

Camden leaders throw support behind Philadelphia in Amazon quest

[Phaedra Trethan](#), @CP_Phaedra Published 2:41 p.m. ET Jan. 18, 2018 | Updated 3:59 p.m. ET Jan. 18, 2018



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CAMDEN - Camden won't be the bride in its pursuit of Amazon, the internet retail giant looking to build a new, multimillion-dollar headquarters employing 50,000 people.

But it might be a bridesmaid to Philadelphia if the City of Brotherly Love gets to wed its fortunes to Amazon, [which announced Thursday it had narrowed its list](#) to 20 cities, including Philadelphia, Newark and New York City.

"This is great news for Philadelphia, Camden and South Jersey," Camden County Freeholder Director Louis Cappelli Jr. said Thursday.

"We believe if the Philadelphia metropolitan region makes the final cut it will be a win for the overall region and that it will benefit our area with billions of dollars in new development and more than 50,000 new highly paid employees."

In October, county and city officials had [pitched the Camden Waterfront](#), with 138 acres of mostly unused land on each side of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, as a strong potential location for a new Amazon headquarters.

Amazon, officials hoped, would join Holtec, Subaru of America and the Philadelphia 76ers, among others, in taking advantage of Camden's central location, mass transit accessibility and relatively low real estate values — as well as millions in state tax incentives.

The county submitted its 199-page bid, which details incentives worth hundreds of millions of dollars, with Camden City and Cooper's Ferry Partnership.

Cappelli said he believes although Camden was not named among Amazon's finalists, its proposal bolstered Philadelphia's chances.

"We believe that Camden City's rebirth and economic growth in Camden County had a direct impact on the proposal and played a key role in boosting it to the next level," he said in a statement.

238 cities across the United States were eager to become the home of HQ2, Amazon's new headquarters. Amazon has trimmed down its list to just 20 cities. USA TODAY

"Of course, we would have been overjoyed if the Camden proposal made the cut," he acknowledged. In a December meeting with Harold Epps, Philadelphia's director of commerce, Cappelli said Camden and the region "would be working with the city if they were picked and if Philadelphia makes the final cut."

"There is no question in my mind that Camden and South Jersey would feel a positive impact based on the size and scope of the investment Amazon would bring to the region," he added.

Seattle-based Amazon has said its second headquarters would be a \$5 billion project that would support up to 50,000 jobs.

Its planned facility — known as Amazon HQ2 — is also expected to create "tens of thousands of additional jobs and tens of billions of dollars in additional investment in the surrounding community," the retailer said in a Sept. 7 announcement.

Philadelphia's [108-page proposal](#) touted locations including University City, Schuylkill Yards (an area under development near 30th Street Station); and the Philadelphia Navy Yard. All of those are within commuting distance of South Jersey and accessible by public transit.

Its listing of other Fortune 500 companies doing business in the region included three in South Jersey: Campbell's Soup (Camden), American Waterworks Company (now in Voorhees but relocating to Camden) and Subaru.

Camden County's proposal had recommended Amazon use about 80 of the 138 acres, with some buildings rising up to 30 floors; it would not have required demolition of any homes or displacement of any residents.

The proposal also listed incentives such as a 20-year property tax abatement for the campus sites and a "transferrable corporate tax credit" with a potential value of up to \$350 million over 10 years.

Former Gov. Chris Christie signed legislation last week offering Amazon tax breaks worth as much as \$5 billion.

"Getting from 238 (bids) to 20 was very tough — all the proposals showed tremendous enthusiasm and creativity," said Amazon executive Holly Sullivan in a statement.

While Camden, Jersey City, New Brunswick and other New Jersey cities applied, the state's elected leaders put their might behind Newark, which seemed to fit the bill for Amazon's wish list, with an urban location, mass transit, proximity to an international airport and generous tax incentives.

"Our location is unparalleled, our highly educated workforce is among the best anywhere, and our strong public schools, diversity, and infrastructure combine to create communities that businesses and workers would love to call home," Gov. Phil Murphy said in a statement.

Still, New Jersey's bid hasn't been met with universal support. Critics think the tax breaks are too lucrative and would give up revenue the state needs to invest in its transportation system, for example.

"For New Jersey's economy to be truly competitive and strong, the state needs to get back to basics: investing in the assets that give us an edge," Jon Whiten, vice president at New Jersey Policy Perspective, a research group, said.

Not every South Jersey politician was throwing his support behind Philadelphia, however.

State Senate President Steve Sweeney, a Gloucester County Democrat, said Amazon would bring New Jersey "substantial and long-lasting benefits with new jobs and sustained economic activity."

"We stand behind the proposal and we will continue to work to convince Amazon that New Jersey is the best location for their new headquarters," he said in a statement.

Camden Mayor [Frank Moran, who succeeded](#) Dana Redd this month after her two terms, shared Cappelli's optimistic view of Philadelphia's selection.

"Certainly, we still believe that Camden is the best possible place for Amazon," he said in a statement.

"Nevertheless we know and we've said before that the city will see a tremendous benefit if our region makes the final cut. In fact, we are throwing all of our support behind the Philadelphia proposal because if Mr. Bezos decides to locate in Philadelphia, Camden, South Jersey and the Pennsylvania suburbs will be flooded with billions of dollars in economic development.

"We are cheering on our colleagues in Philadelphia and stand ready to assist their proposal in any way possible."

Cities and regions that made Amazon's finalists were: Atlanta; Austin, Texas; Boston; Chicago; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas; Denver; Indianapolis; Los Angeles; Miami; Montgomery County, Maryland; Nashville; New York City; Northern Virginia; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; Raleigh, North Carolina; Toronto; and Washington, D.C.

Amazon expects to make its decision later this year.