



Staff Report on the Development of Data Centers

Community Development Department: Planning & Zoning Division

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Background

Data Center facilities house the technological infrastructure required for data storage, artificial intelligence (AI) processing, cryptocurrency, online gaming, and the functioning of our apps and internet surfing. They are where our virtual activities all connect to a physical place. These buildings contain server equipment, computers, storage systems and operating equipment like coolers, security systems and back-up generators or other power sources (ULI 2024).

In 2025, the rapid national escalation of data center construction spurred 11 states to pursue moratoriums and/or regulations, including 21 bills in the State of Georgia Legislature. Legislators and policy analysts cite concerns about massive water use, surges and outages of power, noise generated by fan systems and diesel generators, and pollutant emissions, among other issues. Further, data centers consume great quantities of land without generating commensurate



employment for the square footage developed (i.e., their land use results in under-utilization of land, based on employees per square foot). The largest - those categorized as “hyperscalers” - can require one million acres of land, although the range varies by facility type. Since 2022 the AI industry has invested over \$600 billion dollars in capital expenditures to data center construction (2026, Wong).

Data centers provide an essential service for economic competitiveness; they also generate temporary construction employment and investment in the built environment.

Data centers do not have a definition within the City of Roswell’s Unified Development Code (UDC). Because this use is not indicated or listed in any zoning district, it is currently considered prohibited (*City of Roswell UDC* Sec 9.1.2 B.). Even if the City found the use desirable, the lack of a definition or use standards in Article 9 restricts the City’s ability to regulate where a new data center could be located or what criteria should apply for their development.

This report presents findings about the operation and impact of data center development to inform decision-makers and the public as the City prepares an appropriate regulatory framework.

As a land use, data centers differ from traditional warehouses for several reasons, including requiring more security and uninterrupted surveillance and controlled-access points. The Urban Land Institute captures some of these differences as shown below:

Land Use Differences from Industrial Warehouses (ULI 2024)

- Data centers are often taller than traditional single-story warehouses. They can be single-story – starting at 30 feet -- or multi-story.
- They require fewer employees once construction is done, so long-term impacts on traffic, schools and public services are minimal.
- They need fewer parking spaces and plumbing fixture counts than are typically mandated by industrial codes.
- Data centers require more robust underground and above-ground infrastructure.
- Unlike warehouses and factories, data centers have external electrical and mechanical equipment.

Data Center Typologies by Operations and Scale

Data center operators prefer massive scale or a way to cluster centers within physical proximity because this helps to both reduce latency (the time it takes for information travel) and improve reliability.



The following set of categories organize data centers in terms of descriptors of their operations, per a report for the Department of Defense published by the Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory (Shehabi, 2024):

Type of Data Center	Description
Telco Edge	Deployment of small closets/rooms to micro data centers and network infrastructure by communications companies as points of presence throughout their network
Commercial Edge	Network closets, server rooms and micro data centers deployed to support modern digital, infrastructure and software delivery services to edge locations for commercial (focused on supply chain and channel operations)
Small and Medium Businesses (SMB)	SMB deployments in their own internal facilities
Enterprise Branch	Classic remote and branch office (ROBO) deployments for large enterprises in their own internal facilities (network closets, server rooms)
Internal	Data centers run by enterprises, internally, for their own use
Communications Service Providers (Comms SPs)	Data centers run by telecommunications/cable companies to supports internal services required to enable provision of communications technology services to their customers
Colocation-Sm/Med Scale	Data centers built by local colocation companies typically providing retail leasing at smaller scale
Colocation- Large Scale	Data centers built by major colocation companies providing wholesale and retail colocation leasing, Typically deploying large and mega datacenters
Hyperscale	Data centers built by companies that deploy internet services and platforms at massive scale

The Berkley report further organizes several of these categories **based on scale**, specifically in terms of the **megawatts of power** used to serve each facility type. Some industry reports have “translated” this power usage into its associated square footage of building size.



- **Edge facilities** are typically on the scale of a few thousand square feet and have an electrical capacity of one or less megawatts (MW).
- **Enterprise** facilities are typically in the range of 5,000-50,000 square feet and have an electrical capacity of 1-7.5 megawatts.
- **Colocation** facilities are typically in the range of 50,000-600,000 square feet and have an electrical capacity of 7.5-90 megawatts, but average in the range of 150,000 square feet.
- **“Hyperscale”** facilities are those that exceed several-hundred-thousand square feet and can go into the millions of square feet in some cases (Nichols, 2026; Shehabi *et al*, 2024).

These findings show great variability in size and operations; regulations managing negative impacts should address these variations accordingly.

Comparison of Select Zoning Codes

Because these facilities are a new phenomenon, many jurisdictions have no reference to data centers in their regulations. When comparing five other local jurisdictions that *do* have data centers as either a permitted- or regulated- use, differences emerge. Neither Sandy Springs, Johns Creek nor Dunwoody have data centers listed as a use and are therefore not included in these findings.

