

**January 12, 2019**

**Listening Session: Amazon in Arlington**

**SUMMARY**

On January 12, 2019, the Arlington County Board hosted a second listening session on Amazon's decision to locate a major new headquarters to Arlington over the next decade. The County Board felt it was important to provide an opportunity to listen to community opinions, concerns, and insights on the topic, outside of the traditional public hearing process. This session was part of an assortment of engagement opportunities that the County has hosted or attended regarding Amazon's announcement.

For more in-depth background information on Amazon coming to Arlington, see the information available at [www.arlingtonva.us/amazon](http://www.arlingtonva.us/amazon), which includes the presentation offered at the listening session and the fact sheets distributed at the listening session. The site also includes Arlington's proposal to Amazon, the fiscal and economic impact study commissioned by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Arlington's Amazon Virtual Learning Series, and other information.

This summary reflects the key themes identified at the January 12 listening session attended by approximately 180-200 participants.

Emerging themes throughout the morning included the following topics:

- Arlington's incentives proposed to Amazon
- Amazon's relationships with government agencies, especially ICE
- Amazon's motives
- Communication and engagement related to Amazon
- Affordable housing
- Transportation (traffic, parking, and public transportation capacity)
- School growth
- Impact on local business
- Growth and development
- Office vacancy
- Jobs
- Energy and environment

## **Arlington's Incentives Proposed to Amazon**

- [Transient Occupancy Tax \(TOT\)](#)
  - Pleased that incentives come back to the community.
  - Interest in learning more about how the \$23m TOT incentive was decided.
  - Concerns that Arlington (and the state) are subsidizing the wealthiest company in America.
  - Interest in the County using the TOT to support affordable housing instead of giving funds to Amazon.
- Board Vote on the Performance Agreement
  - Participants varied in their views regarding the performance agreement; with some participants expressing desire for the County Board to vote “no” to the performance agreement; and others applauding the County for securing this opportunity that can help with addressing commercial vacancy rates and raising commercial tax revenue.
  - Interest in the County Board slowing down their decision.
- Other
  - Concern that the fiscal and economic impact study does not include economic incentives.
  - Concerns about language in the Commonwealth agreement alerting Amazon about any FOIA requests; and interest in Arlington's commitment to [the FOIA process](#).
  - Concerns that Amazon doesn't seem to care about the will of the people in Seattle and that it will be the same in Arlington.
  - Concerns that the average salary in the [fiscal and economic impact study](#) uses \$150k as average salary, based on salaries as high as \$800K, which means there will also be lower wage workers included in that average.

## **Amazon's Relationships with Government Agencies, especially ICE**

- Concerns about how Amazon's work with ICE is not consistent with Arlington's values as a community that values all immigrants.
- Concerns regarding Amazon's work on a product used by police and government agencies and highlighted in an ACLU report.
- Interest in understanding how/if the process of negotiation to come to Arlington aligns with Amazon's contracts with DOD and other federal agencies.
- Concerns that we are not having a conversation about ICE because we don't want to discuss racism.
- Concerns that the County Board has not addressed or responded to the concerns raised about Amazon and ICE.

## **Amazon's Motives**

- Concerns that Amazon is only coming here for their proximity to the federal government, and not concerned about the needs of Arlington residents.
- Interest in ensuring that the County has resident's best interests in mind and not only Amazon's interests.
- Interest in the timing of Amazon coming to Arlington and if they intend to have a conversation with the community and address the concerns identified by people in the community.

- Concern that Terry McAuliffe started the deal with Amazon 5 years ago.
- Concerns about Amazon's work on intellectual property.
- Interest in understanding which 'lines of business' Amazon will host in Arlington and how they will use the space.

### **Communication and Engagement Related to Amazon**

- Interest in the County having conversations with Seattle government to understand the issues and problems that occurred because of Amazon and encourage us to learn from them.
- Concern that the presentation is not available in languages other than English on the County website and that listening sessions are not welcoming to non-English speakers.
- Pleased about bringing Arlington to Amazon, and the County has done a great job.
- Interest in having one person in the County to handle all issues on Amazon; and answer community questions.
- Interest in the County Board and staff honoring the County's [FOIA policies](#) with Amazon.
- Interest in the process and opportunities for the community to provide input to staff and the County Board between now and the decision on performance agreement.
- Interest in thinking about ways we can help shape Amazon (to engage with us) as opposed to Amazon shaping us (in Arlington).

