

Amazon's HQ2 selection process has South Florida busy meeting 'intensive' data requests



Marcia Heroux Pounds - March 1, 2018

Since making the list of 20 finalists for Amazon's second headquarters, South Florida's economic development leaders have been busy tackling "intensive" data requests from the e-commerce giant.

At stake for South Florida: 50,000 jobs and \$5 billion in investment.



50,000 jobs the prize as South Florida makes Top 20 for new Amazon HQ

During a panel discussion Thursday before commercial real estate executives in Fort Lauderdale, they remained tight-lipped about Amazon's selection process but did reveal how Palm Beach,

Broward and Miami-Dade counties continue working together to provide the company information on the region and eight proposed South Florida sites.

“We’re providing an incredible level of detail that is pretty intensive,” said Mike Finney, president and CEO of Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County’s economic development group. “They say they want to make a decision by the end of this year.”

He declined to specify what data Amazon is seeking. However, in its “request for proposal,” Amazon stated it is looking for 100 acres for a development of about 8 million square feet.

“It’s just an incredible undertaking,” said Finney, the newest economic development leader in South Florida, having joined the Miami-Dade group about eight months ago.

Appearing before the local chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Parks, known as NAIOP, Finney, along with Palm Beach County’s Kelly Smallridge and Broward’s Bob Swindell, spoke Thursday about their approach to winning corporate relocations — and a bit about Amazon HQ2.

The tri-county region joined forces to submit a bid in October. The economic development leaders said they came together for the bid because they knew they had to pitch regional benefits — abundant and bilingual talent, airports and other transportation, beaches, sports teams and public schools — to be a contender.

In terms of what Amazon is looking for, “the counties alone couldn’t click all of those boxes,” said Swindell, president and CEO of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance. Together, “we can say to Amazon: We can support this project.”

Smallridge, president and CEO of the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County, said because Amazon is looking to add 50,000 jobs, “it made the best sense to put in all the assets of the tricounty area.”

The three counties regularly compete with each other for corporate relocation projects from across the country; this is the first major effort where the agencies came together to make a single bid.

“The nature of our work at the end of the day is that we want projects to come to Miami-Dade County, Kelly wants them to come to Palm Beach, and Bob to Broward. We get that,” said Finney, who wrote the Amazon proposal for the region.

Sites proposed include one in Palm Beach County, two in Broward and five in Miami-Dade, but no specific sites are being disclosed due to Amazon’s demand for confidentiality in the process.

If South Florida wins the bid, there would be challenges in adding 50,000 jobs. “But it’s something that would happen over a long period of time,” Finney said. With support from academic and governmental leaders, “I think we’re perfectly ready to absorb the project,” he said.

South Florida made the list of 20 finalists in January and faces stiff competition from major cities in the United States and Toronto. Some areas are offering big incentives to Amazon, such as Newark, which has included a \$7 billion tax-credit incentive in its proposal.

But John Boyd, an independent site selector based in New Jersey, has said that South Florida’s international tie-ins are a strong positive for Amazon choosing the region for its second headquarters.

“I’ve always viewed South Florida as a strong candidate for Amazon HQ2 with one [asset] being the abundance of multilingual skill sets and Miami being the gateway to South and Central America,” he said.