Three of the five ordinances reviewed require **conditional/special use approval** from their governing bodies before data centers may locate in their respective zoning districts. The City of South Fulton and Forsyth County require conditional/special use approval for *any* data center, regardless of size, impact, or zoning district.

Four of the five place additional restrictions on data centers in some form or another. Buffer and distance requirements are the most common of those reviewed. Cities of Alpharetta, Atlanta, and South Fulton, along with Forsyth County, all require either **buffers** at abutting property lines, **minimum distances** from specific uses like residential, or both.

Of the five reviewed, the City of Milton had relatively few standards for data centers. However, they are only allowed in four of Milton’s 18 standard (non-overlay and not including specially designated form-based code areas) zoning districts (*City of Milton*, 2025; *Code of Ordinances*, 2024; *Code of Ordinances*, 2025; *Ordinance 24-O-1222*, 2024).



The tables below summarize these findings:

Locality	Zoning District (Type)		
	Mixed-use	Commercial	Industrial
City of Alpharetta	NO	NO	Conditional Use
City of Atlanta	Special Use in select high-intensity districts		OK
Forsyth County	NO	NO	Conditional Use
City of Milton	OK	OK in 4 districts	N/A
City of Sandy Springs	Not listed; must be approved by Director	Not listed; must be approved by Director	Not listed; must be approved by Director
City of South Fulton	NO	NO	Special Use

Locality	Limitations and special restrictions			
	Buffers	Noise testing	Utilities	Additional
City of Alpharetta	40' abutting public roadway	Noise testing required, no regulated levels	None	20' building height (Min); design and screening; lighting; 100' setback from road
City of Atlanta	None			Prohibited from the Beltline Overlay District and within a half-mile of a high-capacity transit station
Forsyth County	75' abutting select low-density/low-intensity zoning districts	60 dB (55 dB at night) abutting residential	Hydro-cooling systems may not use the County water system	20' building height (Min); ventilation and cooling systems must be housed inside the building; generator use and testing times limited; 100' setback abutting residential zoning
City of Milton	None			
City of Sandy Springs	None			
City of South Fulton	100' abutting a residential use; 50' landscape strip at right of way	65 dB (55 dB at night) abutting residential use	Substation Study required if applicable, with 300' setback from road	20 acre Lot (Min); design and screening; transitional height requirements



State of Georgia Legislation

The 2026 Georgia General Assembly included **21 bills proposed** in the legislative session that addressed various dimensions of data center impacts. This shows the seriousness and complexity of the matter. Of those bills, only four passed either of the chambers prior to Crossover Day, however none made it through adjournment (*Sine Die*), which means no new changes at the State level emerged to regulate data centers.

The 2026 Georgia Legislative approved no bills that change Data Center regulations or change the current tax incentives in place.

House Bill 134, Senate Bill 410, & Senate Bill 476 all passed the Senate but stalled in the House. These three bills addressed the current State tax provision, whereby data centers are partially exempt from sales and use tax for the purchase of their equipment. These three bills proposed to end this exemption.

A fourth bill, Georgia House Bill 1063 passed the House but failed in the Senate. This piece of legislation would require that electric utilities in the state protect general residential and commercial electricity customers from **any cost increase** related to the construction or operation of data centers. Some lawmakers were concerned about interfering with the efficacy of the rule recently established by the Public Services Commission, also aiming to protect residential customers.

Other Government and Regulatory Agencies

Municipalities/Georgia Municipal Association (GMA). The Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) reports mixed reception across Georgia municipalities that currently have data centers. Municipalities with older data centers – which have less intense than newer - generally report favorable views (interview, Callie Hood, research associate GMA).

According to GMA staff, information is a key factor that has hindered decision making among Georgia municipalities regarding data centers. GMA survey results on the topic find that just over half of Georgia municipalities felt they had enough information to sufficiently make policy decisions over data center uses. Conversely, 34% felt they did not have enough information and 13% had mixed opinions.

GMA researchers also report that organizations that own and operate data centers tend to be hesitant to provide information to municipalities. In many cases, data centers may operate as a proxy for major tech corporations (e.g. Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, etc.) but are often owned and operated by separate organizations with names not recognizable to the general public. This has hindered some local governing boards seeking to gather information.



Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Helping to reduce this gap of information, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs has included data centers in its listing of projects that require review under its “Development of Regional Impact” process (for projects 300,000 square feet or greater) (DRI; *Developments of Regional*, n.d.). DRI projects are subject to state and regional agency infrastructure and land use reviews. Data Centers triggering DRI review must now disclose information regarding their use of water and electricity so communities can better understand the impacts of proposed new, large projects (<https://georgiarecorder.com/2025/11/21>).

