



Dane County

Minutes - Final Unless Amended by Committee

Advisory Committee on Data Centers

Consider:

Who benefits? Who is burdened?

Who does not have a voice at the table?

How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

12:00 PM Hybrid Meeting, at Room 351 City County Building, 210
Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd

See below for additional instructions on how to attend the meeting and provide public testimony.

A. Call To Order

Others present: Majid Allan, Jaron McCallum, Ben Kollenbroich, Todd Violante, Lauren Kuhl, Brian Ohm, Christian Farina, Kate Smith

Chair Miles called the meeting to order at 12:00 PM.

Present: 12 - CYNTHIA RICHSON, DOUG YELK, BOB WIPPERFURTH, CINDI KELM-NELSON, CIARAN GALLAGHER, CAITLIN SHANAHAN, DON POSTLER, KERRY MARREN, PATRICK MILES, TERRY BRADSHAW, TONY ABATE and LAURA SCANDURRA

Excused: 1 - COREY SINGLETARY

B. Consideration of Minutes

[2025
MIN-603](#)

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 10, 2026 ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DATA CENTERS MEETING

Attachments: [ACDC February 10, 2025 Draft Minutes](#)
[20260210 - ACDC Registrations.pdf](#)

A motion was made by POSTLER, seconded by WIPPERFURTH, that the Minutes be approved as amended. The motion carried by a voice vote.

Richson requested a technical change to include the word consider in the sentence "establish a repository of background information" under G. Goals/Priority Setting.

C. Action Items

D. Presentations

1. Updates

Pending Legislation Document

At the first committee meeting, a request made to have a list of pending legislation related to data centers. The county's Legislative Lobbyist pulled together pending legislation regarding data centers, which is available on the Planning website: <https://www.danecountyplanning.com/ACDC>. Staff will request for the Legislative Lobbyist to include a key to the document indicating what the colors on the document represent.

Website Update

Updates will be made to the website, including posting links to reference information and articles of interest. If there are additions for the website, send them to Planning Staff at: ACDC@danecounty.gov <<mailto:ACDC@danecounty.gov>>, links and documents will be organized. A statement will be added to the site noting that the posted links and materials do not necessarily reflect the endorsement of the committee.

Guest Speakers

There were 4 guests in attendance to provide perspective on the two main agenda topics: data center basics, and regulatory authorities and policy options available to local units of government. Speakers were ACDC member and UW data center lead, Terry Bradshaw; Professor Emeritus from UW-Madison Department of Planning & Landscape Architecture, Brian Ohm; City of Madison Attorney, Kate Smith; and Assistant Dane County Corporation Counsel, Christian Farina.

2. Data Center Basics

Terry Bradshaw presented an overview of data centers, explaining that data centers are climate-controlled facilities that contain the servers and related equipment to store and process digital information and enable a wide range of digital and online services, including "cloud" and video streaming services, online banking, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). He reviewed facility types (enterprise, colocation, cloud/hyperscale, and edge), and why hyperscale facilities can create outsized impacts. He described key infrastructure elements ("anatomy" of a data center), including utility interconnection/substations, on-site electrical equipment (switchgear/transformers and batteries/Uninterrupted Power Supply), IT load (servers/storage), cooling systems (including open-loop cooling towers versus closed-loop dry coolers), fiber/network connectivity, and backup power systems (often diesel generators with on-site fuel storage).

Discussion ensued regarding types of hardware, climate control of data centers, history of data centers, maintenance of cooling systems, environmental impacts of maintenance, consideration of renewable energy to power data centers.

[2025](#) DATA CENTER BASICS
[PRES-295](#)

Attachments: [2025 PRES-295.pdf](#)

3. Local Government and Policy Options

Professor Brian Ohm presented on the Wisconsin policy and regulatory context affecting data centers and reviewed the range of local government tools available to address them.

Professor Ohm noted that data centers represent the latest in a long list of contentious land use issues like suburban shopping malls, wind/solar farms, and frac sand mining that local governments in Wisconsin have had to address and determine how to move forward.

