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## NEWS LOCAL

### Shoemaker wants city to lure Amazon to SSM

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

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(AFP/Getty Images)

Amazon is putting out a call to cities across North America asking them to woo them into setting up a second headquarters and Matthew Shoemaker wants the city to answer that call.

The Ward 3 councillor has penned a resolution for Monday, asking that city staff and the Economic Development Corp. review Amazon's RFP documents and submit a proposal to the online giant for the city to host the project.

A joint international venture with **Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.**, should also be explored, the resolution reads.

Amazon's RFP, posted on its website last week, invites communities in a metropolitan statistical area to enter into a competitive site selection process for its second corporate headquarters.

The existing headquarters is in Seattle, Wash.

Proposals, to be received by an Oct. 19 deadline, specifically set the giant online company's preferences and requirements.

It's looking for a metropolitan area with more than one million people, a stable and business friendly environment, a strong labour market and good real estate options.

A shovel-ready site of about 100 acres is needed, as are specific fibre optic connectivity and a labour force of about 50,000 people.

Shoemaker said the \$5 billion investment by Amazon could be a game changer for any city.

He's cognizant that while **Sault** Ste. Marie can check off the boxes for many of Amazon's preferences - like land availability, operational costs connectivity, transportation networks and quality of life - there are some challenges that the application may face.

"The RFP doesn't say a community 'must have' these things. It says it has 'preferences' and certainly we can check off most of the boxes we have and can work around some of the others," he said.

The RFP was already seen by the EDC's Nevin Buconjic, manager of trade, investment and community marketing.

"This would represent a huge opportunity for any community in North America to get a headquarters like this," he said.

Buconjic said he's already met with **Sault** Ste. Marie Innovation Centre to see if the city can meet the IT components listed in the RFP.

And apparently it can, he said.

Challenges would be in the labour market area, Buconjic said.

"Clearly we don't have 50,000 people available to work. Our labour market isn't even that big so we'd really need to look at how we can capture that opportunity somewhere," he said.

A unique spin on **Sault** Ste. Marie's application could be a joint proposal with **Sault** Ste. Marie, Mich.

The international border poses interesting opportunities for such markets. Proximity to major transportation networks such as air, rail, water a road can easily be identified although Amazon is looking at travel times to international airports as an important consideration.

Buconjic said an interesting aspect of the RFP document is that Amazon is also looking for a "cultural community fit" for its long-term success including the presence and support of a diverse population, higher educational institutions and a government structure eager to work with the company.

Shoemaker says networks to international transportation hubs are simple and within a one-hour flight from **Sault** Ste. Marie and shipping channels can easily reach 40 million people around the Great Lakes basin.

As well, about four 100-acre sites that could house a 500,000-square-foot building have been identified and the city already works with area post-secondary institutions to create the training needed to supply the labour market.

"We already believe we have the quality of life and certainly, we live in the best city in North America," he said.

With **Sault** Ste. Marie already the home of the corporate headquarters for OLG, Shoemaker said it has proven it can host a major headquarters.

What's more important to both Shoemaker and Buconjic is that Amazon's RFP process is unique and likely being monitored by other big companies.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time any major company has looked at building a headquarters this way. If it's successful, this unique, forward-thinking RFP could become a practice by others," he said.


Buconjic agrees and says the RFP puts the onus on communities to put their best foot forward - and incentives - to lure the business there.

"This is a very specific RFP in some ways and it makes us look beyond what we've traditionally had to do. It's a good exercise to prepare ourselves and really determine what our assets and limitations are," he said. "We're up against some really big cities in Ontario, like Toronto and Waterloo and not to mention the U.S. cities," he said.

It's also expected that Windsor and Detroit will be submitting a similar joint proposal.

The RFP due date gives cities little time to prepare.


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