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Amazon HQ2: How Did We Get Here? What Comes Next?

Sometime in the coming weeks Amazon will announce a short list of U.S. cities in which it will consider placing its new \$5 billion, 50,000-person second headquarters. It is likely that these finalist cities will be large, prosperous, and located in the eastern part of the country.

Even in cities of a significant size and wealth, the arrival of what Amazon calls HQ2 will be transformative, even explosive. One only needs to look at the impact of HQ1 on Seattle to see why. Commentators in Seattle have taken to calling Amazon's expansion the "prosperity bomb," reflecting both the massive impact of the company's growth and the heat of the ensuing fights about how that growth should be managed and distributed across the city.

With the prospect of a second "prosperity bomb" being dropped in a major American city, it's not surprising that Amazon debates are raging. In fact, the Amazon HQ2 competition has focused the attention of a uniquely broad and diverse cadre of leaders across media, politics, business, and advocacy. Nationally, it has become a signpost for public policy issues ranging from antitrust to tax incentives to the need for policies that better support struggling communities. Locally, in each bidding city the response to HQ2 has simultaneously united a broad array of institutions around a shared economic development prize, and at the same time exposed fissures between elite-driven organizations and grassroots advocates about how bids should be executed, if at all.

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