Data centers reaching DRI status will be required by the DCA to submit at the time the project is submitted:

- Project size
- Estimated value at build-out
- Estimated number of full-time employees
- Estimated water demand
- Estimated sewage flow
- Expected increase to traffic trips
- Estimated solid waste increase
- Estimated peak electrical load, among other items.

This helps local governments obtain insight that data center developers may be otherwise hesitant to publicly release. This list does not include noise studies or noise impact information, which would need to be requested independently from a DRI.

Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC for Georgia Power adopted a new rule January 22, 2026, that requires any new customers **using more than 100 megawatts** of energy to be billed using terms and conditions beyond those used for standard customers, to address risks associated with these large-load users. Costs covered by the ruling are both site specific costs and costs incurred by upstream generation, transmission and distribution to these large-load power users.

This measure aims to protect Georgia Power’s residential and other customers regarding financial impacts. It does not address excessive and cumulative load stressors or potential shortages to the energy supply system.

*“The amount of energy these new industries consume is staggering,” said PSC Chairman Jason Shaw, “...this new rule...is helping ensure that existing ...customers will be spared... costs associated with adding these **large-load customers** to the grid.”*



Industry Perspective

About a dozen private entities involved in the construction, operation, service or ownership of data centers were approached by Staff for comment. Amazon Web Services, Open Ai, the Data Center Coalition and Georgia Power responded.

Georgia Power: Representatives of the Georgia Power Company met with Community Development Department Staff to discuss data center electricity use and how they are affecting other communities in Georgia.

They report they do not have concern with legacy data centers and new, smaller “co-location” facilities, where multiple organizations place their servers in a central facility with other organizations’ servers. Their primary efforts are to prepare communities for new growth and to plan for the capacity to meet the needs of the hyper-scale facilities.

Georgia Power representatives emphasized that their planning and the current construction pipeline will deliver sufficient capacity to service data center customers into the future. Representatives stated that no disruption to services will occur and that there will be **no effect** on existing residential or commercial customers. They wished to make it clear that no data center project would be signed as a customer with Georgia Power unless there was enough capacity to account for the new usage. The energy impacts section further below reports how Georgia Power has rapidly and significantly re-adjusted their projections based on the massive rise in demand over the past three years.

Amazon Web Services (AWS): Amazon Web Services responded to request for information by the City with a written response generated by an AI agent. Continued attempts for live individuals have not resulted in further response. While relatively generalist answers, AWS’ response acknowledges the concerns that local communities have.

Amazon’s response emphasizes the infrastructural and operational needs of new data centers. They state that these facilities require “redundant power systems” and “uninterruptible power supply.” Generally, Amazon states that these facilities require being connected to multiple power grids in order to ensure that power provisions are never fully cut off.

The response emphasizes security concerns for data center facilities, including internal monitoring, dual factor verification by staff members, and requiring staff escorts for visitors. Amazon noted that this impacts the built environment on the exterior of the project, where physical access at the perimeter of the property must be strongly defended to prevent intrusion from unauthorized individuals.



Amazon's response also notes that local governments should work to manage of the impact that new data centers might have on noise considerations, increased traffic, high network and electric utility needs, and a ***need for coordinated emergency responses*** for data center emergencies.

Data Center Coalition: An organization representing the data center industry discussed a few of the issues and concerns regarding the facilities with Staff. Common regulations that the Coalition finds reasonable include:

- Setbacks of 100'-200' from residential uses
- Noise abatement requirements, as measured from the property line
- Regulations defining when backup generators can be used (usually only during backup generation and testing)
- Regulating cooling systems provided that the local government indicate which ones *cannot* be used, rather than trying to define a narrow list of allowed types because technology is changing rapidly.

The Coalition representative also provided context regarding requirements to use alternative power sources like solar rather than diesel generators. She explained that, that would take about 10 acres of land for the solar panels required to generate just 1 MW of power; the scale doesn't work in built-out urban settings (interview, 4/13, Khara Boender, Data Center coalition).

OpenAI: Open AI is a public benefit corporation leading artificial intelligence (AI) research and deployment, most famous for ChatGPT and GPT-4, which are a "chatbot" application and the technology powering it, respectively. The OpenAI representative observed that data centers are not big attractors for new high-tech based businesses. He stated that there already exists a heavily saturated supply of data centers in the region (interview 4/14 with Hank Evans, Economic Development, Physical Infrastructure, OpenAI). Businesses needing data center infrastructure will often develop it internal to their primary business operations. He also acknowledged that an average sized data center of 200,000 square feet will likely generate only around 30 permanent jobs. However, he emphasized that the salaries for the positions created are high, such as technical engineers earning six figures.

Impact Discussion

Fiscal Benefits Analysis

Many states and local governments have seen data center development as positive for their economic development, primarily where there have been underutilized green fields in ex-urban settings. The Roswell Economic Development analysts provided a benefits comparison analysis regarding the development of data centers and their potential tax revenue impact in the City. The analysis generated the following outcomes showing a comparison of Data Center uses to Warehouse and Commercial/Office¹ land use types.

