

**Jessica Xiao**

Silver Spring Resident

To the Montgomery County Council

Re: ZTA 4-26 and the Data Centers Task Force

Good afternoon, thank you for holding this public hearing. My name is Jessica Xiao, I am a resident of Silver Spring. I've lived in Glenmont, Rockville, and downtown Silver Spring over the years.

I'm here in support of a data center task force that is transparent with multiple and multilingual opportunities for community members to offer meaningful input throughout the process, and in addition to the limitations proposed in the zoning text amendment 4-26, I'm in favor of a full pause on data center development at least until after the findings and recommendations of the task force are reviewed by the council, including a pause on the development at the Dickerson power plant which aims to use the water from the Potomac, an overstressed river that was just hit downstream of Dickerson with what is reportedly becoming the largest wastewater spill ever nationally. I would also recommend the task force mandate make explicit the possibility that the report may recommend no data centers at all.

And that would be an appropriate conclusion to follow with MoCo at the lead of reimagining economic development that aligns with responsible stewardship. I saw this language held in false dichotomy in a press release about the zoning text amendment and these two things do not have to be at odds.

Data centers consume a lot of water — this has been widely reported and studied for some years — the UN just announced last month that the global water crisis has become global water bankruptcy — these are not just words, these have scientific definitions. Water bankruptcy is defined by insolvency and irreversibility. Insolvency refers to withdrawing and polluting water beyond renewable inflows and safe depletion limits. Irreversibility refers to damage to key parts of water-related natural capital like wetlands and lakes that makes restoration to initial conditions infeasible. Water protection is everyone's responsibility so that we may continue to exist on this planet for generations to come.

Data centers are a social justice issue with disproportionate impacts on Black and brown folks and rural folks. I have visited the NoVa stretch of data centers - it's very bleak – and I've been to Tippets Hill Cemetery, historically black cemetery that is now a small triangle of land between two large data centers. This is the one that still exists — not the two in Brentsville Virginia irreversibly damaged by Microsoft. I've visited Boxtown, Memphis, where Musk's x AI facility is currently still spewing formaldehydes and other carcinogens into the air, and where he intends to build a second one – and residents there are sadly accustomed to knowing family members who have passed away early due to cancer — even before the facility existed, the cancer rate in Boxtown was four times the national average due to the existing polluting industries there.

I live in downtown Silver Spring and my electricity bill for the one-bedroom I rent was \$123 last month, keeping the thermostat at 68-70 degrees. In DC, over the last 5 years, costs went up 93%. Commercial users have only seen rates rise 3%. PJM is embarking on this 5 billion dollar build out of transmission lines mostly for data centers that residents in Maryland and Virginia are paying for. ([WaPo](#)) It was a particularly cold time, but these electricity costs will only continue to go up – private equity is already buying out utilities companies to set up data center infrastructure - and stressing energy grids for data centers, while deprioritizing everyday residents' usages of energy. We must remember who we care about when we design infrastructure — it's each other, not corporations making money.

Ultimately I think about how industry exploits and weaponises local governments for private gain, under the guise of creating public good, especially given long historical records of greenwashing and bandaid solutions that have been found out to be cosmetic. We are not desperate for the attention of data centers and the tech industry — we are a community that holds power over our own futures with great responsibility.

Like moths to a flame, we are becoming humans to a screen, by design. Moving at the speed of industry, not community, by design. They want us to move on their timelines, not our own. They make it sound reasonable to feed into screen addictions at the expense of the real material world — and instead of harm reduction. Yes – AI and technology have possible positive applications, but the dominant ways in which its being designed, shaped, and implemented, have had horribly negative consequences.

I worry about county residents who are like my parents — immigrants who have made their entire lives here in the United States for whom English is not their first language — who are swayed by economic arguments and quite frankly don't see how they can stop anything — they live in Delaware across from an airport, near new pharmaceutical companies, and close to a new data center development. That's why it's evermore important to have local governments that are leaderful and visionary, not buying into the sales pitches of inevitability.

Data centers first and foremost enrich the wealthy who are already reaping the profits of the digital systems they have entrenched us all in.

Montgomery County can be ambitious and a leader for imagining the new – how do we build economic prosperity while divesting from that which kills us? How to build community wealth without being a part of a manufactured economics arm race with no lasting benefits for the residents of this county. Thank you.