

Amazon hires Washington, DC official who participated in HQ2 talks

One of the DC government's top economic development officials, who tried to charm Amazon into building its second headquarters in the District, will be stepping down to work for the tech giant in the coming weeks.

Brian Kenner, DC's deputy mayor for planning and economic development, helped lead the Mayor Muriel Bowser administration's "Obviously DC" campaign. The campaign was aimed at tempting Amazon to locate a new headquarters in the DC metro area, using a combination of tax credits and other incentives. The effort ultimately failed, with Amazon initially splitting up its second headquarters between Long Island City in NYC and a Northern Virginia headquarters just outside DC. Months later, New York officials rallied against the deal, citing outrageous tax incentives and anti-union language, forcing the e-commerce giant to scrap its plans and build out solely in the Virginia location.

The DC campaign to woo Amazon included a tax incentive package worth around \$488 million and \$1 billion (through 2024) along with accelerated permit approvals and a position for Amazon within the mayor's office to aid with the project.

Amazon vice president of public policy Brian Huseman, connected Kenner's hiring to his knowledge of and experience with the HQ2 process. "Our new headquarters presents an opportunity for us to build a foundation for regional collaboration and engagement," Huseman said. "We will rely on Brian Kenner's expertise in the region and in economic

development to help us do that.”

Kenner said he was approached by Amazon around four weeks ago for the position as senior manager at the company’s DC policy office.

Despite his connection to the HQ2 campaign, Kenner told the *Washington Business Journal* Thursday that he only participated in “cursory talks with the company” during that period. Despite his claims, the *Washington City Paper* reported last April that Kenner was brought along with Mayor Bowser to attend a dinner with Amazon executives while the company was still scouting out HQ2 locations. Kenner’s ability to move from the private to public then back to private sectors throughout his career highlights a major criticism of Washington and the national subsidy process as a whole.

Kenner’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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