

Testimony on ZTA 26-01 Data Center Commercial Uses - Data Center

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If data centers are right for Montgomery County now, they will be right for the county in 6-12 months when a transparent public process has made a full accounting of where and how data centers can be sited to complement the county's goals - and the biggest question - who pays? Good leadership proceeds carefully and in collaboration.

A recent presentation hosted by the MCA highlighted the many challenges that data centers present for the environment and human health. The example they reviewed was for one of the large centers to be placed in Dickerson. This site resides upriver from the water intakes for the Dalecarlia water treatment facility on the Potomac River. Are data centers strictly prohibited from discharging ANY amount of PFAS into cooling water? The facilities will certainly contain PFAS. It's structurally inherent within data centers.

From where will they draw water in the midst of an extreme drought? What will water consumption for data centers do to homeowner/business rates charged by WSSC? Are data centers allowed to drill wells and tap aquifers for water usage?

Will the centers be required to employ sustainable energy generation such as wind, solar and geothermal for online and back up power? If not, how will particulate matter and exhaust be controlled from the dozens of backup diesel generators that will be needed during power outages?

What effect does facility power consumption have on electricity rates for the citizens of the county and the region? I would think that county and state leaders have moral and fiduciary responsibilities to ensure that PJM does not interfere with electricity rate setting to benefit data centers over homeowners and businesses. As a homeowner, I've been waiting for nearly 24 months for my subscription to Neighborhood Sun solar to be completed. All of the roadblocks that PJM has created to slow this connection process should be removed before ANY data center construction begins. Exelon has also enacted predatory practices toward sustainable

energy in the region. ALL of the benefits that accrue to homeowners and businesses using sustainable energy should be greenlighted.

What is the revenue model for these data centers? What is the taxing structure and how will the huge costs in water, power and pollution be offset? It is meaningless to allow construction to commence on data centers before these questions are answered in detail. We should avoid the legislative approach to 5G where local efforts to study and regulate the technology were steam-rolled by the feds, and local politicians just threw up their hands and still voted to greenlight it. The Purple Line, another example, where empty promises were made on a project that has become an unfunded mandate for county taxpayers requiring billions more dollars on a project with no reasonable delivery date in sight.

The use of campaign contributions to local politicians from technology companies with a vested interest in building data centers should be closely examined.

The citizens of MC are highly taxed and yet the results of winter storm Fern are still blocking streets and travel lanes around the county. The asphalt playground at KP Elementary has yet to be cleared into the third week following the storm, forcing students to remain inside for recess. Completely unacceptable!

County leadership and the Planning Dept. jump from one commercial boondoggle to another and we can't even get an elementary school playground cleared. A school system that receives 54% of county taxpayer revenue. School admins. have been forced to call for volunteers.

The jobs of our many elected leaders at all levels of government should be to materially improve the lives of the taxpayers without constantly asking us for more money while improving the profitability of developers and industries asking for tax breaks.

Thank You,

Bailey Condrey

March 4, 2026

Dear Members of County Council,

I'm writing to request that you place a six-month moratorium on the permitting process for data centers to be sited in Montgomery County, until a full cost/benefit analysis can be conducted. This should include the costs that will be born by county taxpayers, effects on utility bills, the resources that will be used by the centers and the environmental pollution that the Potomac watershed will need to address.

One of the contractors under consideration is Atmosphere, said to be the "greenest data center developer," but has yet to build a project, intends to rely on polluting diesel generators for backup power - providing more than a Gigawatt for the Dickerson center. The generators would be tested at least monthly and potentially relied upon 24/7 during the coldest winter months. That means game over for the County's climate goals and serious impacts on public health. A new VCU study finds [it is healthier to live and breathe near a gas plant than a data center.](#)

A gigawatt is sufficient to power ~ 750,000 homes, which will most certainly drive up the price of electricity for ratepayers. Perhaps ratepayers should be allowed to lock in rates for electricity before data centers come on line. What allowances will be made by PEPCO to shift the economic burden for electricity price increases to data centers?

From Pennsylvania:

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/03032026/pennsylvania-data-center-resistance/>

From Iowa:

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/01032026/iowa-county-data-center-ordinance/>

Before any permitting is fast-tracked for these centers, taxpayers and politicians should have a thorough understanding of how data center revenue models are designed. How do they make money? What taxes will they pay? What types of tax incentives do local leaders typically throw into the mix, and if these are utilized, who pays for them? What upward pressure will be placed on diesel prices, driving up the cost for local businesses that depend on it for fuel?

