Developer’s Guide to Warehouse Development Planning



DEVELOPER PLANNING GUIDE

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Plan the Development Before Committing

Warehouse planning connects the investment case to the site, tenant operations, building design, approvals, utilities, procurement, and construction. This guide is for developers, owners, investors, and project teams evaluating a new warehouse or distribution facility in North Carolina.

Use it to identify the questions that must be answered before land commitments, design decisions, and construction spending advance. It does not prescribe a standard building size, clear height, price, or delivery duration: those should follow the project and verified site conditions.

How to use this guide

- Define the intended use, business case, and tenant assumptions.
- Review site feasibility with the relevant professionals.
- Develop a coordinated scope, budget, and milestone schedule.
- Complete the two-page development worksheet and readiness checklist.
- Record unresolved risks, owners, and decisions before committing to the next phase.

> Planning tip
> Early planning should make assumptions visible. A promising location or attractive purchase price is not yet a verified development plan.

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Define Development Goals

Clarify whether the facility is speculative, built for a named tenant, or owner-occupied. A distribution operation, storage facility, light manufacturing use, and mixed industrial operation can place different demands on the building and site.

- Intended use, stored materials, operating hours, and tenant requirements.
- Building area, expansion needs, and office or support-space allowances.
- Truck traffic, trailer storage, employee access, and loading patterns.
- Racking, material handling, equipment loads, and automation interfaces.
- Utility capacity, service expectations, and operational resilience.
- Target delivery date, budget framework, and decision authority.

For speculative development, document leasing assumptions and identify which features are fixed, adaptable, or tenant-funded. Review market assumptions with the relevant leasing and investment advisers rather than treating general market optimism as proof of demand.

> Planning tip
> Agree the opening-day requirements and the future options you want to preserve. Review every major design decision against those priorities.

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Evaluate Site Feasibility

Investigate a site before treating its full acreage as usable building or yard area. Setbacks, easements, drainage, access, environmental constraints, grading, and utility infrastructure can change the developable footprint and cost.

- Land-use compatibility and any required entitlement process.
- Boundary and topographic information, easements, access rights, and parcel constraints.
- Truck access, roadway connections, turning movements, and potential off-site work.
- Geotechnical conditions, earthwork assumptions, drainage, and construction access.
- Environmental history, flood exposure, and potential streams, wetlands, or buffers.
- Utility availability, verified capacity, service extensions, and expected delivery dates.

Use appropriate surveying, geotechnical, environmental, civil, and utility expertise. Record the scope and limitations of each investigation. A report reduces uncertainty within its scope; it does not eliminate every unknown condition.

> Planning tip
> Compare total development implications, not land price alone. Include off-site obligations, approval risk, utility lead times, and expansion constraints.

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Confirm Utilities and Operational Systems

Utility proximity does not establish adequate capacity or a timely connection. Request project-specific information from the relevant providers and coordinate it with the operating requirements and design.

• Electrical load, service capacity, transformer or equipment availability, and energization milestones.

• Water, wastewater, and fire-protection supply requirements and available service.

• Telecommunications routes and tenant connectivity needs.

• Gas or other services where the intended use requires them.

• On-site equipment, automation, charging infrastructure, refrigeration, or process loads.

• Responsibilities for service applications, fees, easements, extensions, and provider work.

Tie racking, stored commodities, storage configuration, and fire-protection design together through the responsible specialists. Coordinate material-handling equipment, slab requirements, dock systems, and structural interfaces before those designs are finalized.

Planning tip
Treat utility delivery and tenant equipment as schedule dependencies. Confirm who provides each system and when it must be ready.

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Build the Project Team

Assign responsibility for both development decisions and technical work. The same organization may hold several roles, but approval authority and contractual responsibilities should remain clear.

• Developer or owner: investment objectives, funding, scope priorities, and authorized decisions.

• Tenant or operations team: intended use, equipment, storage, loading, and occupancy requirements.

• Architect and engineers: coordinated building, site, structural, and system design within their scopes.

• Survey, geotechnical, environmental, and other specialists: site investigations and recommendations.

• Construction manager: planning coordination, cost and schedule input, procurement, reporting, and oversight under the agreed arrangement.

• Contractor and trades: execution and coordination of contracted construction work.

• Utilities, authorities, and advisers: provider work, approvals, financing, leasing, or legal matters as applicable.

Planning tip
Name who approves spending, design changes, procurement commitments, and schedule adjustments. Keep the decision log accessible to the team.

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Use Pre-Construction to Resolve Unknowns

Pre-construction turns the project concept into an actionable development plan. Coordinate investigations, design, estimates, procurement, and approvals so that one workstream does not rely on an unresolved assumption in another.

