

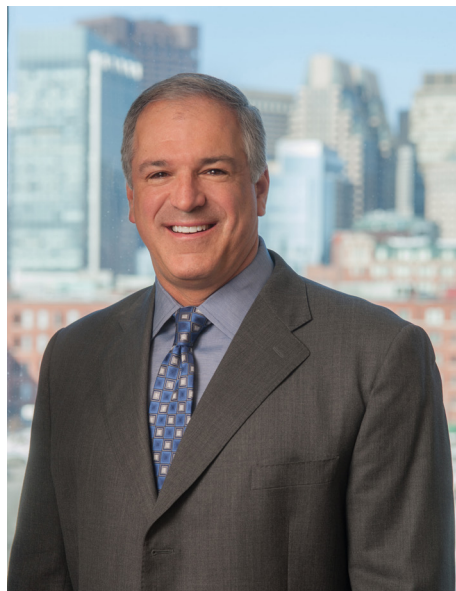
BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Viewpoint: Amazon HQ2 means a need for transit oriented development

Massachusetts is a top contender as the location for Amazon HQ2, and the excitement is mounting. As we contemplate the impact of a massive influx of Amazon employees, it is hard not to ask the question: Where will these 50,000 professionals live? Amazon's employees – like many current Massachusetts residents – will look for convenience factors such as transportation, amenities and suitable housing to keep pace with their changing lifestyles.

Amazon employs more than 40,000 people in the South Lake Union neighborhood of Seattle, many of whom come from all around the world. About 15 percent of them live in the same ZIP code as their office, and about 20 percent walk to work. The majority of Amazon employees spurn cars, choosing to walk or bike to work, creating a tremendous need for transit-oriented housing.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council estimates that Greater Boston will need to add 435,000 housing units by 2040 to keep up with demand – with or without Amazon. To meet this demand, the Baker administration has proposed a new law that would change the zoning requirements for housing. The Housing Choice Initiative features an ambitious goal of adding 135,000 homes over the next eight years to extend the current pace of development, setting aside \$10 million in state funds to reward participating cities and towns.



Mike Scott is chairman of law firm Nutter's real estate department.

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There are many challenges to overcome, particularly at the local level. Some communities view transit-oriented development as solely as an area served by a subway stop. However, strong commuter rail and bus service, as well as access to regional transit, must be included in the transit mix.

Are you making work-related resolutions for 2018?

Density is also a factor. Certain regions of the state have pockets of land currently zoned for single-family housing or otherwise place restrictions on housing-unit production, limiting the density the state requires to initiate

transit-oriented development.

Local communities need to start asking the right questions: What is the appropriate density? How do we diversify housing choices? And, how do we deal with affordability?

The Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act, known as 40R and enacted a decade ago, encouraged communities to create dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts, including a percentage of affordable housing units, to be located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing cities, and town centers, and in other highly suitable locations.

This created greater permitting density for transit-oriented development, but more needs to be done. It is time that we as a Commonwealth, recognize the incredible housing shortage and work with local communities to overcome this barrier of NIMBY-ism to create districts that are zoned around transit.

More housing means lower prices, and whether you work for Amazon or not, lower prices mean your kids will be able to raise their families here too. We can come together and commit to provide more transit service if municipalities agree to commit to density and affordability in these districts.

Whether or not Amazon chooses Massachusetts, the state and its development community should already be thinking strategically about our housing needs.