



"Technology City of the South"

# The Alpharetta Story

May 2025

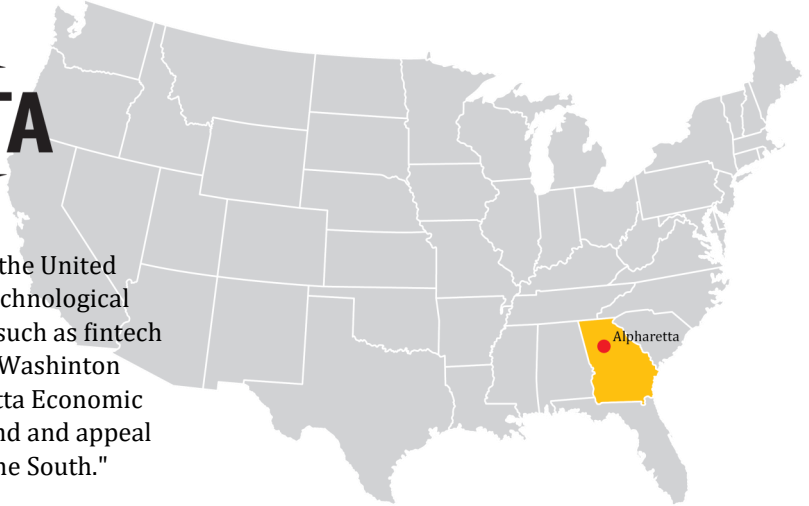
WASHINGTON | CORE



# ALPHARETTA

## GEORGIA

Alpharetta, located outside Atlanta, Georgia in the United States, is a rapidly developing industrial and technological cluster with around 4,800 companies in fields such as fintech and medical devices, and 900 tech companies. Washington CORE spoke with Charlie Jewell of the Alpharetta Economic Development Department about the background and appeal of what is now called the "Technology City of the South."



### INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES EXPANDING PRESENCE

An executive at the U.S. subsidiary of Beckhoff Automation GmbH & Co. KG, a global German manufacturer of industrial automation equipment, describes their new office opened in Alpharetta in August 2024: "Our new facility serves as a hub for the southeastern United States, demonstrating not only internal collaboration but also a strong commitment to our customers." The 1,500-square-meter office will serve primarily as a sales and support center and will also host meetings and seminars with customers. The company regards Alpharetta as a "strategic location for expanding customer and market share in the southeastern United States, where global manufacturing giants are concentrated."

The city is also attracting companies in the medical device and biotechnology sectors. For example, in June 2021, German medical device giant Pajunk relocated its U.S. headquarters to Alpharetta. In the U.S., local anesthetic products have been in growing demand as they help reduce the prescription of opioids, which have caused widespread addiction issues. Pajunk has been expanding its business in this field. In Alpharetta, the company built a large facility, including a 15,000-square-meter building and a 9,000-square-meter warehouse.

### GROWING TECH PRESENCE

Located about 30 miles north of Atlanta, the economic and commercial hub of Georgia and the broader southern U.S., Alpharetta was originally a sleepy suburb. In recent years, however, Alpharetta has seen significant growth in technology-related companies. According to Economic Development Director Charlie Jewell, more than 900 technology-focused companies are now based in the city. In the medical technology sector, in addition to Pajunk, U.S. firms such as two subsidiaries of Alora Pharmaceuticals and medical



staffing company Rep-Lite have recently relocated their headquarters to Alpharetta.

Now a major industrial cluster, the city's population of 67,000 nearly doubles to 100,000 on weekdays, reflecting its economic vibrancy. Additionally, 71% of its residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, far exceeding the national average of 35%.<sup>1,2</sup> Jewell sees North Carolina's Charlotte and Texas's Austin—both renowned technology hubs—as Alpharetta's primary rivals. However, Alpharetta distinguishes itself through several key advantages. For example, the cost of living in Alpharetta is approximately 2.4% lower than in Austin<sup>3</sup> and Alpharetta offers a high safety index for quality of living, scoring 90.14, compared to Charlotte's moderate safety index of 53.48.<sup>4</sup>

### FIBER-OPTIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUSINESS INCENTIVES

Since the 1990s, Alpharetta has focused on the technology industry, introducing fiber-optic networks citywide early in the internet era. This infrastructure

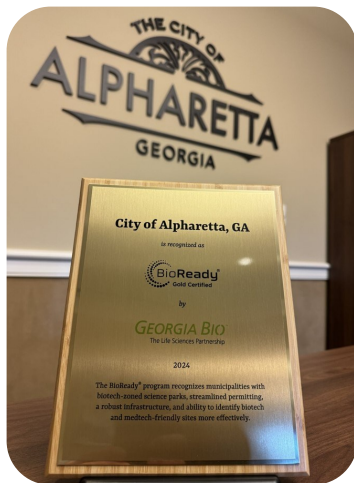
attracted businesses, leading to the arrival of over 300 IT companies in the following decade. Today, even Morgan Stanley has a global center in Alpharetta.