¹ The data source for the City of Roswell impact model selects "office" as a subcategory to "Commercial."



Comparison Scenario: 80,000 Square Foot Impacts by Land Use Type

**Data Center normal
(80k ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	20
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	86
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	106
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	107
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$395,920
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$2,491,120
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0

**Warehouse normal
(80k ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	53
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	64
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	117
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	107
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$15,837
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$99,645
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0

**Commercial normal
(80k ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	320
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	268
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	588
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	107
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$35,633
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$224,201
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0



Comparison Scenario: 250,000 Square Foot Impacts by Land Use Type

**Data Center large
(250k ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	63
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	268
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	331
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	335
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$1,237,250
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$7,784,750
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0

**Warehouse large (250k
ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	167
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	199
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	365
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	335
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$49,490
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$311,390
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0

**Commercial large (250k
ft2)**

Summary Results: Economic and Fiscal Benefits	
Permanent Direct Jobs Created by Project at Build-out/Lease-up	1,000
Permanent Indirect Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	836
Total Jobs Created from Project at Build-out/Lease-up	1,836
Temporary Construction-Related Jobs Created by Project	335
Projected Roswell Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$111,353
Projected total Real Property Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$700,628
Project Roswell Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Fulton Co. (3%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0
Projected Georgia (4%) Sales Tax Collections at Build-out/Lease-up	\$0



According to the Roswell internal Business Analyst modeling, and as supported by business articles, Data Centers generate the least amount of jobs when comparing to alternative land uses such as Warehouse or Commercial/Office, by a significant amount. However, Data Centers also generate higher annual property and real tax revenue compared to Warehouse and Commercial/Office, due to the extremely high value of “Personal” property (the servers, technology and systems within).

Jobs. Jobs projections above were generated by an internal modeling tool. The literature review offers similar, albeit somewhat varying estimates employment at data centers. Some industry reports suggest that employment can number as high as 157 for facilities of approximately 165,000 square feet (*Data centers*, 2017). Other journalistic reports suggest that no more than 100 employees are permanently on staff at facilities almost double the size (Dotan, 2025). OpenAI staff stated that on average, it’s around 30 jobs for a 200,000 square foot facility.

It is also important to note, many estimates include construction jobs in the count of employment positions created. These are, by their nature, temporary and only last during the construction period of the facility.

Broadstaff Staffing Solutions, a firm dedicated to providing staffing and consulting for AI and data centers, measures permanent facility employment in terms of megawatts (MW). They state that a small data center of 1 MW (typically around 6,700 square feet) employs 8-15 staff, medium centers of 5-20 MW (typically in the range of 33,500-134,000 square feet) have 15-35 staff, and a large center of 20+ MW (134,000 or more square feet) have 35 or more staff (Chung, 2025;).

Industry sources report that data centers offer a lower ratio of employees per square foot compared to manufacturing or other non-residential land use.

6,700 SF employs ~ 8-15 staff

134,00 SF employs ~ 15-35 staff

Commercial real estate firms Colliers Atlanta and Blanchard and Calhoun provide site locator clients data regarding employee-per-space, based on industry type (i.e., jobs density). To compare economic impacts and opportunities, Staff prepared the table below based on these industry sources (Collier 2026; Blanchard and Calhoun 2026; Broadstaff 2026).

Type	# Sq Ft	Sq Ft/Employee	Est # Employees
Office	134000	250	536
Industrial	134000	500	268
Warehouse	134000	1000	134
Data Center	134000	3829	35



Electricity. Data center operations, scaled at the regional or state level, require levels of electricity previously unimagined. According to Science for Georgia, approximately 80-90% of the planned increase in electric grid capacity in Georgia is dedicated to new data centers (Sharma, 2025).

In 2025, there were 97 operational data centers in Georgia. During this same time, the facilities had a capacity of 6,500 MW of electricity consumption. This results in an average energy consumption of 67 MW per data center, not accounting for differences in consumption based on size (Sharma, 2025). This is approximately the **equivalent of over 50,000 households** (*Electricity consumption, 2015*).

