

# Long-planned Northern Virginia science center eyes a 2022 groundbreaking

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COURTESY HGA

Plans for the Northern Virginia Science Center have changed over the years — and the building is finally poised to break ground.

The Children's Science Center hopes to break ground next year on its long-planned Northern Virginia Science Center, more than seven years after [announcing it had picked a site in Loudoun County](#) for what was then a substantially smaller project.

The science center, in partnership with the Science Museum of Virginia, [had hoped to complete fundraising for the project](#) in time to break ground by December 2019. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as a realization that the team had carved out too small a piece of the 424-acre mixed-use Kincora development by Tritec Real Estate Co. than could accommodate the 70,000-square-foot facility's programming needs.

“We’re now tracking toward a 2022 groundbreaking. And the reasoning there is in part because, as we got into the design, our partners and the architects said, ‘Hey, we need a bigger parcel for everything you’re trying to do,’” said [Nene Spivy](#), executive director for the science center. “If you’re going to build something that’s going to last for decades and decades, you might as well get it right.”

The team has retained [HGA](#) to design the project, which has been shifted from a 1.5-acre parcel closer to Kincora's center to a larger, 5-acre section further north, nestled against the backdrop of natural parkland leading to Broad Run, Spivy said. The geographic shift [was approved](#) by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors just before the full force of the pandemic hit Greater Washington, key to its ability to move forward despite the crisis. But that change also required more time to redesign and entitle the project, which now can

also accommodate a planned expansion wing with a dome theater for large-format films and potentially even a planetarium contemplated for a future phase.

Organizers said the new site's natural setting is proving a better fit for the focus of the science center. Architects changed the building's look to better connect with those surroundings, said [Marc L'Italien](#), a design principal with HGA specializing in cultural and higher education projects. Sharper edges have been crafted into more of a curvilinear style with rounded edges.

“As a museum architecture firm, one of the things we’re always careful about is making sure we provide situations where there’s ample space to expand in the future,” L'Italien said.

Today, the team is \$6.7 million away from its \$75 million fundraising goal, thanks in large part to [backing from the commonwealth](#), Loudoun County and a \$10 million donation from [Northwest Federal Credit Union](#) — enough to break ground once the project has been redesigned and fully entitled. The center hopes to announce another major donation in late September or early October.

“We were nervous because we’ve been working on this for 14 years and [thought] now the pandemic’s going to take us down. But our funding stayed intact and our supporters stayed at the table,” Spivy said. “We want to bring this over the finish line and break ground in 2022, and we want to find those partners that are going to help us do that. This is for the community and by the community, so don’t feel like it’s too big to make a difference.”

The science center is one of two planned museums at Kincora, where a National Museum of Intelligence and Special Operations is also on the books. Both will be a [part of the larger mixed-use development](#) expected to span 6.7 million square feet of residential, office, retail, hotel, civic and cultural uses. That retail is slated to include a Wawa convenience store and, potentially, a Bowlero or similar [bowling alley-themed entertainment tenant](#).

“As a cultural amenity — not just for our project but for Loudoun County and Northern Virginia — it’s really a great addition to the landscape,” said [Christopher Kelly](#), a Tritec spokesman, said of the new science center. “The way that project is designed now, with the Children’s Science Center on one side of the project and the MISO museum on the opposite bookend of the street, is going to create a better development.”



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