DATA CENTERS

Task Forces, Case Studies & Public Engagement

LESSONS FROM PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Prince George's County Planning Department



Presenters





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Agenda

01 About M-NCPPC

02 Framing the Issue: Data Center Growth

03 Prince George's County Planning Framework

04 Qualified Data Center Task Force

05 Issues & Concerns

06 Recommendations

07 Regulation Options

08 Lessons Learned

WHAT IS M-NCPPC

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

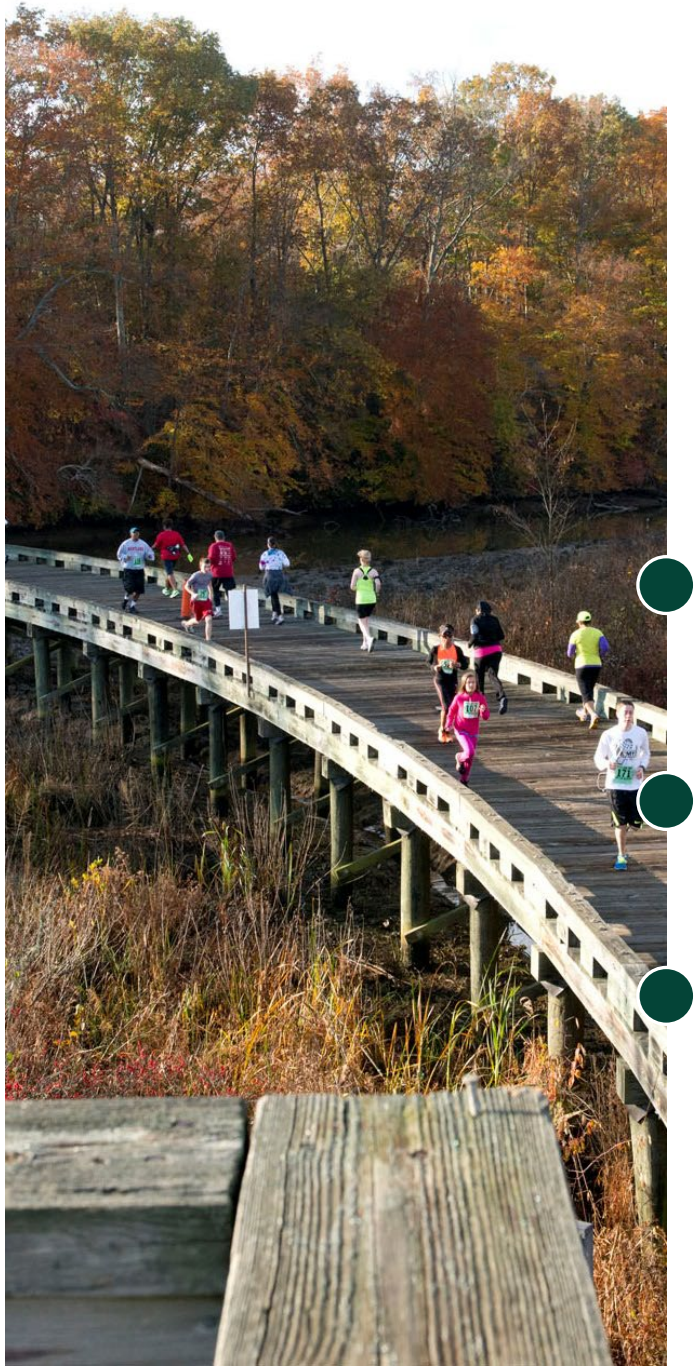
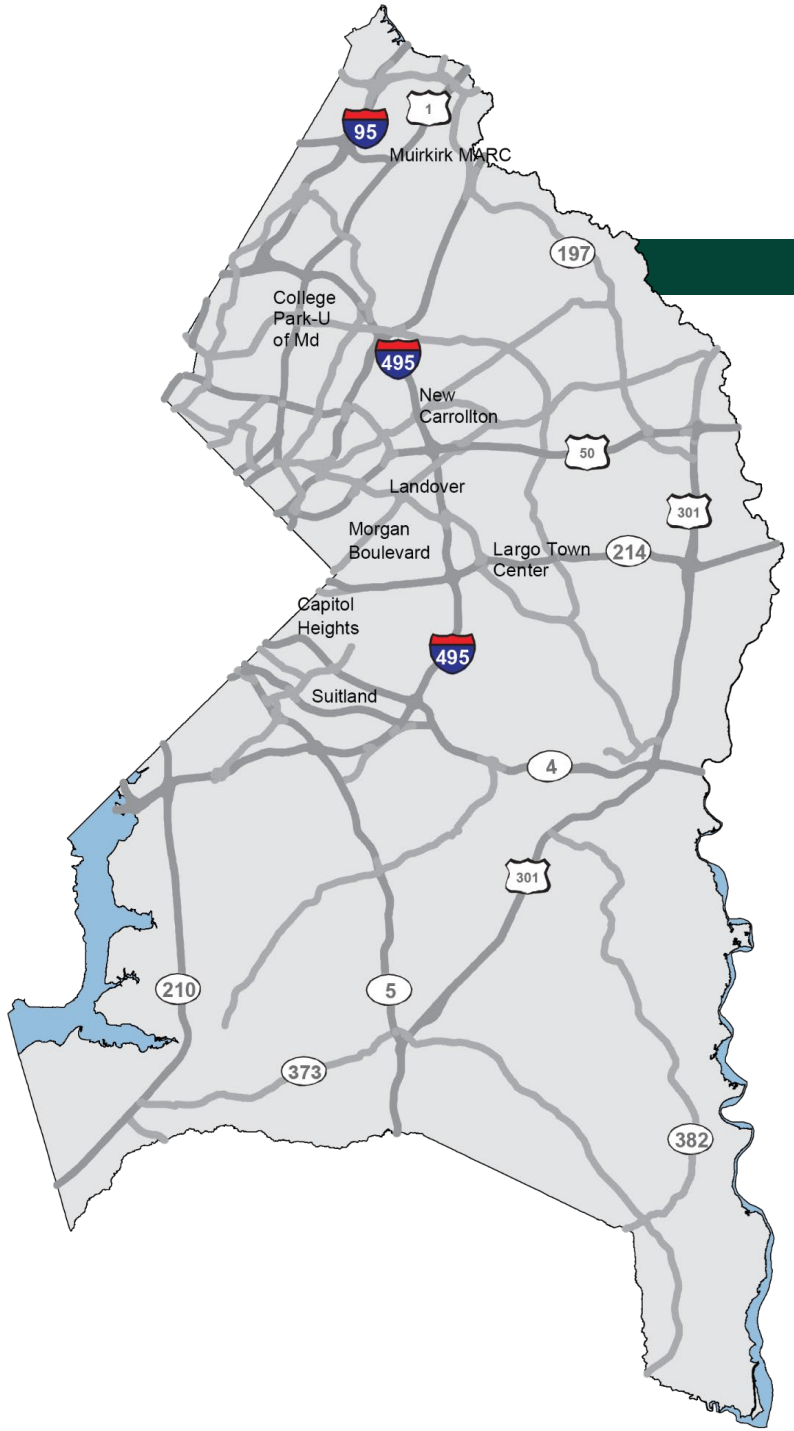