- Establish a scope baseline with inclusions, exclusions, allowances, and open questions.
- Update estimates as site information and design detail improve.
- Review constructability, site logistics, and trade interfaces.
- Assess alternatives against performance, operating needs, cost, availability, and schedule.
- Identify long-lead packages and the approvals needed before release.
- Track risks with a responsible person, next action, and decision date.

Value engineering should evaluate total project value, not simply remove upfront cost. Check whether an alternative affects tenant functionality, durability, maintenance, energy use, expansion, or construction sequencing.

> Planning tip
> A decision made early is useful only if its effects reach the drawings, estimate, procurement plan, and schedule.

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Design Around Operations and Adaptability

Building features should follow the intended operations and leasing strategy. Larger dimensions or more equipment are not automatically better; assess their benefits against cost, site limitations, and actual tenant needs.

- Clear height and structural layout coordinated with storage and equipment.
- Column spacing, circulation aisles, and material-handling workflows.
- Dock locations, loading equipment, truck courts, and trailer parking.
- Slab performance requirements coordinated with equipment, loads, and racking.
- Fire protection, egress, accessibility, and building systems appropriate to the use.
- Office areas, employee amenities, parking, security, and maintenance access.
- Future expansion, utility pathways, and adaptable tenant layouts where justified.

Review the concept with operations, leasing, design, and construction representatives. Evaluate conflicts between truck movement, employee routes, dock activity, emergency access, and neighboring properties.

> Planning tip
> Document why a design feature is needed. Verify the operational and financial assumptions rather than promising a particular return on investment.

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Coordinate North Carolina Approvals

The approval path depends on the location, site, intended use, and scope. Confirm the applicable reviewing authorities and required sequence early; one jurisdiction or prior project is not a complete template for another.

- Land use, zoning, site-plan review, and access coordination as applicable.
- Site-specific environmental, stormwater, land-disturbance, or water-resource requirements.
- Building and trade plan review, permits, inspections, and occupancy requirements.
- Utility-provider approvals and any off-site work or easements.
- Conditions attached to approvals that affect design, procurement, or construction.

Maintain an approval log identifying the requirement, authority, submission status, reviewer comments, responsible party, and next milestone. Distinguish permitted fieldwork from planning and procurement activities.

Official resources

NC DEQ: Permit Assistance and Guidance
NC OSFM: Commercial Plan Review

Resources checked September 30, 2026. Confirm project requirements with the applicable authorities and responsible professionals. These resources identify starting points, not a complete permit list.

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Build a Milestone Schedule

Replace a generic duration chart with a project-specific milestone plan. Establish target dates and forecast dates separately, showing what each activity depends on and who controls the next decision.

- Site investigations and the development go / no-go decision.
- Concept design, scope confirmation, and budget review.
- Entitlements, permit submissions, responses, and required approvals.
- Utility applications, provider work, and equipment procurement.
- Site preparation, building construction, and trade sequencing.
- Inspections, systems verification, tenant equipment, and turnover.
- Required occupancy approvals and operational readiness.

Some tasks can overlap when authorized and practical; others cannot advance until a prerequisite is complete. Review long-lead items, seasonal conditions, site access, and unresolved approvals. Include allowances for reviews and corrections rather than assuming every first submission is accepted.

> Planning tip
> A schedule is a forecast supported by assumptions. Update it when those assumptions change, and explain the consequences to the owner.

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Budget the Whole Development

Separate the full development budget from the construction contract. Identify estimates, firm commitments, allowances, exclusions, contingency, and tenant-funded work so the team understands what each figure includes.

- Land acquisition and relevant due-diligence costs.
- Surveying, environmental and geotechnical work, design, and other professional services.
- Sitework, earthwork, drainage, and any required off-site improvements.
- Structure, envelope, slab, loading systems, and building services.
- Utility fees, extensions, provider work, and connection responsibilities.
- Racking, equipment, automation, office improvements, and other owner or tenant packages.
- Approvals, financing or holding costs where relevant, and operational start-up.
- Risk-based contingency and identified unresolved scope.

Site conditions, finish or system requirements, labor availability, procurement, and schedule constraints can change costs. Establish the contingency with the project team and revise it as uncertainty is resolved; do not present one percentage or price as suitable for every facility.

> Planning tip
> Compare estimates using the same scope, assumptions, and date. Low initial cost may exclude work the development still needs.

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Track Risks and Decisions

Use a working risk register rather than a one-time list. For each issue, record its possible cost or schedule effect, responsible party, response, decision deadline, and current status.

- Site uncertainty: investigate within an agreed scope and track remaining assumptions.
- Approval delays: confirm the submission path and assign responses.
- Utility delivery: obtain provider information and identify alternatives where feasible.
- Equipment lead times: coordinate releases with approved requirements.
- Design interfaces: resolve building, racking, fire-protection, and operational conflicts.
- Scope changes: evaluate effects before authorized commitments.
- Tenant readiness: coordinate equipment, staffing, and move-in with construction.

