

An Open Letter to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos

So last month, Amazon announced that you are looking for a location for your second headquarters (HQ2), and cities across North America jumped at a chance to submit proposals. You have your [list of things](#) you're looking for from cities—but we live in these cities, and we've got some expectations of our own for Amazon. We love jobs, we love technology, and we love convenience—but what you're looking for will impact every part of our cities. We built these cities, and we want to make sure they remain ours.

1--Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

It's clear that one of the main selling points of bringing Amazon's HQ2 to ANY city is that you've promised to create between 40-50,000 new jobs. Who doesn't love new jobs? Well, we think it's important to talk about the kinds of jobs we get. We believe that Amazon will need workers to do roughly four types of work: construction, permanent positions on your campus including service workers, programmers & administrators, and logistics.

Construction

The first big phase of Amazon's project will inevitably involve construction workers—you've got to build a campus big enough to house all those workers! As you think about coming to our city, we're asking you to make sure those are good jobs, available to us and our neighbors. We're asking you to:

- Reserve a substantial number of construction jobs for local residents, especially underrepresented people of color and women, and partner with workforce development and community organizations that can help ensure the success of a targeted hire program;
- Make sure that construction contractors enter into project labor agreements that will help ensure workers have protections on the job and can guarantee that construction will be completed on time using skilled hands;
- Use and invest in high quality pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs that create new pathways for underrepresented workers such as women and people of color;
- Protect the right to form a union, and to whistle-blow on unsafe conditions;
- Ensure that all construction employers on your project pay living wages, provide access to high-quality health benefits and retirement security, fair scheduling and health and safety education; and
- Implement measures that protect returning citizens from discrimination during the hiring process.

Permanent Campus Workers

A large part of Amazon's workforce will no doubt be highly-educated office workers -- you estimate the average pay for this new workforce will exceed \$100,000 per year!¹ Many tech companies, including Amazon, use guest worker visas to hire people with skills they claim not to be able to find in the US.² If these are the good jobs of our nation's future, let's make sure that Amazon HQ2 is helping us prepare our own kids, unemployed workforce, and returning citizens for them. We're asking you to:

- Create a mentoring program where Amazon engineers, economists, data scientists, accountants, and other professionals are partnered with hard science teachers in our school districts to help show kids what it's like to work in STEM;
- Partner with groups that provide skills trainings to adults, to make sure that our unemployed residents are learning what they need to work again;
- Respect the right of workers to form a union for all your workers, including the service workers that make your campus run, and remain neutral in any union organizing drives;
- Develop responsible contracting standards for service contracts to ensure that cafeteria workers, janitors, security officers and other onsite service workers are paid a livable wage, receive benefits equitable to those received by directly employed workers, have the right to a voice at work without fear of discrimination or retaliation, do not suffer mass layoffs when contracts change hands, and are protected from misclassification and other forms of wage theft;
- Partner with workforce development groups to provide job training for returning citizens;
- Hold monthly meetings where engineers who are working on automation efforts sit down with warehouse workers, delivery drivers, and other blue collar workers that may be impacted, to discuss the plans.

Logistics

Obviously, logistics and operations are at the very core of Amazon's DNA. In the past, Amazon's warehouses have been reported for [creating unsafe working conditions](#), and [outsourcing jobs](#). We realize that the plans for HQ2 don't directly project increased warehousing in our city—but some of us already have Amazon warehouses in our state, and we think you need to clean up your employment practices in them. We're asking you to:

- Agree to directly employ the majority of warehouse workers and severely limit the use of temp agencies;
- Respect workers' right to form or join a union, and protect whistleblowers;
- Allow independent, third party organizations to conduct health & safety trainings regularly;
- Pay living wages, provide access to high-quality health benefits and retirement security, and employ fair scheduling practices;

1

https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/G/01/Anything/test/images/usa/RFP_3._V516043504_.pdf

2

<https://www.seattletimes.com/business/microsoft/tech-firms-may-face-tough-fight-if-guest-worker-programs-are-next-trump-target/>

- Ensure that a substantial percentage of jobs go to working people from disadvantaged communities; workers who struggle with irregular employment; and the formerly incarcerated; and
- Allow warehouse workers to give input into planned automation, and provide retraining programs when automation causes job loss.

