

GE snubs Raleigh again - Commerce records show NC wasn't shortlisted this time

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Electric General is bringing a data hub to Atlanta.

While **General Electric** (NYSE: GE) may have had Raleigh on its short-list for its new headquarters, the manufacturing giant did not appear to consider the City of Oaks when selecting a site for its 400-job big data hub.

That project is headed for Atlanta.

North Carolina Department of Commerce Spokeswoman Kim Genardo said Thursday that there were no records indicating GE ever considered the state for the hub.

It's a stark contrast to just a few months ago, when the state email records both Raleigh and Charlotte were on the GE radar.

And it's one of a handful of high-profile projects Atlanta has won in recent weeks.

Fortune 1000 payment processor **Global Payments** (NYSE: GPN) is investing about \$220 million in a headquarters project in Atlanta. And much of that investment will be in data centers – a high interest area for the Triangle, which already has a significant data center presence, as well as the data center group headquarters for global technology giant Lenovo.

Messages to both companies on their decisions weren't immediately returned.

John Boyd, who helps companies scout for locations through his New Jersey-based firm, the Boyd Company, says Atlanta is generally on a roll right now when it comes to snagging projects. It offers a few incentives Raleigh just can't replicate, such as its airport's international flight service options (more than 75). Raleigh just added a second Transatlantic flight in May.

But Boyd says GE picking Georgia for its hub "should especially smart the North Carolina economic development foot soldiers as the Raleigh area has been promoting itself aggressively as an up-and-coming I.T. and software center."

While GE's headquarters was a "long shot" for Raleigh, the I.T. division headquarters could have been a good fit, he says. He expects the state to aggressively pursue technology projects going forward, as what's typically the Triangle's sweet spot, pharma and biotech, is in "consolidating mode these days."

"(It's) nothing like the go-go days of the last couple of decades when the Triangle was the location of choice for growing pharma companies relocating out of states like New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts," he said.

Boyd says Atlanta isn't Raleigh's chief rival. He says he's hearing increased interest from clients about Nashville, Tampa, Columbus, Indianapolis and Jacksonville.

To him, the "big gorilla" in the room continues to be the contentious House Bill 2, a measure passed earlier this year that has already been blamed for PayPal's Charlotte jobs pull out and Deutsche Bank's expansion freeze in the Triangle. But it's hard to track how that measure might be impacting economic recruitment, as no records have been released showcasing any project losses blamed on the bill in North Carolina.

At a recent forum on economic development in North Carolina, Chris Chung, CEO for the North Carolina Economic Development Partnership, said the primary reason he's given when companies go elsewhere is real estate. Most companies are looking for existing buildings for their expansions and relocations, he says, and the state can't always deliver.

But the state has been scoring some wins this year, particularly in manufacturing. This week alone Commerce announced the state had won two-job creating projects, TekTone and U.S. Cold Storage.