



DATA CENTER COMMUNITY MEETING GUIDE

What to know, what to ask, before your council votes

A single hyperscale data center can draw as much electricity as a mid-size city, use millions of gallons of water a day, and run a constant mechanical hum 24/7 — while creating far fewer permanent jobs than its footprint suggests. This guide gives you the numbers and the questions to bring to a public meeting.

100 MW	45-65 dB	5M gal/day	\$64 Billion
draws as much power as a city of 80,000 people, running 24/7	typical noise level at the property line — like a vacuum cleaner, nonstop	peak water use possible from a single facility	in U.S. projects already blocked or delayed by local opposition

BEFORE THE MEETING: WHAT TO FIND OUT

Most of this is public record if you know where to look — find it before you show up:

- Has the developer filed for **water rights or a water use permit**? Check your state water authority or county clerk.
- Is there an existing **interconnection agreement** with the utility? Grid operators (PJM, MISO, ERCOT, etc.) keep public queues.
- Has your **state or county passed data-center-specific legislation**? Roughly 27 states have some form as of 2026.
- Is a **tax abatement or PILOT agreement** being negotiated separately from the zoning vote — and by whom?

QUESTIONS TO ASK, BY TOPIC

POWER • Dedicated rate class, or spread across everyone's bill? • Who pays for new substations, lines, or generation? • How does this affect regional grid reliability at peak demand?	WATER • Peak daily use, not just average — and from where? • Senior or junior water right vs. existing users? • Evaporative cooling (high water) or closed-loop (low water)?
NOISE • Independent pre-construction noise study, made public? • Projected dB at nearest property line, day and night? • Generator test schedule — will neighbors be notified? • Binding post-construction verification, with a real remedy?	JOBES & TAXES • How many <i>permanent</i> jobs, and at what average wage? • Value and length of any tax abatement — what does the community get in return? • Enforceable local-hire commitment for construction?

CONSTRUCTION & LONG-TERM

- Expected construction timeline and traffic/road impacts?
- Decommissioning plan or bond if the facility closes or is never fully built out?
- Are tonight's commitments legally binding conditions of approval, or just statements of intent?

RED FLAGS WORTH NOTICING

- Vague answers on water source or noise — "we'll study that after approval."
- Pressure to vote quickly; questions treated as obstruction.

- Non-disclosure terms hiding the tax or interconnection agreement from the public.
- Verbal promises at the podium that don't appear in the written conditions of approval.

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

If it isn't written into the **binding conditions of approval** — the rate class, the water source, the noise limit, the jobs commitment, the decommissioning plan — it isn't a commitment. It's a pitch. Ask for it in writing before the vote, not after.

COMMON CLAIMS, AND WHAT THE DATA ACTUALLY SHOWS

Developers often present the same handful of claims at these meetings. Here's how each holds up against published data:

<i>"This will create hundreds of good jobs."</i>	Most are temporary construction jobs (18–36 months). Permanent on-site jobs typically run from dozens to a few hundred once the facility is operating.
<i>"Water use will be minimal."</i>	A typical facility averages ~530,000 gal/day but can peak at up to 5 million gal/day during summer cooling. Ask for the peak figure, not the average.
<i>"This won't affect your electric bill."</i>	PJM's 2027/28 capacity auction cleared at a price adding an estimated \$15–25/month to typical household bills, with data center load growth cited as a major driver.
<i>"The noise will be barely noticeable."</i>	Well-managed facilities run 45–55 dB at the property line. Documented complaint cases run 55–65 dB, and generator tests can be heard up to a mile away.
<i>"Tax revenue will benefit the whole community."</i>	Depends entirely on the abatement terms. Some agreements waive the majority of near-term property tax revenue — ask for the specific percentage and number of years.

REAL-WORLD PRECEDENTS YOU CAN CITE

Newton County, GA	A single Meta data center uses 500,000 gallons of water a day — 10% of the <i>entire county's</i> water consumption, from one building.
PJM 2025 Capacity Auction	PJM failed to meet its own grid reliability requirement for the first time in its history; roughly 5,100 MW of the shortfall is attributed to data center load growth.
NERC Level 3 Alert, May 2026	Only the third such alert in NERC's 58-year history, triggered after data centers in Virginia and Texas caused sudden 1,000+ MW load-loss events on the grid.
Amazon / NIPSCO, Indiana	A well-negotiated agreement is projected to save local households roughly \$1 billion over 15 years — proof that favorable terms are achievable with the right agreement.
Nationwide Opposition	Data Center Watch tracks roughly \$64 billion in U.S. data center projects already blocked or delayed by local opposition, with 58+ local moratoriums across 31 states as of mid-2026.

MEETING NOTES

MORE FROM FORTUNE FAVORS THE PREPARED

This guide is a companion to our full article, [**“The Data Center Next Door”**](#) — with the full state-by-state data, methodology, and citations behind every figure here. Fortune Favors the Prepared also publishes:

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Sources: Aterio US Data Center Inventory; dcmapp.us; Data Center Watch; DOE/LBNL Data Center Energy Report; NERC; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy; UC Riverside water capacity study (2026); PJM Interconnection. Figures current as of publication; see the full article for detailed citations, state-by-state data tables, and additional context.

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