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DuPage National Technology Park Repositions Itself For Future Growth

by Northern Illinois Real Estate Magazine staff writer

In the city of West Chicago lies the largest undeveloped land parcel in DuPage County known as The DuPage National Technology Park. The park, owned by the DuPage Airport Authority, is comprised of about 600 acres of which 450 are useable.

A key component of airport management involves the development of surplus properties that are not necessary for aviation. The reason airports acquire surplus land is to insulate surrounding neighbors from the noise generated by air traffic. Airports often develop these surplus properties to diversify their revenue sources.

Immediately south of the airport is the Prairie Landing Golf Club, which is owned by the Authority. This has been a successful development that was designed in such a way that canals

serve as drainage for the airfield, and provide for the irrigation of the golf course.

South of the golf course is Roosevelt Road with the entire former Technology Park land being south of that. I spoke with David Bird, executive director of the DuPage Airport Authority, who indicated, "The Airport is a very substantial land owner with a total of 2,800 acres with 1,100 acres dedicated to aviation. The balance is a buffer zone, which can be developed for uses compatible with the airport. There is a lot of development potential on the air side and on the non-aviation side. We see very good things over the coming decades. It's a substantial land area and is going to contribute tremendously to the economic development of DuPage County."



Bird

In the late 1990's, the DuPage Airport Authority Board contemplated several different development alternatives that were politically rejected. Some members of the state legislature took over and asked for and received a grant of \$34,000,000 that was awarded to DuPage County for the purpose of developing a technology park. The grant money for a technology park use was sought by the politicians, not the Airport. It was to be spent on development infrastructure for the technology park, but bore no relationship to costs. The state provided no budget; there was no feasibility study, and

there wasn't even a concept plan. Their anticipation of a successful technology park was a guess, unsupported by data or research.

According to experts, a successful technology park must (1) be adjacent to major transportation arteries, (2) have a major research university presence, (3) have federal, state and county incentives available, and (4) hotels, restaurants and retail stores should be nearby. The Technology Park location did not have any of these necessary components for success.

By state mandate, the Technology Park was overseen by a separate board of directors with no development experience. The Technology Park languished unsuccessfully for over seven years.

In the summer of 2010 the management of the Technology Park was awarded to the DuPage Airport Authority Board. Under the leadership of Dan Goodwin, the DAA Board ordered a feasibility study. Chairman Goodwin explained, "In more than 10 years, this is the first time anyone has approached development of the Technology Park land in a professional manner. This one and only feasibility study defines a credible, sustainable plan, and concluded that the best chance for success was through development as a business park, not a technology park. The Technology Park didn't fail because of the recession; it failed because the technology park concept

itself never made any sense at this location. The decision to develop a technology park was made by politicians, not by professional developers."

CenterPoint Properties and the Airport Authority are now working directly together to remarket and reposition the entire site. Jones Lang LaSalle, a preeminent national broker, has been retained to attract additional users. A larger marketing program has been budgeted and government incentives have now been obtained. The expanded use as a business center greatly increases the potential tenant base. The Mayor of West Chicago, where the Business Center is located, has now been brought into a partnership with the Airport to foster development of the 600 acres.

It appears the DuPage Airport Board has the development expertise, the financial resources, and the community involvement necessary to make the DuPage Business Center a success.

The new team of developers, commercial brokers, and community leaders that the Airport Authority has brought together, has greatly increased the park land's potential for success.



Goodwin



Recently the new DuPage Business Center was dedicated. Pictured at the rededication of the former DuPage National Technology Park are: David Bird, executive director, and Gerald M. Gorski, vice chairman, DuPage Airport Authority; Mayor Mike Kwasman, City of West Chicago; Fred D. Reynolds, senior vice president, development, CenterPoint Properties; J. Leonard Caldeira, managing director, industrial services, Jones Lang LaSalle; Brian Quigley, vice president, development, CenterPoint Properties; and David J. Sabathne, president/CEO, West Chicago Chamber of Commerce & Industry.