
Program Overview

In a 1991 proposal for state funding, Prince William County articulated a vision for a world-class technology and research park that would attract high-quality development to the area:

“Prince William County will be the centerpiece of a unique, multi-institution campus developed through public/private partnership...with the ambiance of a high-class corporate research park, with an attractive, core campus of roughly 100 acres, surrounded by a burgeoning development zone that will include corporate offices and headquarters, research centers, government facilities, performing arts centers and cultural amenities, and residential development.”

What was then an ambitious vision in 1991 is today a reality. What was then a horse farm is today Innovation Technology Park. Home to more than 30 companies and state and federal agencies, the growth at Innovation has generated over \$800 million in announced investment and the announced intent to create more than 3,500 new jobs.

A landmark partnership between Prince William County, private land owners and George Mason University, Innovation Technology Park represents the power of leveraging partnerships between governments and non-governmental entities to promote Economic Development that contributes to the local economy and improves the quality of life for citizens. This vision of University-Centered Economic Development serves today not only as a core driver of economic growth in Prince William County, but also as a model that is gaining traction with development agencies throughout the globe. Organizations from as far away as Austria and Australia are applying the lessons learned from Innovation Technology Park's pioneering approach in their communities.

A testament to what can be achieved when diverse public and private entities mobilize toward a common vision, Innovation Technology Park embodies the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and replicability celebrated by the VACo Achievement Award.

Problem: The Need for Increased Quality Economic Development Within Prince William County

In the late 1980s, the leadership of Prince William County, Virginia recognized that the presence of a first-tier research university would be an essential component in efforts to promote high-quality commercial development that could attract capital investment, create high-wage jobs and contribute to the quality of life for citizens within Prince William County. The attraction of such commercial development was recognized as a necessity, in that disproportionately heavy reliance on the residential tax base for general fund revenue would make it untenable to provide quality levels of service to the County’s growing population.



The Farmland that would become Innovation Technology Park, Circa 1991

Solution: A Partnership to Create a New Model of University-Centered Economic Development

The vision that emerged as the solution to the needs of the County was one of a world-class research and technology park anchored by a leading educational institution. Conceived as the epicenter of economic expansion for the region, this technology park would turn vast acreage of farmland with little infrastructure, limited access, and relative obscurity within the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area into a robust node of first class, high tech development.

Prince William County initiated discussions with George Mason University (GMU) about creating such a technology park. GMU was interested in the proposition as it would elevate their status in the academic and research communities through their “distributed university” model. Instead of a traditional campus with departments located in various clustered buildings on one large campus, a distributed university houses areas of study in various campuses located in strategic communities near the main campus.

Each campus maintains unique areas of study and adapts its curriculum to the needs and resources of the community. Prince William County and GMU officials agreed that Prince William County was an ideal location for a new campus, and described anticipated results of such a venture in a 1991 proposal for state funding that articulated the core vision of what would become Innovation Technology Park:

“Prince William County will be the centerpiece of a unique, multi-institution campus developed through public/private partnership...with the ambiance of a high-class corporate research park, with an attractive, core campus of roughly 100 acres, surrounded by a burgeoning development zone that will include corporate offices and headquarters, research centers, government facilities, performing arts centers and cultural amenities, and residential development.”

The County’s leadership quickly recognized that bringing this vision to fruition would require them to serve as a catalyst for development by coordinating with private land owners, implementing appropriate zoning, purchasing significant acreage to be held for development, leading the way in road and infrastructure development and forging ahead with efforts to attract an internationally recognized corporate anchor.



Building 1 of the GMU Life Sciences Campus in Prince William County Circa 1996

Early Successes and Setbacks

With clear direction and plans for a GMU campus, Prince William County moved quickly to bring the campus and technology park online in six short years. In 1992, the statewide higher education bond referendum included funding for the first academic building at the GMU campus. By 1994, Prince William County’s efforts in working with four private land owners led to the donation of 120 acres for the campus. In that same year, Prince William County, GMU, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Virginia’s Center for Innovative Technology presented a collaborative proposal to attract American

Type Culture Collection (ATCC), the first corporate client to locate adjacent to the GMU campus. The project included a 100,000 square-foot corporate office and lab space, and the proposal included funding for a second academic building with lab space on the GMU campus. In 1995, Prince William County put a sector plan and higher education zoning overlay district in place that clarified the types of businesses and facilities that could locate in the area surrounding the campus.

In 1996, Prince William County was completing its obligations to finish the initial infrastructure and turn the development over to the private sector to begin developing the land around it. The first GMU building was nearing completion, construction on the second academic building was underway, and ATCC began erecting its facility. Just as the campus seemed to be generating momentum, the County was faced with a serious dilemma. The expected public-private partnerships for developing the land around the University quickly dissolved as private land became embroiled in bankruptcy, foreclosure, and Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) actions. Prince William County was confronted with the difficult question of whether a county government should be an active participant in the development of a technology park or simply allow the issues to be resolved and trust that new private land owners would move the idea forward.

