



# *Justice For All Coalition*

*United We Stand, LIC-Astoria*



## No to Amazon Profiticians

The Justice for All Coalition stands firmly against the Amazon deal in its entirety and sees its presence in LIC as a major threat to the diverse communities of LIC, Astoria, and Western Queens, including residents in the local NYCHA complexes of Queensbridge, Ravenswood, Astoria and Woodside Houses.

Not only does this deal not meet the needs of our community, but – in exacerbating gentrification and displacement, and endangering the future of public housing – it promises to create greater risks and challenges for them.

### Explanation of our concerns:

1. Public Giveaways Despite Public Need
2. Lack of Community Involvement
3. Jobs for Whom?
4. Faux “Community Benefits”
5. Intensifying Gentrification
6. Spurring the Privatization of Public Housing & Homelessness
7. Missed (Transit) Connections

#### **1. Public Giveaways Despite Public Need**

We are deeply offended by the massive public giveaways to one of the richest corporations in the world, owned by one of the richest men in the country. These public giveaways include \$2.8

billion in local, state, and federal public subsidies AND the 99-year leasing of publicly-owned land.

Meanwhile NYCHA's \$77 million deficit (expected to be \$400 million in a decade) and \$25 billion in unmet repairs leaves public housing residents dealing with crumbling infrastructure and inhumane living conditions including heat and hot water issues, mold, lead paint, broken elevators and intercoms, and rodent infestations.

Moreover, the Department of Education building on publicly-owned land that is part of the Amazon site has long been sought after by local community groups, who have envisioned ways it could be used to serve the needs of the community.

Learn more here: <https://www.change.org/p/city-elected-officials-save-the-waterfront-this-land-is-our-land-public-land-for-public-use>

## 2. Lack of Community Involvement

This plan was devised behind closed doors, without community or City Council input. In circumventing the City's land use review process (ULURP), and instead routing the deal through the state-level land use process (GPP, or General Project Plan), the Mayor and Governor have effectively and intentionally excluded community input and concerns.

Within a month after the Amazon deal was announced, an Advisory Committee was hastily assembled. This [45-member committee](#) is [the Mayor's idea of "robust community engagement"](#) meant to ensure "that the investments and resources generated from this project serve the needs of everyone in Long Island City and beyond." This Advisory Committee is too little, too late: the deal has already been struck, and forming a committee for community input after the fact is a sham. The most this committee will extract are a few crumbs, none of which will outweigh the enormous harm brought to our community by Amazon's presence.

Worse still, participation in the committee gives the appearance of community acquiescence to this deal; it is a public relations stunt, at the expense of Queens communities. To consider this process as sufficient - let alone "robust" - community engagement is an insult with devastating consequences for our community.

## 3. Jobs for Whom?

Amazon says that it will bring 25,000-40,000 jobs paying an average of \$150,000 a year to residents of NYC, but we ask, jobs for whom? Are these jobs for existing community members or for new arrivals, who will likely be whiter and wealthier than most Queens residents? There are no legally binding conditions in the deal that require or encourage local hiring – not in local public housing campuses, nor across Western Queens.

Instead of bringing jobs to our community, Amazon is more likely to reinforce unequal trends in the neighborhood, like the 30% increase in the number of jobs (from 56,000 to 73,000 jobs) between 2002 and 2015 in LIC (zip code 11101), which occurred alongside a rise in unemployment for residents of Queensbridge and Ravenswood Houses.

Moreover, the influx of wealthier residents will spur gentrification and displacement, as outlined below in point #5.

#### **4. Faux “Community Benefits”**

One tenet of the deal that has been promoted as a benefit for the community is three years of semi-annual job fairs and resume workshops for Queensbridge residents and training and recruitment programs for City residents. These initiatives exclude the majority of local public housing residents, and duplicate services that already exist, instead of creating new jobs and education programs that could do more good for the community.

#### **5. Intensifying Gentrification**

The addition of Amazon to LIC comes at a time when gentrification has been intensifying in the area, as a result of four recent City-led rezonings: three in [LIC \(2001, 2004, 2008\)](#) and one in [Sunnyside and Woodside \(2011\)](#). The resulting luxury residential development has contributed to rising rents and the displacement of long-time residents, local artists, small businesses and small manufacturing. Beyond the threat physical displacement poses for the livelihoods of community members, these changes [disrupt vital community networks](#) that neighbors rely on in maintaining everyday life.

