

EDITORIAL

# Long Island in prime position

Amazon's arrival in Long Island City offers a regional opportunity that must be seized

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Sixteen miles. That's roughly the distance from the Nassau County border to the tallest building in Long Island City best known for the Citi emblazoned atop its green glass facade.

Soon, that tower could sport an Amazon logo, in what would be just the start of a mammoth effort to bring up to 40,000 Amazon jobs to the region and an estimated \$900 million a year in new tax revenue to the state.

But all that jazz that could take place at the western boundary of actual Long Island isn't going to happen overnight. Tremendous challenges remain to get Long Island City and its environs ready for an Amazon campus. And the anti-corporate, anti-change rhetoric of disaster and catastrophe from some elected officials hasn't been helpful. To get the benefits and input they crave, a better strategy would be to ask smart, specific questions, analyze the problems, and offer potential solutions on issues like transit, traffic, housing and schools that could make this project a blessing, not a burden.

It's not just New York City that has to prepare for Amazon. Long Island has to be ready, too. That'll require our academic institutions, business leaders, political officials and planners to think strategically about how to take advantage of the synergy that could come from Amazon and other companies that inevitably will spring up because of its presence.

## Building a future

Not since the glory days of Grumman Corp., which at its height employed 33,000 Long Islanders, and allowed many ancillary firms to flourish as well, has the region had a chance to gain so much from one company. But this time, the Island can build better, to create a diverse sector of technology companies and other firms that could power a new economic engine here.

Long Island for decades has sought to build such a sector, flitting from software to biotech to wireless, but never finding the anchor company it needed. Amazon can be that foundation, where other companies can directly and indirectly build on the tech giant's success.

It's never been easy for the high-cost Island to attract companies from the outside, or to keep the companies that start here. What's more, local leaders note that the region already has a shortage of trained, knowledgeable, qualified workers in key fields like engineering and computer science. They have valid concerns about whether our smaller firms will be able to compete with Amazon

for talent, and whether the region can develop a large enough talent pool to meet the need.

There's no doubt some future Amazon workers will live here. Already, one-third of Nassau residents commute to New York City, and bring back 50 percent of the county's disposable income, according to the Long Island Association. With the promise of tens of thousands of jobs at an average salary of \$150,000, Amazon's presence can provide even more residents with even more of that income, which they'll bring home and spend here.

## Readying a workforce

It's up to the region's community colleges and universities to develop certificate programs, majors and degrees to prepare our students to work in the tech economy. In the 15 years it could take Amazon to ramp up fully, necessary skill sets will change. Our academic institutions must be flexible enough to develop new programs more quickly than they have in the past.

But even if we're able to grow and attract new companies, and a pool of talented workers, a question remains: Where do we put our new residents?

Amazon's arrival only intensifies the need for attractive rental housing, condos, and further development around Long Island Rail Road hubs. If workers can live near a LIRR stop, and get to Long Island City in 30 to 40 minutes, as they can, say, from Mineola, that'll become a strong selling point. If the housing is too limited, few will consider putting down roots in Nassau and Suffolk. Our housing needs must be addressed with a greater urgency.

Then there's the question of how to get those workers to their new offices. Right now, neither the Hunterspoint Avenue stop nor the Long Island City stop at Borden Avenue and Second Street handles significant train traffic. At least one must be upgraded to accommodate more trains from more points across Long Island. Adding a station at Sunnyside Yards would be a particular boon.

An even bigger problem is that Long Island City is already the equivalent epicenter of New York City's congestion migraine. The only way to cure that headache — and help the MTA, too — is through a tolling plan for the now-free East River bridges or the Manhattan roads to which they lead.

Bringing Amazon to Queens is not a small undertaking. But New York has done big things before.

When Rockefeller Center was first proposed in the late 1920s there were plenty of public objections to some of the plans. But John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and his partner found a way to "yes." Eventually, the bustling hub of office buildings, shops and underground passageways, the famous plaza where the Christmas tree is now being decorated, and the accompanying Radio City Music Hall, were built.

That city within the city put New Yorkers to work then, and has since become an economic and arts centerpiece. Now, we can't picture New York City — or our region — without it.

