

Major Life Science Development Starts Construction at 2,000-Acre Site in Georgia

Project Shows Growing Significance of Lab Space in Commercial Real Estate



The project near Atlanta will draw researchers from medical, agricultural and environmental sciences to its lab, residential and retail developments. (Rowen Foundation)

By [Andy Peters](#)

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The state of Georgia is backing a mixed-use project near Atlanta that will provide offices for academic researchers in the latest indicator of the growing importance of lab space in commercial real estate.

Construction began last week on the Rowen project on a 2,000-acre site near Dacula, Georgia. Gwinnett County provided about \$86 million in funds for land acquisition,

planning and development. The total public and private investment could reach \$1.8 billion, according to the county. The first phase is expected to open in early 2024.

Real estate developers and investors are attracted to projects with laboratory space, especially for companies and organizations involved in life science, according to a recent [CBRE report](#). The [San Francisco](#) Bay area, [Seattle](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#), have seen recent large investments in life science development projects.

Backers have compared the proposed Rowen project to the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina's Raleigh-Durham area. Established in 1959, Research Triangle Park connected companies with substantial research-and-development operations in the life sciences, including GlaxoSmithKline, with academics at the area's large research universities.

Like Research Triangle Park, the Rowen project in Georgia is expected to pull in researchers from the nearby Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory University in Atlanta and the University of Georgia in Athens. Rowen's initial focus will be on organizations involved in medical, agricultural and environmental sciences.

When completed, Rowen is expected have about 22 million square feet of lab and office space, residences, retail and other properties.

The Rowen Foundation, a nonprofit group leading the development, will repay Gwinnett County for loans used to acquire land, according to a spokesman. Mason Ailstock, president of the Rowen Foundation, is a former chief operating officer for Research Triangle Park in North Carolina.

Other backers include Atlanta-based construction firm SG Contracting, state-owned Georgia Gwinnett College and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Rowen Foundation has acquired at least 1,208 acres of undeveloped property along Georgia Highway 316 in Gwinnett County, according to CoStar data. The acreage covers five separate tracts at [Drowning Creek Road](#), [1524 state Highway 316](#), [Lawrence Road](#),

[Old Freeman Mill Road](#) and the [intersection](#) of Old Freeman Mill Road and Drowning Creek Road.

For the Record

Reeves Young is the general contractor for infrastructure work. HGOR is the master planner and landscape architect. The law firms Marks & Williams, Kutak Rock and Mahaffey Pickens Tucker were legal counsel on property sale transactions. Weissman PC was legal counsel to the foundation on other real estate matters.