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This new research hub is a $75 million bet on Houston's tech and innovation future

By **Marissa Luck**, *Staff Writer*

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The Arc is new research and development hub coming to the Ion innovation district in Houston that will bring private industry and academic researchers together under one roof.
Courtesy of Bogza

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Rice University broke ground on an expansion of its innovation district in Midtown Houston this week, another step in its yearslong effort to foster a stronger startup and tech ecosystem in Houston.

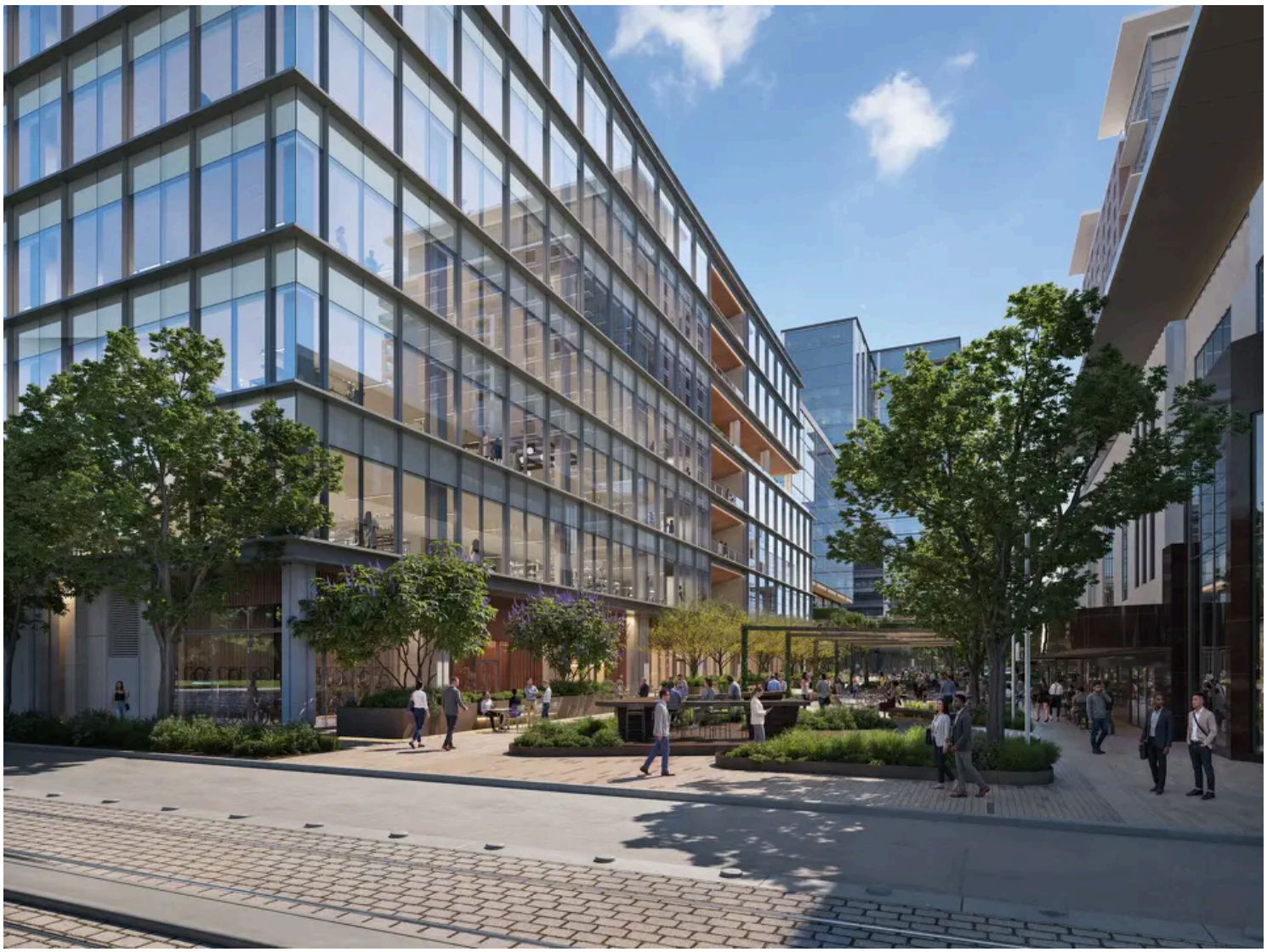
With the new $75 million facility, Rice said it aims to bring academic and private industry researchers across multiple disciplines under one 200,000-square-foot roof.

