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Dear council members and Executive Elrich: I am joining the voices raised in support of a moratorium on the proposed data center in Dickerson. There are too many unanswered questions.

--Are we really willing to let the data center take 2 million gallons of water out of the Potomac every day? Will some of that water be returned to the river? If so, will it contain pollutants, or will it have an elevated temperature? We have had a serious drought in Montgomery County and this entire region for the past several years, and the Potomac regularly runs at low levels. I don't think we can spare 2 million gallons for industrial use.

--Where is the power going to come from to operate this data center? These data farms are notorious for sucking up massive amounts of electricity. Are we looking to solar power? How many acres of farmland and wilderness will be taken up for solar panels to power this center? There has also been talk of diesel generators as backup power sources. How will we mitigate the noise and pollution caused by these big generators?

--The county's agricultural reserve was established decades ago with great foresight, and is a precious resource that sets us apart from places that have allowed unrestricted residential and industrial growth. We have been vigilant in guarding the ag reserve against imprudent development. Data centers, my friends, are imprudent development, and with all their necessary infrastructure could signal the beginning of the end for the ag reserve.

That would be a huge loss for all of us.

I urge you to take a step back and give some serious consideration to the long-term costs and benefits of permitting this data center. I understand that there are potential financial benefits that could accrue from this development. But we should consider carefully whether those rewards will be worth the sacrifice in environmental and social damage. Take some time to think about that. If we do decide to go forward, we will need some strong policies and regulations on how these centers can operate. Honestly, I am doubtful that I will be convinced this development is a good idea, but at the very least you need to be able to tell the people of Montgomery County that you took the time to consider whether this is really a good deal for the county and its residents.