Image: Boardwalk at Merkle State Wildlife Sanctuary & Visitor's Center

Bi-county agency in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties improving the quality of life for 2 million residents.

- Manage physical growth and plan communities.
- Protect and steward natural, cultural and historic resources.
- Provide leisure and recreational experiences.

Prince George's County



483 Square Miles

27 municipalities

365,506 housing units

347,744 households

$101,798 median household income

Source: The U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey, 5-Year estimates

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Planning Department



James R. Hunt, MPA
Acting Planning Director



Framing the Issue: Data Center Growth



Hyperscale

AI and cloud computing are accelerating demand for hyperscale facilities.

Infrastructure

Large campuses require substantial power, water and wastewater infrastructure.

Land use policy

Local governments face new land use and policy questions as citizen voice concerns about environmental quality, equity, and costs of utilities.

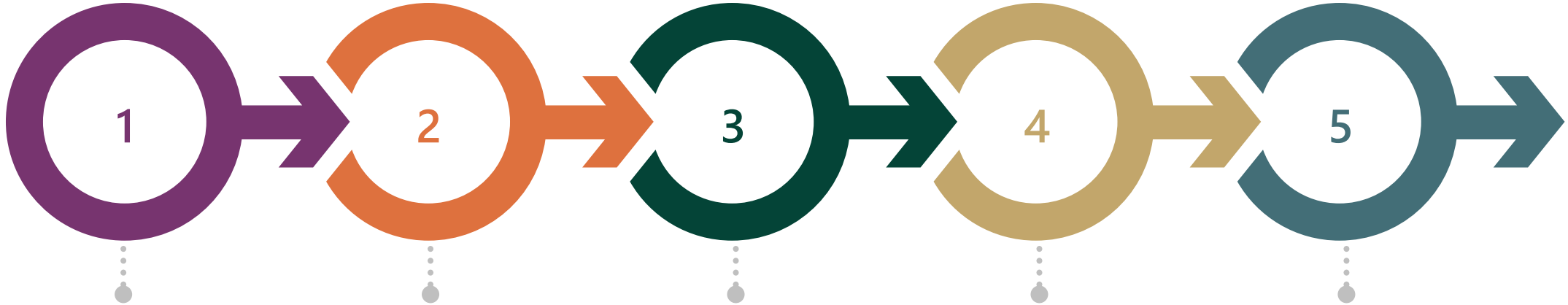


Prince George's County Approach

- Measured evaluation of qualified data centers.
- Planning framework review.
- Task Force created to assess impacts and opportunities, tour existing facilities.
- Consultant (Gensler) retained to support public outreach and case study research.

Taskforce as a tool

Taskforces are a tool to drive conversations and impactful public engagement. Taskforces can move local knowledge upstream before policy, procurement, or investment is locked in.



Governance gap

Technology moves faster than trust, authority, and implementation.

Primary case

Taskforces make invisible tradeoffs visible.

Comparison

Can demonstrate why policy ideas fail at implementation.

Design test

Five questions separate engagement from governance.

Application

Taskforces map multiple issues through a framework to build consensus



- Cross-disciplinary review process.
- Case studies and field observations.
- Stakeholder and public engagement.
- Policy recommendation development.

Qualified Data Center Taskforce

The taskforce convened experts from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to steer the County towards positive policy development outcomes.





Community Meetings

- 150 attendees at 3 July meetings across the County (North, Central, South)

  + 450 attendees at October meeting

- Each meeting included:
  - Registration with interactive welcome posters
  - Data center overview presentation
  - 3 rounds of roundtable discussion

- Every comment digitized and organized and quantified by topic.

Engagement By Design

Credibility comes from a visible chain of custody for public input

Common Technical Foundation

Explain the Issue

Understandable Choices

Break down tradeoffs

Facilitated Deliberation

Capture disagreement

Traceable Record

Digitize and categorize

Recommendations with Ownership

Tie to action items

Do not ask residents to react to a solution when they were not invited to define the problem.

Community Engagement Discussion Results

2,595 responses across four meetings



Environmental Impact

Environmental impacts were top concern

Governance and Planning

Many do not want any data centers in the County
Others want to be included in the process

Economic Value

Want lasting jobs without new financial burdens

Design and Aesthetics

Buffers for noise control and community-oriented design

Zoning Clarity and Protections

Want clear rules and meaningful safeguards

Community Reinvestment

Want investments in schools, libraries, parks, and other community infrastructure.

Opportunities and Challenges



Economic development and tax base expansion



Infrastructure capacity concerns



Environmental impacts and resource consumption



Land use compatibility and community character



Location and scale of data centers proposed

Issues to Resolve

- Environmental impacts-
  - Water quantity and water quality
  - Air quality
  - Noise and Vibration
  - Light

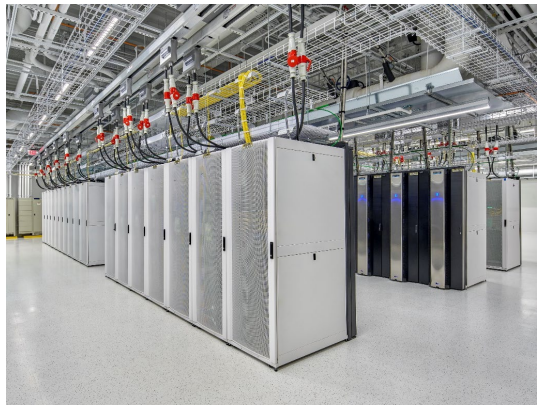
- Health Impacts-
  - Heat Island Effect-Waste Heat
  - Waste
  - Hazardous Materials

Types of Data Centers

Edge



Compact and located close to end users or data sources



5,000sf – 10,000sf

Enterprise/Corporate

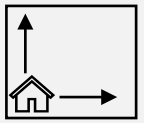


Owned and operated by a single organization to support internal IT needs—either on-premise or at an off-site facility



10,000sf – 50,000sf

Colocation/Wholesale

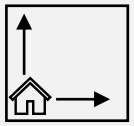


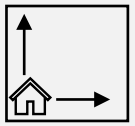
Facility providers offer space, power, cooling, and physical security for equipment owned by multiple clients.



