

# Walker County Data Center Study Committee

## Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Sept. 10, 2026

**Time:** 4:00 p.m. – 5:02 p.m.

**Location:** Walker County Civic Center

### Attendance

- Travis Middleton
- Jon Pursley
- Barney Danks
- Chad Hodges
- Laura Owlsly
- Jason Rader
- Lacey Smith
- Stephanie Watkins
- Kenneth Wilson

### Call to Order

Stephanie Watkins called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

### Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made and seconded by Jason Rader to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. The motion was approved.

### FlashVote Survey Results

The committee reviewed results from the recent FlashVote survey. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the county's survey panel responded.

Key findings included:

- Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents indicated they were unaware that data centers can vary significantly in size.

- Nine percent (9%) indicated they felt they did not know enough about the topic to have an informed opinion.
- Respondents were provided nine potential areas of concern and were asked to select their four primary concerns.
- The most significant concern, identified by 69% of respondents, was increased electricity and water usage.
- Noise was also identified as a significant concern.

The committee discussed the importance of using the survey results, along with additional community input, to inform its recommendations.

## **Community Feedback**

The committee acknowledged and expressed appreciation for members of the community who have submitted recommendations, concerns, and suggestions directly to the committee through Stephanie Watkins.

Committee members were invited to discuss questions or observations related to the information submitted.

Laura Owsley shared several concerns that were consistent with feedback received from members of the community, including taxation, property values, temporary structures, noise, environmental impacts, aesthetics, and ownership transfers.

Discussion included the following considerations:

- The expiration of certain tax incentives in 2031 and their applicability to state and local taxes.
- Local sales and use tax considerations.
- Property tax treatment of data center equipment and personal property.
- The distinction between permanent data center buildings and temporary or mobile structures, including pods and containers.
- Whether temporary structures and equipment could affect property values while being treated as personal property for tax purposes.
- Concerns regarding companies experiencing financial difficulties, ownership changes, or abandoning projects after significant capital investment.
- Aesthetic considerations and the potential appearance of data center structures. An example submitted by Brandon Wilson, depicting a structure designed to resemble a barn, was discussed.
- Potential requirements addressing ownership transfers.
- The possibility of requiring an impact study for each proposed data center.
- The potential for an environmental review or study, including consideration of involvement by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Noise and potential impacts on surrounding land values.

## **Noise and Generator Operations**

Jason Rader noted that generator operating times should be addressed in any proposed ordinance. Discussion included establishing maximum generator run times and prohibiting generators from being used as a primary power source, except as otherwise permitted.

The committee discussed establishing requirements for scheduled testing and maintenance run times, including potentially setting specific schedules for generator operation.

Laura Owsley reported that she had visited the CleanSpark site and used a sound meter to collect information. She referenced an Oglethorpe Sound Study by Burns & McDonald for Monroe County, GA, and ordinances in Floyd County as potential points of comparison.

The committee discussed sound measurements, including an example of a 65-decibel reading taken in LaFayette near the property. It was noted that the measurement was not taken directly on the property and that surrounding residences should be considered when evaluating noise impacts.

The committee discussed the potential use of both A-weighted and C-weighted sound measurements in an ordinance.

## **Electricity Usage and Curtailment**

Barney Danks discussed TVA's curtailment program, which allows TVA to reduce or interrupt electricity service to large users when necessary to protect the electrical grid. He noted that there are limits to the amount of curtailment TVA can utilize.

The committee also discussed electricity and water usage associated with data centers. It was noted that electricity usage is generally a greater concern than water usage for certain modern data center operations. Closed-loop cooling systems were discussed as an example of technology that can reduce water consumption.

## **Draft Data Center Ordinance**

Jason Rader provided an update regarding the draft data center ordinance.

Jon Pursley discussed a proposed 400-foot setback, noting that the distance was adapted from another ordinance and represented an example of one of the more restrictive setback requirements currently in place.

The committee also discussed potential penalties for violations of noise requirements, including fines ranging from \$100 to \$1,000.

Non-conforming uses were discussed, including whether existing uses should be permitted to continue under the current code if zoning requirements change. The committee discussed how changes in business operations or ownership could affect non-conforming uses.

## **Zoning and Land Use**

The committee discussed appropriate zoning classifications for data centers, including heavy industrial zoning and the potential use of industrial parks.

Laura Owsley expressed support for restricting data centers to industrial parks where appropriate.

The committee discussed potential buffers between residential and industrial uses, including residential-to-residential and residential-to-industrial transitions. It was noted that changes involving heavy industrial zoning are typically addressed at the city or larger municipal level.

The committee discussed the importance of establishing appropriate regulations rather than allowing development to occur without clear standards, particularly given the potential long-term impacts on the county and future generations.

## **Environmental and Infrastructure Considerations**

Environmental impacts were discussed, including potential effects on wildlife and surrounding property. Jon Pursley noted that development activities such as construction of roads and homes can also affect wildlife and environmental conditions.

The committee discussed water and utility infrastructure requirements. Increased water usage by other large industrial users, including Pilgrim's, was referenced as an example for consideration.

Laura Owsley questioned whether a utility availability letter would be required before a project could commence. Mr. Pursley explained that such verifications are part of the planning & permitting process, and if utilities cannot be provided, a project cannot commence or the cost is placed back on the developer.

Site visits were also discussed along with committee availability for Sept. 30 or Oct. 2. Committee members were given instructions to let Stephanie Watkins know of preferred dates for site visits. Discussion was held regarding the meeting time, and a recommendation was made and approved unanimously to move future meetings to 6 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.