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Hey Alexa: Why Should Amazon Pick Charlotte?

By Melissa Oyler October 16, 2017

As far as we know, Charlotte has not offered to change the name of our city like some others have (side-eye to you, Amazon, Georgia).

But the Queen City, along with every other metropolitan area out there, is doing her part to get Amazon's attention as proposal responses are due this week for HQ2.



Courtesy of Alex Cason

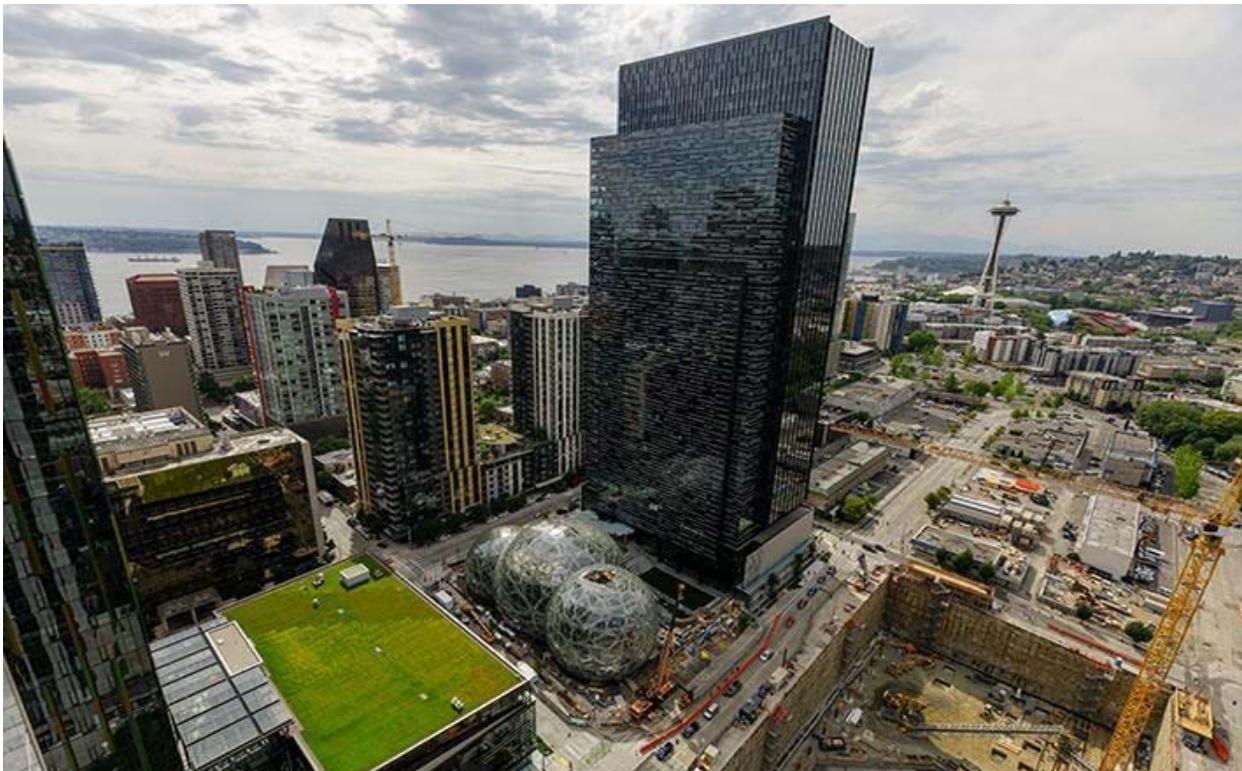
Charlotte is going full throttle in its efforts to woo Amazon, according to a joint statement from the Charlotte Regional Partnership and the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce. The

group recently launched the #CLTisPrime website, slapping the hashtag on the tops of city buses, on signs and in social media posts.

Business owners and residents of Charlotte are also on board: Tweets with the #CLTisPrime hashtag touted perfect year-round weather, Crowders Mountain and a large millennial population.

Charlotte Hornets owner and basketball legend Michael Jordan sent Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos a letter asking him to consider Charlotte, The Charlotte Observer reports. The Charlotte Regional Partners designated Wednesday as “Charlotte Is Prime Day.” Participants will post pictures showing Amazon how great Charlotte is; prizes will be given for winning photos.

What is Amazon asking for?



Amazon

Seattle-based headquarters of Amazon



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In addition to the infrastructure — up to 8M SF within 30 miles of a city center — that would support a campus of this magnitude, the request for proposals states Amazon is looking at large metropolitan areas with friendly business environments. The term “creatively” is used more than once: It has a preference for “communities that think big and creatively when considering locations and real estate options.” And the site itself does not have to be development-prepped; the city can think creatively as long as it does not slow Amazon's timeline.