50,000sf - 350,000sf, 1 – 10 acres

Hyperscale





Large facilities by major providers like AWS, Microsoft. Designed for scalability and ultra-fast connectivity.

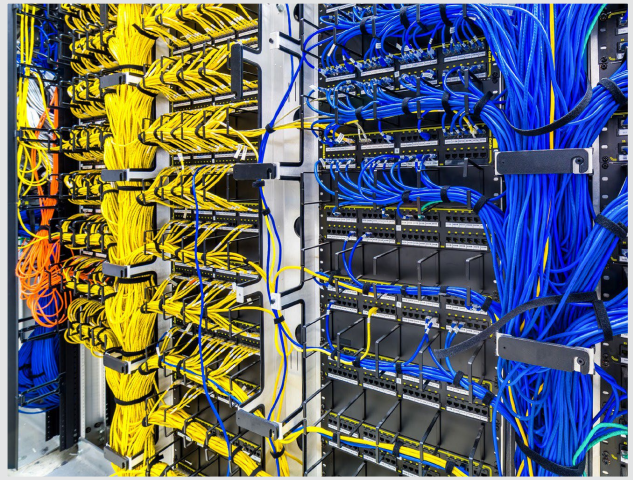


350,000+ sf, 10+ acres

Case Studies & Field Observations



- General policy approach and unique standards / stipulations
- Processes for data center project applications and review
- Enforcement of community and economic benefits / incentives



Five Jurisdictions

These five jurisdictions were chosen based on their high current market activity in data center development and distinct policy approaches that vary from highly incentivized to strictly regulated conditions.

Each case study is characterized based on its own historic context and potential contributions to how their policies may inform and influence the future policies adopted by Prince George's County.

