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Another Voice: Niagara River Greenway dodged an Amazon bomb

Another Voice

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By Larry Beahan

OK, Grand Island dodged an Amazon bomb aimed at its green forests, clean waters and nourishing wetlands and threatening to strangle its highways and bridges with trucks and its airways with asthma-inducing diesel fumes.

Gigantic Amazon was not concerned that Grand Island is the heart of the Niagara River Greenway, an unparalleled region of scenic beauty, ecological diversity and biological abundance, designated by UNESCO a “Wetland of International Importance” under its Ramsar Convention and by Audubon a “Globally Important Bird Area.” It is one of the most important and threatened bird habitats on Earth. It contains the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” Niagara Falls. And Amazon didn’t care.

In 2007, the Niagara River Greenway was officially established, under law by New York State, for the purpose of its natural and economic restoration. The Niagara Power Project is funding this massive rehabilitation project over 50 years with \$450 million.

Amazon offered a \$10 million sweetener for the privilege of dropping its second-largest-warehouse-in-the-world bomb into this beautiful stretch of wetland island and river connecting two great lakes, and just upstream from one of the greatest tourists

sites in the world. It is unthinkable.

Yet, Amazon offers money and jobs, tons of them. An offer we, perhaps, can't refuse? Western New York has lost steel plants, automobile plants, airplane plants. We are no longer the largest grain port in the world. We could certainly use Amazon's economic boost but not at any price.

This clumsy behemoth, Amazon, can't be trusted to plop down wherever it pleases. It must be steered. We are rich in deserted manufacturing sites that are prime for Amazon. Lackawanna with its rail connections looks ideal.

What about our iconic New York Central Terminal? That monumental tower could house Amazon headquarters in regal style. The outmoded buildings and massive rail yards around it have the space for the outsized warehouse. If Amazon would use the those railroad connections it could solve the problem of road congestion and diesel pollution that Amazon trucks are noted for.

For this constructive reuse of a beloved Buffalo landmark, the city might find ways to make business easier for Amazon.

The New York Central Terminal is close to my heart. I worked the Christmas rush there through college loading and unloading rail cars. My dad worked there for 40 years, sorting and shipping mailed packages and letters for the U.S. Railway Mail Service.

Let's put Amazon where it will do some good.

Larry Beahan is secretary of the Adirondack Mountain Club, Niagara Frontier Chapter.

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