

The Columbus Dispatch

John Glenn Airport is development magnet

This warehouse and office building is among several new development projects at or near John Glenn Columbus International Airport.

Posted May 21, 2017 at 5:00 AM Updated May 21, 2017 at 9:19 AM

By Marla Rose
The Columbus Dispatch

Several years from now, the road around John Glenn Columbus International Airport will be a giant construction site as a planned billion-dollar new terminal is built.

In the meantime, plenty of smaller projects are beginning or underway at or near the airport, taking advantage of available land and easy access to Columbus' freeway system. They include:

- The Columbus Regional Airport Authority, which oversees John Glenn Airport, plans a new Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel a short walk from the terminal building.
- On the north airfield, Columbus-based Daimler construction has begun work on the latest phase of an office-and-warehouse development down the road from the headquarters building it built for NetJets a few years ago.
- In Whitehall a half mile from the airport, the second phase of an office-and-warehouse project from Mark F. Taggart Co. is under construction for an opening late this year.

“There are many companies that want to house their corporate offices along with a distribution and warehousing component,” said Robert White, Jr., president of Daimler. “A lot of older buildings don't have the proper (configuration), internet access and other things. ... It's hard to find the right space in older, existing buildings.”

Columbus-based clothing maker Homage is one of the tenants in the previous phase of Daimler's development, occupying 40,000 square feet of warehouse and office space for the past two years. The project benefited from state tax credits valued at about \$146,000 in exchange for promised additions to Homage's workforce by 2017. It has exceeded those goals, employing about 175 total in its office, warehouse and local stores.

The apparel company's decision to consolidate several former locations at the airport was driven by the desire to be close to Easton Town Center, where the company has a busy store, and to be near the shippers it uses, such as FedEx, Homage President Jason Block said.

Many Homage workers live in or near Downtown, Block added, "so there is the added benefit of being opposite traffic going to and coming from work." Morning traffic is much heavier coming into Downtown than leaving it, and the opposite is true in the afternoon rush hour.

Whitehall is bounded on the north by 5th Avenue next to the airport, and the city has become more aggressive in the past couple of years in seeking new development.

Zach Woodruff, economic-development director for Whitehall, said the city's location near freeways and the airport has been a selling point.

"What I think is interesting is that it's development being done for users that aren't necessarily heavy air cargo users or shippers," he said. "But the area definitely has advantages in terms of logistics and access."

Phase One of the Air South Commerce Center in Whitehall was completed in July 2016. Drinkware maker Takeya USA and Continental Auto Parts, two companies new to the Columbus area, quickly filled the space.

Taggart is now looking to lease the phase set to open later this year. That phase will feature up-to-date technology and "all the bells and whistles needed to attract users today," Woodruff said.

"The inventory of Class A space (the most up-to-date, desirable real estate) has been so low," he said. "We've worked with developers on projects like this because we know that once ground is broken, they'll start leasing."

These projects don't include ones directly related to aviation activity at the airport, including a new private airplane hangar that Renier Construction is building for MPW Industrial Services.

A new car-rental facility to serve the airport, being built by the airport authority, should commence construction next year.

Additional hotel rooms also are in the works on the airport property.

Work on the new Residence Inn next to the airport terminal is planned to start next year, with a hoped-for spring 2019 completion date. Like the Fairfield Inn & Suites next door, it will be developed and controlled by the airport authority.

To help oversee these and future development projects on airport land, the airport authority has started a search to replace its longtime real-estate chief, Robin Holderman, who retired at the end of April. Holderman, who had worked in commercial real estate in central Ohio since 1972, had joined the airport authority in 2006.

Elaine Roberts, CEO of the authority since December 2000, also has announced a plan to retire at the end of this year.