Firefly planning a major rocket assembly and launch facility in Florida

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- Firefly says it will build a large new rocket manufacturing facility in Exploration Park, Florida.
- These renderings show the scale of the facility.
- This is what the front door may look like.

On Friday, Texas-based rocket company Firefly announced that it has reached an agreement to develop manufacturing facilities and a launch site at the Cape Canaveral Spaceport in Florida. The new facility will support the production of up to 24 Alpha rockets a year, with the ability to scale from there, company officials said.

These are sizable plans. Over an unspecified period of time, the company said it will invest $52 million into the facilities. Florida's spaceport development authority, Space Florida, will also provide an additional $18.9 million in infrastructure investments.

The company will build its launch facilities at Space Launch Complex 20, where Space Florida hopes to develop a multiuser facility for small-satellite launch companies like Firefly. It will also build an expansive facility to assemble its Alpha

(and eventually the larger Beta) rockets, near the large Blue Origin plant in Florida's Exploration Park area.

This will be Firefly's second launch site, as it previously has announced plans to launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. That's where the first Alpha vehicle will launch from, and for now, it's still scheduled to take flight in December of this year. The company did not say when it anticipates flying from Florida for the first time.

Resurrection

Firefly is based just north of Austin, Texas. It presently has a research and development site about 30 miles northwest of its headquarters, in Briggs. The company can build up to eight Alpha rockets a year at the Texas site, so if it is successful in meeting its launch goals of dozens of missions a year, it will need the Florida facility to come online in the early 2020s.

The aerospace company has made a remarkable comeback since 2016, when its founder Tom Markusic could no longer raise the funds needed to keep the firm going. It has since retooled with stable financing from Ukrainian businessman Max Polyakov and increased the capacity of its Alpha vehicle to 1 ton to low-Earth orbit. Although Firefly certainly must cross technical hurdles to reach the launch pad, it is clear that the company is doing a credible job on the equally important task of creating the massive infrastructure needed to support the development, assembly, and launch of boosters.

For Space Florida, this is a nice win, too. Last October, a Firefly competitor, Rocket Lab, announced that it would build its first US-based launch site at Wallops Island, in Virginia, rather than in Florida. "We lost the Rocket Lab site earlier, but this is much better for Florida as Rocket Lab wasn't going to assemble their vehicle here," one Florida-based source told Ars.

Listing image by Firefly

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