

Data Center Study Committee

Meeting Minutes — September 24, 2026

Attendees

Stephanie Watkins
Travis Middleton
Courtney Johnson
Barney Danks
Jon Madden
Jon Pursley
Lacey Smith
Kenneth Wilson
Jason Rader
Laura Owsley

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Stephanie Watkins called the meeting to order at **6:00 p.m.**

Laura Owsley noted a correction to the previous meeting minutes. The reference to Oglethorpe County should have been **Monroe County, Georgia**.

Jason Rader made a motion to approve the minutes with the correction. Courtney seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Draft Ordinance Discussion

The committee continued its review of the draft data center ordinance. A previously referenced **performance bond** had been added to the draft ordinance.

Discussion continued regarding industrial zoning and the conditional use process. Jon Madden raised concerns regarding minimum square footage requirements. Jon Pursley discussed the conditional use process and the opportunity it provides for government review and oversight. The role of the Planning and Zoning Commission as a recommending body was also discussed.

Travis Middleton asked how often the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Commissioners have been aligned in their decisions.

Kenneth Wilson raised the question of potential sound impacts on a 10-acre property. Travis Middleton referenced industrial districts and available land uses.

Laura Owsley questioned Barney Danks regarding representation and residential location. Mr. Danks stated that he owns a data center, though he was unaware until he read the definition and confirmed that he lives outside of Walker County but owns property in Walker County for his solar farm and data center. Stephanie Watkins noted that Danks was appointed by a district commissioner.

Courtney Johnson asked how a 10-acre minimum requirement would affect greenspace requirements. Jon Pursley referenced greenspace requirements as they relate to the poultry industry.

Data Center Definition, Size and Zoning

Laura Owsley distributed a definition of data centers for the committee's review.

Barney Danks raised concerns about restricting data centers to industrial zoning. He referenced an 8-megawatt site on slightly more than two acres as an example and noted that not every data center is the same in size, scale, or impact.

Jason Rader stated that a smaller-scale data center could operate similarly to other businesses, while larger-scale data centers should be located in industrial zoning.

Travis Middleton asked whether the committee could agree that data centers should be located in industrial zones and whether closed-loop systems should be required.

Laura Owsley raised the issue of water-cooling systems.

Jon Pursley discussed permitting in phases and explained that utilities would have to provide approvals for each phase. Barney Danks provided an example involving the purchase of electrical power, noting that an agreement with the electric company is necessary to confirm that the required power can be provided.

Laura Owsley asked whether there are properties currently zoned industrial that are also located within historic districts. She also asked whether the ordinance could restrict data centers to industrial zoning only. Pursley suggested that the question be referred to legal counsel.

Owsley also asked about including an **air-quality provision** and requested that legal counsel be asked about possible **anti-clustering provisions**.

General Development Standards

The committee began discussion of **Section 4, General Development Standards**.

Laura Owsley referenced an example involving Covington, Georgia.

The committee discussed **eminent domain and easements**, including circumstances in which the county might acquire property versus requiring a data center developer to obtain its own

easements. Owsley asked that legal counsel be consulted regarding possible measures to protect residents in situations similar to the Covington example.

Utilities and Development Standards

The committee continued discussion regarding utility capacity and permitting, including whether applicants should be required to demonstrate that utility providers can meet the proposed demand before a permit is issued.

The committee discussed setbacks and whether a **400-foot setback** would be adequate. Owsley referenced examples of setbacks ranging from **500 to 1,000 feet**.

Discussion continued regarding **berms, setbacks, fencing, and greenspace**.

The committee also discussed variances versus conditional uses, with Pursley explaining the distinction between the two.

Process and Next Steps

Owsley asked what the process would be if the committee changed its recommendations. Watkins explained that the committee's recommendations would go to the **Planning and Zoning Commission** and then to the **Board of Commissioners**.

The committee noted that additional portions of the draft ordinance still need to be reviewed, including **Sections 5, 6, and 7**, with topics including lighting and sound.

A possible field trip was also mentioned for **October 2nd, gathering at 9:00 a.m. at the Civic Center**.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at **7:32 p.m.**

Minutes submitted by Lacey Smith