

Data Center Ordinance Development

City Council Workshop
October 22, 2026

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DATA CENTERS FOUNDATION

What is a Data Center?

A facility that houses computer systems, servers, networking equipment, and associated infrastructure for data storage, data processing, or data distribution.



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Data Centers Are Not New

Have Existed For Decades

- 1946: ENIAC, an early room-sized digital computer, enters service
- 1960s onward: mainframe and server rooms run hospitals, banks and governments
- 2000s: the internet boom and cloud computing drive large-scale construction

Critical IT Infrastructure

- Banking, utilities, health care, 911, and government services run on them
- Schools and local businesses depend on them for records, email, and cloud services
- Everyday apps like streaming, maps, and online shopping rely on them

Regulations must find lines between community benefit and community harm.

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DATA CENTERS FOUNDATION

Rapid Expansion Driven by AI is New

Why now

- Rapid growth in A.I., cloud computing, and digital infrastructure is driving unprecedented new facilities
- In the next year, AI data center use is expected to double

Communities must be adequately prepared for potential strains on infrastructure.



3×

U.S. spending on building AI-ready data centers in last three years

97 GW

projected global growth, 2025–2030, doubling the sector

30×

projected US AI data center power demand by 2035, from 4 GW to 123 GW

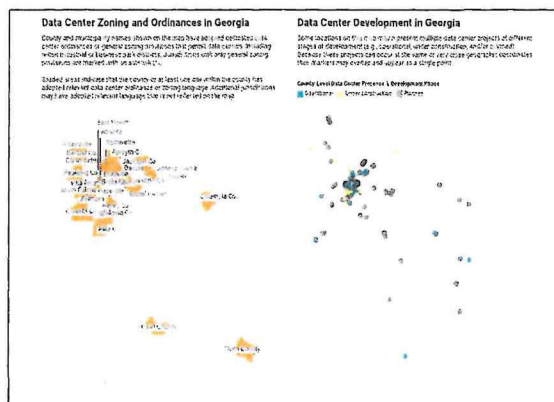
Sources: Goldman Sachs Research; IEA, Data Center Outlook Update

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DATA CENTERS FOUNDATION

Georgia Stands Out

- N. Virginia is called “the capital of data center growth” and is the largest data center market in the world.
- Georgia has rivaled growth, surpassing N. VA in annual leasing activity and active construction.
- Inventory tripled in a year: about 17 Georgia data centers operate; 80+ projects are planned.
- Georgia Power projects data center electricity to triple over the next decade



Regulations

- No major State law passed in 2025–26; local governments are setting the rules.
- 34 counties and 23 cities have drafted ordinance language, 12+ jurisdictions have adopted moratoriums.
- The Georgia Public Service Commission passed new rate-structuring rules so new data centers pay their share. It regulates Georgia Power, not where data centers are built.

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DATA CENTERS FOUNDATION

There Are Many Types of Data Centers

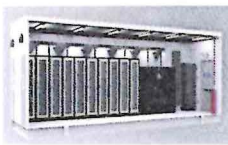
Size: from a single room to buildings of several million square feet.

Resources: all need land, power, water and fiber, but how much varies greatly.

Purpose: some serve one hospital, school or business; others serve millions of users.

**Accessory**

Size: small sites
Users: users nearby
Power: 50 kW–2 MW
Note: thousands being deployed
Small: <1 acre (often just part of a building)
Edge: ~0.1–0.5 acres for small colocation or telecom sites

**Minor**

Size: 20,000 – 100,000 sq ft
Servers: 500–2,000
Users: one organization or smaller businesses
Power: 5–10 Megawatts
Enterprise/colocation: 10–40 acres

**Major**

Size: 100,000–500,000 sq ft
Users: regional or specialized needs
Power: 10–20 Megawatts
Enterprise/colocation: 10–40 acres

