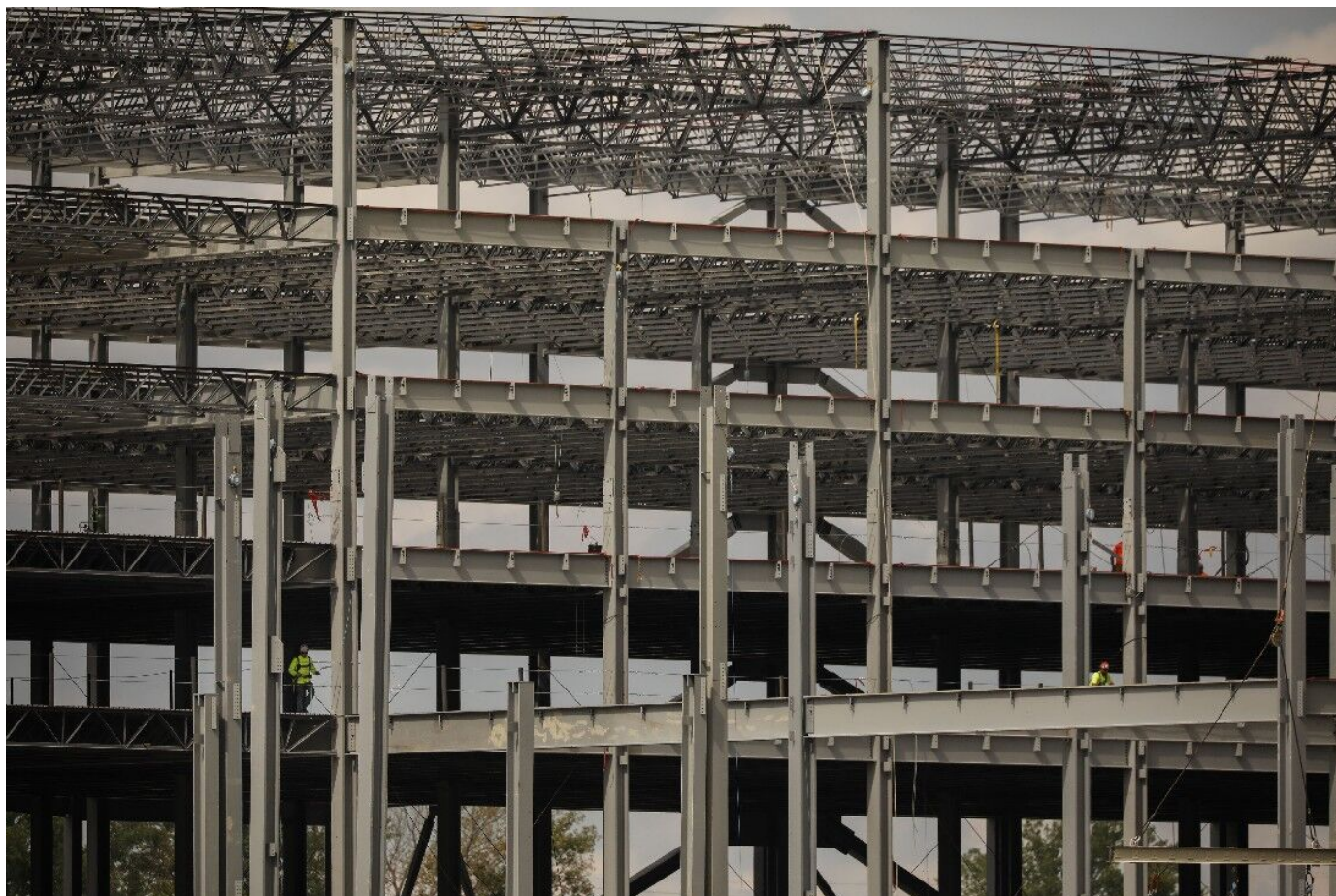

https://buffalonews.com/news/local/kucharski-says-amazon-bid-must-be-more-organized-and-more-secret/article_517f60f6-e155-11ea-b1c4-33e316ee6ef9.html

Kucharski says Amazon bid must be more organized – and more secret

Thomas J. Prohaska
Aug 18, 2020



Construction is underway on a Amazon site in Liverpool, just outside of Syracuse. The project is similar to one that the company has dropped on Grand Island.

