

Commentary

St. Clair County best location, location, location for NGA

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By WAYNE BARBER



The purpose of this letter is to state my endorsement and support for the selection of the Scott Air Force Base site in St. Clair County for the relocation and expansion of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency project.

There are many locational considerations that require close attention and evaluation in making this decision, which I believe clearly point to the advantages that the St. Clair County site as proposed presents. Additionally, the NGA project will have positive economic impact for the entire region including outlying areas that have experienced loss of jobs and economic growth.

I have been closely associated and directly involved with the commercial real estate profession for over 30 years in Southern Illinois. Over this time, I have witnessed tremendous growth and new private sector investments from businesses, corporate entities, industrial firms, residential developers and other investors that see the benefits and opportunities that our area has to offer. This growth and development has not just happened by chance or luck but required a collaborative effort and strong leadership among the private sector and public sectors working closely together.

As to the locational advantages and reasons why the 182-acre site located in St. Clair County adjacent to Scott AFB is the right choice, please consider the following:

- 1. Site readiness:** One of the primary advantages of the 182-acre St. Clair County site is the fact that the land is readily available and there are no issues with assembly of the parcels. Additionally the site is free of structures requiring costly demolition and potential delays in preparing the site. Another critical factor is that the site is free of any known environmental issues that would require remediation. Lastly, the county offer of 200 additional acres ensures long-term expansion needs.
- 2. Transportation and accessibility:** A major consideration is selecting a site that is easily accessible yet providing controlled and limited public access to address concerns of security. Once again, the proposed St. Clair County site meets this important need. The site adjoins Scott AFB, which has high security measures and protocols in place. Employees, service providers and others will have easy access to the site via Interstate 64 at the new Reider Road interchange, which is within a 15-20 minute drive from St. Louis. Additionally mass transit is provided via MetroLink and St. Clair County Transit.
- 3. Security issues:** Given the nature of the mission and work of the NGA, security is a primary consideration for site selection of the new facility. Given the location of Scott AFB adjacent to the proposed site and fact that the surrounding area is largely undeveloped security at this site can be more readily addressed and met. Concerns for employee safety are not an issue that would need to be addressed as with the alternate sites.
- 4. Cost considerations:** Cost of development in Southwestern Illinois is considerably less than in St. Louis. As stated above, the proposed 182-acre site is predominantly undeveloped. Therefore, the cost associated with preparing the site for building and development is largely reduced. Providing essential public infrastructure including access to the site, utilities, etc. would be considerably less given the present site conditions.
- 5. Affordability and diversity of housing:** Present and future employees of NGA looking at moving can find a diverse choice of neighborhoods with a wide range of housing at all price points within close proximity of the site. Southwestern Illinois has attracted new residential developments and housing prices are well below the average for the St. Louis Metropolitan Region.
- 6. Scott AFB partner:** Military and civilian retirees will be a continuing source for a skilled and experienced work force for NGA. This location will also further solidify Scott AFB's position as a military base and as the St. Louis region's largest employer.
- 7. Location, location, location:** This is a site selector's best dream come true. An expandable site with easy access at virtually no cost that offers the project a trained labor supply. This is exactly what every industrial site selector is looking for and makes the Illinois site the obvious choice.

The overall economic impact and benefits that both Southwestern Illinois and NGA would gain from the Illinois location are immense and will provide long term and sustainable jobs and growth for the entire St. Louis/Illinois region.

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