

Data centers hold our digital lives, every email and photo that live in the cloud has a home on a chip in a large warehouse somewhere, along with all the computational power used to train ever newer and bigger AI models. All these processes need enormous amounts of power from local grids around the clock and constant cooling with local water supplies. Currently, neither Maryland nor Montgomery County have any regulations governing where data centers can be sited, how close to residential areas, how much water and power they can use and who pays for these massive water and power needs. Breaking: GMU study highlights data center health risks, urges strong regulations on data centers to protect health At the same time, a proposal has been submitted to the Planning Commission for the development of a hyperscale complex of 5 data centers in Dickerson. While this project has received conceptual approval from the County, the full approval will require a major modification review. The project will utilize the Potomac River for its cooling needs. The County Executive's community forum on February 3rd allowed residents to share their thoughts about data centers. Those who spoke urged a transparent, deliberative process to carefully balance this entirely new land use with the county's commitment to equity, climate goals and resource protection. That process is best facilitated with a moratorium on new approvals as have been placed in moratoriums in PG, Frederick, Carroll and Baltimore Counties. After the community forum, the County Executive said he is leaning toward a moratorium while regulations are put into place. Council President Natali Fani Gonzalez is opposed, as some other Councilmembers may also be. There are at least two Zoning Text Amendments governing data centers moving through the planning commission and council. Planning staff analysis has so far found "indeterminate effects" of the ZTA on climate change. Your Voices Write and let them know that a moratorium is the responsible and transparent way forward allowing appropriate time to conduct a comprehensive analysis addressing the complexities of this land use.