Derek Gee

The effort to find a new site for a massive Amazon warehouse, which fell through last week in Grand Island, needs to be more organized – and more secret – the head of the region's business marketing agency said Monday.

"Just about everything we do is in confidence. We sign nondisclosure agreements," said Thomas A. Kucharski, president and CEO of Invest Buffalo Niagara. "This type of process is supposed to work in confidence until you get to the end."

Officials in Niagara County, for instance, have publicly said they called Amazon and its site developer, Trammell Crow Co., in the wake of the Grand Island project's demise. Kucharski said Monday he thinks the effort to save the project needs to be more centralized.

"I don't think any of our community members know the exact criteria that qualifies a site to be considered by them. That's why this should occur in an organized way," Kucharski said.

"Several of our communities, trying to be helpful, have tried to contact them," Kucharski said. "Speaking to them, like any developer, they're not unlike any business or developer: They'd like to work with a coordinating entity. If they had to work with numerous entities in each place that they're looking to site a facility, it would become unwieldy.

"Unfortunately with this one, a number of the entities that signed NDAs didn't really observe them as well as they should have throughout the process. There was a little more public disclosure than anybody would have liked."

As a result of the failure of the Grand Island plan for "Project Olive," as the warehouse project was dubbed, some officials have become more careful about discussing the possibility of luring that project to other locations in the region.

For example, Orleans County Economic Development, which owns a 200-acre business park in Medina, acknowledged Monday it has been on Amazon's radar for some time.

But spokeswoman Andina Barone said Orleans County officials will not approach Amazon or Trammell Crow on their own.

"We will work with our valued partners at Invest Buffalo Niagara," Barone said.

Legislator Richard L. Andres Jr., chairman of the Niagara County Legislature's Economic Development Committee, said the county is pushing ahead, trying to get owners of potential sites to agree to make them available for an Amazon project.

He wouldn't identify the sites, but the county has locations in the towns of Niagara and Cambria that are preapproved by Albany for high-tech manufacturing. An Amazon warehouse would not fall into that category.

Andres said the county contacted James Murray-Coleman, senior vice president of Trammell Crow, even before last week's news in Grand Island.

"At one time they said they had so much invested in Grand Island they didn't want to leave, but that was before getting the door slammed on them," Andres said.

Since the failure of the Grand Island plan, Murray-Coleman has been contacted again, Andres said. His response?

"Just general pleasantries, 'thank you for your interest,' " Andres said.

Murray-Coleman did not return calls from The Buffalo News.

Kucharski said none of his contacts at Amazon or Trammell Crow have talked to anyone from Niagara County.

"The folks we're working with at the company and the developer, they have not been in contact with anybody else but us," Kucharski said. "Obviously, Amazon's a very large business. Who knows who they were talking to? We have told everybody it's much better to present a united front on any of these expressions of interest."

"We know that there is much speculation and all we can say is we are working closely with our economic development partners," said Susan C. Langdon, executive director of the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency.

"The folks that are in charge of facilities and real estate, all those facilities at Amazon, as recently as the end of last week, hadn't talked to anybody else," Kucharski said. "If they did talk to them, I hope they made a good case. We have made a good case for all of our available sites. ... We don't have any idea when they'll re-engage on this project, if they will re-engage on this project. Or it might be something else. They did indicate we're an important part of their delivery system, so hopefully we'll get another shot at it, whenever that is."

 1 comment

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 I have covered Niagara County for The Buffalo News since 1995, when I joined the paper after 10 years as news director at WLVL in Lockport.

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