Loudoun County, VA



Fairfax County, VA



Frederick County, MD





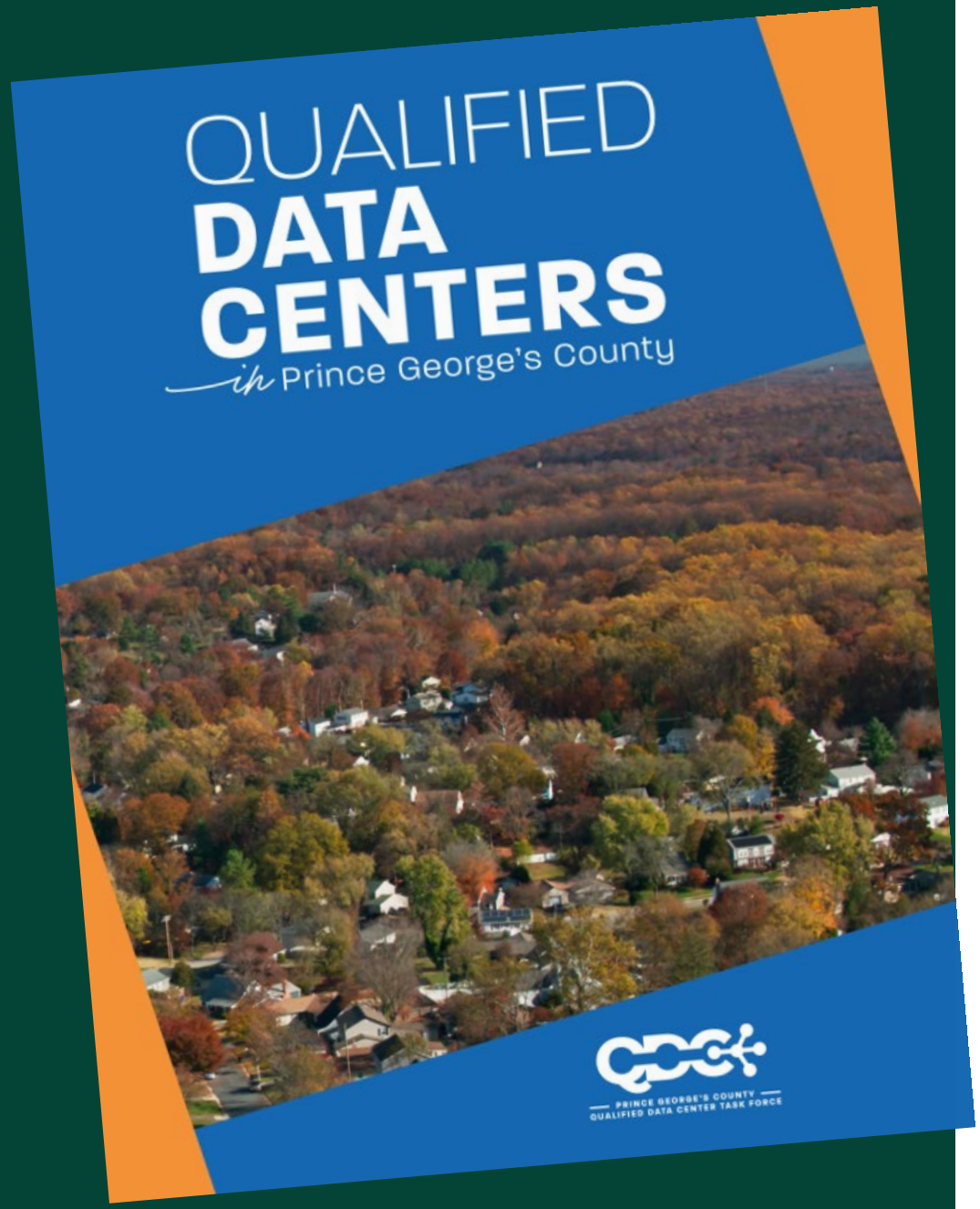
Franklin County/ New Albany, OH



Fulton County/ Greater Atlanta, GA

Case Study Comparison

County	Policy Updates	Application Review Process	Zoning and Siting	Community Benefits
Loudoun	• Research initiated Feb. 2024. • Phase 1 Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments approved in March 2025 • Phase 2 ongoing	• Only allowed through special exception use in certain office and industrial zones • Specific conditions may be set	• Ordinance under review for amendment • Façade and site standards a good policy model for guidelines that address noise and aesthetic concerns	• Annual real property tax revenues $100 million+ • 30% decrease in property tax for residents over the past decade; • Educational and workforce development program partnerships
Frederick	• Workgroup formed June 2023 • Report issued March 2024 • In progress: Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Map Amendments, and Draft Overlay Zone Map	• Conditional use permits and impact studies required • Noise and vibration studies are periodically required once in operation	• Overlay zone limits the footprint of data center growth • Prioritizes brownfield redevelopment and preservation of agricultural lands	• CBAs could help advance agriculture land conservation programs and other community priorities.
Fulton	• Municipalities approved zoning ordinance amendments	• Special use permits required • Developers must disclose plans for energy and water use, stormwater management, tree impacts, and utility infrastructure needs	• Prohibited within one-half mile of high-capacity transit stations, the Beltline, and identified community commercial corridors	• Microsoft Data Academy training lab at Atlanta Technical College
Franklin	• General policy guided by 2020 strategic plan, amended 2022 • No other policies in development.	• By-right as an office use • Administrative process with expedited site plan review and permitting.	• Designated Business Park within Town Employment Center District incentivizes developers to leverage existing infrastructure	• Numerous educational and workforce training programs; revolving community funds.
Fairfax	• Research initiated May 2023 • Findings issued Jan. 2024 • Revised ordinance adopted in Sept. 2024	• Several industrial zones allow by-right use, policy incentivizes special exception. • Sound studies: during application and before occupancy permit	• Rezoning to a by-right district triggers application documentation (noise studies and architectural drawing)	• Educational programs and workforce training opportunities in technology and AI



Key Recommendations

14 Policy Recommendations

- **3** zoning and land use policies
- **3** environmental policies
- **4** site and building design policies
- **2** planning process policies
- **2** for community benefits and incentives

Zoning and Land Use



Loudoun County eliminated by-right data center development in all zones. Only office and industrial zones allow for a special use exception.

