

Site selector: Space Force HQ in Orlando would boost image, launch new business



United Launch Alliance launches one of its Atlas V rockets, which commonly lift off from Florida's Space Coast.

By Alex Soderstrom – Staff Writer, Orlando Business Journal – July 13, 2020

The reason eight municipalities across Florida — and more across the country — are jockeying for the future U.S. Space Force Command Center is clear to John Boyd.

“The prestige of this project brings incalculable location branding value,” Boyd, principal at site selection firm The Boyd Co. Inc., which is not involved with the Space Force process, told *Orlando Business Journal*. “There’s no industry that has more prestige than the space industry.”

The Princeton, New Jersey-based consultants have worked with a number of corporations, including aerospace firms like The Boeing Co. (NYSE: BA) and Raytheon subsidiary Pratt & Whitney, in site selection. And Boyd views the Space Force headquarters as a “historic” project that would bring a number of economic advantages to the area if Central Florida were to snag it.

The region is certainly in the mix. Brevard, Orange and Seminole counties each entered bids for the command center, which Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis endorsed on June 29. The U.S. Air Force is poised to pick a home for the hub of the next U.S. military branch in early 2021.

An economic catalyst

The command center brings the immediate impact of 1,400 civilian and military personnel either relocating to or being hired in the region. But that’s just the start.

The headquarters would be a “catalyst” for new aerospace, defense, telecommunications and information technology business supporting the facility, Boyd said. It’s also likely to generate demand for branch manufacturing plants, regional sales offices and more homes, he added.

And that’s important because advanced manufacturing and high-tech jobs mean high wages. For example, engineering, developer and computer systems positions in Orlando pay average annual salaries ranging between \$84,839 and \$131,460, according to Los Angeles-based CBRE Group Inc. (NYSE: CBRE). That’s much higher than the Orlando area’s average annual wage of \$46,140, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Plus, new workers in the region means the likelihood of new home sales. Every home sale in the state has an estimated local economic impact of \$77,858, according to a 2018 study by the National Association of Realtors.

Making the space case

Local county officials made their cases to be the home of the Space Force in letters to Assistant Secretary of the Air Force John Henderson in June.

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings and Seminole County Commissioner Jay Zembower both underscored the abundance of defense and tech talent because of the concentration of simulation companies located at Central Florida Research Park in Orlando. Brevard County Commission Chairman Bryan Lober and Lynda Weatherman, CEO of the Economic Development Commission of the Space Coast, highlighted Brevard County’s longstanding ties with the space industry and Air Force.

Florida’s growing population, strengthening political influence and business-friendly climate make it the apparent frontrunner in Boyd’s eyes, he said.

Of course, the region has deep roots in the space sector. That's largely because of the Space Coast, the home of popular launch sites at NASA's Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station.

Hawthorne, California-based SpaceX frequently launches from Brevard County. Plus, Boeing has its space and launch division headquartered in Titusville, and Kent, Washington-based Blue Origin LLC operates a 750,000-square-foot rocket manufacturing facility on Merritt Island.

At the same time, defense work is a major part of the local economy, as military contracts generate jobs and subcontractor opportunities. In fact, the region snags about \$4 billion in government contracts each year.



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