State policy actions were highlighted, including 2023 Wisconsin Act 19 which created sales/use tax exemptions for “qualified data centers”, and 2025 Wisconsin Act 16 which provided an exemption to the 12% cap on Tax Increment Financing for data center host communities Port Washington and Beaver Dam.

Ohm outlined the broader regulatory framework involving state agencies such as the Public Service Commission (rates and generation/transmission issues), DNR (wetlands, stormwater, air permits, sewer service area amendments, and Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act compliance), and even DOT (state highway access issues). He emphasized that local governments retain multiple “levers” to address data centers, including land use authorities, annexation/intergovernmental approaches, and other regulatory and fiscal tools. With regard to local government authorities and policy options, Ohm cautioned that officials should be mindful of proper procedure when taking action on proposals, since local units must defend any lawsuits that may stem from those actions. He cited a pending lawsuit in Port Washington over alleged open meetings violations.

Ohm addressed comprehensive and farmland preservation planning. He noted that data centers impact most if not all of the 9 required plan elements in different aspects, including housing, transportation, utility and community facilities, agricultural, natural and cultural resources, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, land use, and implementation. Plans provide the policy basis for future land use decisions, and zoning is one tool to implement a community’s plan.

Extraterritorial plat review and zoning authorities of cities and villages were reviewed. Ohm noted that those municipalities have the authority to review land divisions within 1.5-3 miles of their boundaries. Extraterritorial zoning is also a tool that cities and villages can use in cooperation with their neighboring townships, though this is a tool not frequently used in WI.

Other tools available to local units include intergovernmental boundary agreements and cooperative plans and revenue sharing. Annexation is another authority that cities and villages have, but Ohm estimated that roughly 90% of annexations are initiated by landowners/developers. Incorporating as a city or village is an option for towns that meet certain population criteria, but the process is lengthy.

Professor Ohm discussed zoning and process options such as treating data centers as permitted versus conditional uses (potentially by size/type), creating standards to address impacts (e.g., noise, water/stormwater, wetlands, air quality, sustainability), and the potential use of a temporary moratorium while

local regulations are evaluated/updated. He also noted that comprehensive plans and related plans (including farmland preservation) can be relevant in evaluating policy choices and siting decisions since zoning decisions must be consistent with the adopted plan.

Development agreements between a local governmental unit and developer were also reviewed. Pre-annexation agreements, which have been used in recent data center proposals, are a form of development agreement. Ohm cautioned that, while development agreements are commonly used in practice, there is no state enabling legislation. He noted further that “contract zoning” is illegal in Wisconsin.

Discussion ensued regarding the role of the DNR, communities taking a formal position on data centers, state review of data center proposals, whether local governments could prohibit data centers, possibility for local governments to jointly regulate data centers, and possible state preemption of local government authority.

Kate Smith from the City Attorney’s Office for the City of Madison provided an overview of the City’s moratorium on data centers. Smith indicated that policymakers wanted to be proactive instead of reactive to data centers. The city felt it was necessary to take stock of where data centers exist in Madison and their characteristics. Currently, data centers fall under telecommunications centers for zoning and permitting purposes, and are listed as a permitted use in some zoning categories.

The city chose to address unanswered questions with the temporary moratorium, which will provide time to connect with other cities to learn from their experiences. It will also provide time for the city to consider possible amendments to its comprehensive plan and zoning code. Further discussion ensued regarding possible changes to the city’s comprehensive plan in light of the city’s existing planning objectives and demands for limited land base, as well as options to collaborate with city staff.

[2025](#)
[PRES-278](#)

Local Government and Policy Options

Attachments: [Dane County Data Centers](#)

E. Reports to Committee

None

F. Future Meeting Items and Dates

Planning staff will send out alternative meeting times to see if there is an option that will work for all members’ schedules.

G. Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda

None

H. Such Other Business as Allowed by Law

None

I. Adjourn

A motion was made by POSTLER, seconded by RICHSON, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 1:55 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lauren Kuhl, pending Committee approval