

Expert: Schools, real estate and more may draw secret manufacturer and jobs to Space Coast



A launch tower at Kennedy Space Center, where Space Florida wants to bring a \$300 million manufacturing facility. Jim Carchidi



By Alex Soderstrom – Staff Writer, Orlando Business Journal
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Housing, education and economics will be key in landing the \$300 million aerospace manufacturing project known only as "Project Kraken," and Florida's Space Coast checks all those boxes, according to a site election expert.

Space Florida's board of directors on March 17 gave the green light for the organization to negotiate with an unnamed spacecraft maker in an effort to lure it to bring a new manufacturing

facility and 2,100 jobs to Brevard County. However, Florida is not the only state in the race to land the mystery company.

In this competitive project, the Space Coast stands is a real contender, site selection expert John Boyd told *Orlando Business Journal*. Geographic and economic advantages of Central Florida will help it stand out to this unnamed firm, said Boyd, a principal at Boca Raton-based The Boyd Co. Inc., which is not involved with Project Kraken.

"Economic development is about the steak and the sizzle," Boyd said. "Florida is really having a moment today."



John Boyd

'Center of excellence'

The space industry prioritizes intellectual capital, and the proximity to education and aerospace hubs like Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach and Patrick Space Force Base in Cape Canaveral elevate Brevard County's status, Boyd said. Plus, nearby metro Orlando opens up more options for executive-level housing and transportation critical for the manufacturer's workforce, he added.

Meanwhile, the Sunshine State's business-friendly policies are attractive, and state aerospace economic development group Space Florida is adept at working with businesses in the space industry, Boyd said.

Of course, it does not hurt the Space Coast is home to NASA's Kennedy Space Center and functions as a hub of private space manufacturing and launch operations overseen by Elon Musk's SpaceX, Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and others. Space Florida's proposed site for the facility is near Cape Canaveral, which puts the spacecraft maker close to a group of active launchpads.

"The center of gravity of the aerospace industry has shifted to the Sunbelt, specifically the Southeast," Boyd said. "The Space Coast is a center of excellence."

Bringing high-wage jobs

Landing Project Kraken would mean more than 2,000 high-wage jobs by 2025. These positions would pay an average salary at \$84,000. That's much higher than the Melbourne metro's average annual wage of \$51,180, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The high-wage work generated by the region's space industry has contributed to economic stability for the county during the tumultuous economic conditions of the pandemic. In February, Brevard County's unemployment rate of 4.2% was lower than Orange County's rate of 6.9% and the statewide rate of 4.7%, according to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

In addition, the project would bring more people and business to the Space Coast, which would be a boost for small business across Brevard County, Rapid Prototyping Services LLC founder Ken Brace previously told *OBJ*. The Satellite Beach-based 3-D printing prototype company thrives on local clients, Brace said.

As part of its efforts, Space Florida will attempt to secure construction financing through municipal bonds, negotiate a lease agreement for the property and seek matching funds through Florida Department of Transportation's Spaceport Improvement Program.

Representatives of Space Florida and the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast declined to comment on the project.