

Building boom: Brooks redevelopment reaches over \$1 billion in total investment



by **Shari Biediger**
February 27, 2023



Class-A office suites named WatersEdge are under construction at Brooks, where development continues across the former military base. Credit: Scott Ball / San Antonio Report

The government entity working for over two decades to redevelop the decommissioned Brooks Air Force Base announced that it has reached a significant economic milestone while promising more to come.

Through new development bringing jobs and housing to Brooks, more than \$1.2 billion has been invested since the Brooks Development Authority took over the 1,308-acre mixed-use campus in 2001.

The milestone demonstrates how Brooks has served “as a model of a success story of what can happen when military bases across the country possibly will close down,” said Connie Gonzalez, chief strategy officer at Brooks.

The investment includes construction and development by [Brooks](#) and its business partners — in new manufacturing plants and other institutions, as well as health care, lodging and residential, retail and dining that have brought new economic activity to Southeast San Antonio.

Road improvements, a new park and trails and a public transportation hub represent public investment in infrastructure by the city and county at Brooks, estimated by economic analysts TXP to have an annual economic impact on the region of \$1.05 billion.

“We have another \$425 million [worth of projects] currently underway ... and so once all of those are done, we’ll be near the \$1.5 billion in development since we took over 21 years ago,” Gonzalez said.

The former military installation is a federally designated “[opportunity zone](#)” providing tax benefits to investors.

The milestone follows the recent groundbreaking for the first Class-A office building at Brooks and the unveiling of plans to build almost 500 single-family homes intended as rental properties.

Homes and offices

At a Feb. 15 construction kickoff for Los Cielos, the neighborhood now under construction where 1960s-era base houses once stood, Brooks and city officials welcomed the development with partners San Antonio-based AHV Communities and Dallas-based Preston Hollow Community Capital.

“Brooks has brought together a community of not only places to live, places to work and very much places to play now,” said Ramiro Albarran, managing director at Preston

Hollow. “So it is combining what everybody tries to do and is actually succeeding.”

The developers broke ground for Los Cielos in 2021 and will be taking reservations this summer for the houses — open first to those who were displaced when homes in the Heritage Oaks neighborhood were demolished. The former residents were offered monetary and relocation assistance.

The community will feature amenities including a dog park, pickleball court and a swimming pool.

“We’re excited that we already have a running list of residents that plan to be residents when they reopen,” Gonzalez said.

Also in the residential category, Terramark Urban Homes is building single-family, for-sale townhouses in the Southlake neighborhood at Brooks, and Houston-based Morgan Development is building the 373-unit Caroline apartments.

That brings to 926 the number of residential units now under construction at Brooks, according to Gonzalez.

In January, workers began vertical construction on a commercial office building on the campus, one of two structures that Brooks officials are calling WatersEdge I & II.

The first-ever Class-A office space built on the South Side, the two four-story buildings will feature 200,000 square feet of premium office space, Gonzalez said. Amenities will include balconies that overlook a pond and shade trees, and 1,100 parking spaces.

When completed in late 2023, the Brooks Development Authority will become the first office tenants.

Food and drink makers

Site work is underway at Brooks for a new indoor farming facility being built by Soli Organic, a Virginia-based grower and marketer of fresh produce.

By 2024, company officials said the facility will be producing up to 5 million pounds of organic herbs and leafy greens it plans to supply to area retailers.

Two French food manufacturers also are setting up shop at Brooks.

Bakerly, the maker of French-style breads and pastries, is building at the campus its second U.S. location, a 137,000-square-foot facility that will house production operations and administrative offices.

The \$35 million Bakerly plant, employing an estimated 200 people, is expected to be open this summer.

Bakerly joins Cuisine Solutions, which **in 2021 opened** its 315,000-square-foot manufacturing facility. It has been called the largest *sous vide* food plant in the world. Founded in France, Cuisine Solutions is based in Virginia.

The \$200 million facility makes vacuum-sealed *sous vide* meals for airlines, grocery stores and chain restaurants like Starbucks and Panera Bread.

“Cuisine Solutions surely played a role in helping us convince Bakerly to not only choose San Antonio but to choose Brooks for their existing plant, and so this has been several years in the making,” Gonzalez said.

New restaurants also have opened in recent months at Brooks or are in the planning stages.

In September 2022, local restaurant owner Johnny Hernandez opened his newest La Gloria restaurant on Kennedy Hill along Southeast Military Drive.

Other food and beverage stores set for Brooks will make their home at La Picoso, a retail and entertainment development under construction near the Embassy Suites Hotel.

The developer, Birnbaum Property Co., named the development after the ranch owned by family member and former Texas Gov. John Connally, who visited Brooks Air Force Base with then-President John F. Kennedy in 1963, said Gonzalez.

Among the tenants at La Picoso will be national chains BJ’s Restaurant & Brewhouse, Outback Steakhouse, Bubba’s 33, Dave’s Hot Chicken, Jersey Mike’s Subs and Pluckers Wing Bar.

Roadways and training

In December, Brooks and city officials gathered to celebrate two road projects recently completed at Brooks totaling \$13.3 million.

Funded through the 2017 bond initiative, improvements were made to Inner Circle Road from Louis Bauer Drive to Research Plaza and to the extension of Research Plaza from Inner Circle Drive to South Presa Street.

Now Brooks officials are eyeing Sidney Brooks Street, a 1.4-mile east-west corridor they say is in dire need of improvements.

The east portion of Sidney Brooks will be improved with \$15 million in 2022 bond funding.

For the west portion of Sidney Brooks, the Brooks Development Authority and VIA Metropolitan Transit submitted in February a request to the U.S. Department of Transportation for \$25 million. Awards are expected to be announced in June.

This fall, the **Texas Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education**, in partnership with Bexar County, plans to break ground on a facility where San Antonio residents can access provide training and advanced manufacturing certification programs.

The 30,000-square-foot TX-FAME training center will be located near Cuisine Solutions and other light-industrial facilities at Brooks.

Disclosure: Brooks CEO Leo Gomez is a member of the San Antonio Report board of directors, and Brooks is a financial supporter of the San Antonio Report. For a full list of business members, click [here](#).