



## Call it Sim City

### Research park expected to be a catalyst

**BY ALLISON CONNOLLY THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT**

The relocation of the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center to a new office park on the Portsmouth-Suffolk line will benefit more cities and help make Hampton Roads as well known for modeling and simulation as Silicon Valley is for computer chips, officials believe.

Old Dominion University, which runs VMASC, announced Thursday that it would anchor a technology park at the heart of a mixed-use project called Hampton Roads Crossing located north of Va. 164 and east of College Drive, straddling the border between Suffolk and Portsmouth. Hampton Roads Crossing is being developed by HRC One LLC, a joint venture of HL Development Services Group and Terry Peterson Residential Cos.

VMASC, which uses computer technology to replicate real-life scenarios such as combat or surgery for training purposes, has outgrown its existing space, leased at the Tidewater Community College campus in northern Suffolk. The new site is about a mile away, but more importantly, according to Robert Fenning, ODU's vice president for administration and finance, it is about a half-mile from the Joint Forces Command's Joint Warfighting Center, a research arm of the Pentagon.

"From a regional perspective, it's going to be a very important economic opportunity," Fenning said.

Until now, Suffolk has reaped most of the benefits from the rapidly growing modeling and simulation industry that has sprung up in northern Suffolk around VMASC and the Joint Forces Command. Other Hampton Roads cities are eager to share the wealth.

"It's a location that works for the whole region, from the Peninsula to Chesapeake," said William Hudgins, president and chief executive officer of HL Development, an affiliate of NAI Harvey Lindsay Commercial Real Estate Services of Norfolk. "It has tremendous growth potential."

VMASC will locate in a 32-acre research, education and technology park called the Modeling Analysis Simulation and Technology Center, or MAST. The park will be in the 150-acre Hampton Roads Crossing project, which will also feature residential and retail development.

The developer will build and own VMASC's \$11.6 million, 60,000-square-foot building and lease it to ODU. It will be one of five buildings on the Suffolk side.

Four buildings are planned for the Portsmouth side, including ODU's Tri-Cities Higher Education Center, which offers upper-level undergraduate and graduate classes and certificate programs to residents of Chesapeake, Portsmouth and Suffolk. The \$10.2 million, 50,000-square-foot building will be owned by ODU.

Both buildings are expected to be completed by fall 2007.

Portsmouth and Suffolk offered half a million dollars each toward construction of the buildings on the Hampton Roads Crossing site.

"It was a true regional collaboration," said Portsmouth economic development director Steven Lynch. "I can't think of another case in Hampton Roads like it."

Suffolk Economic Development Director Tom O'Grady said there already is interest from defense contractors in the other buildings.

"We're excited about the development of this new office park that will offer new opportunities for high tech companies to come to Hampton Roads," he said. "It's another asset we have available to show off to new companies."

The burgeoning modeling and simulation industry pumps \$413 million a year into the Hampton Roads economy

and has created 4,000 jobs with annual salaries that are nearly twice the local average of \$32,000, according to a 2004 study.

ODU became one of the first schools in the nation to offer master's and doctoral degrees in modeling and simulation with VMASC. The program now has more than 100 students and faculty members. They collaborate on projects with Joint Forces Command and the more than 100 defense contractors that have signed on as partners. In the past few years, a number of the companies have opened simulation labs nearby.

Just this Tuesday, Raytheon Co. announced plans to build a 22,000-square-foot simulation lab at Bridgeway Commerce Park, near other labs run by Lockheed Martin Corp., General Dynamics Corp. and Science Applications International Corp.

Lynch said he hopes the growth of companies in Hampton Roads Crossing will spread to another mixed-use office park under development on Victory Boulevard that includes a new campus for Tidewater Community College.

"This will help us market other sites to modeling and simulation companies," Lynch said.

ODU officials had hoped to announce a deal last month, but site selection proved more complex than they had expected. Among the issues confronting them was to make sure the new site linked up with National LambdaRail, a supercomputing highway being laid in the form of fiber optic cable around the country that allows academic and research institutions to conduct large computer experiments. The rail was hooked up to VMASC's present site last month and will be redirected to the new site when it is up and running.

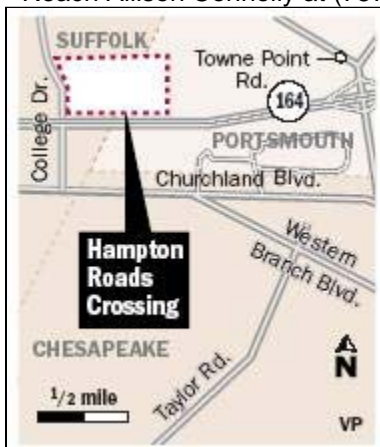
Competition for VMASC's relocation was fierce. ODU considered four proposals. Three out of the four sites considered were in Suffolk. The fourth was at the southwest corner of Portsmouth Boulevard and Interstate 664 in Chesapeake.

William E. Wood and Associates, which pitched the Chesapeake site to ODU, still plans to pursue modeling and simulation companies for the office park, which will also feature retail and residential space.

Such mixed-use developments tend to be popular with scientific and high-tech communities, said Ned Williams, the firm's vice president of commercial real estate.

"We feel there's a tremendous opportunity for building a modeling and simulation community in the area," he said.

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**RENDERINGS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SUFFOLK** The 32-acre lot chosen as the new site for the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center straddles Suffolk and Portsmouth.