Ten Questions Before Our Community Makes a Data Center Decision

A data center can shape public infrastructure, utility costs, natural resources, local finances, and quality of life for decades. Before approving zoning, incentives, utility arrangements, or permits, elected officials should obtain clear, documented answers to these questions.

1 Who is actually proposing and operating the project?

Identify the developer, property owner, intended operator or tenants, parent companies, financing parties, and each entity receiving permits, incentives, or public services.

2 What will be built, in what phases, and at what operating scale?

Require a phase-by-phase schedule showing buildings, computing capacity, electric demand, water use, backup generation, and the realistic maximum buildout.

3 How much electricity will the project require, and what grid work will it trigger?

Quantify peak and annual demand for every phase. Identify needed substations and transmission or distribution upgrades and disclose the assumptions behind the estimates.

4 Who pays for grid upgrades, and how will reliability be protected?

Specify costs assigned to the developer, utility customers, or taxpayers. Establish safeguards against higher rates, delayed connections, or reduced reliability for existing users.

5 How will the facility be cooled, and how much water will it consume?

Provide normal, peak-summer, and emergency requirements; identify the source and cooling technology; and disclose expected losses from evaporation or blowdown.

6 What happens to water supplies and wastewater systems during drought or extreme heat?

Evaluate effects on wells, streams, reservoirs, drinking-water capacity, and treatment systems. Establish enforceable drought restrictions, contingencies, and discharge standards.

7 What local impacts will residents experience, and how will emergencies be handled?

Assess land disturbance, visual effects, noise, air emissions, traffic, road damage, hazardous materials, fire risks, and demands on police, fire, and emergency services.

8 How many jobs will remain after construction ends?

Separate temporary construction jobs from permanent on-site positions. Disclose duration, wages, benefits, residency expectations, contractor use, and workforce commitments.

9 What incentives are being offered, and what is the community's net fiscal benefit?

Publish tax abatements, grants, infrastructure subsidies, and utility arrangements. Compare projected revenues with the full public cost of serving the project.

10 How will promises be reported, verified, enforced, and remedied?

Put public reporting, independent verification, audit rights, deadlines, penalties, incentive clawbacks, corrective actions, and permit remedies into binding agreements.

DECISION STANDARD — **Do not approve zoning, incentives, utility arrangements, or public commitments until the full buildout, full public cost, and enforceable long-term obligations are understood.**