

How Hundreds of Silent Supporters Won JBG SMITH Unanimous Approval for a Future HQ2 Site

Reaching the silent supporters who don't attend public meetings



Connecting with silent supporters of new real estate development is imperative to securing approval for large-scale projects like Central District Retail, outside of Washington, DC.

Central District Retail is one of JBG SMITH's major planned developments in Crystal City, part of the "National Landing" neighborhood that made headlines in late 2018 as the location of Amazon's HQ2. It will transform the area from what feels like an office park into a space where people want to spend more time outside of the 9-to-5.



An innovative engagement strategy with digital tools

But the usual “abutter outreach” approach, with in-person meetings and flyers, wouldn’t be enough to get the project approved. JBG SMITH had to reach the broad base of community members who not only live in Crystal City, but also spend time there. They were ready and waiting for new development to make Crystal City more vibrant and dynamic.

JBG SMITH used coUrbanize’s text-messaging features, moderated comment forum, and digital letters of support to connect with hundreds of silent supporters in Crystal City.

“With a project of this scale and this much potential development, we really wanted to find new opportunities to access community members who couldn’t show up at board hearings and wait six hours to testify,” says Andrew Van Horn, Former Executive Vice President of JBG SMITH.



What do you want to see when you leave the future Metro exit at 18th & Crystal?

- 1 Public seating & tables
- 2 Trees & plantings
- 3 A farmers market



Text **1**, **2** or **3** to:
(703) 940-0838

Connecting with silent supporters, digitally



1,046 COMMENTS TOTAL

57% POSITIVE SENTIMENT

27% NEUTRAL SENTIMENT

7,256 USERS

10,056 SESSIONS

50 LETTERS OF SUPPORT

12 MONTHS FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LAUNCH
TO COUNTY APPROVAL

100% APPROVAL BY ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD

The project team placed street signs throughout Crystal City asking fact-based questions like, “What kind of restaurant would you visit most often at the corner of 18th & Crystal Drive?” and “What stores or shops would encourage you to spend more time here in the evening and on weekends?” Community members passing by were able to text their responses, which were posted directly to the Central District at Crystal City coUrbanize project.

To connect with as many community members as possible, they also distributed the project platform through the Crystal

City Business Improvement District group’s network, and posted signs throughout JBG SMITH’s other office buildings in Crystal City.

“The 1,000+ comments we were able to collect online were indispensable. We leveraged those in community meetings and board meetings to show that there were hundreds of silent supporters for the project, whether people are able to come to the meeting or not,” says Victoria Coates, Senior Development Analyst at JBG SMITH.

Letters of support turn the tide

Before the hearing, JBG SMITH leveraged the hundreds of supporters on coUrbanize through an online campaign to collect letters of support for the development. In just 4 weeks, they received letters of support from 50 community members on coUrbanize.

With more than 1,000 responses, the Central District team gained powerful, data-driven insights about what community members wanted, as well as the key community concerns that they needed to address. When the final hearing came, JBG SMITH used their coUrbanize data report to demonstrate

public support for the project, and underscore their proactive attention to community feedback.

When JBG SMITH made its final presentation to the Arlington County Board, they knew that they couldn't expect all of their supporters to attend. coUrbanize's extensive survey results helped them demonstrate broad support from the public. JBG SMITH received unanimous approval from the County – just a few weeks before Amazon announced that they had selected National Landing for HQ2.

Using coUrbanize, the JBG SMITH team:

- Got the message out about the Central District project early and often
- Reached a critical mass of community members, and were able to connect with hundreds of Crystal City stakeholders online
- Demonstrated that there was real support for the project from the public, through comments and letters of support



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