



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

June 26, 2020

Dear City Councilmembers:

I am pleased that the Council is now seriously considering passing a historic tax on Amazon and the other top 3 percent big businesses in Seattle, with seven out of the nine Councilmembers having publicly pledged their support, making it a veto-proof majority.

The fact that the City Council might now be moving forward together on an Amazon Tax is entirely and exclusively due to the thousands who have been fighting for the Tax Amazon movement, including black and brown community members and leaders, multi-racial community organizers, LGBTQ community members, immigrants, rank-and-file labor members, Democratic party rank and file, and socialists.

The Council debate reflects today's widespread public understanding that working people face an unprecedented triple COVID crisis – a housing unaffordability crisis, a joblessness crisis, and a public health crisis – while big corporations in our city continue to enjoy a tax haven. That is an untenable and inhumane contradiction.

The Democrats' version of the Amazon Tax legislation, which is now co-sponsored by five Councilmembers, falls well short of what our community needs, but would be a real, substantive step forward. My office and the Tax Amazon movement are ready to work with any Councilmember to strengthen the legislation in the days ahead and remove its corporate loopholes, so that we can pass the Amazon Tax legislation that addresses the scale of the human crisis in our city.

Today my office detailed several amendments (below) that I will be proposing to strengthen that legislation. I urge you to join me in supporting these amendments in addition to supporting the Amazon Tax in general. and I would welcome your co-sponsorship on any of these amendments. I also welcome your questions and feedback. Please feel free to contact my staff, Jonathan Rosenblum.

First, I am proposing an amendment to bring the funding back to the movement's demand, to raise the minimum revenue necessary to address the scale of the housing unaffordability and homelessness crisis, by increasing the amount to be raised with the Amazon Tax to \$500 million/year. This amendment would mean that the Amazon Tax would fund 8,000 affordable homes for our most vulnerable community members as opposed to only 3,200 homes! It is the first step for elected officials to acknowledge the scale of the crisis, but what ultimately matters is the dollars available to address the widespread suffering.

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It would be absolutely unconscionable for the Council to allow budget cuts to happen. I am proposing an amendment to completely reject the Mayor’s austerity program and to allow us to pass a zero-cuts budget, by increasing the amount to be raised with the Amazon Tax by an additional \$293 million/year. The Mayor has announced [a 2021 budget shortfall of \\$293 million](#), and has asserted that massive layoffs and concessions by City workers and those who need the services are “unavoidable.” I completely reject this cruel, inhumane and dishonest conclusion, and urge all Councilmembers to do so as well. Layoffs, furloughs, and concessions by workers and the communities they serve are 100% avoidable. It is a question of which side you are on, especially in a city as wealthy as Seattle.

I am proposing an amendment for us to join together to put specific substance behind the slogan Black Lives Matter, which Councilmembers have vocalized. This amendment would increase the tax rate in the Democrats’ Amazon Tax legislation to bring in an additional \$50 million/year, and dedicate that new funding to building at least 1,000 new, quality, affordable homes in the Central District, [as called for by African-American faith leaders](#) earlier this month when they unveiled their Central Area Housing Plan. My amendment would ensure that the city include a “neighborhood preference policy” for these new Central District apartments, available to households between 0 and 80 percent AMI, to give tenancy preference to those who have lived in the CD or who have historical family ties to the neighborhood.

As Reverend Carey Anderson, pastor of Seattle’s First African Methodist Episcopal Church, said [last week at our press conference](#) to end racist gentrification, **“Simply put, if Black Lives Matter, then affordable housing for Black families in the Central Area should matter.”**

This amendment would build on the successful de-gentrification work led by Africatown and other community groups, and will contribute to undoing racist gentrification policies that private developers and the political establishment have been responsible for creating and perpetuating over the years.

Fourth, I will bring forward an amendment to increase the tax rate in Democrats’ Amazon Tax legislation to raise an additional \$50 million/year specifically for Green New Deal Investments as spelled out in the Sawant-Morales Amazon Tax legislation. Last year, the Council unanimously adopted Resolution 31895, which established key climate justice goals and committed the City to implement comprehensive strategies, including investments such as those proposed in the Sawant-Morales legislation. These investments will help reduce Seattle’s climate pollution by insulating and weatherizing tens of thousands of homes, by installing efficient, renewable energy systems, and by investing in just transition strategies for workers in fossil fuel-dependent industries, and create more than 22,000 jobs in the next decade.

While the Democrats’ Amazon Tax bill contains lengthy declarations in the “Whereas” clauses about the urgent need for the City to support the Green New Deal, including “the need to establish a dedicated revenue source in order to implement Green New

Deal strategies,” there are no dedicated funds allocated toward Green New Deal programs, unlike in the Sawant-Morales plan. This amendment fixes that and would allow the Council to begin to stand on the right side of history.

My office will be bringing an amendment to eliminate the outrageous sunset clause from the Democrats' Amazon Tax bill. The proposed sunset is a sop to big business, a slap in the face of working people and small business owners who in Seattle have long shouldered the overwhelming burden of taxation while big business gets handouts. We need a deeply progressive tax system to become the norm, and need a sunset clause on the status quo of regressive taxes and underfunding of the needs of society.

Last but not least, I am bringing an amendment, along with Councilmember Herbold, to advance the start date for the Amazon Tax to Aug. 1, 2020. This will raise an additional \$74.5 million for use in 2021, providing essential funds for our community when it is so urgently needed.

Again, I welcome your ideas and feedback, on these amendments and on other aspects of the legislation. I, and the entire Tax Amazon movement, look forward to working with you to adopt a strong Amazon Tax legislation that addresses the triple crisis working people face with the scale, speed, and urgency that is required.

Sincerely,



Kshama Sawant