Innovative Solutions to Difficult Problems

Faced with these emerging challenges, Prince William County sought recommendations from the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in 1996. The ULI was so intrigued by the innovative approach to university-based economic development that they recommended the name, "Innovation" for the office park, which the County adopted in 1997. The conclusion of the ULI report commissioned by the County recognized both the challenges and opportunities the County faced in actualizing its ambitious plan:

"[We] would like to commend the County for its remarkable efforts to date, which have created a nucleus and infrastructure for a major development project. [...] It is extremely rare that a governing body has the capabilities, the foresight, and the courage to adopt innovative techniques in the creation of

such a project. [...] To build upon the foundation already laid by the County... an increased focus, sense of urgency, and commitment are necessary. [...] This undertaking will require the total focus of a dedicated group of people on a single objective: the successful completion of Innovation. With tenacity and patience, Innovation can become the gateway to Prince William's future."

On the recommendation of the ULI, Prince William County decided to stay the course and to purchase 525 acres of available land to stabilize land values, create a new real estate market area, and create a vibrant new employment center.

By 1998, Prince William County had established the framework for a dynamic technology park that would serve as a magnet for targeted economic development. Prince William County continued to provide infrastructure (roads and utilities), and paved the way for developers and businesses to fill the office park with high tech companies. Within four years, Prince William County had paid off the land debt and added a variety of new industries to Prince William County.

Results

Today more than 1,745,000 square feet are under roof at Innovation Technology Park. Twelve years since coming to the market, activity in the park provides irrefutable evidence that this unique effort is achieving its vision. Since 1997, 41 business announcements have occurred at Innovation including the location of 28 businesses new to Prince William County and 13 expansions with a total announced investment of \$806,370,000 and 3,950 announced new jobs. The momentum of the last 12 years presents Prince William County with a promising outlook for the future.



Innovation today, home to more than 30 high-tech companies and agencies who have announced more than \$760m in capital investment.

Maximizing Future Potential

The growth at Innovation continues. Anchored by major players in the biotechnology industry and GMU's life sciences campus – which now enrolls more than 4,000 students in its bachelors, masters and PhD programs – Innovation Technology Park is home to the largest and fastest growing life sciences community in Northern Virginia. The park is gaining world renown as a hotbed of research in biodefense, proteomics and nanotechnology, and will continue to be a magnet for companies in the life sciences industry for decades to come.

The growth at Innovation, however, expands beyond its core life sciences orientation. Prince William County's premier technology park also plays home to a growing number of federal agencies, federal contractors, internet technology companies and other high-tech businesses. Moreover, a subcommittee of the Economic Development Task Force recently formed by the Prince William Board of County Supervisors is currently exploring opportunities to solidify an even more robust relationship for the next decade through the adoption of a Master Agreement to include a 200,000 square foot town center adjacent to the GMU campus, as well as a science park. Anchored by GMU's stunning new Hylton Performing Arts Center, this mixed-use development will include a full-service hotel/conference center, additional class A office space, retail square footage and several hundred residential units.

Innovation Technology Park vis-à-vis the VACo Achievement Awards Selection Criteria

Innovative Solutions

Truly an innovative solution to the challenge of attracting quality commercial development, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors took the initiative to forge a relationship between George Mason University, private land owners, and the County. These relationships, along with the unprecedented decision by the County to purchase and market 525 acres of land for development in 1997 required the

investment of significant real and political capital. Nonetheless, these investments by County leadership have paid remarkable dividends for our community.

The promotion of intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration with private enterprise in addressing a problem or situation

Prince William County's Innovation Technology Park has been a vehicle for significant collaboration between private and public entities as well as local, state and federal government. Early in the development of the project, the County's leadership recognized the importance of attracting a stable, internationally recognized corporate anchor to Innovation Technology Park. In 1994, Prince William County, George Mason University and the Commonwealth of Virginia worked closely to attract ATCC to Innovation through a package of incentives that included a cooperative partnership between GMU and ATCC that continues today.

Today, Innovation Technology Park plays home to continued intergovernmental collaboration as a means of forwarding the goal of quality development in the area. On the Prince William Campus of GMU are two facilities, the Freedom Aquatic Center and the spectacular nine-story Hylton Performing Arts Center, built through the cooperative initiative between Prince William County, the City of Manassas, and George Mason University.

Such collaboration has not been limited to the local government level. GMU's leading-edge Level 3 Biosafety Research Laboratory - Opening in June, 2010 - was funded through the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and George Mason University. The research that will take place in this facility marks not only important strides in biodefense and infectious disease mitigation, but also the value that cooperation between public entities and government can bring to our communities and our nation.

A model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities

Innovation Technology Park, and the concept of collaborative University-Centered Economic Development on which it is predicated, provides a proven model for attracting quality development that can be replicated in other communities. Today, the County's economic development team often hosts delegations from throughout the nation and the world who wish to learn from and model the pioneering form of University-Centered Economic Development at work in Prince William County's Innovation Technology Park.

Conclusion

Prince William County's Innovation Technology Park has been a remarkable success, and all indications are that Innovation will continue to be a key driver of economic development in the County for decades to come. Significantly, the County's investment in roads and infrastructure at Innovation have been funded almost entirely through land sales with very little investment from the General Fund. The County is within 2-3 land sales of entirely recouping all road and infrastructure investment to date and future revenue from land sales will be returned to the general fund.

Many aspects of this effort, including the University-Centered approach to economic development that it pioneered, the public/private partnerships it envisaged, and the manner in which public funds were used to catalyze and shape economic development, seemed radical in the early 1990s when the project began to take shape. Nonetheless, Innovation Technology Park stands today as a testament to the effectiveness of these progressive development strategies and serves as a model that is gaining traction in communities throughout the globe.