

2025 RES-205

ESTABLISHING THE DANE COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DATA CENTERS

Across the Midwest, technology companies and investment firms are making unprecedented investments in large “hyperscale” data centers, designed to support the rapid growth of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and digital commerce. These facilities—often housed in massive buildings hundreds of thousands of square feet in size and clustered on “campuses” spanning hundreds of acres—require extraordinary levels of electrical power and cooling infrastructure, among other resources.

Several large data center projects have already been announced or are under consideration within Wisconsin, including in Port Washington, Mount Pleasant, Menomonie, and the Town of Vienna in Dane County. Similar proposals are emerging across the region, spurring important conversations within the communities about their relative merits and impacts, and highlighting the need for comprehensive and reliable information on which communities can base their decision making. These important and potentially irreversible development decisions need to be based on sound, factual information, and communities need to be equipped with an understanding of what decisions are within their power when responding to proposals for data center developments.

These developments promise potential benefits but at the same time, they raise complex questions about sustainability, resource use, impacts on ratepayers, and community compatibility, among other issues. Hyperscale data centers are among the most energy-intensive types of land use, drawing hundreds of megawatts of power and potentially requiring large volumes of water for cooling. The scale of such facilities also raises the question of whether they will necessitate significant new electrical infrastructure, including new generation facilities, large substations, and high-voltage transmission lines, each with its own land use, aesthetic, and environmental impacts.

Dane County consistently ranks among the most agriculturally productive counties in Wisconsin and the nation. Dane County farms contribute significantly to the state's economy and food system. Rural landscapes and agricultural heritage are defining elements of Dane County history and identity. The county has been a state leader in farmland preservation, resource protection, and comprehensive planning, adopting policies that emphasize compact growth, intergovernmental cooperation, and the stewardship of land and water resources.

Given these Dane County values and longstanding commitments, the question of whether—and under what circumstances—hyperscale data centers should be located within Dane County warrants careful study. It is therefore necessary and prudent to establish an advisory body to research the issue and provide the Dane County communities and the County Board with findings and policy recommendations that will inform thoughtful, data-driven decisions on this issue.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors hereby establishes a Dane County Advisory Committee on Data Centers for the purpose of impartial fact-finding, researching, analyzing, and providing recommendations regarding the economic, environmental, and community implications of data center development within Dane County.

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53 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee shall examine and report on
54 issues, including, but not limited to:

- 55 1. Energy consumption and emissions impacts, including potential impacts on local
56 utilities, ratepayers, and Dane County's air quality, climate action, and carbon-
57 reduction goals;
- 58 2. Electrical transmission and distribution infrastructure, including the potential need
59 for new substations, transmission corridors, and upgrades to existing facilities,
60 and the associated impacts on reliability, land use, ratepayers, and the
61 environment;
- 62 3. Water usage, including sources, sustainability, impacts to surface or
63 groundwater, impacts to watersheds, and potential competition with municipal,
64 agricultural, and residential water users;
- 65 4. Noise, lighting, and other aesthetic and community character impacts associated
66 with large-scale data centers;
- 67 5. Emergency services and security implications, including capacity of fire-fighting,
68 hazmat, and other public safety services for response to natural and manmade
69 hazards onsite;
- 70 6. Economic and fiscal benefits, including potential tax base growth, employment,
71 and secondary development opportunities;
- 72 7. Land use and environmental compatibility, including potential conversion of
73 farmland and consistency with county plans for rural preservation, natural
74 resource protection, and efficient infrastructure use;
- 75 8. Lifespan of these facilities and considerations and plans for decommissioning
76 them at a future date, given rapidly changing technology;
- 77 9. Intergovernmental relations, including the potential for both competition and
78 cooperation among communities, as well as approaches for consistent evaluation
79 and siting of data centers among the county's towns, cities, and villages;
- 80 10. Regulatory and legal authorities and policy mechanisms through which local units
81 of government can establish and enforce standards and development criteria for
82 these types of proposals; and
- 83 11. Any other relevant issues that arise in the course of the Advisory Committee's
84 work and that bear exploration to inform its comprehensive findings and
85 recommendations.

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87 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that as part of its charge, the Advisory Committee shall
88 prepare summary findings and recommendations regarding the development of
89 hyperscale data centers within Dane County, taking into account current and projected
90 energy and water demands, infrastructure needs, and consistency with adopted
91 comprehensive plan goals, farmland preservation policies, and climate objectives.

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93 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee shall develop and
94 recommend policy and regulatory options for the review and siting of hyperscale data
95 centers, including land use policies, siting criteria, model zoning provisions, overlay
96 districts, or conditional use review standards, ensuring that any such developments align
97 with countywide goals for sustainability and land stewardship.

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99 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the summary findings and recommendations of the
100 Advisory Committee will be made available as a factual, evidence-based resource to
101 Dane County communities, both to inform their understanding of what latitude they have
102 when responding to proposals for data center developments and to provide them with a

103 comprehensive and useful tool for decision making. The findings and recommendations
104 will also provide policy guidance for Dane County's Planning and Development
105 Department, particularly the Zoning Division.

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107 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee shall consist of thirteen (13)
108 members, appointed by the County Board Chairperson as follows:
109 Two (2) representatives of Dane County towns, including one from among the six towns
110 that have opted out of Dane County zoning;
111 Two (2) representatives of the Dane County Cities and Villages Association;
112 Three (3) members of the Dane County Board of Supervisors;
113 One (1) representative of a recognized environmental organization;
114 One (1) member with a background in energy policy or utility regulation;
115 One (1) member with subject matter expertise in data center development or technology
116 infrastructure;
117 One (1) representative of the agricultural or farmland preservation community;
118 Two (2) at-large members with a background or demonstrated interest in land use,
119 environmental planning, and sustainability .

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121 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that staff support will be provided by the County
122 Department of Planning & Development and the County Board Office as needed.
123 Corporation Counsel and others will provide assistance as needed.

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125 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the task force be paid per diems and
126 mileage, as set forth by Dane County Ordinance.

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128 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee shall convene within 60 days
129 of adoption of this resolution and shall hold at least two (2) public hearings at times
130 designated by the committee as appropriate points in the process—one hearing for
131 presentation of findings relative to the items enumerated on lines 56-86 of this
132 resolution, with a timeline for feedback on the findings, and a second hearing for
133 presentation of final recommendations and resources for communities.

134 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee shall provide a final written
135 report of its findings and recommendations to Dane County communities and the Dane
136 County Board of Supervisors within twelve (12) months of its first meeting.