Amazon’s presence is sure to intensify these trends of rising land values, hardship and displacement. This is already evidenced by the [“condo-buying frenzy”](#) in the weeks following the announcement that Amazon would come to LIC.

#### **6. Spurring the Privatization of Public Housing & Homelessness**

The expected intensification of gentrification and rising land values in the area will encourage the City to privatize local public housing campuses through its [NextGeneration NYCHA Plan](#). NextGeneration NYCHA aims to resolve the housing authority’s financial deficits by opening up its campuses to private developers (also known as infill) and/or shifting buildings from public to private management, and apartments from Section 9 into Section 8 (also known as RAD - Rental Assistance Demonstration). In short, NYCHA NextGeneration transfers control of public housing campuses and land from the public to private developers who privilege profit over people.

The privatization of this public asset would be detrimental to both residents and the City.

Public housing is currently home to 1 in 14 (or 8 million) residents across the city, with a 270,000-household-long waiting list (as of 2015), and it is an important affordable housing stock

for low-income residents and seniors, and workers who provide essential services to the City, including teachers, police officers, and nurses.

As gentrification pressures continue to increase land values and private-market rents across Western Queens and the City, lower-income and working-class New Yorkers have fewer alternative housing options, and preserving public housing becomes ever-more important.

For many NYCHA residents (for whom the average family income is less than \$25,000), the alternative means leaving the city if they can, or turning to homeless shelters and services provided by the Department of Homeless Services. Beyond the human component of putting capable people in challenging if not debilitating situations, the tradeoff of public housing for homeless services is [a misuse of public money](#)<sup>\*\*</sup> that further depletes public funds that could be used to make repairs and improvements to NYCHA campuses and/or provide other viable and truly affordable housing options to low-income New Yorkers.

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**\*\*The City spends \$2,000-\$7,500 per month to shelter – NOT HOUSE – a person dealing with homelessness. In 2018, the city spent over \$1 billion to shelter our swelling homeless population (over 60,000 people) – and the Department of Homeless Service’s total budget came to \$1.8 billion.**

## 7. Missed (Transit) Connections

The Mayor is using the Amazon deal as justification for [reviving the Brooklyn-Queens Connector \(BQX\)](#), a trolley to run along the Queens-Brooklyn waterfront from Red Hook to Northern Astoria. The BQX has long been rejected by the communities along the route for its failure to meet the actual transit needs of current residents, who are more likely to travel within neighborhoods or between their boroughs and Manhattan.

Moreover, the anticipation of an additional and higher fare ensures that it will not be affordable to working-class and lower-income New Yorkers, for whom MTA fares are already too high. And yet, working-class and lower-income residents, including those in Queensbridge, Ravenswood and Astoria Houses would be among those most affected by the ongoing construction of the project.

Instead of a new trolley, our local community needs more bus lines, and added buses on the roads and subway cars on the tracks. More broadly, local and city residents need more investment in our public transportation system to fix other infrastructure failings that delay trains and make us late for work, school and other appointments and/or unnecessarily complicate getting from point A to point B.

For residents across Western Queens, these failings have made the 7 train notorious for perpetual overcrowding, major and near-daily delays (due to signal and track problems, etc.) and unnecessarily long commutes. The described above “intensifying gentrification” across Western Queens and the influx of newcomers it will bring will worsen these conditions. Rather

than giving Amazon nearly \$3 billion in tax breaks and incentives, we should be extracting tax revenue to fund public transportation. There IS money for the MTA, we're just giving it away.

If implemented, the BQX would also further intensify gentrification – which would compound current trends and the effects of Amazon's presence on the surrounding community in ways described in point #5 & 6.

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To these ends, the Justice For All Coalition stands united with other community groups across Western Queens, and residents across the city in saying we do not accept the Amazon deal and we do not want or need Amazon HQ2 in our neighborhood or city. We want and deserve real public investment and better city management by public officials that privilege the needs and well-being of their residents first and foremost.