

# San Antonio Express-News

## Quesada: Port San Antonio Eyes New Type of Defense, Industrial, Research Complex; Seeks to Bridge Communities

**The Port has big plans for the research campus that would connect the community and improve quality of life.**

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**Tony Quesada – December 13, 2024**

If Jim Perschbach and Port San Antonio can will into fruition its latest pie-in-the-sky idea for elevating the former Kelly Air Force base far beyond the traditional industrial park, I won't be surprised.

In the more than six years that Perschbach has been president and CEO of Port San Antonio, the organization — charged with overseeing economic development on the 1,900-acre campus — has sought to redefine the makeup and purpose of such a complex.

I've spoken with Perschbach roughly half a dozen times over the years, and I've always come away with some version of the thought: "Well, that's ambitious; let's see whether they can pull it off."

So far, the Port has pulled off a few ideas that some called crazy at the time. They include its Project Tech office buildings for high-tech tenants and an innovation center now known as the Boeing Center at Tech Port, which houses a concert and event venue, a science and technology museum, and an office of Capital Factory, among other things.

Before members of our Editorial Board met recently with Perschbach and a couple of the Port's executives, the most recent moon shot the Port had pitched is an unsolicited proposal to build a new headquarters for the Sixteenth Air Force, also known as Air Forces Cyber. It's well-known this military unit, focused on information warfare, has been operating in a suboptimal building — to put it kindly.

While that idea simmers, Perschbach and company have floated the Port's grandest and most encompassing proposal to date: a collection of projects packaged under the working title "The Defense Industrial Research Campus of The Future — Research and Innovation Park Evolved."

It envisions an array of modern and futuristic architecture, expanding from its already planned Innovation Tower. It seeks to bring together military missions; defense, aerospace and tech industries; and academic research institutions — along with the people living in nearby neighborhoods.



Diné Development Corp., a Navajo Nation-owned IT, engineering and services firm, will join five other cyber companies at the Capital Factory inside the Boeing Center at Tech Port. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio

Besides the Innovation Tower, the site plan calls for a joint activity cyber center, a vertiport and a military campus that is simultaneously separate and secure while also integrated into the development's layout. This way people working there can share in the amenities — including restaurants, retail and a fitness center — incorporated into the design.

The idea, according to its conceptual materials, is to create a “campus ecosystem that builds value by fostering collaboration between the military, commercial enterprises and entrepreneurs, research institutions, and the community.”

For years, Perschbach has sought to facilitate collaboration between seemingly siloed industries, such as aviation and cybersecurity. This new concept seeks to take that ideal to another level.

“We need to connect disparate communities,” Perschbach said.

That he considers this a “need,” rather than an ideal, speaks to his vision for the long-term sustainability and relevancy of the type of development the Port is pitching.

The plan calls for a 900-seat child care center that would make about one-third of its capacity available to each of three cohorts: military families, defense industry workers and neighboring community members.

The shortage of child care is a national issue. Many two-parent households struggle with the dilemma of needing two incomes to make ends meet but finding that child care is either unavailable or so expensive that it wipes out the second income. And for single-parent homes, it's even more straining.

Perschbach is not only proposing a valuable service, but also a social opportunity in that it offers a potential benefit from blending the children in the day care. And it's on brand with the Port's overarching aspiration of bringing communities together.

Incorporating grocery and retail stores into the plan has a similar aspect.

With as many people who could potentially work and live around the development as the Port projects; a convenient grocery store is another amenity that would serve the community's benefit. In one version of such a store, Perschbach describes an operation that would blend concepts of a civilian grocery store and a military commissary. The idea is that while the store would be open to all, military customers could enjoy prices comparable with base-run commissaries, which are lower, while civilian customers would pay regular prices.

And again, such a store would be a place where military and community members could connect while engaging in an activity that we all have in common — buying food for our families.

Another notable aspect of the plan is that it seeks to share these amenities with a side of town that has been overlooked when it comes to positive investment and development compared to the North Side, Northwest Side and downtown, among others.



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a child care center that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for grocery and retail stores that are part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts an aerial view of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



This is the corner of San Antonio that lost its only hospital not long ago.

Port San Antonio could follow the typical blueprint for industrial park development, but Perschbach and his team see that the competition for tenants demands a more attractive and amenity-rich environment — one that potential occupants will see value in as a tool for employee recruiting and retention.

And the Port's desire to bring its neighbors onto its campus goes far beyond community relations. It too is a long-term recruitment play as young people come to view the Port as accessible — and by extension its educational opportunities and, for some, eventual employment.



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a military campus that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts Port San Antonio's proposed Innovation Tower, which is incorporated into its concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a joint activity cyber center that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a hotel that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts night life amenities that are part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a fitness center that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a retail corner that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio



A rendering depicts a possible vision for a vertiport that is part of Port San Antonio's concept known as the Defense Industrial Research Campus of the Future. Photo: Philip Williamson/Port San Antonio