

## Welcome to Starbase: Elon Musk to get his own city in Texas

Residents of Boca Chica Village vote to create new municipality housing many SpaceX employees

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A giant bust of SpaceX founder Elon Musk near Boca Chica Village, Texas, whose residents have backed a proposal to make the area Starbase city Credit: Valerie Gonzalez/AP

Elon Musk may have his sights set on Mars, but for the time being the billionaire is building an empire closer to home.

The Tesla and SpaceX tycoon has been given the green light to set up his own new city in south Texas – dubbed Starbase – after securing the backing of an overwhelming majority of locals, many of whom he employs.

A ballot on Saturday secured 212 votes in favour and just six against. The vote also secured the election of the city's first mayor and two other officials, all of whom are current or former employees of Mr Musk's company SpaceX.

The tycoon celebrated the result in a post on X that read: "Starbase, Texas is now a real city!" The billionaire first publicly suggested the idea in 2021.

Texas's newest city, which covers just 1.5 sq miles, will be formed from a string of neighbourhoods in a remote area currently known as Boca Chica Village that is home to SpaceX's rocket launch site.

Over the last seven years, the billionaire has transformed the sleepy beachfront area into a manufacturing hub dominated by SpaceX's headquarters, where the company builds and launches its Starship rocket on test flights. The rocket is at the heart of Mr Musk's ambition to establish a human settlement on Mars.

The Tesla boss's influence extends beyond just bringing jobs to the area: already, Boca Chica Village has several murals depicting the tycoon and his favoured "Doge" meme, while there is even a huge bronze bust of his head. The 9ft-tall statue bears a plaque reading: "ELON AKA Memelord".



A piñata representing Elon Musk at Boca Chica Beach in Brownsville, Texas, during a protest against the village becoming its own municipality, known as Starbase Credit: Gabriel Cardenas/AFP via Getty Images

SpaceX, which is run by Mr Musk, first proposed the idea of turning Boca Chica Village into a city last December, saying it would help it to reach its “goal of making south Texas the gateway to Mars”.

While the vote will not give Mr Musk free reign to adopt any regulations he wants, City officials will be able to do things such as shut down roads during rocket launches and build new housing for SpaceX staff.

The company has complained that it has been prevented from building enough housing for the hundreds of workers who want to live near the headquarters. A recent attempt to build more accommodation was rejected by local county officials.

In addition to the incorporation, locals elected Bobby Peden, a 36-year-old SpaceX employee who has worked at the company since 2013, as the town’s new mayor alongside two city commissioners.

Little is known about the town’s new leaders, who are all connected to SpaceX and ran unopposed with no campaigning.

An X account was created for the new city shortly after the results emerged. In its first post, it said: “Becoming a city will help us continue building the best community possible for the men and women building the future of humanity’s place in space.”

Mr Musk is not the only tech billionaire looking to create his own new enclave. Marc Andreessen, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist known for inventing Netscape, and Reid Hoffman, the co-founder of LinkedIn, are among the backers of California Forever, a real estate company plotting a new city after buying tens of thousands of acres of land near San Francisco.

PayPal tycoon Peter Thiel was one of the first investors in Seasteading, a libertarian project aimed at building floating cities in the middle of the ocean. Crypto entrepreneurs have also tried to create their own utopia in Puerto Rico.

Victory for Mr Musk’s SpaceX was widely expected given that almost all of the 283 eligible voters in the area were employees and their families.



A man in Boca Chica, Texas, wearing a T-shirt reading 'Starbase', the proposed new name for the village Credit: Valerie Gonzalez/AP

Despite this, the vote did face protests amid concerns SpaceX would be granted the power to shut down access to the town's public beach whenever it wanted. The bust of Mr Musk was last month defaced by vandals.

Local Rene Medrano, who grew up going to the Boca Chica beach, told the Texas Tribune: "It's just such a disgrace on what's happening out here. There's a lot of upset community people who are seeing there's a great chance that we may lose this beach."

Mr Musk has recently relocated many of his companies and headquarters from California to Texas as he seeks out more favourable regulation in the Republican-run state. He recently bought a \$35m (£26m) compound in Texas, which is designed to house 11 of his children by different mothers.

County officials will canvass the results of the vote within the next fortnight before the official incorporation is declared by a judge. However, Remi Garza, the elections administrator for Cameron County, said: "It's officially statistically impossible for the measure to fail. Cameron County is about to have a new city."