

# Coming soon to Mountain View: Drone deliveries

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Mountain View, California, residents will soon be able to order food, medicine and other small parcels to their homes via drone.

Although the exact date has yet to be finalized, Silicon Valley [drone](#) technology company Matternet will launch its [pilot program](#) in its home city later this year.

Matternet will start with a couple of drones to test the waters.

The company is still in talks with various merchants and vendors that could serve as partners for the service.

There will be a website and an app where residents can place orders from [local businesses](#). The company is eyeing food and medicine deliveries as the drones can carry packages up to just 4.5 pounds. The drones will initially be limited to a 1.5-mile radius around the hub where the flying robots will be housed—on Ravendale Drive just off Highway 237—but are capable of traveling within a 5-mile radius.

"We're going to have initially one hub at our office, and we're going to launch to serve a few residential neighborhoods around here," said Andreas Raptopoulos, CEO and co-founder of Matternet. "The key thing is that we want the city and the residents to get excited about this service."

While the drones are pilotless, they are monitored and controlled from a "mission control" center at Matternet's headquarters. Once the drone picks up the package from the vendor or merchant, it brings it to the customer's house or office. People will have the option of having the package dropped off at the front door or the backyard.

The drone then lowers the item via a cord while still hovering above ground, then flies back to the docking station at the hub.

For the pilot run, the delivery services will be free for Mountain View residents. Subsequent fees have yet to be determined.

The idea for drone deliveries came about several years ago, according to Raptopoulos, who co-founded the startup in Palo Alto in 2011.

"Every time I press click, there's a human that gets into a two-ton car, drives across town to pick up something small like a sandwich, and then brings it over here," Raptopoulos said, referring to food ordering apps such as GrubHub, DoorDash and Uber Eats.

The advantage of having small items delivered by drone is that they don't have to deal with traffic and emit no greenhouse gases.

"This happens (food deliveries by cars) millions of times a day. And it has a massive environmental footprint," Raptopoulos said. "It taxes the roads with more traffic. It slows things down for people. So we'd love to see if this technology can really be embedded in the Valley and bring these benefits to the residents."

But it took some time before Matternet could bring its services home, as it had to secure certification from the Federal Aviation Administration to legally fly drones beyond the "line of sight."

Air travel is somewhat restrictive around Mountain View, home to Moffett Federal Airfield, which is used by both civilian and military aircraft.

"It took us a long time (to get FAA approval), but I think once we got over that hurdle nationally, the follow-up effort to get it here in the Bay Area was not too hard," said Jim O'Sullivan, vice president for regulatory strategy. "They know that we're an experienced and safe operator, and that makes it easier to get over the hurdle."

While the service is new to the Bay Area, the drone company has been operating in other locations for several years already.

Operations in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Zurich, Switzerland, are focused on delivering medical items, including lab specimens and specialty pharmaceuticals, to hospitals. Meanwhile, in Florida, UPS uses Matternet to transport prescriptions from a CVS pharmacy to residents of The Villages retirement community.

Prior to the pilot launch, Matternet is working on getting in touch with [community members](#) and the local government to tailor their services to better meet their needs.

"We're doing community outreach now. It's important to not surprise residents," O'Sullivan said. "We'll also be participating in the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce's Technology Showcase. That's a way for Mountain View residents to get involved."

The local government in Mountain View, home to tech giant Google, is also no stranger to high-tech solutions. The city already has Nuro autonomous delivery vehicles on the road bringing people food and sidewalk bots delivering library books.

Mayor Pat Showalter said she welcomes Matternet's drones as an addition to the city's high-tech services available to the public, as they could be helpful for residents with mobility issues, such as elderly residents or people with disabilities.

"It will certainly be helpful for residents, but we'll be watching to make sure it's done safely," Showalter said.

Mountain View Chamber of Commerce President Peter Katz said he was also looking forward to Matternet serving inaccessible areas of the city.

"We are excited and looking forward to this kind of service coming here

to serve residents who live in hard-to-reach places in the city," Katz said.

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