

Business without borders

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THE NEWS that Vertex Pharmaceuticals will move its headquarters from Cambridge to Boston's Seaport District may be a victory for Mayor Menino's efforts to create an "innovation district" along the waterfront, but it makes little difference to the Massachusetts economy. Rather than compete over which address gets plugged into the workers' GPS systems, Massachusetts cities should be joining together to expand the state's economic pie.

Thankfully, that mission seems to be gaining some traction on both sides of the Charles. Last month, city councilors in technology-rich Boston and Cambridge advanced an innovation of their own: instead of competing for business, why not join forces to woo entrepreneurs to the region who might otherwise relocate to Silicon Valley? The creation of a forum to explore such strategies showed enterprise on the parts of then Boston City Council president Michael Ross and first-term Cambridge councilor Leland Cheung, and should be embraced by others in Massachusetts.

It's not just other states that pose competition. Emerging megacities in China and elsewhere are aggressively recruiting high-tech firms. The battle now and in the future isn't the Seaport District vs. Kendall Square, but Massachusetts vs. the world.

Young entrepreneurs from clean-tech firms and other growing companies want to work and live near each other. Up to now, tech firms have generally chosen to locate near MIT and Harvard or in suburban office parks along major highways, but these established clusters also benefit if the footprint of the local high-tech industry expands. The more potential niches that Greater Boston offers, the better it can compete for promising businesses and talented workers.

Cambridge's natural strength is its two big-name research universities. In Boston, the Menino administration is making a somewhat different pitch — one that focuses not only on flexible research space, but also on housing that fits the lifestyles and pocketbooks of young researchers. Companies and developers are responding. One recent arrival to Boston's Marine Industrial Park is Oasys, a company that specializes in low-cost, low-energy methods to desalinate sea water. Nearby, plans are underway to build scores of rental apartments, including units that reflect many young researchers' priorities by featuring larger work spaces and smaller kitchens.

The same principle of regional cooperation that's taking root in Cambridge and Boston should apply to Holyoke and Springfield, New Bedford and Fall River, and other twinned cities that sometimes end up pulling against each other rather than against outside

competitors. If Massachusetts is to thrive, local officials should make even greater efforts to encourage business without borders. ■