- Tighten Data Centers Use Restrictions in Non-Industrial Zones
- Protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas by Restricting Data Center Development
- Establish an Overlay Zone that Incentivizes Brownfield and other Underperforming Sites for Data Center Development

Environment

More than 70% of responses about environmental impacts were about energy and water use

- Require a Sustainable Operations Plan with Every Special Use Exception or Planed Development Zoning Map Amendment (ZMA-PD)
- Incentivize the Construction of Sustainable Data Centers That Exceed Established Environmental Standards
- Advocate for Implementing a High-Energy Use Surcharge on Data Centers

Site and Building Design



Atlanta outlines strict size and aesthetic standards that dictate materiality and siting conditions.

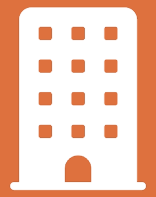
- Adopt Flexible, Green Design Standards for Data Centers
- Discourage Speculative Data Center Development by Incentivizing Projects to Pursue Planned Developments
- Increase Setbacks and Screening Requirements for Data Centers Near Residential Areas
- Amend the Noise Ordinance to Regulate Data Center Generator Testing

Planning Process

In Fairfax County, only the highest intensity industrial districts allow footprints of more than 80,000 sq ft without an exception.

- Require All Data Centers to Undertake the Special Use Exception Process
- Amend Planned Development Requirements in the Zoning Ordinance to Require Detailed Site Plan Review for all Data Centers

Other Community Benefits & Incentives



The MGM National Harbor CBA is one of the strongest examples in Maryland of enforceable CBAs linked to major economic development.

- Establish a Community Advisory Group and Verify Compliance Mechanisms to Recommend and Monitor Community Benefits Associated with Data Center Developments
- Establish a Hybrid CBA Framework Combining Ordinance and Project-Specific Agreements

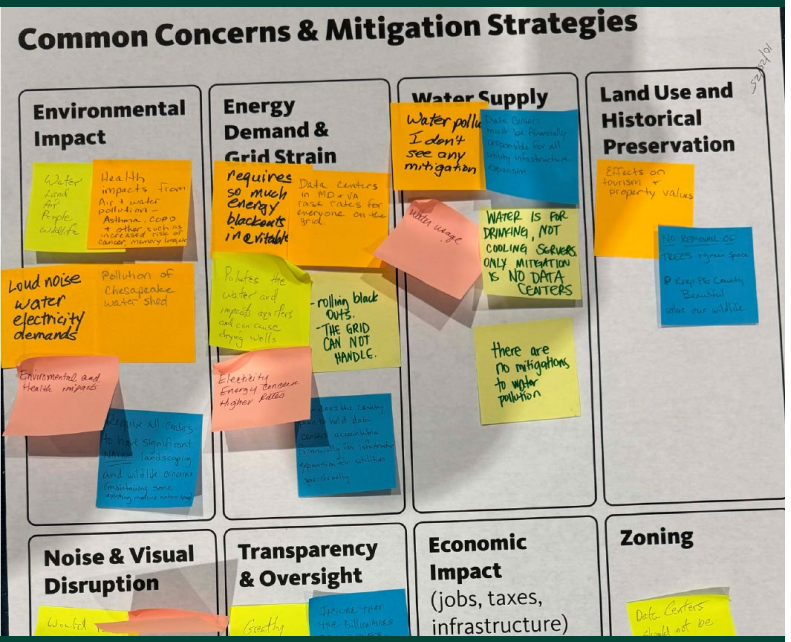
Zoning Changes: Options for Regulation

- Conditional Use-Standard Conditions
- Rezoning-Planned Development Districts
- Overlay Zoning-Floating Overlay Zones
- Construction of Community Benefit Agreements

Zoning Changes: Considerations

- Providing information on electrical generation needs and sources.
- Water consumption and pre-treatment
- Air Quality
- Waste Heat and release from site.
- Noise & Vibration Abatement Procedures and Requirements
- Bonding Requirements
- Monitoring and Reporting
- Decommissioning
- Enforcement

Takeaways



1. Engagement can be leveraged to educate the public on complex, rapidly evolving land use topics and to build shared understanding

2. Complex issues like data center require a context sensitive approach. Each community needs to evaluate the best regulation options for the context.

3. Preliminary policy alternatives that reflect data-backed public input serve as a solid foundation for legislators to craft tight land use and zoning policies

Questions & Answers





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