

Amazon and political officials celebrate grand opening of HQ2 in Northern Virginia

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On Saturday, June 17, Amazon officially opened its second headquarters, dubbed “HQ2,” in Arlington, Virginia. The new location, located just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, has co-equal status with the company’s original headquarters in Seattle, Washington.

The company announced in 2018 that it had chosen the Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C. suburbs to house the second headquarters. Amazon says the newly-opened part of HQ2 can accommodate about 14,000 of its white-collar employees, 8,000 of whom have already been hired. In all, HQ2 will employ some 25,000 corporate employees, according to Amazon.

Construction on the first of two phases of the sprawling campus finished earlier this year. Phase 1 focused on building Metropolitan Park, a complex with two office towers called Merlin and Jasper – named after Amazon Web Services software – as well as a playground and green spaces, an art installation and over a dozen new shops.

In March, Amazon announced it was pausing construction on Phase 2 of the project, which has been named PenPlace and will be located directly north of MetPark, with three new skyscrapers, plus a helix-shaped glass structure to be known simply as “The Helix.”

According to the *Washington Post*, “the company’s highly publicized move to Arlington is playing out amid broader concerns about soaring housing costs, remote work and the contraction of the tech industry.” The latter part of the statement is a reference to Amazon’s recent cutting of 27,000 jobs from its workforce as the company pares back its operations following declines in the stock market.

Last Thursday, Amazon executives joined political officials from the area to cut the ribbon on the project.

In attendance were Amazon Vice President of Public Policy Brian Huseman, VP of Worldwide Economic Development Holly Sullivan, VP of Global Real Estate John Schoettler. Also on hand was a bipartisan delegation of regional politicians, including Virginia’s Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin, his wife Suzanne, Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, Democratic congressman Don Beyer and Arlington County Board Chair Christian Dorsey, among others.

At the ceremony, Youngkin beamed, “We celebrate this partnership building a better and brighter future right here in Virginia. The Amazon team is truly engaged fully, not just in their business, but in Virginia.”

By “partnership,” Youngkin is referring to the incentives Virginia offered Amazon to attract it to the capital region. When Amazon was scouting for a new location, it invited cities to compete against each other as it considered where to make its multibillion-dollar investment and locate its tens of thousands of highly-paid corporate employees. Cities and states tripped over each other to offer Amazon billions of dollars in tax breaks and incentives, along with promises to build up local infrastructure to suit Amazon’s needs.

In Virginia, state and local officials approved almost \$2.4 billion in different perks and incentives as the company meets certain hiring and construction goals. In April, the company applied to receive nearly \$153 million in incentives from Arlington County in Virginia for its 8,000 hires thus far.

The state of New York had previously offered the company \$3 billion when it was considering splitting its HQ2 campuses between the District of Columbia and New York City, a decision it later abandoned in retaliation against local opposition in 2019.

At the time, Virginia officials pompously promoted

their craven pursuit of HQ2. Christian Dorsey, Arlington County's Democratic Board Chairman, stated that Virginia, unlike New York City, "has its act together." On Saturday, Dorsey exalted that "we are catalyzing the emergence of a dynamic neighborhood that will be the envy of our region" which would "deliver transformational change."

Dorsey's "dynamic neighborhood" surrounding HQ2 is in fact a classic case of gentrification. An article in the *Post*, which is owned by Amazon's billionaire founder Jeff Bezos, that accompanied the grand-opening was forced to acknowledge that "residents opposed to rapid development worry the coming influx of software engineers will further strain their more suburban neighborhoods."

An article in the *Post* last year centered on Amazon's voluntary "Housing Equity Fund," supposedly dedicated to combat the area's rising cost of living, noted that "Amazon's efforts will likely do little to move the needle for the region's lowest-income residents, many of whom are already stretching their paychecks to make rent every month." It reported that just "6 percent of the units secured so far under Amazon's fund have been set aside for the poorest renters — hardly enough to address fears that they will have to move out as the company's new office buildings go up."

Amazon's decision to forge ahead with its HQ2 "grand opening," despite difficulties it has encountered during the pandemic, is a showing of the corporation's commitment to playing an essential role in the United States government's war policy against Russia and the preparations for a conflict against China.

Amazon has long maintained a close relationship with the US state and particularly its military and intelligence apparatus. Since 2013, the corporation has held a \$600 million contract with the Central Intelligence Agency to manage its cloud service. In May 2022, Amazon was awarded a \$10 billion contract to manage the National Security Agency's cloud. In 2021, Amazon abandoned the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) after a protracted fight with Microsoft over a contract to build an internet-based structure to house the United States' military's information systems.

The Pentagon replaced the contentious JEDI contract bidding process with a new program called the Joint

Warfighting Cloud Capability (JWCC). At the end of last year, the Defense Department awarded a four-way bid to the major cloud computing companies: Amazon, Microsoft, Google and Oracle. Amazon also uses third parties to sell its technology to Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in 2018, prior to Amazon's HQ2 announcement, of "the fusion of America's high-tech sector with its military, in line with the Pentagon's so-called 'third offset' strategy, which aims to regain America's 'military edge' by 'harnessing a range of technologies, including robotics, autonomous systems and big data.'"

This process has only become more of an imperative under the Democratic Biden administration, which has staked its presidency on a war in Europe with nuclear-armed Russia and conflict with China. As Amazon's more than one million workers are drawn increasingly into conflict with Amazon's exploitation of the workforce, they must recognize that they are also in a fight against a critical part of America's war machine and draw the necessary conclusions.



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