Amazon is not necessarily looking for a replica of its campus in Seattle, but a few fundamentals need to be similar. Strong local tech talent and proximity to higher education, accessible mass transit, and local culture and creativity rank high on the e-commerce company's must-haves, along with fiber connectivity and optimal cell coverage.

What would Charlotte get?



Courtesy of Alex Cason

Charlotte skyline

In return, Amazon pledges sustainability, community charity involvement and employment with generous benefits. HQ2 is anticipating 50,000 new full-time jobs, paying an average of more than \$100K annually.

Amazon is dedicated to sustainability in its new HQ2. Its Seattle campus has 20 LEED-certified buildings, energy-efficient lighting and a recycled-heat system. The campus utilizes composting and recycling, green space, and solar and wind operations.

Indirectly, Seattle's CRE and city reap the benefits of Amazon's proximity. "Amazon has been a catalyst for development in Downtown Seattle with an abundance of restaurants, services, coffee shops," the RFP states. In 2016, 233,000 guests stayed overnight at hotels when visiting Amazon employees and their guests. About \$43M was paid into Seattle's public transportation system for employee transit benefits.

Do we have a chance?



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Participants form into groups at the HiveStorm Amazon HQ2 Summit.



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“It’s going to be very interesting and very competitive. One thing you’ve really got going for you here is N.C. generally knows how to treat businesses,” The Fallon Co. Chief

Investment Officer Michael Fallon said. “You’re talking about an area, a place that needs to be able to grow an 8M SF campus and 50,000 people. So, Charlotte’s got some runway.”

About 120 community members attended last week’s HiveStorm: Amazon HQ2 Community Summit, a brainstorming event hosted by Carolina Fintech Hub, F3 and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Participants were divided up into groups of 10 to come up with ways for Charlotte to entice Amazon. After the event, groups continued the creative process in a digital community.

HiveStorm’s organizers planned to take the best ideas and create an Amazon Echo special skill. “When you ask Echo or Alexa ‘Why should Amazon pick Charlotte?’ we’ll have it say back the Top 10 ideas,” said Carolina Fintech Hub’s Tariq Bokhari, one of the event’s organizers.

Charlotte Regional Partnership President and CEO Ronnie Bryant said Charlotte can show off its infrastructure, culture and workforce. “Amazon will receive 150 responses from around the country, and a lot of them will be put in the trash can, because they are communities that not only don’t have a long shot, but communities that probably don’t have a prayer. We believe we have a legitimate shot at winning this project,” Bryant said at the summit.

“We think every point within the RFP we can address and make the case for Charlotte with tangible perspective,” he said. “We definitely want to appeal to the culture of Amazon. Culture is very important and that’s why I think we will be very competitive in that regard.”

Bokhari said it seemed like a no-brainer for Carolina Fintech Hub to work heavily to draw Amazon to Charlotte.

“One of our big passion areas is the region in Charlotte,” Bokhari said. “The fact that we know Amazon’s business model; there’s a lot of parallel points, from the talent we hire to the consumers that are using the services.”



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Amazon is a family, HQ2 is a second home



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The HiveStorm Amazon HQ2 Summit, a community event to brainstorm ways to get Amazon to consider Charlotte for its new headquarters, was held at UNC Center City last week.

Charlotte may not have the flash of other contending cities, but Bokhari does not think that counts the Queen City out.

“I equate this to: Somebody comes out and says they’re buying a new car, and somebody over here says, ‘Well, there’s no chance that person’s going to buy a minivan,’” he said. “It’s not always the sports car everyone’s going after; sometimes they have a family, and a minivan makes the most sense.”



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“Amazon has a family that they’re looking to expand into a second home, and Charlotte, in my opinion, is the top-of-the-line minivan,” he said. “We’ve got the third-row seat, we’ve got all the bells and whistles, and not only is it cooler than you’d think before you buy it, it’s one of those things where you’re like, ‘Man, that thing was a lot cheaper than I thought.’”

The bottom line? “If you don’t read the RFP, then you don’t understand what Amazon is looking for, and you don’t understand why Charlotte is the best,” Bokhari said.

A blueprint for the future

Amazon may be the coveted prize, but it is not the only prize: Even if Charlotte does not win Amazon, following the retail giant’s to-do list could help the Queen City win other business.

Every single city should be paying close attention to what Amazon is demanding as a blueprint for all development, Fallon said.

“That RFP was very straightforward, simple and direct on what virtually every company right now is trying to do,” Fallon, a Boston-based developer with projects in Charlotte, said at Bisnow’s recent Charlotte Office Development conference in Uptown.

“If you look at that [RFP] and hold that as gospel as to what you’re trying to do with a city, I think you’ll be in great shape,” Fallon said.