



Fw: Data Center

From Reinhardt, Jennifer <Jennifer.Reinhardt@kcmo.org>

Date Mon 12/8/2025 6:41 AM

To Clerk <Clerk@KCMO.org>

Cc Svea Phillipi <sveaphillipi@gmail.com>

Below please find public testimony for Ord. 251031.

Thanks,



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From: Svea Phillipi <sveaphillipi@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, December 7, 2025 3:41 AM

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Subject: Data Center

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Dear Members of the Council / Zoning Committee,

I write to voice strong opposition to the current draft of the zoning code for data centers in Kansas City and to urge a substantially stronger, separate regulation regime for data centers that takes into account serious community, environmental, and public-health risks.

- Lumping data centers under “Large Format Uses” ignores their unique scale and externalities. Data centers, especially hyperscale facilities, are not like big-box retail or standard warehouses; they consume massive amounts of power and water, can heavily stress infrastructure, and often operate 24/7. Treating them as generic “large uses” fails to capture their true footprint in a community context.
- Approving data centers “by right” deprives neighbors of meaningful input. As proposed, many facilities could be built without special review, public notice, or community consent leaving residents blindsided and vulnerable to sudden changes in their neighborhood’s character, traffic, noise, resource stress, or environmental risk.
- No guarantees of industrial only siting or neighborhood notification. Without explicit restrictions, data centers could slip into or near residential zones, creating serious impacts on nearby populations. Residents deserve to know when such a facility is proposed nearby.
- Environmental and public-resource impacts are not addressed. Current provisions do not require environmental impact assessments, do not regulate water use or backup generators, and do not ensure protection of precious resources like potable water.

A recent investigation by Rolling Stone (2025) highlighted what can happen when large data centers are deployed in sensitive water-stressed areas without robust safeguards. In eastern Oregon’s Morrow County, Oregon home to multiple data centers operated by Amazon Web Services and intensive agriculture aquifer contamination tied to data-center water use has reportedly driven nitrate levels in some wells to as high as 73 parts per million (ppm), far above safety thresholds.

Residents in that county have alleged a marked increase in miscarriages, rare cancers, kidney disease, and other serious health issues impacts that some attribute to the supercharged contamination driven by data-center water use.

Though the company denies responsibility claiming its facilities use only a small fraction of the water supply and that water quality issues predate its presence the investigation underscores how data centers can exacerbate pre-existing environmental vulnerabilities, especially in communities dependent on groundwater.

This serves as a powerful real-world case study: without precautionary regulation, even a “clean tech” facility can result in long-term environmental degradation and serious public-health consequences.

To avoid replicating Oregon’s tragedy and to protect Kansas City communities, the zoning code for data centers should:

1. Create a separate zoning classification for data centers, distinct from “Large Format Uses.”
2. Require a special-use permit (or conditional-use permit) for all data centers, with full public notice, community hearings, and a vote by the city council or appropriate committee not automatic “by right” approval.
3. Allow data centers only in designated industrial zones (not commercial or residential zones).
4. Mandate public notice to all nearby residents when a proposed data center is within a defined radius (e.g., ½ mile), so neighbors can participate before final approval.

5. Require comprehensive environmental impact assessments (EIA) as part of any data-center application, including: groundwater and aquifer studies, water-usage estimates, sustainable cooling strategies, and contingency plans for spills or wastewater discharge.
6. Limit or prohibit fossil-fuel backup generators (given air pollution, noise, and emissions), or require emissions mitigation and local air-quality review.
7. Set strict water-usage and cooling requirements, mandating closed-loop cooling where potable water is not used, or requiring water recycling so there is minimal to no net draw on aquifers.
8. Require full utility and resource-usage disclosures before approval, so the city can assess grid load, water demand, and long-term infrastructure/utility impacts.
9. Establish ongoing monitoring and reporting obligations (e.g., annual reports on water usage, wastewater discharge, energy consumption, compliance with environmental standards).

Kansas City stands at a crossroads: we can allow unregulated data-center expansion with potential long term costs to our water, energy, and public health or we can adopt a zoning code that treats data centers with the seriousness they merit. The cautionary example from Morrow County, Oregon illustrates what is at stake: unchecked data-center growth can transform environmental vulnerabilities into public-health crises.

Please adopt a dedicated data-center zoning classification, require public oversight through special permitting, and ensure robust environmental safeguards.

Sincerely,

Svea Phillipi

Parkville MO