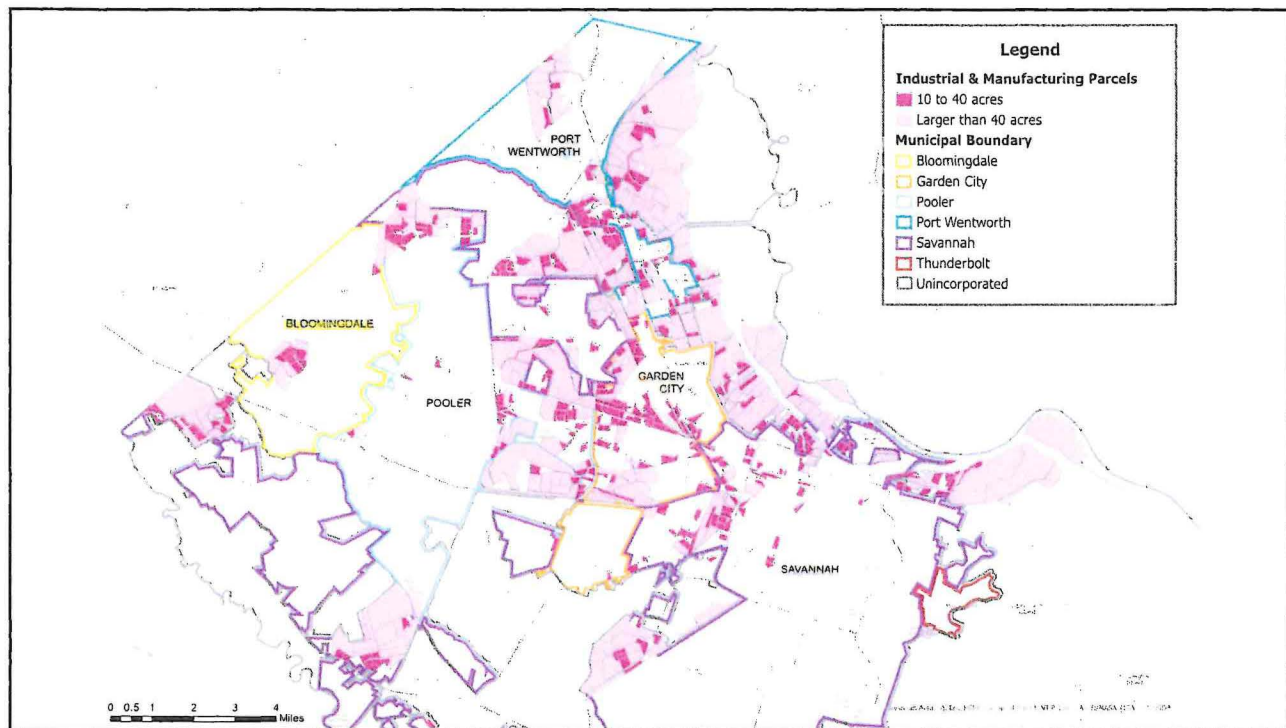
**Hyperscale**

Size: 500,000 sq ft to several million
Servers: tens of thousands
Users: millions of users
Power: 20–100+ Megawatts
Large colocation/wholesale campuses: 40+ acres

Public concern centers on environmental, land use, and quality-of-life impacts, which grow with the size of the facility and what the facility houses.

Sources: *IEE Magazine*, “How much electricity does a data center use?” (2023); Data Centers I DRAFT ordinance, 10/2/2023.

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GEORGIA DATA CENTER PROJECTS

Georgia Data Center Projects Tracker

Project	Location	Type	Megawatts	Acreage	Square feet	Water use	Status
Project Camellia On hold	Effingham County	Hyperscale	3,200	1,400	4.4 million	About 30,000 gallons a day; closed-loop cooling	Development / Review
White Oak Technology Park On hold	Columbia County	Hyperscale	Not disclosed	1,900	9 million (23 buildings)	Not disclosed	Approved / Development
LaGrange Data Center On hold	LaGrange / Troup County	Major (new building)	Not disclosed (developer targeted 100)	270	470,000 (proposed expansion)	Not disclosed	Under Construction / Expansion
Douglas County Data Center On hold	Douglas County	Hyperscale	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	500,000+ (original building)	Uses recycled wastewater for cooling	Operating
Stanton Springs Data Center On hold	Newton County / Stanton Springs	Hyperscale	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	About 2.5 million	About 10% of the county's daily water supply	Operating / Expanding

Hyperscale estimates using the utility demand size ranges. "Not disclosed" means no public figure was found. Sources: Georgia Data Center Projects 2025; The Atlantic; The Wall Street Journal; News reports.