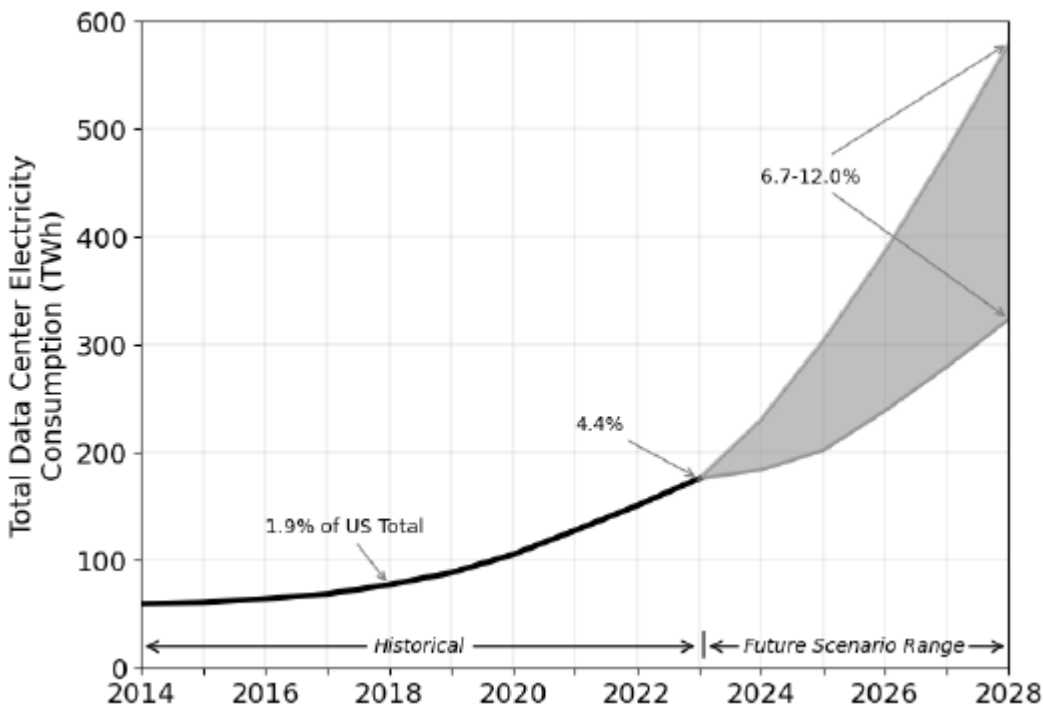
Data centers with an electrical capacity of 1 MW require around 6,700 square feet of floor space (Chung, 2025). While 1 MW is low in the scale of data centers, the power demand would be the equivalent needed for 746 households.

National trends tell the story of the drastic increase in data center power usage. By 2028, analysts estimate that data centers will consume up to **12% of the total electricity in the United States**. One regional planning office calculates that is the equivalent power need of **adding eight** New York City's to the country (Mason 2025; Shehabi 2024). In just three years, Georgia Power's 7-year estimate of power generation **increased 20-fold**.

Georgia Power: 7 Year Estimates

Since 2022, Georgia Power's estimates for its seven year projection of power needs have increased **20-fold** (in MegaWatts (MW)).

YEAR	7 YEAR ESTIMATE
2022	400 MW
2023	6,600 MW
2025	8,500 MW



Total U.S. data center electricity use 2014-2028; Source: (Shehabi, 2024)(Pew Research Center)

Water. Several sources reviewed documented the consumption of water and the types of coolant systems reliant upon it. The technologies for each coolant type are as complex as the digital equipment – one report tracked data for 13 different cooling system categories (Shehabi, 2024). That same report found that for every 1 kWh of electricity used, data centers consume 1.2 gallons of water (Shehabi *et al*, 2024). Data centers can consume 100,000 gallons to 3 million gallons per day depending on the cooling system employed.

Even a small powered data center (using just 1 MW) would use approximately 1,200 gallons per hour at peak operations. Under these assumptions, medium facilities (one using 5 MW or ~33,500 square feet in size) would consume ~**6,000 gallons per hour**. A large facility (20 MW or ~134,000 square feet) facilities would consume ~**24,000 gallons** per hour. This is the equivalent of 72, **360, and 1,440 residential households**, respectively (Indoor water use, 2017). According to one report, a hyper-center can consume as much as 500,000 gallons of water per day (Brookings 2025; Water Usage in DCs). A Consumer Report special article reports that the Phoenix Metro area projects an increase from 385 million gallons of water to **3.7 billion gallons annually**. That’s sufficient water to service a community of 34,000 homes (Consumer Reports 2025).



Alternative cooling systems exist and continue to be developed, such as “immersion cooling (Yanez-Barnuevo, 2025). Newer facilities rely upon “closed-loop” cooling systems. These recycle wastewater and chemically treated freshwater, but they can require more energy for their circulation systems.

These findings indicate that for the City of Roswell, new data centers need to locate in the areas served by Fulton County. The City’s permitting process already requires applicants submit verification by the County to confirm capacity for supply prior to any permitting for new facilities.

Noise. A report from an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia suggests that the noise created from data centers may not be high enough to be immediately bothersome to nearby residences. Data centers, during the design process, can limit their noise pollution through the design of the building itself. That said, noise testing prior to the commencement of operations will help a municipality to ensure noise levels is satisfactory for the health of local communities (Greer, 2024).

