

## Site selection expert: Dayton continues to strengthen its case for landing U.S. Space Command



*John Boyd is principal of New Jersey-based consultancy The Boyd Company*

By John Bush – Senior Reporter, Dayton Business Journal Jul 9, 2020

A site selection consultant who has expertise in aerospace and defense believes the Dayton region has strengthened its case for landing one of the most coveted projects nationwide.

John Boyd, principal of New Jersey-based consultancy The Boyd Company, says Wright-Patterson Air Force Base has a good chance of becoming the headquarters for the new U.S. Space Command. The command is part of the U.S. Space Force — the first new branch of the military in over 70 years. If selected, the Dayton region would gain more than 1,000 new jobs, as well as international acclaim.

Boyd, whose company works with aerospace giants such as Boeing, Safran and Raytheon subsidiary Pratt & Whitney, has been following the selection process closely. He initially considered the Dayton area as a long-shot candidate, but has changed his tune in recent weeks given several new developments.

"At the outset of this when Dayton first asserted itself as a candidate location, we termed Dayton as an outlier candidate," Boyd said. "However, in the past several weeks, I think a number of factors have strengthened Dayton's case. I think Dayton is very much in the game for this highly coveted, trophy project."

### Local and state support

One factor that led Boyd to re-evaluate Dayton's chances was the support from Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, the Ohio congressional delegation and a coalition of local mayors and county commission presidents. The group recently endorsed Wright-Patt as an ideal location for the command in letters to both the assistant secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force secretary.

"You're seeing a coalition of elected lawmakers from the governor to Sens. (Sherrod) Brown and (Rob) Portman and Congressman (Mike) Turner who have actually met with the Pentagon to talk about this Space Command and the impact on intelligence and jobs at Wright-Patterson," Boyd said. "Then you have a coalition of local mayors and county commissioners, the academic community and the real estate community who are all working in unison to promote the region."

Boyd also noted the recent military-friendly legislation DeWine signed into law, along with the state's focus on economic development.

"The Ohio economic development effort led by Mike DeWine is a great case study of smart economic development acumen and professionalism," he said.

Ohio's strength in economic development will be a factor in deciding which state will acquire the command. While economic development is typically focused on businesses, Boyd says the U.S. Department of Defense is taking a similar approach to private industry when it comes to site selection.

"You're seeing the federal government handle this process in a way that we see private sector companies handle it," he said. "This idea of an application process, meeting certain site selection criteria, etc. — that signals the government is paying attention to traditional business climate factors."

## **Location**

As with any large-scale project, location is key. The fact that Dayton is in the center of the country and has a low cost of living, along with Wright-Patt being surrounded by suburban and rural areas, are all factors that play into the region's favor, according to Boyd.

Being located in a suburban area is especially advantageous given the Covid-19 pandemic. Boyd said this is another aspect that wasn't a consideration just a few months ago before the virus took hold, but will now play a role in the site selection process.

"This idea of being in more of a suburban or rural location versus being in a major epicenter like a Houston or a Dallas for a project like this is a new selling point Dayton has today that it didn't have before the Covid-19 crisis," he said.

## **Talent**

One factor Boyd said most people outside the region aren't necessarily aware of is Dayton's rich pool of talent. Since the Space Command comes with around 1,400 jobs, talent attraction will be another key part of the DoD's decision.

"I think talent is a key driver," he said. "There's an opportunity for Dayton to talk about its critical mass of engineers and IT professionals in the market. I don't think enough people know about

Dayton's compelling labor market. And it becomes even more compelling if you bring in the skill sets from places like Columbus or Cincinnati."

### **Economic impact**

If Dayton does land the Space Command, the economic impact would be huge. With the massive amount of new jobs comes increased economic activity in the housing market, an influx of tax revenue, new construction activity and opportunities for more corporate-related events.

Additionally, the command would spark interest from suppliers, defense contractors and other types of avionic and aerospace companies that would likely establish a presence in the region to be close to the command.

"The benefits are just enormous," Boyd said.

### **Prestige**

Beyond the economic benefits is the prestige of being home to the first new branch of the military since 1947, Boyd said.

"This is really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be associated with this exciting industry," he said. "What's more exciting than space?"

Even if the Dayton region doesn't win the new command, Boyd said there are benefits to just being considered for the project.

"I'd argue that Dayton already has benefited from being in this discussion," he said. "Even if Wright-Patterson falls short in its pursuit of the Space Command headquarters, it will serve the region well for future aerospace and other advanced manufacturing projects. It also raises the profile of the region to a national and even a global aerospace industry audience. This is a platform for Dayton and Ohio to promote itself as a center of excellence in aerospace."