

# Amazon deal needs to be creative

**BY DOUG MOORADIAN**  
Candidate, New York State Assembly 145th District

In the coming weeks, the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA) will consider Amazon's application for a variety of tax breaks. As a board member with the NFC Development Corp. in Niagara Falls, I've observed municipalities all across Western New York enter into similar agreements, leveraging payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) and job creation guarantees.

While I have spoken at several town hall meetings in support of

Amazon, the economic impact and job numbers promised often fall short with these projects (see Tesla in Buffalo). So, why do our elected representatives at all levels of government continue to utilize this same old strategy and then hope for different results?

Amazon is one of the most creative and forward-thinking companies in the world. They have completely altered how we think about shopping, entertainment, technology and so much more. When it comes to this partnership, isn't this an opportunity for us to get more creative ourselves?

In the past, Amazon has offered host communities funds for improvements to parks and infrastructure, and they should do the same here. But in addition, we also need Amazon to support projects and programs that generate revenue in the form of tax dollars and promote our communities and businesses.

To accomplish this, Amazon could:

- √ Create a \$500,000 homebuyer assistance fund so that when any of their 1,000 employees purchase a home in Niagara County, Amazon provides \$5,000 toward the down payment.

- √ Sponsor workforce development and job training programs that help potential employees learn the skills they need to work in this one-of-a-kind facility before its opening date.

- √ Establish a school technology foundation to ensure that Niagara County students have access to state-of-the-art devices and internet service, both in school and at home, for years to come.

- √ Commit to using union labor during construction of the facility and also allowing workers the option to organize, without pushback, once the distribution

center is operational.

- √ Collaborate with the NFTA to establish new bus routes to the facility and have Amazon reimburse employees for the cost of public transportation during their first year on the job.

It is time for our community to stop relying upon outdated strategies and start thinking more creatively. This opportunity to engage Amazon as a true community partner is too great for us to pass up – and the ideas outlined above would have a positive impact on our region for generations to come.

## Completion of \$3.5M supportive housing development in North Tonawanda

Features 12 affordable apartments, including 8 units with supportive services for survivors of domestic violence

Gov. Kathy Hochul recently announced the completion of a \$3.5 million supportive housing project in downtown North Tonawanda. Supported through the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, the adaptive reuse of the structure, at 49 Tremont St., created 12 units of affordable housing, including eight studio apartments with on-site supportive services to help women who have experienced homelessness and are survivors of domestic violence.

"All too frequently, domestic violence survivors find themselves facing housing instability as direct result of leaving an abusive partner," Hochul said. "These studio apartments will provide a safe haven for survivors, where they can access the support and services they need to start on the path to recovery and stability."

Located across from Historic Riviera Theatre, 49 Tremont is within walking distance of the downtown area of North Tonawanda. The project substantially overhauled the more-than-a-century-old structure, converting a former gymnasium into studio apartments and adding a ground floor café, which will provide residents with on-site workforce training and employment opportunities.

The project received \$1.4 million from the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, which is

administered by the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. In addition, OTDA will provide operating funding for the supportive services via the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative.

The New York State Homes and Community Renewal provided \$1.7 million in funding through the Low-Income Housing Trust Fund Program and Rural and Urban Community Investment Fund, which leveraged funds from the Homeless Housing Assistance Program, New York Main Street, the Yahoo Foundation, and developer equity. Empire State Development also provided \$300,000 for the project through the Smart Growth Community Fund, and \$33,000 via Verizon Media Community Benefit Fund for Niagara County.

State OTDA Commissioner Daniel W. Tietz said, "For survivors of domestic violence, having a safe, stable home is a crucial first step on the road to recovery. These studio apartments will provide that stability for survivors, while also providing them with the supportive services they need to start anew. This project, like so many others supported through the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, further demonstrates Gov. Hochul's unwavering commitment to ensuring all New Yorkers have access to safe, affordable

housing, including some of the most vulnerable among us."

Empire State Development President CEO and Commissioner Hope Knight said, "The redevelopment of this former YWCA facility into a safe, welcoming home for women will provide them with a stable and supportive environment and access to valuable services. Further, the adaptive reuse of this YWCA is a critical component of economic development, requiring a strong plan and partnerships between many levels of government, private and nonprofit sectors. I am proud that ESD could play a role in this vital project."

Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Director Kelli Nicholas-Owens said, "Without safe and affordable housing, many victims of domestic violence have to make the impossible choice to either stay with their abusive partner or face homelessness. As New York state transforms systems to be more survivor-centered, trauma-informed and culturally responsive, we are reframing services and prioritizing permanent housing solutions to stabilize families impacted by the many forms of abuse. I am honored and excited about this partnership with the YWCA Niagara Frontier. I know from personal experience that the YWCA changes the lives of the women and families they serve.

Governor Hochul's leadership remains steadfast in ensuring that survivors of gender-based violence have access to the stable support they need."

YWCA of Niagara Frontier CEO Kathleen Granchelli, said, "The YWCA board of directors and staff are very excited to have this project completed and open to serve the needs of the women in our community."

New York State Sen. Rob Ort said, "Having a safe and welcoming place to call home is an integral aspect of an individual's life, yet far too many are forced to cope with dangerous and hostile environments due to domestic abuse. With this investment, New York state is stepping up and providing the survivors of domestic abuse a place where they can feel safe and secure. Not only will these survivors now have a place that they can call 'home,' but they will also have access to critical resources to help overcome the many challenges they have faced."

North Tonawanda Mayor Austin Tylec said, "The YWCA is a new facility that wouldn't be possible without the support of Gov. Hochul's office. With this financial support, our community is able to provide shelter for victims of homelessness and domestic violence for women and their children."

Niagara County Legislature

Chairwoman Rebecca Wydysh said, "This project is such a tremendous accomplishment on multiple fronts, providing much-needed affordable housing for survivors of domestic violence while also giving this century-old building a new purpose. I applaud the YWCA of Niagara Frontier and their partners in state government for their vision and hard work to make this project happen."



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### Mental Health Association cornhole fundraiser

The Mental Health Association in Niagara County will host a cornhole fundraiser, "Cornhole for a Cause," from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, July 31, at the Davison Road Inn, 383 Davison Road, Lockport. Proceeds will go toward programming and services for those living with a mental health diagnosis and their families.

Donation fee is \$20, payable at the event. Players are guaranteed at least three games. The winning team will receive a cash prize. There will also be a 50/50 drawing.

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