

Boston-area Smart City Aims at City's Booming Tech Sector

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Rendering of a Union Point park at dusk. (Courtesy Elkus Manfredi Architects)

While tech giant Alphabet recently announced it would develop 12 acres of Toronto waterfront into a smart-city-technology testing ground, a similar undertaking has already begun 12 miles south of Boston. Developer LStar Ventures has big plans to turn this 1,500-acre site, dubbed Union Point (formerly South Weymouth Naval Air Station), into a “smart” development that will specially cater to technology companies.

On the surface, the project is an eco-friendly exurban development with a leafy, bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly mixed-use master plan. In addition to offering housing, retail, residences, restaurants, three million square feet of office space, and eight million square feet of commercial development, Union Point would connect to Boston—and its booming tech industry scene—via a nearby MBTA commuter rail. Boston-based Elkus Manfredi and Watertown, Massachusetts-based Sasaki are master planning Union Point and working with engineering firms such as Arup, Vanderweil Engineers, and VHB on

a range of sustainable features, including natural, on-site wastewater treatment systems. However, where Union Point really sets itself apart is in its information technology infrastructure.

The city will lay the foundations for its tenants to use its streets and buildings as testing grounds for smart city technology. In addition to omnipresent wi-fi, “Union Point will have a site-wide fiber-optic cabling system to support commercial tenants, building assets, and IoT [Internet of Things] systems,” said David Wilts, associate principal and digital master planning leader at Arup. In other words, companies will be able to install sensors to collect data on air quality and building performance, and even be able to set up public digital signage. In this way, Union Point could easily support smart city ventures similar to Chicago’s Array of Things sensor network or New York City’s LinkNYC towers.

The first stage of development is a \$25 million sports complex designed by Elkus Manfredi and Sasaki that will

feature multiple fields, including a rugby pitch, playground, park, restaurant, and renovated gymnasium. Including this complex was crucial in the two-year process of getting local communities on board with the development; its fields will be available to the three nearby towns at reduced leasing rates.

Technology, however, is a notoriously fickle thing to design into a project. For example, the video-call screens installed in Korea’s smart city mega-development Songdo are already obsolete. But Union Point hopes to avoid that by only laying the groundwork for its tenants. “LStar Ventures aspires to be the leader in the practical application of technology that we know, that we can imagine, and that is beyond today’s imagination,” said David Manfredi, founding principal at Elkus Manfredi. “That is why the armature that we create must be flexible, durable, and adaptable over time.”

The Boston-area is no stranger to smart city developments, as the 45-acre Cambridge Crossing tech hub was also unveiled this year.