



TAKING CHARGE OF OUR FUTURE:

DEKALB'S NEW DATA CENTER PLAYBOOK

For too long, local governments have played defense when massive tech companies roll into town. The old playbook was just trying to mitigate the damage, making a data center slightly less noisy or slightly less ugly. But mitigation isn't a community benefit. It just makes a massive industrial intrusion slightly less painful.

These hyperscale facilities extract immense value from our land and our power grid. In exchange, we extract generational value for our neighborhoods. As recent reporting highlights, the under the radar climate impacts of data centers are staggering. These buildings are essentially giant heaters. We shouldn't let our communities absorb the costs while tech giants walk away with the profits.

If a data center wants to build here, they have to become an active, positive part of our civic and ecological infrastructure. Here is the strict new baseline we are demanding before any facility gets a green light.

PART 1: STRICT ZONING LIMITS & A HARD CAP ON SIZE

- **The 500,000 Sq. Ft. Cap:** No single data center facility in DeKalb County may exceed 500,000 square feet.
- **Mandatory Special Land Use Permits (SLUP):** Every proposed facility will be required to go through the SLUP proces, meaning they face intense county scrutiny, community input, and a public vote by the Board of Commissioners before they can build.

PART 2: ENVIRONMENTAL & POWER PROTECTIONS

Developers must prove they aren't harming our microclimates or draining our local grid.

- **100% Renewable Energy Mandate:** Data centers cannot just plug into the grid and burn fossil fuels. We are requiring operators to power their facilities with renewable sources, relying on on-site solar energy generation and clean energy power purchase agreements to offset their footprint.
- **Ban on Toxic Diesel Generators:** We are mandating the use of industrial-scale battery storage systems for all backup power needs. Leave the diesel in the past.
- **Neighborhood Battery Microgrids:** Since we are requiring large battery systems, they shouldn't just sit there. Facilities must design their battery storage to act as a bidirectional microgrid, pushing power back into the surrounding residential grid to keep the lights on in our neighborhoods during a blackout.
- **Targeting the Urban Heat Island Effect:** Data centers generate industrial levels of heat, increasing the temperatures of surrounding blocks. Developers must conduct Environmental Impact Assessments measuring this thermal impact at the property line.
- **Mandatory Cooling Interventions:** To counteract this heat, we will require a mandated 50% tree canopy coverage, "cool" high-albedo roofs, and green roofing.
- **Neighborhood Cooling Funds:** If the developer physically cannot meet the on-site canopy requirements, they will pay a fee-in-lieu directly into a ring fenced fund. Those dollars will be spent only in the immediate surrounding neighborhoods to plant street trees, build park shade structures, and protect the community from the heat.

PART 3: WATER STEWARDSHIP & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AUDITING

Data centers are notorious for consuming millions of gallons of local drinking water for their cooling towers and then dumping the heated, chemically treated water back into the municipal sewer system. In DeKalb County, our water is a vital public resource, not a cheap industrial coolant.

- **Mandatory Closed-Loop Cooling:** We are banning open-loop and evaporative cooling systems that drain municipal water. All data centers must use closed-loop cooling systems that continuously recycle water or utilize liquid and air-cooling technologies. Any water demand must be met with reclaimed gray water, not DeKalb's drinking water supply.
- **On-Site Pre-Treatment:** Any wastewater discharged by a facility must be fully pre-treated on-site. We will not allow PFAS-laden industrial runoff to burden our aging sewer infrastructure, the Snapping Wastewater Treatment Plant, or the South River watershed.
- **Auditing by the Environmental Justice (EJ) and Sustainability Resident Review Group:** The EJ and Sustainability Resident Review Group will act as the public watchdog. This resident-led commission is legally empowered to audit the water, energy, and thermal data reported by the data centers. They will conduct regular reviews to ensure operators meet sustainability commitments, protect high-risk neighborhoods, and honor Community Benefit Agreements. If developers fail to comply, the Commission will bring violations directly to the Board of Commissioners.

IF A DATA CENTER IS APPROVED...

PART 4: THE "PUBLIC DIVIDEND" COMMUNITY BENEFIT AGREEMENT

We are requiring a Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) to get a zoning permit or a tax break.

- **The "DeKalb AI" Compute Carve-Out:** We are requiring a 2% in-kind capacity carve-out. The developer must provide free, dedicated, high-speed server space to power the DeKalb County School System's technology, run local government services, and host a secure, private "DeKalb AI Assistant" that is free and accessible to every single one of our nearly 800,000 residents.
- **Small Business Access:** If you run a local business with under 50 employees, you will get access to a portal powered by this free capacity, giving mom-and-pop shops the same AI logistics and marketing power as corporate giants.
- **Emory Health Research Mission:** We will dedicate a portion of this free server space to local university partners like Emory, giving researchers the computing power they need to run models for public health and medical breakthroughs.
- **The AI Tech Dividend Fund:** As a firm fiscal policy from the Board of Commissioners, we will not allow all the new tax revenue generated to vanish into the county's general fund. Instead a dedicated share of new tax revenue will go directly into a neighborhood fund to install rooftop solar, upgrade HVACs, and weatherize the homes of nearby low-income residents and seniors, wiping out their power bills and offsetting the neighborhood grid strain.
- **Waste-Heat Indoor Farming:** Rather than venting excess heat into the sky, developers will be required to reuse thermal exhaust to support adjacent vertical indoor farms operations to provide fresh food year round to local food banks.
- **WorkSource DeKalb Global Training:** We are mandating a tech training pipeline for residents living within a 3-mile radius. The goal is not just facility jobs, but globally recognized certifications that prepare our neighbors for high-paying technology careers anywhere in the world.

HAVE YOUR SAY !

This is a turning point for how we handle industrial growth. We want to hear from you. Please step up to the mic during public comment and let us know what you think about stopping massive data centers, holding them accountable, and securing a true public dividend for our neighborhoods.

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SCAN TO STAY UPDATED:

