sectors in the community and at every stakeholder meeting,” said County Commissioner Darryl Stacy. *“A strong, resilient, and diverse workforce for critical occupations and industries is needed to respond to immediate needs and achieve a strong economic recovery. This is the first ARPA award to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic and we are especially excited that it will leverage the ongoing efforts of an established community coalition.”*

“Startup 405 is Cleveland County’s only state-certified business incubator, and we’re proud it’s in the county seat,” said Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila. “Since 2001, NEDC has operated three incubators, each bigger than the last, and has documented more than 750 jobs created with an average salary of \$58,000. By comparison, this new incubator (18,000 square feet) will be twice the size of the NEDC Commerce Building (9,000 square feet), so Council has high hopes for the future and we’re confident NEDC will deliver.”

NEDC will use ARPA funds to purchase property at 425 West Main Street, formerly known as the Copelin Office Building, and begin renovations after a 6–8-week design phase. During that time, the Start-up 405 Board of Advisors and others will visit incubators in Tulsa and OKC and reimagine the best use of the facility. “It’s important to the NEDC Board that we develop the facility in such a way as to maximize its usefulness to the community while honoring the history of its prior use with design elements. Because we own the Commerce Building directly across Main Street, NEDC has a unique opportunity to re-establish the entrance to downtown, elevate the community image, and lead the way in revitalization.” McKinney added.

When complete, the newly renovated incubator space will host more than 30 businesses in sectors ranging from SaaS (service as a product) to technological innovation to light assembly. Space will also be set aside for students of Norman Public Schools, the Moore-Norman Technology Center, and the OU Innovation Hub. Investing ARPA dollars in this way creates long-term economic impacts for the county and city as well.

“Cleveland County is proud to partner with NEDC through American Rescue Plan monies to help ensure that our local economy is strong, resilient, and provides diverse opportunities for its residents,” said County Commissioner Rusty Grissom. “My fellow commissioners and I look forward to continuing the county’s years of partnership with NEDC through *Startup 405* to elevate community and economic development in Cleveland County.”

City of Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila, who was present for the joint check presentation on behalf of the City, emphasized the importance of partner agencies sharing a vision to drive innovation in the community and applauded the supportive efforts of County leadership.

NEDC tenants are accepted through an application process. For more information on their services, please visit the “Startup 405” tab on the Norman Economic Development Coalition website at www.SelectNorman.com or call 405-573-1900.

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About NEDC

NEDC is operated by the Norman Economic Development Coalition and is a joint effort of the University of Oklahoma, City of Norman, Moore Norman Technology Center, and the Sooner Centurions Economic Development Council.

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About Cleveland County

Cleveland County covers more than 500 square miles and a steadily growing population of close to 300,000 people (2020 census), making it the third most populous county in Oklahoma.

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About Norman

Norman is the largest city and the county seat of Cleveland County, and the second-largest city in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, behind the state capital, Oklahoma City with 128,907 residents.

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