Review risks at design and budget milestones and during regular project meetings. Escalate decisions before they block procurement or fieldwork. Record what changed and why so the next estimate and schedule use the same information.

> Planning tip
> Treat risk control as an assigned task. A concern without an owner or action date can remain unresolved until it becomes a delay.

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Choose the Delivery Structure

Construction management, general contracting, and design-build describe roles and arrangements that may overlap. The contracts establish design responsibility, trade-contract ownership, construction risk, reporting, and change authority.

Construction management

CM can support early budgeting, schedule development, procurement, and construction oversight. Advisory CM and arrangements in which the manager also holds construction contracts or assumes construction risk have different responsibilities.

General contracting

A general contractor coordinates and executes contracted construction work. Selection may involve qualifications, negotiation, competitive bids, or a combination. Early contractor involvement can be arranged when appropriate.

Design-build

A contracted delivery team holds design and construction responsibility. Establish owner requirements, review points, reporting, scope boundaries, and change procedures to support a coordinated outcome.

Choose based on scope maturity, site uncertainty, schedule, owner resources, procurement, and accountability. Broad Reach applies construction management practices to connect design decisions, costs, coordination, and field oversight across the selected delivery approach.

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Plan Turnover and Operational Readiness

Define the handoff before the final weeks of construction. Readiness to occupy, operational start-up, and final contractual completion may involve different milestones.

- Confirm inspections and approvals required for the intended occupancy.
- Complete appropriate testing, commissioning, and verification for relevant systems.
- Coordinate tenant racking, equipment, utilities, IT, and move-in requirements.
- Track punch-list items with responsibility and target dates.
- Collect agreed record documents, manuals, warranties, and closeout information.
- Train operations and facilities representatives where included in the scope.
- Provide warranty contacts and a process for post-occupancy issues.

Confirm who accepts the work, receives documents, and manages open items. Address remaining obligations and payment milestones according to the contracts. Keep tenant work and owner-supplied packages visible in the completion plan.

> Planning tip
> A completed building needs a coordinated operational handoff. Verify the people, equipment, and documents needed to begin using it.

PROJECT TOOLS | COMPLETE WITH YOUR TEAM

Development Worksheet - Part 1

Record available information and flag assumptions for review. Attach drawings, reports, and a fuller risk register where needed.

Site address, parcel, and development contact

Intended use, tenant strategy, and operating needs

Building area, yard requirements, and expansion plans

Site investigations completed and unresolved conditions

Utilities: capacity, connections, and delivery assumptions

Target occupancy date and key dependencies

PROJECT TOOLS | COMPLETE WITH YOUR TEAM

Development Worksheet - Part 2

Record available information and flag assumptions for review. Attach drawings, reports, and a fuller risk register where needed.

Scope baseline, design priorities, and owner / tenant packages

Budget range, exclusions, allowances, and contingency

Approvals: authority, status, responsible person, and next date

Procurement: long-lead items, releases, and delivery assumptions

Main risks: effect, response, owner, and decision deadline

Delivery structure, decision authority, and next planning steps

PROJECT TOOLS | BEFORE COMMITTING TO THE NEXT PHASE

Development Readiness Checklist

Check items reviewed with the responsible professionals. Record open items and conditions for the next commitment. All items need not be complete at every phase, but their effects must be understood.

- ☐ Use, business case, and tenant requirements are documented.
- ☐ Site constraints and due-diligence limitations are understood.
- ☐ Truck access, developable footprint, and utility assumptions are reviewed.
- ☐ Scope, exclusions, and owner / tenant responsibilities are defined.
- ☐ Budget assumptions and contingency have been reviewed.
- ☐ Approval dependencies and utility milestones are assigned.
- ☐ Critical design interfaces and procurement risks are visible.
- ☐ Delivery responsibilities and change authority are established.

Open item / responsible person / decision date

YOUR NEXT STEP

Plan Your Warehouse Project With Broad Reach

Evaluating a warehouse site, preparing a development concept, or coordinating a facility for a tenant? Bring your planning worksheet, available site reports, drawings, operational requirements, and target delivery date to a conversation with Broad Reach Construction.

We can discuss the current stage, identify missing information, and outline the next steps for feasibility, pre-construction, design coordination, budgeting, scheduling, and construction oversight.

Call (984) 332-3927

Explore our warehouse services

Warehouse Construction in North Carolina

Warehouse Construction in Charlotte

Commercial Construction Resource Library

Charlotte office

4108 Park Rd, Suite 215
Charlotte, NC
Opening October 1, 2026

Planning tip
Start with the information available today. Early coordination helps turn development assumptions into an informed project plan.

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