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## OPINION LETTERS

### Push for Amazon project a noble idea - LETTER

Letter To the Editor

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#### Letters to the editor

I applaud Ward 3 Councilor Matthew Shoemaker's energy and ambition in seeking to promote the Sault as the home to Amazon's new headquarters. But I am only clapping with one hand, producing the same silence as Mr. Shoemaker's initiative surely will.

In presenting his case, Mr. Shoemaker expounds on the virtues of the Sault and surrounding environs, citing several desirable attributes such as ample space, relatively efficient transportation routes, and general affordability. He has certainly provided a wonderful love letter to this fine community and the positivity he exudes is contagious.

But as the New York Times recently reported, cities throughout North America are embarking on exactly the same process, even sending civic representatives to Seattle to "walk as closely to Amazon's headquarters as is publicly accessible" (Ottawa) or assigning a student course project on the initiative at the prestigious Wharton Business School (Philadelphia). The twin Sault effort is not the only joint proposal in the works as Detroit and Windsor are also developing an Amazon plan. Many cities have produced promotional videos, presenting their communities in the best possible light and hopeful vaulting them to the top of Amazon's list. It's a strange courtship to be sure, something between corporate speed dating and the *The Bachelorette*. That many of these enticements don't have a chance of winning the competition seems not to matter nor does the slight whiff of desperation that permeates some of the hopeful applications. In the Sault's case, Shoemaker and the city council seem to comprehend the realities of the situation and understand what a long shot this is. The city's population doesn't meet the stated figures of the Amazon RFP nor is the civic infrastructure and university system sufficient. Indeed, the entire plan is structured around benefits to the Sault but it is a real stretch to see how the Sault's location would be an overall benefit or advantage to Amazon. This kind of one-way thinking is endemic to many of the efforts across the continent to win Amazon's corporate heart. What the city council has exactly right, however, is the belief that embarking on the RFP could prove to be a valuable exercise. As with any challenging enterprise, lessons will accrue from the process itself and unforeseen civic value, assets, and approaches will surely be revealed. It may be that the Sault's limitations are exposed but, simultaneously, its strengths will also be amplified, providing a firmer footing for future development opportunities. This kind

of review is always essential to successful management and it is probably the most advantageous component of Shoemaker’s objective to proceed with the proposal.

Sault citizens will learn plenty as the self–assessment and promotion process unfolds. The only criterion is that, in assigning time, committee personnel and resources to developing the Amazon pitch, council must keep close track of the expenditures and be fully transparent in declaring the costs associated with the proposal. At the very least, this is owed to the citizens.

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