The same report states that the facilities that have ongoing complaints from local residents regarding quality-of-life-affecting noise typically report noise in the range of 40-59 dBA (Greer, 2024). While this is below what is considered harmful to human ears, approximately 85 dBA, it is still at about the same level of a conversation at a distance of three feet away (Greer, 2024; *Occupational noise*, n.d.). Moreover, it is approaching the level of sound that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) begins to consider uninhabitable for residential land use when they review new airport proposals, which is 65 dBA averaged throughout the day (*Land use compatibility*, n.d.). The impacts worsen human health however because the noise is described as a constant buzz or drone with no relief.

A noise impact study would need to model out projected decibels and intervals (extent of continuous, non-stop sound emissions) for Roswell decision makers to determine the impact of a given proposed project and whether proposed technologies or materials sufficiently mediate. Large buffers over 100 to 150 linear feet and required distances from resident uses can help mitigate impacts from nuisance level noise.

Public Safety & Emergency Response

Data center operations introduce a public safety profile distinct from traditional warehouse, office, and industrial uses. Their scale, hardened access, low staffing, and concentration of energy storage and backup power require coordinated review by the Roswell Fire Department (RFD) and the City's emergency response community. Public safety considerations should be addressed alongside the fiscal, utility, and noise impacts already covered in this report.



The Urban Land Institute, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and the International Fire Code (IFC) all recognize data centers as a discrete occupancy category requiring tailored fire and life safety controls (ULI 2024; NFPA 75; NFPA 76; NFPA 855).

Fire Suppression and Life Safety. Data centers concentrate three significant fire hazards rarely co-located in conventional commercial buildings: large-format lithium-ion battery banks supporting uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems, multiple diesel-fueled backup generators, and high-density electrical equipment operating continuously. Lithium-ion battery thermal runaway events can require extended water application for cooling and exposure protection, may re-ignite over time, and can release toxic off-gases, including hydrogen fluoride and carbon monoxide (NFPA 855). Governing standards include NFPA 75 (Fire Protection of Information Technology Equipment), NFPA 76 (Fire Protection of Telecommunications Facilities), NFPA 855 (Installation of Stationary Energy Storage Systems), and the 2024 International Fire Code, Chapter 12, which addresses energy systems, including stationary energy storage. Because Georgia has adopted the IFC with state amendments, any data center ordinance or condition of approval should require compliance with the currently adopted fire code, Georgia amendments, and the referenced NFPA standards applicable to fire protection, emergency access, hazardous materials, and energy storage systems.

Contaminated Runoff and Environmental Protection. Fire suppression activities at data centers may generate significant volumes of contaminated runoff. Water used during suppression or cooling operations may mix with battery materials, diesel fuel, refrigerants, glycol, dielectric fluids, or other hazardous substances. Because Roswell sits within multiple sub watersheds of the Chattahoochee River Basin, uncontrolled runoff from a data center fire could create environmental impacts beyond the immediate site. Conditions of approval should evaluate runoff containment, stormwater isolation, emergency shutoff valves, containment basins, and coordination with stormwater and environmental protection agencies.

Emergency Access. Industry sources confirm that data centers are designed with hardened perimeters, mantrap entries, and dual-factor authentication for staff and visitors (Amazon Web Services, written response 2026). These features create documented delays for fire and emergency medical service responders. Conditions of approval should require Knox-box installation, RFD-controlled override credentials, posted facility access protocols, and a documented escort procedure for any responding crew. These provisions should be verified prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.

Pre-Incident Planning. The combined effect of building scale, low on-site occupancy, and restricted internal layout makes site-specific pre-incident planning essential rather than optional. Plans should be developed in coordination with RFD prior to occupancy and updated annually. Required



content includes utility shutoff locations, electrical lockout coordination with Georgia Power, hazmat inventories, battery chemistry and capacity, cooling-system fluids, generator fuel storage volumes, and incident command staging areas.

Hazardous Materials. Data center cooling systems may employ refrigerants, dielectric fluids, glycol, or, in some configurations, ammonia, each with distinct hazmat response profiles (Shehabi et al., 2024). On-site diesel storage for backup generators presents an additional Class B fire exposure. Ordinance language should require disclosure of cooling fluid types and volumes, generator fuel storage volumes, and a site-specific hazardous materials inventory provided to RFD prior to occupancy.

Air Quality and Diesel Generator Emissions. Diesel backup generators present ongoing air quality concerns separate from their fire exposure. Recent federal regulatory changes have lifted prior restrictions on continuous generator runtime, increasing both the frequency and duration of emissions. Hyperscale facilities can house thirty or more generators with thousands of gallons of on-site diesel, creating cumulative nitrogen oxide (NOx), particulate matter (PM2.5), sulfur dioxide, and formaldehyde emissions of concern to nearby residential, school, healthcare, and senior care occupancies. Ordinance language should require disclosure of generator count, runtime limits, testing schedules, and compliance with Georgia Environmental Protection Division air quality regulations.

Cooling Tower Public Health Risk. Open-loop and evaporative cooling systems are documented vectors for waterborne pathogens, including *Legionella pneumophila* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ASHRAE 188). Closed-loop systems mitigate, but do not eliminate, this risk. Ordinance language should require water management plans consistent with ASHRAE Standard 188 for any facility employing cooling towers or evaporative systems.

