

## Central Florida's home and land supply give edge in Space Force HQ race



*A long-exposure images shows an Atlas V rocket made by United Launch Alliance blasting off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. United Launch Alliance*



By Alex Soderstrom – Staff Writer, Orlando Business Journal  
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Central Florida's defense industry and aerospace talent pool are factors in its push to land the U.S. Space Command, but the area's biggest draw may be something not at all tech related: real estate.

That's because the future home of the U.S. Space Force will need land to be built on and homes to house the 1,400 civilian and government personnel working in the command center. This may give an advantage to the three local counties bidding to host the facility.

## A housing boost

Two of the competing local counties, Orange and Seminole counties, don't have as close ties to the aerospace industry as the other local bidder, Brevard County. That's according to Brad Parker, a land expert with Longwood-based Southern Realty.

But Orange and Seminole counties both offer high-quality housing attractive to the engineers, military officers and others who will work at the Space Command, Parker said.



*Brad Parker Brad Parker/Southern Realty Enterprises Inc.*

And more homes are on the way to the area. In fact, Orange County had 10,591 building permits filed in 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That's far more than the 5,388 filed in El Paso County, Colorado, current home of the Space Command. It's also more than nine times the number of permits filed in fellow contender Santa Barbara County, California, home of Vandenberg Air Force Base and the nearby city of Santa Barbara.

Plus, Seminole County boasts an existing inventory of high-level homes and has landed the operations of major corporations like Deloitte and Verizon Communications Inc. (NYSE: VZ), Parker added. "They couldn't get a better place than the Lake Mary/Heathrow market."

Of course, other factors such as the talent pool and government incentives will factor into the decision, Parker said. The U.S. Air Force plans to pick a home for the hub of the next U.S. military branch in early 2021.

## Room for growth

Although Brevard County is home to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Kennedy Space Center and a host of private space firms, the county needs to offer more to land the Space Force hub, according to Lynda Weatherman, CEO of the Economic Development Commission of the Space Coast. "People need to understand this is highly competitive."



Lynda Weatherman Jim Carchidi/OBJ

One reason to consider Brevard County is the region's abundance of land, which will allow the Space Force Command to grow and develop its own identity, Weatherman told *OBJ*. That's better than one of the leading alternatives: putting the command center at the U.S. Department of Defense's existing U.S. Space Command in Colorado Springs, she said.

The command center is important because it would be a "catalyst" for new aerospace, defense, telecommunications and information technology business supporting the facility, John Boyd

previously told *OBJ*. Boyd is a principal at site selection firm The Boyd Co. Inc., which is not involved with the Space Force process. It's also likely to generate demand for branch manufacturing plants, regional sales offices and more homes, Boyd added.



John Boyd

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.