2--Building and Sustaining Great Communities

The qualities that Amazon is looking for in its new home search are the same things many of us want—it's perfectly normal to want a place where employees will enjoy “living, recreational opportunities, educational opportunities, and an overall high quality of life.” The things about our cities that make you want to move here are the same reasons many of us live here—we have great systems of higher education, museums, and infrastructure that helps move people and things from one place to another. But we got that stuff by collectively paying for it, through taxes, and we're expecting Amazon to pay your fair share if you end up being our neighbor.

Taxes

It goes without saying that you can't have great public services without paying taxes. We know you've had a little problem grasping that, sometimes. Here's the deal:

- If you want a highly-educated local talent pool you must pay all of your property taxes to fund our schools, public safety, infrastructure and other public goods and services;
- For the same reasons, you must pay sales taxes on the HQ2's building materials, machinery and equipment. And although you've finally this year started collecting sales taxes on your own goods in every state with a sales tax,³ you need to also do that on sales conducted on your platform by third parties.
- You must not seek to keep your employees' state personal income taxes, nor should you seek the right to sell your corporate income tax credits to other companies.

Transportation

We love that you're looking for cities that have robust public transit infrastructure—but we know that an influx of 50,000 new people will strain our existing service, and building new transit to serve Amazon could divert funds from the rest of us. Let's make sure that, as transit gets built out, it's working for everyone in our community. We're asking you to:

- Support transit investment that serves us all, especially communities that rely on public transit;
- Make sure that discussion of new lines, new routes, or other expansion of transit services includes community input;
- Ensure affordability for all users of any new systems of public transportation;

³ <http://money.cnn.com/2017/03/29/technology/amazon-sales-tax/index.html>;
<https://itep.org/amazon-will-collect-every-state-sales-tax-by-april-1/>

- Decrease carbon emissions by only using clean-energy vehicles; and
- Make sure that jobs created by transportation construction and expansion follow the same principles we laid out for construction jobs on your own site.

Housing

It's no secret that the tech industry has hastened an affordable housing crisis in Seattle and other cities around the country⁴ (including some of ours!). We want to make sure that as our community grows, it's not outgrowing our ability to stay here. We're asking you to:

- Make a significant annual contribution to supporting the development and preservation of affordable housing in our city, including by contributing land to Community Land Trusts or similar organizations that will ensure housing affordability over the long term; and
- Support, with resources, organizations that are defending the rights of tenants and vulnerable homeowners.

Small Businesses

Small businesses give our cities character, charm, and local flavor. They're what people remember, when they visit—and provide goods and services that local residents count on from one generation to the next. We're committed to keeping them open and flourishing. You can support our small businesses when you:

- provide grants, business loans, or services to strengthen neighboring small businesses that may be impacted by development, including storefront improvement projects, commercial lease review, accounting, and business planning; and
- Establish a robust local vendor contracting program that ensures particularly local small minority- and women-owned businesses are able to benefit from contracting opportunities at HQ2.

3--Accountability & Transparency

Typically, these kinds of business development deals are negotiated in secret, with public comment only happening at the very end of the process. We believe that, as a 21st century technology company, you should be fully committed to open-sourcing the process of reaching a deal with our whole community. Here are some examples of what we expect to see:

⁴ <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015-12-29/tech-hubs-could-be-fueling-housing-bubble>;
<http://www.kiro7.com/news/local/sawant-homeless-explosion-in-seattle-happened-as-amazon-gobbled-up-prime-real-estate/604920450>;
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/09/23/seattlegrowth/WgwzzDLEiR2DM9bLYWwIUP/story.html>

This letter is now live-- [read & sign here](#).

- Prior to local project approvals, you'll engage in meaningful negotiation with community stakeholders regarding community benefits and measures to mitigate project impacts;
- You will enter into a legally-binding Community Benefits Agreement and other legally binding agreements with community stakeholders;
- You'll submit regular reports on Community Benefits to an oversight committee on which community stakeholders are directly represented;
- Prior to local project approvals, you'll provide the public with a detailed, verified Community Impact Report regarding the project's impacts on jobs, small businesses, housing, the treasury, the environment and public health;
- You'll provide the public with ongoing, verified information regarding hiring, wages and provision of community benefits throughout the life of the project, not just for your direct employees, but for contractors, sub-contractors and temp agencies; and
- In your hiring practices, you'll respect local labor policies and legislation, and not fight to have them pre-empted by the state.

To join as a signer of this letter, click [here](#).