

Research District seeing growth

There has been a lot of new activity at the Tri-Cities Research District during the past several months, and there's more to come.

Many people see new land development and construction as indicative of current or impending economic growth.

So those who have ventured into north Richland recently probably have begun sensing and anticipating that such growth is afoot.

This recent activity is focused in the research district area between Stevens Drive and George Washington Way, which is known as the Innovation Center at Tri-Cities Research District, a master planned business park that first began taking shape last year. Now the area is home to multiple fully occupied modern office buildings, and newly finished streets and lighting outline the footprint for more innovative office and lab spaces to come.

A closer analysis foreshadows plans for the Innovation Center to resemble a high-tech, urban setting with street-forward buildings and rear parking, with a pedestrian-friendly, stay awhile downtown atmosphere. Stone-paved drives, welcoming lamp posts, and artistic, visually appealing landscaping and walking paths are just a few cues that something special is being created.

This is not just office and lab space,

development for hire if you will. It represents the realization of the careful and purposeful planning of a complete environment in which to live, work, play and learn to help support the sustainable growth of our local tech-based economy. This will help the Tri-Cities appeal to more businesses and professionals being recruited from outside the area.

I recently attended a meeting among community leaders involved with developing the district where upcoming projects, including the Innovation Center, were discussed. I came away feeling excitement for the transformation ahead.

For example, near the corner of University and Stevens are the beginnings of a new University Square with space outlined for amenities such as a bank, restaurant, gas station and convenience store. In addition to providing convenient access to frequently used services for existing north Richland residents and professionals, the square also will provide a draw for new businesses to locate in and around the Innovation Center.

A short distance from there, at the corner of the WSU Tri-Cities campus, ground-breaking for a new Wine Science Center is slated for late next year. Plans also are in the works for sleek, modern apartments and another phase in the Willow Pointe riverfront

development for additional housing options in the Research District. Multi-use retail and office space also is planned.

If you venture further north past the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory campus, you'll find empty space where many buildings once stood in the 300 Area. As PNNL staff relocate to newly built buildings on the campus, older buildings are being retired and demolished.

And these are just a few of several high lights.

"Development activity in the Tri-Cities Research District area of North Richland has really stepped up over the past year," said Innovation Center developer and district board member Rick Parsons. "We have put a lot of effort into ensuring that the district offers a complete lifestyle for those who choose to locate or relocate here, in the interest of achieving sustainable, tech-based business and employment growth."

"We're creating an environment conducive to innovation, collaboration, and community all wrapped into one," he added. "A lot of care is being taken to incorporate features found in larger metropolitan areas while also drawing inspiration from the unique characteristics of the Tri-Cities."

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