Critical Infrastructure Security. Data centers function as elements of national digital infrastructure. Both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Data Center Coalition recognize these facilities as potential targets of physical intrusion, vandalism, and unmanned aerial system (UAS) overflight. Coordination protocols between facility security operations, Roswell Police Department, RFD, and Roswell 911 should be established as a condition of approval, including procedures for active threat response, drone overflight, and post-incident scene control.

Sensitive-Population Proximity. Buffer and setback requirements proposed elsewhere in this report address residential land uses but should also explicitly address proximity to public and private schools, daycare facilities, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, public parks, and



designated emergency evacuation routes. Recommended minimum separations for these sensitive uses should equal or exceed those for residential receptors, given the cumulative noise, air quality, and emergency response considerations identified above.

Community Notification. In the event of a major fire, hazmat release, or evacuation, surrounding residents and businesses must receive timely notification. Facility operators should coordinate with the City of Roswell on Emergency Alerts (EA), and any applicable local notification systems. This coordination should be documented in the pre-incident plan.

Mutual Aid and Regional Capability. Hyperscale data center incidents may exceed RFD's organic suppression, hazmat, and EMS capability. Mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments and regional hazmat teams should be reviewed and updated, and any apparatus, training, and staffing implications should be identified prior to ordinance adoption to inform future budget cycles. These public safety considerations, taken together, support the inclusion of formal RFD plan review authority for any data center proposal exceeding the Development of Regional Impact (DRI) threshold of 300,000 square feet, or, alternatively, for any facility with electrical capacity exceeding 7.5 megawatts.

Real Estate Bubble Contingency. At the national industry level, there exists a caution about over-development and preparing local economies to prepare against a potential bubble primed to burst. Industry voices have expressed calm, but the consequences of allowing such investment without guarantees could be significant (Bair, 2025; Sharma, 2025). Large-scale data center developments that are abandoned or canceled mid-way would leave behind buildings in the hundreds of thousands of square feet. Currently, the global demand for data centers remains high. Per Science for Georgia, there are over 120 data centers and crypto mines in the

Atlanta Metropolitan Area alone (*Data center situational*, 2026). Various market sources caution about an oversaturated market that could result in a series of large-scale abandoned buildings rather than economically thriving spaces. Repurposing requirements can be a condition of the use, committed and enforced via developer agreements.

Preliminary Recommendations: Use Definitions, Zoning and Design Standards

Establishing a definition and a Conditional Use

Discrete Use. Staff recommends drafting a text amendment that adds “data center” as its own discrete use. Similar uses, such as “warehouse and distribution” in UDC 9.6.6 or the “computer or data processing” sub-type of “office” use in UDC 9.5.4.A.1, are the closest to data centers as exists in the UDC today. However, neither of these definitions clearly conclude the business activities that



data centers undertake. Moreover, neither of these definitions include the limitations that would protect the general public against possible nuisances.

Categorize by Scale. Along with it being its own discrete use, different sizes of data centers should receive different treatment in the UDC. The negative effects of data centers generally have a substantially higher impact if they are a larger facility. Organizing permissions for data center by size allows flexibility for smaller facilities to overcome unnecessary obstacles to approval while ensuring that larger facilities receive appropriate public review. This would be similar to how the Roswell UDC addresses vehicle repair, for example; the UDC section 9.6.5 categorizes this use into “Major,” “Minor,” and “Commercial vehicle” types, based on the scope of repairs made at the business. Moreover, this would align with other code changes proposed in Metro Atlanta localities. DeKalb County in particular is, as of writing, proposing to categorize data centers into “accessory,” “minor,” “medium,” “major,” and “campus” sizes (Prevost & Chauveau, 2026).

Conditional Use. Data centers, beyond size alone, can vary highly on a case-by-case basis. To this end, larger data centers should, in general, require conditional use approval from Mayor & Council, and should not be allowed by-right in any non-industrial district so that the elected body can receive sufficient data regarding impacts of a specific proposal. Facilities not requiring conditional use approval should still always have required use standards in place within Article 9 of the UDC and not be allowed by-right in any circumstances. Use standards include design and nuisance controls.

Buffer Requirements

Staff recommends including additional use standards that would further limit potential negative impact of data center facilities on local residents and businesses. Other Georgia jurisdictions have landscaping buffer requirements that reasonably increases in intensity as the size of data center increases. The UDC has several types of landscaping buffers: types A and B are 20’ without a screening wall and 10’ with a screening wall, respectively, and types C and D are 40’ without a screening wall and 20’ with a screening wall, respectively. Considering Forsyth County and City of South Fulton’s code requiring buffers of 75’ and 100’, it may be advisable to create a new set of wider buffer types in order to account for larger data centers (*Code of Ordinances*, 2024; *Code of Ordinances*, 2025).