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PROS AND CONS

Data Centers Require Cost – Benefit Analyses**Benefits**

- Significant private investment and tax revenue
- Reuse of existing industrial properties
- Opportunity for infrastructure improvements via direct customer investment
- Construction jobs and some diversification of the economy

Challenges

- Some types have significant power and water demands
- Noise, heat, emissions, and backup generators
- Few permanent on-site jobs
- Land use prioritization and conflicts with surrounding uses
- Environmental injustice, socio-economic issues
- Climate change
- Priority access and grid stability
- Safe Decommissioning
- Long-term planning for AI's evolution

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SAVANNAH'S TEMPORARY MORATORIUM

Council paused large-scale data centers to give staff time to research and tailor regulations to our community

Aug 27

Council adopted a 155-day moratorium on large-scale data centers

Sep 10

Second vote held

Jan 29

Moratorium sunsets, with a possible 30-day extension

Why: City ordinances have no classifications or standards tailored to data centers. Prevents large-scale data centers from moving forward before regulations are established.

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DATA CENTER ORDINANCE DEVELOPMENT

Within the Next 155 Days**1**

Assess future infrastructure considerations/implications

2

Establish zoning and development standards

3

Address conversion of existing warehouses

4

Update the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance

5

Work with partners in Chatham County

6

Return to Council with recommended regulations

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THE ORDINANCE WORK PLAN

Three Parallel Workstreams**Ordinance working group**

SME staff from MPC, Chatham County, and the City staff from Policy & Intergovernmental Affairs, Planning & Economic Development, and Water Resources draft the zoning amendment.

Stakeholder engagement

A public webpage with a comment form, and roundtables with utilities, business, environmental, health, education, neighborhood and land-use voices.

Council engagement

Today's workshop, then public hearings and a Council vote, with Chatham County and the MPC kept in the loop.

Three drafts: first, second with stakeholder and Council input, then final.**Informs the second draft.****Decision before Jan 29.**

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TAILORING TO SAVANNAH

What is best for Savannah?**What is best for each neighborhood?**

A city citywide ban carries legal risk, so the ordinance should set where & under what under what conditions

What we can regulate

- Where they locate, through zoning and special use review
- Size, height, setbacks, buffers and screening
- Noise and appearance standards
- Water, wastewater, and stormwater standards
- Public hearings, reporting and decommissioning

What we cannot regulate

- Electric rates, supply or grid connections – authority of Public Service Commission and Georgia Power
- Anything the State already governs

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ELEMENTS OF AN ORDINANCE

DRAFT ORDINANCE CONSIDERATIONS**Size and definitions**

Major 100,000–500,000 sq ft; minor under 100,000; conversions sized by area converted

Location

Special use permit, industrial districts; 1,000 ft from homes, schools, parks, health care

Power

Utility will-serve letter; disclose MW demand and upgrades; costs not shifted to existing customers

Water

Closed loop cooling, evaporative cooling prohibited; water supply/usage; wastewater treatment & capacity

Noise & Setbacks

Max 50 dBA at nearest home; 200 ft buffer; equipment enclosed; 10-hour non-combustion backup

