

"Collaboration: Pivoting Out of the Pandemic" Part 4: A Renovation in "Real" Local Innovation



THE OKLAHOMA CITY INNOVATION DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY IN HOW CITIES ARE PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

SSON Analytics reports that 72% of shared services' strategy for office space has been affected by the pandemic, with 13% shifting to a hub and spoke model of distributed office space to accommodate remote workers needs. Perceptions are shifting about why teams gather and work in person. On-top of being the locus of everyday work for in-office staff, the physical workspace must also provide opportunities on-site for gathering regional remote employees, creating meaningful team connections and career pathing and mentoring talent.

Oklahoma City's latest projection, the Innovation District, is a case study in how workspaces are already changing to reflect the evolving - and increasingly varied - needs of the workforce. This infographic will look at how the Innovation District is a culmination of its people, their collective community investment and cross-sector collaboration to bring about a years-long vision for the city.

OKLAHOMA CITY'S VISION FOR THE INNOVATION DISTRICT

To design a place of convergence that fosters synergistic connections and builds on existing strengths

To promote growth and attraction of new business around technology and health

To build an inclusive community that maximizes the positive impact to the surrounding neighborhoods, city and region

To ensure the plan is sensitive and respectful of the context and the surrounding area

To create a plan that lays out an achievable strategy for implementation



COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

With cross-sector collaboration as the centerpiece of its strategy, OKC's Innovation District also builds a foundation for community sustainability. In doing so, the Innovation District was born of cross-sector collaboration from a variety of sources: 453 members provided input into the district's creation, with 60+ interviews and 15 focus groups organized. This kind of engagement sought input from community leaders, neighborhood residents, real estate developers, research consultants, policy advisors and government members.

According to Mark Beffort (CEO of Robinson Park, real-estate development firm), the project emphasizes "inclusion, diversity, growth and opportunity for all Oklahomans," which you can read more about on the next page. The infrastructural initiative envisions collaboration as a transformative effort between cross-sector consortiums, "industries, academia, business, and public sectors" amalgamated to turn dreams into realities.

Indeed, as Richard Tanenbaum (real estate developer and CEO of Gardner Tanenbaum) asserts, the project ushers a new era of revitalized growth through collaboration, catalyzing "Oklahoma-born advances in bioscience, aerospace, energy and health." Therefore, drawing from a confluence of common interests, The Innovation District achieves community sustainability, attracting widespread attention, and fostering technological transformation. Here, various researchers, entrepreneurs, and big-thinkers, converge with competitive industry leaders in a diverse environment, mobilizing multi-talented growth to ensure community sustainability.

The pandemic presented challenges redefining corporate social responsibility, and how people and organizations in local communities collaborate to consolidate common goals. By utilizing community angled solutions, Oklahoma City aligns local initiatives with big business in its own Renaissance, overcoming many of the challenges imposed by Covid-19. The result is a mixed use space that attracts cross-industry collaboration from its existing high-skilled workforce of scientists, researchers, academics and industry SMEs. The Innovation District focuses on meeting the work/life demands of an evolving workforce with facilities for R&D, production, and professional/shared services, as well as accommodation, open gathering spaces and restaurants.





In Conversation with Mark Beffort, CEO, Robinson Park

We caught up with the CEO of Robinson Park to discuss “Convergence”, an upcoming signature spot located within the Innovation District, which is just east of downtown Oklahoma and set to attract high-skilled industries



Q: Why don't you share a little about yourself and the new site; “Convergence”

A: I've been in the real estate business for about 40 years, primarily in the high-rise office buildings space. We [Robinson Park] own well over 12 million square feet of space in eight different markets, primarily in the urban core in second tier cities. This site, called Convergence, is really special to us because we believe it's going to offer something that is not your traditional office building. This site will be a state-of-the-art physical place that blends a variety of components not currently on offer in OKC.

Q: What was the key selling point for investing in a space like this?

A: This project is meant to build a sense of community to where we can collaborate together in both the public and private sector to provide an environment that allows new technologies to be created. We believe that this particular site allows it to happen. The 400,000 sq. ft project has a pedestrian-centric layout featuring research labs and office space, a hotel, retail space, and a public realm providing an open-air community environment. It's very visible off the main thoroughfare, it's also a direct access point into the central core downtown and it sits in between the research sector for both University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University so our site is a connecting point to bring both of those two universities together. Finally, the city of Oklahoma City through MAPS 4 is collaborating and building a 20,000 square foot Innovation Hall. Through the MAPS 4 project - and that's part of our project as well - those university components, the prime location, the connectivity to downtown, it really is going to be a truly a special place with Convergence at the center core.

Q: How does this site connect business with the broader Oklahoman community?

A: We are providing what we believe is a unique place for new and existing companies to collaborate together to build and develop new technology - whether that's in the areas of bioscience, aerospace, energy, advanced manufacturing and health. We'll also be supporting small businesses by giving them an opportunity to operate within this site. We're also partnering with the University of Oklahoma to provide that research and educational component, not only for their students but also to collaborate with major corporations to provide upskilling and employment opportunities for all Oklahomans.

Q: How will Convergence deliver workspaces that meet the need of the future of work?

A: Today we're obviously in a completely new phase of life, but if you take a step back and look at the use of office space over a 40 year period we've gone through ebbs and flows and that today is not any different. I think it's going to be hybrid. I also believe that you don't collaborate or work as functionally and grow as a company if no one is spending time together. This goes beyond the office though. OKC's new Innovation District will have an outdoor amphitheater, and plaza for public events as well as nearby hotels to support regional and out of state visitors. This will really provide corporations with the opportunity to bring teams together for those highly collaborative, team building experiences that are foundational to supporting the hybrid work experience.

THE GROWING COMMUNITY OF OKC



OKLAHOMA CITY—A VIBRANT VENUE FOR ONSITE EXPANSION

Oklahoma City has enormous potential for shared services organizations seeking a location at the forefront of technological innovation. According to SSON’s Future of GBS Survey, 63% of respondents prioritize “digital technologies and skills,” among relevant accelerants. As digitization accelerates, Oklahoma City – its high-end facilities and 24/7 economy - have been designed to attract top talent. Accordingly, the demand for expertise involving technology, automation, and AI skills should incentivize SSOs to consider Oklahoma City as the best fit for future office hubs of highly-skilled workers.

Ultimately, the city underscores how local collaborative initiatives merge with private funding to tap into existing talent. In its holistic development efforts, Oklahoma City fosters low-cost local innovation and proves to be a vibrant venue for organizational expansion.