Noise Maximums and Minimum Distance to Residencies

Jurisdictions have also been adding restrictions that ensure that noise and utility concerns are addressed. Noise restrictions at the property lines, preferably stricter than those already within the Code of Ordinances (Code), should be instituted. As mentioned, data centers in some states regularly receive complaints for their continuous operations in the range of 40-59 dBA. However, currently, per Roswell Code Section 8.8.3(s)(2)a, only sound levels over 70 dBA (60 dBA during 11 PM and 7 AM) are in violation of sound maximums, when being received from residential properties.



Staff would recommend a noise study for all permitting of data center, as data centers require continuous operations and the impact from noise stems from the continuous sound rather than the decibel per se. The city can establish a lower sound maximum when being received from abutting properties, in the range of 50 dBA.

Studies should model scenarios that include ***all cooling equipment running*** at full operational load. It should consider the maximum number of generators that may both be tested at one time, as well as used when operating for emergency use. Federal regulations have lifted prior restrictions to allow on-going use of generators, making this noise source a greater likelihood. .

Additionally, in order to further ensure that residents are protected, a minimum location distance from residential uses should be set into the use standards. Additionally, design regulations can identify lower noise and pollution generating back-up energy sources instead of loud, diesel driven generators.

Utility Concerns

Where jurisdictions control their own water supply, many are blocking off new data centers from regularly pulling from that supply for operations, instead requiring a “closed-loop” system. Major technology companies such as Oracle have shown support towards increased usage of this technology, in order to abate water usage concerns (Grizzel, 2026).

While the Roswell Water Utility’s jurisdiction does not include all of the City limits, these regulations can help safeguard against over use of the County water system.

Information Concerns

A key concern among Georgia municipalities is that insufficient data and information regarding a proposed center is shared with localities or the general public. A further staff recommendation would be to require data centers of any size to provide the same information they would if the project were subject to a DRI review. This would require the development to provide estimates for utility and water usage and other infrastructure impacts; Mayor and Council can then make a more informed decision on a case-by-case basis.

Public Safety Concerns

Building on the Public Safety & Emergency Response findings above, Staff recommends that the data center ordinance establish the following conditions of approval, to be verified by the Roswell Fire Department prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy:



RFD Plan Review Authority. Any data center proposal exceeding the Development of Regional Impact (DRI) threshold of 300,000 square feet, or with electrical capacity exceeding 7.5 megawatts, shall be subject to formal Roswell Fire Department plan review as part of the conditional use process.

Code Compliance. The facility shall comply with the currently adopted International Fire Code (including the 2024 IFC, Chapter 12), Georgia state amendments, NFPA 75, NFPA 76, and NFPA 855.

Emergency Access. Knox-box installation, RFD-controlled override credentials, posted facility access protocols, and a documented escort procedure shall be in place prior to occupancy.

Pre-Incident Plan. A site-specific pre-incident plan shall be developed in coordination with RFD prior to occupancy and updated annually, addressing utility shutoff locations, hazardous materials inventories, battery chemistry and capacity, cooling-system fluids, generator fuel storage volumes, and incident command staging areas.

Contaminated Runoff Containment. The site shall include runoff containment, stormwater isolation, emergency shutoff valves, and containment basins sufficient to prevent fire suppression water from entering the Chattahoochee River Basin subwatersheds.

Water Management Plan. Any facility employing cooling towers or evaporative systems shall maintain a water management plan consistent with ASHRAE Standard 188.

Hazardous Materials and Air Quality Disclosure. The applicant shall disclose cooling fluid types and volumes, generator count and fuel storage volumes, runtime limits, and testing schedules, and shall demonstrate compliance with Georgia Environmental Protection Division air quality regulations.

Community Notification. Facility operators shall coordinate with the City of Roswell on Emergency Alerts and applicable local notification systems, with the protocol documented in the pre-incident plan.

Mutual Aid Review. Mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments and regional hazardous materials teams shall be reviewed and updated, and any resulting apparatus, training, and staffing implications identified prior to ordinance adoption to inform future budget cycles.

Suppression Agent Supply and Replenishment. The applicant shall provide and maintain, at the applicant's expense, an adequate on-site supply of any specialized fire suppression agents required by the facility's specific hazards, including but not limited to clean agents, water-additive agents (such as F-500 EA), and any agents specified for lithium-ion battery thermal events. The applicant shall maintain a current inventory documenting each agent's quantity, manufacture date, and shelf-



life expiration, and shall replenish or rotate stock prior to expiration. Inventory records shall be made available to the Roswell Fire Department upon request and updated in the site's pre-incident plan. The applicant shall also identify, by written agreement, a 48-hour resupply source for any agent that may be exhausted during a prolonged incident. Replenishment of any agent expended in response to an incident at the facility shall be the responsibility of the applicant, not the Roswell Fire Department.



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