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Expert: Here's how likely JetBlue's HQ move to Orlando is



JetBlue University, which opened in Orlando in 2005, can accommodate up to 300 students and includes training facilities for all company pilots and flight crew, as well as technical support and customer service staff.



By Jack Witthaus – Staff Writer, Orlando Business Journal - March 25, 2021

Some Central Florida business leaders are skeptical that JetBlue will move its headquarters to Orlando, a city that's seemingly always the bridesmaid and never the bride when it comes to these relocations.

However, one real estate relocation expert says there's room for optimism. John Boyd, principal at Princeton, New Jersey-based site selection firm The Boyd Co. Inc., which is not involved with JetBlue, told *OBJ* that New York-based JetBlue Airways Corp.'s (Nasdaq: JBLU) move to the City

Beautiful is a "real possibility." The move would be a boon to the local economy and may result in 1,300 new jobs here, which would create demand for residential space and more.

OBJ has identified one potential space JetBlue may be considering: a proposed six-story, 240,000-square-foot office building at its Orlando Support Center at 8265 Hangar Blvd.

Financially beneficial

A headquarters move to Florida makes sense for JetBlue, which is increasing its service to Caribbean destinations, Boyd said. In addition, the move would result in cost savings on office space and labor. Office rents are roughly \$50 per square foot cheaper in the City Beautiful and workers are paid roughly 20% less in Orlando versus Manhattan, due to the lower cost of living here.

Boyd also said JetBlue's public statements about the potential move point to the airliner seriously considering Florida. On March 23, a JetBlue representative said that its lease expires in July 2023 and it's considering a hybrid work environment after the pandemic.

"JetBlue's statement acknowledging it is reviewing options is telling. The company mentioning post pandemic 'hybrid work environment' is a good signal for no income tax Florida," Boyd said.

Still, it's not the first time Orlando has been in the running for JetBlue's corporate campus. In 2009, the airliner narrowed its list to New York and the City Beautiful for its new headquarters before ultimately choosing the Big Apple.

Where else could JetBlue go?

JetBlue also is exploring other options in New York City and potentially in Fort Lauderdale for its future headquarters with a decision expected later this year.

That said, office real estate experts told *OBJ* other Orlando-area options could be in Lake Nona or other sites near the airport. Still, there is no contiguous office space above 250,000 square feet currently available in the City Beautiful, which means new space likely would have to be built to accommodate JetBlue's move here.

JetBlue is among multiple companies mulling corporate relocations to Central Florida in light of the pandemic, which forced many companies to rethink their office space needs as employees worked remotely. So far, small- to midsize-companies have done deals recently to relocate their offices locally, previously said office expert Greg Morrison, principal and managing director of Avison Young in Orlando, who isn't involved in the JetBlue deal. For example, New York-based health care tech company CoPilot Provider Support Services Inc. is moving its headquarters to Maitland after signing a deal in November for a 15,669-square-foot office.

"In the long run, we're going to see more and more of the larger companies looking to relocate," Morrison said.

JetBlue is the sixth-busiest airline flying through Orlando International Airport with more than 2.12 million passengers served here last year, according to airport data.