



Brevard nominated to host the Space Force's U.S. Space Command Headquarters

Rachael Joy - Florida Today - July 9, 2020

Brevard County has officially thrown its hat into the ring to be chosen as the location for U.S. Space Command Headquarters. Last week Gov. Ron DeSantis endorsed a letter from Brevard County Commission Chairman Bryan Lober nominating the Space Coast for the highly coveted spot.

"As home to the 45th Space Wing, Florida's Space Coast has always valued its more than 70-year partnership with the U.S. Air Force and looks forward to building a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the U.S. Space Force," Lober wrote in his letter.

DeSantis endorsed nominations from eight communities throughout Florida including Jacksonville, Pensacola, Brevard, Miami-Dade County, Orange County, Pinellas County, Seminole County and a joint proposal from Tampa and Hillsborough County.

But according to Rep. Matt Gaetz of Pensacola, DeSantis favors Brevard to host the command headquarters.

"It's his desire to really make a strong application for the Space Coast," Gaetz said during his Virtual Defense Day 2020 forum in mid June.

In fact, the governor singled out Brevard in his cover letter to Air Force Assistant Secretary John Henderson.

"Our state has a long history of support for our nation's effort in space through the operations of the Kennedy Space Center, the 45th Space Wing at Patrick Air Force Base and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. These installations provide great support to our national defense and provide a significant economic impact to our state," DeSantis wrote.



A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket lifts off from Complex 41 at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station Sunday May 17, 2020.

"He has good economic development acumen. He senses the Space Coast proximity to Orlando airport, the diverse housing options for executives," John Boyd, a location consultant with the Boyd Company, said. "So that space corridor to Orlando and those transportation rich assets that Orlando brings to the table provides a platform for a lot of the anticipated suppliers and other types of offices that expect to do business with this new Space Command headquarters."

U.S. Space Command was established last year as the military's 11th unified combatant command. For now it is headquartered at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, which had been the HQ of the Air Force Space Command prior to the establishment of the new unified command.

Boyd estimates the new HQ would add around 1,200 high paying jobs to the state and roughly \$2 billion in direct Pentagon investment, which typically results in corporate relocations to the area and more jobs.

Even if Brevard is leading the Florida pack, the competition out-of-state is stiff.

"Colorado Springs is the community to beat," said Dale Ketcham, VP of Government Relations for Space Florida, the state's aerospace development body tasked by the governor with leading the charge to secure the Space Command headquarters.

Peterson, located near Colorado Springs, is already home to the North America Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), the 21st Space Wing, the Space and Missile Systems Center and the United States Northern Command as well as the provisional headquarters for the U.S. Space Command.



Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond, U.S. Space Command commander, recognizes the establishment of the nation's 11th combatant command in a joint ceremony at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado on Sept. 9, 2019.

The prospective communities must meet the following requirements established by the Air Force: Be within 25 miles of the a military installation, be one of the top 150 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the country and score a 50 or higher out of 100 on the American Association of Retired Persons Public Policy Institute's Livability Index.

Ketcham said 40 communities across the country had already submitted applications prior to Florida's eight. The Air Force has received bids from 26 states.

After the Air Force reviews the nomination letters, they will send an initial questionnaire to the communities and then follow-up with additional questionnaires as they cull the group.

Sometime in the fall a handful of finalists will be selected at which point the Air Force will do site visits to evaluate the locations.

By early 2021, the Air Force is expected to announce its preferred location.

"It's kind of noteworthy that the Air Force is going to identify their preferred location as opposed to saying 'we're going to pick a winner' because the president has made it clear that he will make the final decision," Ketcham said.

President Trump recently made a visit to the Space Coast to watch the historic launch of NASA astronauts aboard the SpaceX Crew Dragon from Kennedy Space Center.

"It's impossible to underestimate the significance of Trump embracing this project," Boyd, said. "In attending the most recent launch ... you could argue visiting these launches were in a way site visits."