Real world information should be relied upon to site these facilities. According to the State of Maryland, "commercial landings of invasive blue catfish, which includes the Potomac River, soared to over 4 million pounds in 2023. This represents a >500% surge over the last decade as watermen increase efforts to combat this expanding population." Where do we want to see greater success; assisting regional fishermen and restaurateurs by socking it to a delicious invasive species, blue catfish; or polluting the fishery and killing these efforts by siting a data center in the Potomac fishery? The benefits for thousands of people and the environment should outweigh the benefit to a few. Jobs will be few once construction is complete.

This from Google AI:

Data centers are emerging as potential sources of [PFAS \(per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances\)](#) contamination due to their intensive use of water for cooling and the presence of [fluorinated gases](#) (F-gases) and [refrigerants](#) in their systems. While specific, public data on exact PFAS concentrations in cooling water is limited, concerns exist that these "forever chemicals" from cooling loops and systems are being released into the environment through cooling tower blowdown and wastewater discharge.

 Bay Journal +4

Key Concerns and Findings:

- **Contamination Pathways:** PFAS in data centers are found in refrigeration fluids, specialized cooling fluids (used in immersion cooling), and certain water treatment additives.
- **Rising Water Usage:** Data center water consumption is growing rapidly, with some estimates suggesting it could double or quadruple by 2028, increasing the volume of potential discharge.
- **Regulatory Scrutiny:** The EPA is now fast-tracking reviews of new PFAS and other chemicals specifically used in data centers due to concerns about their persistence and environmental impact.
- **Lack of Reporting:** Currently, companies are not broadly required to report the volume of PFAS chemicals they use or discharge into water supplies.
- **Contaminant Concentration:** Data center cooling systems can concentrate pollutants, including, in some cases, other contaminants like nitrates, leading to higher levels in discharged water.



The Guardian +5

The long-chain PFAS (such as PFOA and PFOS) are subject to strict cleanup standards and are classified as hazardous substances, which could implicate data centers under CERCLA regulations.

This from the Union of Concerned Scientists:

Reaching out to share an eye-opening finding from our recent report, [Data Center Power Play](#)—one that may help explain why your electricity bill may have gone up, even if your energy use hasn't.



New “hyperscale” data centers—primarily built to process artificial intelligence (AI)—are responsible for rapidly increasing energy demand, and we have the receipts to prove this puts us at risk of



larger utility bills and significant climate and health costs.

Fueled by the AI boom from big tech companies like Google, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft, electric utility companies are rushing to build new power plants to supply these massive data centers. Proposals to power these facilities with fossil fuels will increase air pollution, put stress on local water supplies, and accelerate climate change. This surge in demand is rapidly reshaping the utility industry. Our analysts estimate that US electricity demand could increase 60 to 80 percent over the next 25 years, with data centers accounting for about half of the growth in just the next five years.

But this grim future, where everyday people pay the toll of the AI data center boom, is not inevitable.

As the Trump administration pushes regressive energy policies that steers investments away from cost-effective clean energy sources and toward more volatile, polluting fossil fuels, state and federal policymakers must step up. Sensible policies can keep prices down, protect our health, and reduce heat-trapping emissions.

Our research shows that without policies requiring companies like Google, Meta, and Microsoft to pay their fair shares, *billions of dollars* in costs for data centers could be passed onto consumers. And without stronger clean energy policies, the additional fossil fuels burned to power these data centers could result in a 19 to 29 percent increase in annual US power plant carbon dioxide emissions over the next decade—at a moment when we desperately need to slash these emissions fast.

Our report also outlines a better path forward. We found that restoring the federal clean energy tax credits that the Trump administration threw out would lower electricity system costs and reduce US power plant emissions by 33 percent by 2035—even if data centers' electricity demand more than doubles today's levels.

Transitioning to clean and healthy energy is possible, that's why reports like [*Data Center Power Play*](#) are especially critical right now. When powerful corporations can exploit their influence with a free pass from the Trump Administration, **independent science-backed research uncovers the truth, documents the costs, and equips policymakers and science-defenders with the evidence needed to change the rules for the better.**

Respectfully Submitted,

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