The city has also been proactive in attracting businesses through various incentive programs. For example, companies that establish operations in Alpharetta receive liaison support from city officials to help companies locate within the city. Additionally, businesses that hire Alpharetta residents can receive subsidies of \$250 to \$500 per employee.

A particular focus has been on attracting research and development firms and small to mid-sized manufacturers. Jewell notes that while the city does not have large industrial zones, it supports businesses that seek "economies of scope" through collaboration. The city's zoning ordinance for office properties allows for light industrial use and wet and dry labs.

## INDUSTRY AS AN INCUBATOR

The local business community also plays a significant role in supporting innovation. In 2012, major companies and the city established the nonprofit "Tech Alpharetta." In addition to facilitating networking among existing businesses, Tech Alpharetta functions as an incubator for startups.



Its "Innovation Center" houses about 50 tech startups, spanning fields such as medical devices, healthcare, fintech, server security, smart cities, and machine learning. Volunteers from major companies, such as Amazon Web Services, Best Buy, Global Payments, LexisNexis Risk Solutions, Morgan Stanley, Microsoft, and Verint<sup>5</sup> serve as mentors, providing guidance.

Moreover, in November 2024, Alpharetta received a Gold BioReady Community certification from Georgia Bio, an organization promoting the life sciences industry. This certification informs companies looking to relocate that the city is a biotech friendly zone to do business.

## EDUCATION & TALENT PIPELINE: STEM TRAINING IN ALPHARETTA

Education plays a vital role in Alpharetta's emergence as a tech hub. A standout example is Innovation Academy, a \$68 million public STEM high school

launched in 2021 by Fulton County. Located in Alpharetta, the school offers students specialized pathways in engineering, healthcare, and information technology, aligning directly with the city's booming tech ecosystem. Its regional magnet model draws students from across North Fulton County, preparing the next generation for careers in advanced industries.

Additionally, Gwinnett Technical College operates a campus in Alpharetta, offering workforce development programs in computer science, health sciences, business, and life sciences. Georgia State University also maintains a campus in the city with two-year degree offerings that can transfer into four-year tracks in Atlanta.

While Georgia Tech is not physically located in Alpharetta, its proximity in Atlanta and its reputation as the "MIT of the South" make it a key regional player in talent development and research partnerships.

## BALANCING GROWTH WITH QUALITY OF LIFE

Despite Alpharetta's rapid growth, it has retained its small-town charm. Jason Perez, founder of a startup under Tech Alpharetta, remarks, "When people think of 'technology,' they imagine skyscrapers in Boston, New York, Silicon Valley, or San Francisco. But here, you can still dine at family-owned restaurants and safely walk the streets with your kids." He highlights that Alpharetta's appeal lies in its "small-town atmosphere."

Alpharetta has managed to preserve its Southern charm while becoming a hub for cutting-edge industries like medical technology. Jewell attributes the city's success to prioritizing quality of life over mere economic expansion, ensuring that incoming companies align with the community's vision.







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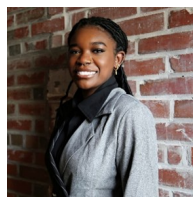
## Interviewer

**Charlie Jewell** is an economic development professional with over 16 years of experience. As the Director of Economic Development for the City of Alpharetta, GA, he is dedicated to fostering business growth and enhancing the city's economic vitality. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration and a Graduate Certificate in Economic Development from Virginia Tech, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from Radford University.

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## Folake Amoda, Researcher



Folake Amoda is a research analyst and project coordinator at Washington CORE. Her role encompasses an extensive array of research topics, ranging from decarbonization business strategies and environmental policies in major economies to wastewater technologies, nuclear emergency responses, ESG financing, costly cell and gene therapy treatments, and emerging information and communication technologies. Employing a multifaceted approach, she conducts comprehensive literature reviews and interview-based research, alongside insightful case studies, across these domains. Folake holds a BA in International Affairs from the University of Georgia.