
OPINION COLUMN

Handy for upcoming, ambitious projects

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star

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(AFP/Getty Images)

SAULT STE. MARIE - No one can argue that Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker is not ambitious when he brings forth ideas to city council.

His ambition shone last week in his monologue, easily explaining why Sault Ste. Marie should submit a response to a request for proposal from online giant Amazon to set up its second headquarters in Sault Ste. Marie.

He easily convinced city council to support his motion, directing staff at the Economic Development Corp., and the city to work on, and submit, a proposal to the Seattle, Wash.,-based company.

"We've got this," Shoemaker repeated in his passionate speech to city council, ticking off the requirements and preferences the RFI listed in its documentation.

Truth be told, we don't have it all, at least not directly, but Shoemaker has used his outside-the-box thinking to turn the negatives into positives and find ways to suggest that Sault Ste. Marie's proposal can be viable.

Some members of city council were so impressed they suggested that Shoemaker be the one to travel to present the RFP to Amazon decision makers personally.

Mayor Christian Provenzano applauded Shoemaker's ambition, noting that Sault Ste. Marie needs to take that type of positive

attitude and forward-thinking in everything it does.

“The naysayers will tell us that we aren’t the type of city that can sustain a mega corporate headquarters . . . don’t just read the headlines and think it’ll never happen. Read the RFP and think ‘How can we make this happen,’” Shoemaker told council.

He’s hit the nail on the head.

Quite simply, if you don’t try, you won’t succeed.

Sure, Sault Ste. Marie will be facing stiff competition from across North America and larger, metropolitan Ontario cities such as Toronto, Kitchener, Waterloo, and an array of American counterparts.

And in the end, it may not win the bid.

But the exercise of researching, writing and submitting such an application is important and can serve as a learning tool for the future.

Shoemaker doesn’t deny that the bid will be a long shot. But as he says, partnering with our Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., counterparts offers something unique in our bid that the GTA – or any other area – cannot offer.

It also “helps fend against the ire that could be raised if Amazon were to move entirely into Canada without a U.S. presence for HQ,” he told The Sault Star.

The Amazon proposal is not the only ambitious project city council is working on.

Council will debate a motion penned by Provenzano at its next meeting asking that it support the development of “a compelling Smart Cities submission” to the federal government’s Infrastructure Canada Smart Cities Challenge.

The challenge was announced early this year as part of the federal government’s 2017 budget.

It’s designed to provide funding, under a competitive process, to develop technology and data applications that improve livability and opportunities for the community and its citizens.

Provenzano hopes that the Economic Development Corp., and Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre can partner with a committee of council to develop an application to submit to the competition.

Again, if successful, the resulting funding would help create jobs, increase the city’s tax base revenue and diversify the community.

Smart City attributes can be applied to all aspects of the city, including information systems, schools, libraries, hospitals, power plant and transportation systems, among other things.

The government’s challenge includes a prize of \$5 million for a small community application, and two prizes of \$10 million for mid-sized communities.

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