### **Affordable Housing**

- Concerns that Arlington already has a low rate of affordable rental housing.
- Concerns that we have lost affordable housing units, so even adding a small amount to AHIF—does not keep up with the demand.
- Interest in having Amazon, but Amazon also needs to contribute to affordable housing to meet the production of 600 units /year—to have enough rental stock by 2040.
- Concerns about the historic impact Amazon has had on housing (rental) in Seattle and how we will not repeat that scenario.
- Interest in learning what the County Board is going to do to combat displacement and provide affordable housing.
- Concerns that the Dillon rule limits rent control, and that we don't have a shared equity for home ownership, especially concerning for people of color.
- Concerns about housing affordability for people on fixed incomes, especially retirees.
- Concerns about affordability for long-term residents in Arlington.
- Interest in learning what the County is doing to open up zoning options in single family neighborhoods to build other housing options and expand diversity.
- Interest in having the environmental principle applied – mitigate impact: Amazon should contribute the money for affordable housing to pay for the impact they are having in the County.
- Concern about affordability because Seattle and Arlington are similar.
- Interest in making other (neighboring) jurisdictions more attractive and limiting the number of Amazon employees moving to Arlington.
- Concern about impact on condo owners. Commenter's condo board just voted to accept bids for purchasing the building, and there is real fear in the Arlington Mill neighborhood that people will be displaced and private developers will buy the condo buildings and residents will not be able to stay in their homes. *[Note: Housing staff followed up with this commenter.]*

- Interest in having the County look at overall housing supply by increasing zoning and/or density.
- Interest in understanding if the County has made any changes to existing plans, or taking apartments in Crystal City to add units to larger sites.
- Interest in the broader regional housing impacts (from participants living outside of Arlington).
- Interest in having a broader conversation and defining “[Affordable Housing](#)” especially for families that have lower household incomes.

### **Transportation**

- Interest in ensuring that there is good coordination between the various agencies across the region, especially regarding the timing of roadway closures and Metro repair.
- Concerns about amount of parking available in the Pentagon City/Crystal City area, as the bus system is not always adequate, requiring people to drive (and park).
- Interest in having more public parking in Pentagon City—like the Ballston parking garage.
- Concerns about the cost of transportation in the region.

### **Impact on Local Business**

- Interest in ensuring that we maintain affordability for small businesses, so we can continue to shop local and support local vendors.
- Interest in understanding what (if anything) [Arlington Economic Development](#) is doing to offer incentives and/or help small businesses with issues including rising rents.
- Concerns that Amazon has already taken street traffic away from local business—through their online dominance.

### **Growth and Development**

- Interest in ensuring that the capital investments made in Ballston on high tech and higher education is not diminished with the addition of an Amazon Tech Campus in Alexandria.
- Interest in the projection related to having only 15%-20% Amazon employees locating /living in Arlington and the related impact on schools and housing particularly outside of the County.

### **Office Vacancy**

- Interest in understanding how Amazon will be using the existing vacancy available vs building new; and how that is aligned with our sustainability principles.
- Interest in having the County recalculate the assumptions based on Amazon using a smaller portion of existing space and impacts.
- Interest in addressing the office vacancy rate; and making the property tax and zoning 50/50 goal.
- Interest in not charging less tax for vacant properties.
- Concerns that there is a financial incentive for building owners to allow office vacancy instead of reduced rents.
- Interest in changing building uses (and related zoning/use) to make room for affordable housing.

### **Jobs**

- Interest in working with Amazon to create an [Academy/Prep school](#) to raise preparedness for young people (especially non-white youth).

- Interest in understanding that, if there are 25K Amazon jobs, how many will be service-related?

### **Energy and Environment**

- Interest in what Amazon (and the County) are doing about water & sewer infrastructure.
- Interested in understanding how sustainable energy has been accounted for in the modeling Amazon's impact – with the increased density.
- Interest in renewable energy and how Amazon will align with [our County goals](#).

### **Other**

- Concerns that Amazon coming will change the character of our community.
- Concerns that with the activity in Crystal City/Pentagon City and on Lee Highway, [Columbia Pike](#) will be left out. Concern about the vulnerability of the Pike as a whole and an ask for the Board to consider 'some measure' (safeguard) to pay attention to the Pike---all while there is activity on Lee Highway and in CC.
- Interest in making people aware of an exhibit at Westover Library (2 more days) "Vanishing Arlington" that is a photo exhibit of homes have been torn down and replaced with mega millions—in Arlington over the past 40 years. WAMU will run piece on Monday (1/14/19).
- Appreciation for hosting these listening sessions.