



Bill 4-26 Buildings – Task Force on Data Centers_Established
Hearing Date: February 24, 2026

Testimony of Karen Metchis on behalf of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County and Montgomery County Sierra Club

I am testifying on behalf of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County and the Montgomery County Sierra Club.

We strongly support what others have said - there are many unanswered questions that need to be addressed before ZTA 26-01 is adopted and before any data center project is approved for development.

We have all read about the issues in Loudoun County – which I won't enumerate except to remind you that we are already seeing dramatically rising electricity rates because of the data center corridor developments in Northern Virginia.

We are in favor of Bill 4-26 - establishing a data center task force - with amendments, two of which I will say here, but other refinements are proposed in my written testimony

- First, the composition of the Data Center Task Force must be fair and balanced. As it is written it leans heavily on industry.

The bill proposes a 15-member task force with 5 county officials, 6 utility and industry related representatives, and only 4 public, non-industry-related members. The balance is wrong. It needs fewer industry-related members, more members representing both environmental and consumer protection advocates, a neutral party who understands how to evaluate the true costs and benefits of data centers, and someone from elsewhere in Maryland or Virginia with lived experience in a community that already has a data center.

- Second, we ask that the bill be amended to establish a moratorium on development of data centers until the State of Maryland's task force report is completed, along with the report proposed by this bill. This would allow the recommendations to be put into effect by law and regulation before data center development proceeds.

No ZTA should be passed until these two reports are completed and fully understood in a transparent public process. We deserve time to ensure we have all the information and safeguards in place that show we know how to grow economically while protecting the environment and all the residents of Montgomery County.

The point is, any effort to build a data center should be held up until there is time to fully review and amend, as needed, Bill 04-26 and the proposed ZTA.

The fact that we have two bills before Council - one going to the PHP committee, the other to the T&E and Economics committee - shows that there are a lot of factors to consider. We have to make sure that the public understands the process and is able to get answers to our questions and concerns.

Although there appears to be pressure to move forward on Atmosphere, LLC's application for five hyperscale data centers at the Dickerson site, we believe a pause is needed to figure out what is best for the residents of Montgomery County.

If everyone wants to do the right thing – including Terra and Atmosphere – why the pushback? The right thing requires fairness and transparency to the public. Provisions must be put in place to ensure net zero greenhouse gas emissions to comply with the Climate Action Plan, to protect the public from increased energy rates, to protect our fragile water supply, and to protect our health.

The Climate Coalition Montgomery County recommends the following specific amendments:

8-58 Statement of Purpose:

- (a)(1)(A) include: evaluate the impact on achieving the County's greenhouse gas and resilience goals
- (B) include thermal effects of water discharge
- (C) include potential vibration and ambient source impacts
- (D) include not just the economic benefits but the full cost/benefit associated with data center development

8-59 Membership - we recommend a composition that has more balance between parties with industry, civic, and governmental interests, such as

- 2 Industry-related or utility representatives
- 1 Representative of the Maryland Tech Council
- 1 Trade group representative
- 1 Member of an up-county farm advocacy group
- 1 Consumer protection advocate
- 2 Environmental and sustainability advocates
- 1 Economist with professional experience in evaluating the costs and benefits of data center development
- 2 Representatives of County executive agencies, i.e., DEP and DPS
- 1 representative from the Montgomery County Planning Department

8-60 Duties and Responsibilities

Add the following:

- required public information be made available during the conditional use and project approval processes, including energy use, energy sources, water use, etc.
- policies on maintaining confidential business information that ensures the public's right to transparency and limits the use of non-disclosure agreements
- differentiation between requirements for small local user-dedicated data centers versus large scale and hyperscale data centers
- differentiation between requirements in light, medium, and heavy industrial use zones, including individual or aggregate parcel sizes
- ramifications for meeting the County's greenhouse gas emission and resilience goals
- conditions limiting expansion or rezoning of adjacent land
- real analysis of the potential to locate hyperscale data centers throughout the County
- protections for agricultural land, conservation areas, forests, and other sensitive areas

Sec. 2 Sunset clause

- Amend to add a moratorium on data center development to remain in force until this report and the State of Maryland's reports are complete and considered by the Council.

Thank you for considering our testimony and recommendations.

Karen Metchis

karen.metchis@gmail.com

Submitted on behalf of:

Climate Coalition Montgomery County

6106 Harvard Ave
PO Box 102
Glen Echo, MD 20812

Sierra Club of Montgomery County

Montgomery County Sierra Club
P.O. Box 4024
Rockville, MD 2084

CCMC Member Organizatons

- 350 MoCo
- ACQ Climate (Ask the Climate Question)
- Bethesda Green
- Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
- Chesapeake Climate Action Network
- Ecosystems Study Group
- Elders Climate Action
- Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane UU Church
- Friends of Sligo Creek
- Green Sanctuary Committee UU Church of Silver Spring
- Montgomery Countryside Alliance
- Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
- One Montgomery Green
- Poolesville Green
- Safe Healthy Playing Fields
- Sugarloaf Citizens' Association
- Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended
- The Climate Mobilization Montgomery County
- Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

- Zero Waste Montgomery County