Oversight & Accountability

Development agreement, decommissioning bond, annual report

Emergency Management

Emergency response plan; Fire Marshal review and pre-incident planning

Community Benefit

Statement of community benefits; benefit agreements under discussion

Design Standards

75 ft height; brick, stone or metal; windows on 20% of facade; no razor wire

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WATER & SEWER

Additional Water & Sewer Considerations

Water Conservation

- Closed loop cooling system requirement, or other similar water conservation technology
- Minimize consumption and eliminate continuous discharge or evaporative loss
- Evaluate infrastructure capacity impacts at due diligence stage

City Ordinance Revisions

- Revise the Revenue Ordinance related to large water and sewer customers
- Define large user customers and develop applicable standards
- Revise applicable ordinance sections as required for the incorporation of a large user customer

Wastewater Treatment

- Define data centers and other similar cooled water systems as a significant industrial user (SIU) thereby requiring an industrial pretreatment permit with the City

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POWER

Our leverage on electricity is limited

10 MegaWatts

can connect to the existing grid without new transmission

- A letter from Georgia Power is all a developer needs to show power is available.
- The PSC regulates Georgia Power's rates and large-load contracts.
- The City controls where and how data centers are built.
- tools are siting, disclosure and conditions: the utility letter and maximum load in writing, backup power standards, and reporting.

Southern Georgia PSC Data Center Fact Sheet, March 2015; Georgia Power letter to the City Manager, Aug 28, 2015.

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WAREHOUSE CONVERSIONS

Existing warehouses are the likely conversion targets, and the City sets the land-use rules

40warehouse permits
since 2015**192,026**

median square feet

346,636

average square feet

1.46M

largest, in square feet

- The typical warehouse built here since 2015 is already larger than the size where the draft ordinance treats a data center as major.
- Under the draft ordinance, a converted building could be classed as major or minor by how much floor area is converted.
- Conversions would meet the same standards and public hearing process as new data centers.

Sources: City of Savannah's warehouse permit data, 2015 - present; City of Savannah's City of Savannah's Warehouse Inventory

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UNDER CONSIDERATION

The questions we are working through for Savannah

Area	Question
Permit type	Special use permit for all data centers, or limited use for minor ones?
Scale and definitions	Which standards apply to minor data centers and small server rooms?
Warehouse conversions	How do standards apply to conversions, based on space converted?
Location and size	What floor area, spacing and MW trigger for added review?
Power and backup	Should diesel and fossil-fuel generators be prohibited?
Distances	Do 1,000 ft separation and 200 ft buffers work in our industrial areas?
Community benefits	Should the ordinance require community benefit agreements?
Oversight	Should annual reporting be required, and how is it shared with the public?
Long-term planning	How will AI evolve, and could needed resources change?

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THE ORDINANCE WORK PLAN

Key dates between now and the sunset

Date	Milestone	Workstream
Oct 22	Council workshop	Council
Oct 22	Publish public webpage & comment portal	Stakeholder engagement
Nov 2	Release first draft ordinance	Stakeholder engagement
Nov 2 – Nov 20	Gather public comment survey on first draft	Stakeholder engagement
Nov 2- Nov 20	Facilitate stakeholder roundtables and neighborhood association meetings	Stakeholder engagement
Nov 10	Chatham Municipal Association after hours Georgia Tech presentation	Council
End of Nov	Issue public survey, stakeholder roundtable, and neighborhood summary report	Working group
Early Dec	Release second draft ordinance integrating feedback	Working group
Dec 15	MPC public hearing*	Working group
Dec 1- 11	Comment period for second draft ordinance	Stakeholder engagement
End Dec	Final draft to Council, Chatham County and MPC	Working group
Jan 14	Council public hearing*	Council
Jan 28	Council vote on ordinance*	Council
Jan 29	Moratorium sunsets	

*Proposed for hearing and vote on the 1st public hearing is scheduled for

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NEXT STEPS

Your input shapes the ordinance

We are asking Council

- Which matters most in your districts?
- Where are you hearing the most concern?
- What should the roundtables consider?

What happens next

- Roundtables and public comment through Dec 15
- Second draft in end of November
- Council hearings in December and January, vote consideration Jan 21*

Comments: savannahga.gov/districts - *Date pending scheduling

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