

## **A statement by Bert Ely to the Alexandria City Council regarding Amazon's headquarters location in National Landing**

November 17, 2018

Madam Mayor and members of Council I am Bert Ely and I live at 200 South Pitt. Speaking only for myself, I fear that important impacts of Amazon's planned headquarters in National Landing have not been fully explored and quantified, specifically with regard to those impacts on existing City residents and neighborhoods.

To that end there needs to be an exhaustive, and very public, review of the impact studies have been conducted, especially with regard to negative impacts. Most importantly, this impact review must have substantial substantive citizen input – it should not be a case where City staff simply tell the citizenry how great Amazon and the Virginia Tech Innovation Center will be for Alexandrians.

Based on the materials that have been posted on-line in recent days, it appears that all of the 25,000 jobs Amazon eventually will create in Northern Virginia will be in Arlington, not Alexandria. That probably will be true, too, for many of the estimated 22,000 “indirect and induced” jobs related to the Amazon headquarters project.

Many of those 47,000 workers, though, will want to live in Alexandria because of its proximity to Arlington; that will be especially true for workers who will want to bike to work. The big questions are where will they live within the City and where will their children go to school.

I suspect many will want to live in existing neighborhoods because of their established nature and charm. Del Ray and Arlandria in particular will be especially attractive in that regard given their proximity to National Landing, but the increased housing demand will be felt throughout the City.

The salary estimates for the new Amazon employees suggest that their incomes will be substantially higher than those of many Alexandrians, which means that the new residents will be able to pay higher rents and house-purchase prices than can many existing residents, especially older and lower-income residents.

The City can therefore reasonably anticipate accelerated gentrification activity in those neighborhoods closest to National Landing, including teardowns of existing housing that will be replaced by larger housing units. I have no problem with gentrification, but it is important to acknowledge, and deal with, its displacement effects, including the human costs.

Amazon's arrival also may accelerate the conversion of older, obsolete office buildings into apartments and condominiums. Those conversions represent constructive reuses of existing structures, but they will lead to the replacement of workers who often lived elsewhere

with residential units that will pay less in taxes than the cost of providing services, including education, to the residents of those converted buildings.

A key question is how much will the new residents brought to Alexandria by Amazon and the Innovation Center add to the already substantial infrastructure investments the City needs to make in the coming decades. More critically, how will those additional investments be paid for, if most of the jobs, and tax base, triggered by the Amazon headquarters project are located in Arlington? Perhaps most importantly, what impact will Amazon have on Alexandria's tax rates – will they go up or go down? Will Arlington be the winner and Alexandria the loser?

I doubt if the citizenry has begun to comprehend all the impacts of the Amazon headquarters project, but it is not too soon for Alexandrians to begin assessing those impacts – positive and negative – on our city. This assessment process should be undertaken immediately to provide a second, and perhaps much more realistic, perspective on the impacts Amazon and the Innovation Center will have on Alexandria and its residents.

Thank you for your time today – I welcome your questions.