

Good afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Doug Siglin. I am a volunteer representing the CCAN Action Fund, speaking on behalf of CCAN's 5,000 members in Montgomery County. My testimony concerns both the ZTA and Councilmember Glass' bill.

I want to be clear from the outset. You should pass the ZTA, but only after adding a provision requiring data centers over a certain *de minimus* size to use all or at least mostly clean energy. You should pass the Glass bill, but only after requiring the task force to report on how new data centers will affect the county's climate goals and proposing appropriate new policies.

Here's why. In 2017, this Council declared a climate emergency and mobilization. An extensive public process produced the Climate Action Plan, committing to a 100% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2035. The last Montgomery County greenhouse gas inventory was done in 2020, showing about 8.6 million tons of climate pollution emitted annually. Our best guess is that we are still in that 8-million-ton annual range.

I'm sure that you all know about the proposal for a 300-megawatt hyperscale data center at the Dickerson site. You may not know that it plans to get all its baseline energy from the grid. It only takes a minute to calculate the CO₂ emissions of 300 megawatts of grid power. At full capacity and typical utilization, this single project will be responsible for around a million tons of CO₂ and methane every year, and considerably more when polluting new gas or coal plants come on line to cover the load from this and other AI factories. That is 1/8th or 1/7th of all the carbon pollution now produced by over a million Montgomery County residents.

Visualize what Montgomery County's carbon emissions graph will look like if this single project moves ahead. Instead of a downward slope showing progress towards zero in just nine years, the line rises dramatically, obliterating the county's climate pollution goals. Another modest data center in Silver Spring plans to expand to 100 megawatts. If its expansion and other data centers are approved, the emissions curve rises even faster.

The solution to this is obvious: pass an amendment to the ZTA making sure that large data centers directly use clean energy, or at least indirectly offset what they use.

Some assert that energy is outside the ZTA's scope. However, a carefully drawn amendment to protect county and state climate commitments and protect residents from the harmful effects of this uniquely intensive land use is appropriate and likely to be legally defensible.

The Montgomery County Planning Board appears to agree. It formally advised you in its February 17th report: “Require standards addressing energy usage, including a finding that Data Center development will not impair the County and State climate goals, utilizing the Carbon Usage Effectiveness ratio as a benchmark, and offsetting data center operational electricity demand, through on-site renewable energy generation, storage, or procurement.”

We have met with the leadership teams of Terra Energy and Atmosphere, who are developing the Dickerson site. They say they want to do the right thing with clean energy. But despite our repeated requests, they declined to make any kind of commitment to any level of clean energy supply. Apparently, their business model or their budget doesn't allow for it. It's not impossible: Google has signed at least 170 power purchase agreements for more than 22 gigawatts of clean electricity for its data centers. But if Dickerson proceeds as planned, this one project will blow up the county's climate goals, giving you a very stark policy choice to make.

Our Climate Coalition partners are asking you today to pause approvals of new data centers. We think that's right. Data centers may be inevitable, but they are coming at us way too fast. There are serious issues to work out. Currently, you and a million other Montgomery County residents are being asked to bear extraordinary environmental and pocketbook costs so that a few may benefit from data centers. That's not worth the extra property taxes.

So we are asking you this: show the nation that Montgomery County is willing to only welcome large data centers that will further the county's climate policy and protect its residents. Simply, if data centers can't be built yet to use clean energy, they shouldn't be built yet. Other counties, the state and the nation desperately need your leadership on this.

CCAN would of course be glad to work with you and your staffs to flesh out the details of the Planning Board recommendation and clarify how you might use the international Carbon Usage Effectiveness metric to craft a smart, defensible amendment to the ZTA.

Thanks so much for your time, and for reflecting on these thoughts.