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Greater Washington's first smart city accelerator now accepting applications

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The products that make cities "smart" will be developed, tested and perhaps scaled in our backyard.

A partnership of the Herndon-based Center for Innovative Technology, D.C.-based Smart City Works and 22 CityLink, the master developer of the Gramercy District smart city planned for Ashburn, is accepting applications for its initial cohort of companies in Smart City Works @ Herndon. The program, expected to launch March 27, is pitched as the world's first smart city "actuator" — think next-level accelerator — focused exclusively on early-stage companies with products that serve the needs of smart cities.



"We are mission focused," said David Heyman, a co-founder of Smart City Works. "We want to make cities safer, more efficient and more resilient. We want to improve the functionality of cities through the built environment."

Much like a business accelerator, the actuator will focus on growing early-stage businesses to the point of commercialization and installation in global urban environments. Each participant will undergo a three-month intensive market and technical boot camp, connect with mentors and graduate with a "Demo Day" in front of investors, end-users and corporations that might take a product to the next level.

Smart City Works @ Herndon will fund up to \$50,000 per company, taking as much as 8 percent equity in each. CIT and Smart City Works are targeting 10 companies for the initial cohort, all of which will bring to the table emerging products in either transportation, resilience and public safety, or construction techniques.

CIT, which will co-operate the actuator much like it does the Mach37 accelerator for cybersecurity companies — will host Smart City Works @ Herndon initially in its headquarters on Rock Hill Road, though it is expected to move to Gramercy District once the development, located adjacent to the future Ashburn

Metro station, delivers.

As we detailed in our recent cover story on Gramercy, the plan for Greater Washington's first smart city is to open the first phase of the \$500 million, 2.5 million-square-foot development in 2019, a year before the second phase of the Silver Line launches service. Gramercy's Phase 1A is expected to feature a single seven-story building, with up to 44,500 square feet of retail on the ground-floor topped by 55,000 square feet of office and then 350 apartments.

Actuator graduates will have a "direct path to a live test environment at Gramercy," said David Ihrle, CIT's chief technology officer.

"22 CityLink will participate in the cohort through curriculum development, and selection and mentorship of these early stage companies," Minh Le, 22 CityLink's managing partner, said in a statement. "We will also provide the graduates access to our ecosystem of world-class partners, manufacturing capabilities, education programs, co-working space and development sandbox for further growth."

Smart City Works is led by Heyman, former assistant secretary of policy for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Robert Mazer, a former equity partner at **Vinson and Elkins** LLP; and Gregory Sauter, former chief corporate officer of AECOM.

The actuator they have created, Heyman said, is geared toward changing the very paradigm of how cities are built. Smart City Works @ Herndon, he said, will not only train its participants on the market and connect them to potential business partners — it will help derisk potential investments by selecting products based on what cities need, overcoming design and technical hurdles, and establishing a network of test beds (like Gramercy) and end users (cities).

On its website, Smart City Works writes that the actuator "is designed to equip companies with the skills, market awareness, and validated products to be highly competitive, growth oriented, and investment ready."

"Our unique focus on the built environment aims to dramatically change the way we design, build, and operate civil infrastructure," the website states. "With unmatched capability and a world class network of technical resources and cities, we go beyond traditional accelerators to more rapidly move the best technology solutions cities need into the hands of city managers and solution-providing companies."

Michael Neibauer

Associate Editor

Washington Business Journal

