
OPINION

Amazon bid worth doing – even as practice

By SARA McCLEARY

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Just like a lot of Saultites, my immediate thought when I read about Amazon's call for proposals for a host city for what has been dubbed its HQ2 was that I hope the Sault throws its hat in the ring. But then I read the list of requirements and dismissed the idea.

I'm glad that Coun. Matthew Shoemaker is encouraging city staff to look into making a bid, but as more and more people add their opinions to the growing list of what might make or break a city's proposal, I hope ours takes all those factors into consideration while staying realistic about the possibilities.

For example, one former Amazon executive has suggested that first and foremost in Amazon's decision makers' minds will be the availability of computer scientists and engineers.

Apparently Amazon has struggled to fill these positions in Seattle, so the ready availability of workers to fill this void will likely play a major part in deciding where to establish HQ2.

With popular and successful computer programs at both the local college and university, the city staffers might consider playing up this angle in submitting our pitch, though I don't know that our supply would really be able to meet that demand.

Meanwhile, others have suggested that Amazon's transportation requirements will play the biggest role in the final decision.

With an additional "up to" 50,000 workers (by Amazon's count) injected into the successful community, not to mention the need to transport people and products, this would not be surprising.

Though we only have a small airport with limited international destinations, we do check most of the boxes on this one (although I'm not sure that our roads or public transit systems could really facilitate that many more commuters).

These are just a couple of the ideas floating around about what Amazon is really focusing on, but the fact remains that these are unlikely to outweigh the company's desire for a metropolitan city with a population greater than one million, or a city able to provide up to 50,000 workers (both numbers that are, quite frankly, pretty out-of-reach for the Sault, if we're being honest).

So by all means, city staff should put together a bid for Amazon's HQ2, and should address all the company's wants. But as one of those wants is "communities that think big and creatively," I want the City to really prove that one.

I know, as do most residents and even, I'm sure, does Shoemaker, that it's incredibly unlikely that the Sault will become Amazon's next North American home.

But let's take the lessons we're learning from this bid, all of the ideas, designs, and plans for Amazon, and apply them to other businesses. Don't wait for a company to put out a request for proposals — go to them.

Show big companies that we think big, that we have good, creative ideas, and that we're that scrappy little city with enough spunk to try to lure them away from big centres like Toronto or Chicago.

Show businesses what we can do for them, not what they would do for the city, and make them want to — NEED to — relocate here.

We might not check all of Amazon's boxes, but let's make the boxes for other businesses, boxes they didn't even know they needed checked.

Sara McCleary is a freelance writer and regular contributor to Sault This Week.

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