Known as the Arc, the project will be built infront of the existing Ion building on Main Street within Rice's roughly 16-acre innovation district. Expected to open in 2028, the seven-story facility will offer a mix of office, laboratory and research space meant to attract companies in fields such as energy, data science, artificial intelligence and computational engineering. The effort, Rice officials said, could accelerate how quickly lab discoveries turn into real-world technologies and products.

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The Arc represents the most significant expansion of the innovation district since the flagship Ion building opened in 2021 within a former Sears department store. The university has attracted several tenants and corporate partners to the Ion, including Chevron, Microsoft and Aramco, as well as startups such as Persona AI.



The Arc will share a central plaza with the flagship Ion building. The facilities will be across from Greentown Labs, a clean energy startup incubator that is also part of Rice's innovation district.
Courtesy of Bogza

The flagship Ion building is almost fully leased, motivating the university to launch the Arc in response to demand, said Kelly Fox, executive vice president at Rice University, in an interview. The new facility will feature more amenities and more lab space than the initial building, she said.

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Rice University will occupy about 80,000 square feet in the Arc to house a variety of programs, including a new AI-related division called The Foundry. The program will allow Rice's AI researchers to operate closer to private industry, said David Sholl, executive vice president at Rice University.

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The remaining 120,000 square feet in the Arc will be marketed to outside organizations focused on research and development across a broad spectrum of fields and companies, from small startups to big corporate users.

The Arc's leasing team has had "meaningful conversations" with a variety of prospective tenants, including clean energy firms, national security organizations and AI-related companies, said Justin Brasell with real estate Transwestern, which is overseeing leasing for the project.

Fox, the Rice executive vice president overseeing the project, said there has not been any additional tenants signed yet, but the university is optimistic about the prospective demand for the space and it is underwriting the first phase.

The Arc builds on the foundation the Ion started, creating opportunities for more companies to join the district's ecosystem of entrepreneurs, researchers and inventors, Fox said.

"Together, these spaces will strengthen Houston's position as a destination for innovation," Fox said.

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Previously, Luck covered commercial real estate in Texas for CoStar News; real estate for Austin Business Journal; energy for Houston Chronicle; and business news for The Daily News in Longview, Wash. She's won awards from Society of Professional Journalists and National Association of Real Estate Editors, and her byline has appeared in numerous publications nationally. Originally from Hawaii, Luck grew up in the Pacific Northwest and studied international political economy at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash. She now lives in Midtown Houston.

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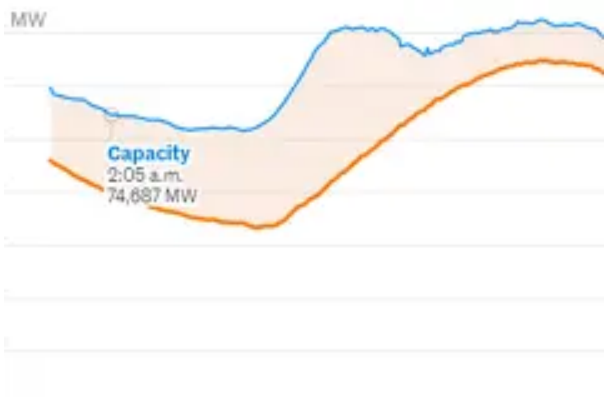
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