

# NashvillePost

## Q&A: John Boyd Jr.

### Site selection firm principal discusses possible Vanderbilt campus in Florida

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John Boyd Jr. is a principal with Boca Raton, Fla.-based corporate site selection firm The Boyd Company, Inc.

Since joining the firm, which was founded in 1975 in Princeton, New Jersey, in 2002, Boyd has worked on site selection and development projects that have involved billions of dollars of capital investment in the U.S. and globally.



*John Boyd Jr.*

In 2005, Boyd launched The Boyd Co.'s online BizCosts.com platform, which provides business operating cost and business climate data to site-seeking companies, developers and the financial sector. Boyd's commentary on corporate site selection, economic development and commercial real estate has often been cited in the national news media.

The *Post* recently discussed with Boyd the possibility of Vanderbilt University establishing a sister campus in West Palm Beach. Specifically, Vanderbilt envisions a campus for its Owen Graduate School of Management, School of Engineering, AI programs and innovation hub

The effort has varying levels of support from Michael Bickford (chairman and CEO of real estate investment firm Round Hill Capital and a Vanderbilt graduate), Stephen Ross (founder of Related Companies, which developed the Manhattan site of Hudson Yards), West Palm Beach Mayor Keith James, Kelly Smallridge (CEO of the Palm Beach Business Development Board) and Palm Beach County Mayor Maria Sachs.

### How can Vanderbilt benefit as much as West Palm Beach?

Vanderbilt's planned campus in Palm Beach County will place it in one of the wealthiest and fastest growing areas in the country. South Florida already houses many influential business and civic leaders who are Vanderbilt alumni, and a VU campus will help to open the floodgates for

new scholarships, gifts to the school and other fundraising activities. Palm Beach is home to some 60 billionaires, and nearly a quarter of Vanderbilt students come from families in the top 1 percent of earners. That makes Vanderbilt one of the wealthiest schools in the nation. Vanderbilt and Palm Beach are a perfect fit.

The expansion, if successful, would come at a time when many prominent universities are suffering major financial pullbacks from wealthy and successful alums that are not pleased with the direction of their former schools. Harvard, Columbia, Penn, New York University and UCLA quickly come to mind in light of the recent campus uprisings over domestic and geopolitical tensions.

Also, Palm Beach County has earned the nickname of “Wall Street South” given the influx of companies in the banking, financial services and hedge fund sectors. This sets the stage for beneficial collaborations and synergies between these companies and Vanderbilt, especially given the data and AI focus of the university’s noted Owen Graduate School of Business to downtown Palm Beach.

### **What are similar examples of universities establishing presences in other cities and the impact those have made?**

It is not uncommon for a university — especially where its undergraduate enrollment has been flat or falling — to open new campuses in cities with growing populations, with strong incomes and with high student demand.

Examples include the University of Hawaii opening a branch campus in Las Vegas, Pittsburgh-based Carnegie Mellon University setting up a campus in California’s Silicon Valley, Creighton University in Omaha and Fairfield University in Connecticut, which have opened campuses in fast-growing Phoenix and Austin, respectively, to train health-care workers. Similarly, Northeastern University in Boston has opened campuses with programs not otherwise widely available in Oakland, Portland (Maine), Charlotte, Miami, Seattle, Toronto and Vancouver.

Other key reasons driving these campus expansions include the availability of outside funding and more exposure for universities not widely known outside of their traditional home bases.

While not universities, I would also point to the Mayo Clinic’s expansion into Jacksonville and Phoenix and the Cleveland Clinic’s expansion into Las Vegas as other types of transformative campus expansions into high growth U.S. metro areas.

### **What will be some of the logistical and cost considerations?**

Given the building boom going on in super high-growth South Florida, the availability of construction workers and keeping the project moving forward on a timely basis (plans call for 1,000 students as early as 2026) may be a challenge. In terms of transferring faculty and staff, home prices and insurance costs in Palm Beach – among the highest in the country — may also

be an issue for some. Overall, we see these challenges being overcome and the benefits of this project enormous for both parties.

### **Any concerns?**

The concerns voiced by the locals are largely centered around the concept of Vanderbilt getting the land free. [But] they do not realize that free land is one of the most common forms of incentives. The agreement precludes Vanderbilt flipping the land should the project fall apart for some unforeseen reasons.

Other concerns related to Vanderbilt not paying real estate taxes on the property since it is an academic institution — not a for-profit business.

Section 196.198, Florida Statutes provides that educational institutions within Florida and their property used by them or by any other exempt entity or educational institution exclusively for educational purposes are exempt from taxation.

Traffic congestion — West Palm Beach has had a dramatic surge in traffic due to all of the population growth and construction in recent years — and the disruption of the downtown business scene are other concerns some have expressed.

### **Universities play a pivotal role in driving economic development (perhaps almost as much so as in educating students). Thoughts?**

The presence of a major university is a strong asset for a city wishing to attract new corporate investment and jobs. A city's academic resources are a top priority in our site selection work for our clients, especially those in the tech, energy, finance and health care sectors, as well as those projects that involve a major head office move, like when finance giant AllianceBernstein shocked Wall Street with its decision to move its headquarters from Midtown Manhattan to Nashville in 2018.

The presence of a leading college or university in a city helps our site-seeking clients in several ways, including recruiting the best and brightest graduates, taking advantage of local continuing education and training opportunities and establishing cooperative research and intern endeavors.

A few examples of especially proactive and winning universities on the economic development front include Arizona State University under president Michael Crowe, University of Nevada at Reno under president and former Gov. Brian Sandoval, Purdue under former governor and president Mitch Daniels and now Mung Chiang, University of Tennessee under president Randy Boyd and Drexel University under president John Fry.

**How would a Vanderbilt campus in West Palm Beach impact the nearby Florida Atlantic University? FAU offers colleges of business and engineering, so a “competitor” entering the market could prove interesting.**

First, of all, Florida Atlantic University has become a major economic development force in South Florida. But as far as FAU is concerned, I am not aware of any strong opposition to the Vanderbilt project. Competition for funds will be different, given FAU is a public university and Vanderbilt is a private school. This dynamic is different than when the University of Florida considered a Palm Beach location. FAU might feel that the Vanderbilt project might dilute [FAU’s] prestige and political influence and power — as FAU is an up-and-coming school on the national scene both in the classroom and on the court and field. Concerns about new hiring pressures, corporate donations and sponsorships may also be concerns.

I see both schools developing a close working relationship with shared commitments to economic and workforce development. Vanderbilt has already stated it looks forward to fitting into the Palm Beach community and being a good neighbor. Nathan Green, Vanderbilt’s vice chancellor of government and community relations, has said such.