

June 25, 2020

-via electronic transmission and regular mail-

Richard Kessel, Chairman
Nassau County Industrial Development Agency
1 West Street, 4th Floor
Mineola, NY 11501

Dear Chairman Kessel:

We read with interest your comments in the Newsday article of June 11th regarding the report that Amazon may be considering the construction of a warehouse on the former Cerro Wire property in Syosset, wherein you were quoted as follows:

“‘We've made it clear, we want Amazon here in our county,’ said IDA chairman Richard Kessel. ‘It means jobs, jobs, jobs — and we will be as creative as we can be to lay out the welcome mat.’”
(<https://www.newsday.com/business/amazon-cerro-wire-syosset-saladino-1.45595862>).

We write to encourage the Nassau IDA to consider ways in which it can “lay out the welcome mat” without trampling Syosset property taxpayers.

Specifically, the Board of Education discussed the potential Amazon project and the Nassau IDA’s perspective noted above at their meeting on June 17th and wishes to express its unanimous opposition to any Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements – which would amount to a subsidy of one of the most profitable entities in the world by the residents of the Syosset community.

Board supports the creation of jobs and new development generally, but the Board also recognizes that some of the tools at the Nassau IDA’s disposal (like PILOT agreements) disproportionately underwrite region-wide job creation at the involuntary expense of Syosset taxpayers.

Lastly, I hope to address your worries from your August 6, 2019 letter to the Board of Education. In it, you state you are “fearful that the School District’s blanket opposition” (to PILOT agreement renewals) “is actually rooted in its conceptual opposition to PILOT agreements.”

Although we are expressing our opposition to a PILOT agreement for this potential Amazon warehouse project, your worry is not the case. As we stated in our letter to County Executive Curran on June 25, 2019, the Board of Education’s blanket opposition impacted solely PILOT renewals and only:

“...until such time as the Nassau IDA provides the School District with adequate notice, (and) implements a different approval process for PILOT renewals...”

These were not intended as unattainable demands. Rather, they were simply restatements of good government measures that you as Chairman of the Nassau IDA, had already promised to implement:

- At the Nassau County IDA meeting held on December 12, 2018, in response to our concerns regarding the limited notice that the School District received regarding projects directly affecting

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our School District and school community, you informed the school's representatives that the IDA would be modifying its notification procedures to better inform affected jurisdictions, such as school districts.

- At the Nassau County IDA meeting held on May 16, 2019, you further indicated that the IDA would be pursuing the creation of a parallel process to evaluate PILOT renewals as the considerations differ from those for initial PILOT applications.

To my knowledge, these process improvements have not yet been implemented, so the Board's blanket opposition to PILOT renewals remains prudent.

With respect to the specific merits of the reported Amazon warehouse project in Syosset, the Board did not take a position in opposition to this development at its recent meeting, as little is known about the site plan and proposed project to date, including what residual contamination may remain on the site, and what measures will be taken to mitigate the impact of the construction, traffic, and emissions from ongoing operations to the elementary schools located in close proximity to the site – but did recognize that this project would be less impactful than previous proposals insomuch as there would be no enrollment impact on schools. Of course, the Board and the District reserve their rights to take a position once documents are made available and the financial and environmental impacts analyzed.

However, with respect to a PILOT agreement for this particular project, it is the Board's firm position that Amazon is not a struggling new business needing financial assistance in the form of a property tax abatement. Thus, we oppose any form of PILOT that allows Amazon (or its leaseholder) to forgo paying its fair share of school taxes on any improved property it owns or operates in Syosset. Doing so would create the preposterous situation of having the taxpayers of Syosset subsidize the one of the largest retailers in the world.

We would respectfully request that you notify the school district promptly of any actions the IDA is taking or considering regarding this property, and we reserve the right to comment further once more specific details about the project become public.

Sincerely,



For the Board of Education,
Dr. Thomas Rogers, Superintendent