

THE NASH GROUP, LLC

Building Community. Restoring Hope.™

COUNCIL BRIEFING · DATA CENTERS AND EMERGING INDUSTRIES

Before the First Hearing

Questions for a council facing its first data center application.

The demand is real. Data centers used about 4.4% of U.S. electricity in 2023 and are expected to use about 6.7 to 12% by 2028. (U.S. Department of Energy, December 20, 2024, on the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory report.)

The pushback is growing fast. At least 75 data center projects worth about \$130 billion were blocked or delayed by local opposition in the first quarter of 2026 alone, roughly the scale of all of 2025. More than 300 state data center bills were filed in the first six weeks of 2026. (Data Center Watch, Q1 2026 report, January to March 2026.)

The decision is local. Most permitting decisions are made by local authorities, and the concerns raised most often are higher utility bills, water use, noise, property values and green space. (Data Center Watch, report covering May 2024 to March 2025.)

SEVEN QUESTIONS TO ASK FIRST

1. **Does our code define this use?** If it is permitted by right, or close enough that nobody has a definition to argue with, the first application sets the rule for every one after it.
2. **What does it actually do, here?** Ask for plain answers on each concern residents raise most: utility bills, water, noise, property values and green space. If no one in the room can answer, that is the finding.
3. **Who explains it, and will people believe them?** Residents rarely believe the applicant, and once trust in the city is gone, the city cannot be the one to explain anything.
4. **Who speaks for the town?** An open comment period and an online survey are self selected. They cannot tell you what the quiet majority thinks. A representative survey can.
5. **What can this process decide, and what can it not?** Publish it before the first meeting, or residents will arrive believing the engagement can undo a decision that has already been made.
6. **Will the record hold up?** The findings should be written so they drop straight into a code update or a zoning text amendment, with the method attached.
7. **Are the council and staff ready for the room?** Map the questions before the hearing: which have real answers, where the record is thin, and how to run a meeting a hostile room still recognizes as fair.

How we help. The Nash Group is the third party in the middle. We do not advocate for or against a project, our fee never depends on the outcome, and we never work both sides of the same project. Request a briefing: nashdg.com/emerging-industry-engagement, tnash@thenashdevelopmentgroup.com, (816) 213-4461.