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South Florida made it to the Top 20 regions being considered by Amazon for its second headquarters.

Amazon pursuit leaves Miami poised to attract multinational companies



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In the 10 years since the Great Recession, no U.S. city has undergone as significant a change as downtown Miami.

Our real-estate market has shed its boom-turned-bust tendencies in favor of stability. New transit systems are serving a population that's grown 40 percent since 2010. Our downtown has emerged as a global destination as new hotels, retail centers and cultural venues thrive on land that was vacant not long ago.

Given this evolution, it's no surprise that Miami's urban core was a focal point of Amazon's search for its second headquarters. In being named among the e-commerce giant's Top 20 locations, South Florida's viability as a home for top-tier multinational companies became national news — with downtown Miami positioned as the region's chief commercial hub and an important link to Latin America.

With the search now over, it's time to reflect and focus our attention on confronting near- and long-term challenges. What did we learn from the year-long Amazon pursuit?

Regionalism is a winning

strategy: To woo Amazon, Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties worked together, rather than as individual counties. The Miami Downtown Development Authority joined the effort spearheaded by The Beacon Council, Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, Palm Beach Business Development Board, plus many other public and private organizations.

This was an opportunity to leverage our region's strengths: Our workforce of almost 7 million people; diverse range of housing submarkets; capacity for future development; and new and improved connectivity via Brightline. Our three international airports offering nonstop service to 205 destinations, along with two powerhouse seaports — PortMiami and Port Everglades — move goods and people across the world.

Our region's place as an HQ2 finalist underscores our national and international appeal. Now that we've navigated the Amazon search, our three counties are better suited to pursue major companies as a united front.

Downtown is a center for world commerce: When businesses scout downtown, they often note three advantages: the investments we're making in urban infrastructure; the number of international banks, financial services firms and technology companies already doing business here; and our location midway between one of the

world's largest airports and Miami Beach.

Miami may be a young city built on urban sprawl, but downtown is becoming a vibrant neighborhood thanks to a spike in vertical development that has ushered in more than 150 new towers where more people are living and working than ever before. Today, more than 92,000 people call downtown home, and the district's daytime population exceeds a quarter of a million.

Our talent base is large, diverse and growing: Foreign-born workers make up almost 40 percent of Miami's creative class, sectors ranging from tech and media to art and design. This is important because a quarter of all startups are founded by immigrants, and almost half of all Fortune 500 companies are founded by immigrants or their children.

At the same time, our region is home to more than 250,000 college students who represent a deep well of talent for potential employers.

The Amazon process was an impetus for putting more resources behind cultivating and developing the future leaders of our workforce.

We must confront South Florida's challenges head-on. Reducing traffic, protecting against climate change and maintaining an accessible housing market are fundamental to our region's future success.

Employers contemplating a presence here want to know that the public and

private sectors have developed a roadmap for managing these challenges.

We're gradually alleviating congestion with the addition of Brightline and soon, a TriRail link to Downtown Miami. Now we must focus on encouraging transit ridership and prioritizing people over cars.

Likewise, many South Florida cities are proactively taking-on climate risks. Recent votes in favor of bonds that will finance resiliency measures in Miami and Miami Beach are a step in the right direction. Now the onus is on local governments to put those funds to the good use while leveraging private support. The same goes for our housing market, where creative approaches to building market rate and affordable homes should be a priority.

Amazon's HQ2 process was the highest profile search of its kind in history, but it's by no means the last. As a gateway market, South Florida is well-positioned to capture additional interest among multinational companies.

Our responsibility looking forward must be protecting and strengthening that competitive advantage.

Alyce Robertson is the executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, www.miamidda.com, which is tasked with improving downtown through business development, infrastructure and capital improvements and the provision of services.