
Data Centers and Vance County

What every citizen should know before the next vote

Prepared April 2026 | Vance County, North Carolina

69 cited sources | Includes Vance County Board of Commissioners and Henderson City Council meeting analysis

Special Called Meeting: Monday, April 20, 2026 at 4:00 PM - ZMA26-001 Vote - 122 Young Street

Regular meetings: Commissioners first Monday at 6 PM | City Council second Monday at 6 PM

About This Report

This is a citizen education document. It is not funded by any data center company, any activist organization, or any political campaign. It was compiled from public records, county meeting transcripts, investigative journalism, government reports, and peer-reviewed research.

Data centers can be good for a community. In other parts of the country, they have stabilized tax bases, funded schools, built fire stations, and created jobs that pay well above the local median income. But those outcomes happened in places where the community set the terms before signing anything.

This report is not an argument for or against data centers. It is a collection of facts, so that every resident can look at what is being proposed, what other communities demanded and received, and what questions are worth asking before any vote is taken. What you do with these facts is up to you.

1. What Is Being Proposed in Vance County

The Rezoning Request: ZMA26-001

On February 12, 2026, the Vance County Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of a rezoning request for approximately 40 acres off US-158 Business, between Pine Meadow Trail and Horseshoe Bend Road. The request would change the zoning from Employment and Institutional Area (EIA) to Light Industrial (LI).¹

The applicant is **Natelli Holdings LLC**, a Maryland-based development company, represented by attorney Beth Trahos of Fox Rothschild LLP. The property owner is Patricia Galloway, who inherited the land from Estella K. Bobbitt.^{1,2}

At the April 6 Board of Commissioners meeting, Trahos stated: "No development plan has been submitted for your review at this time." She asked the board to consider the rezoning purely on its merits under the comprehensive plan. When pressed by citizens about whether a data center was planned, no direct answer was given.³

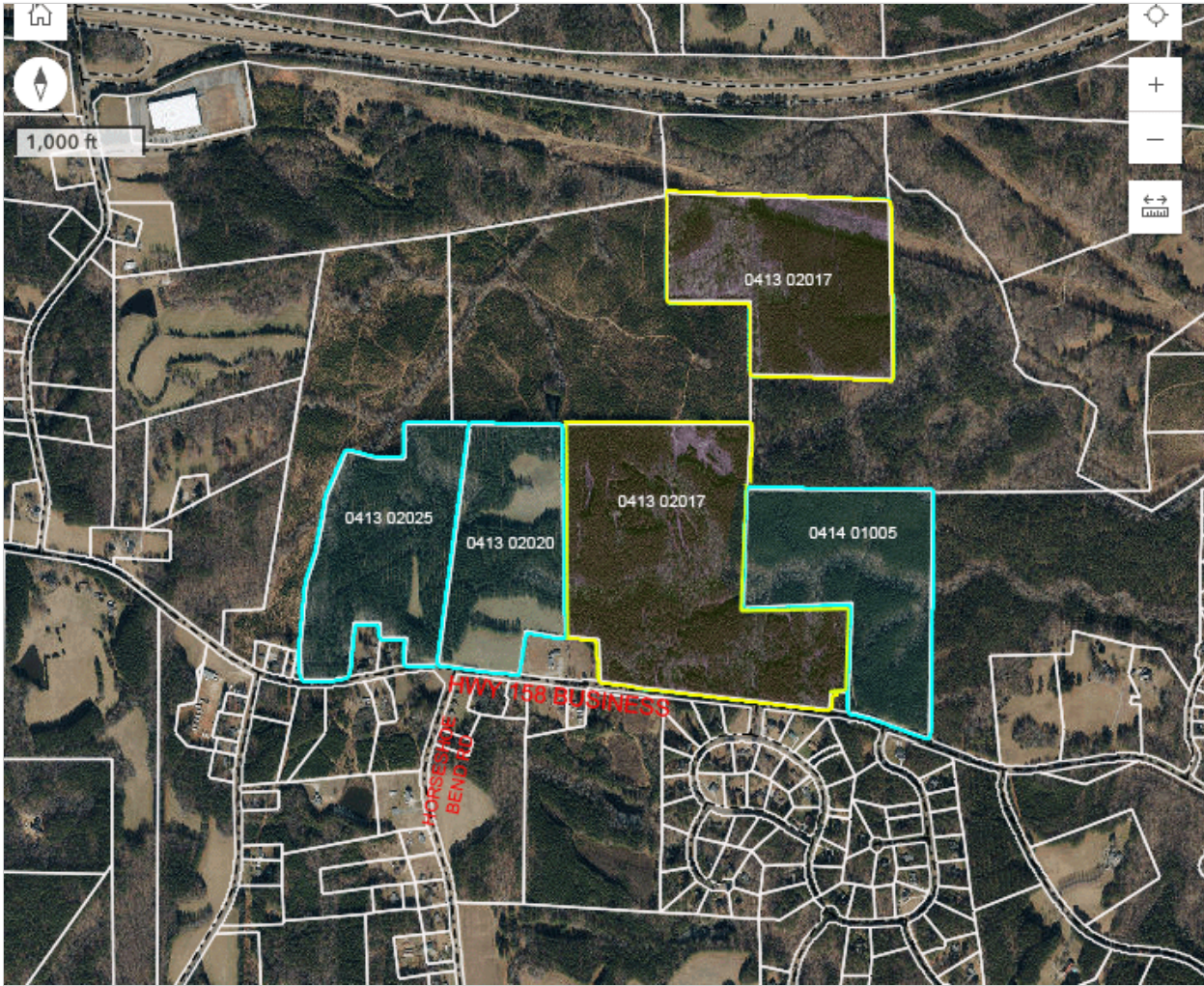
The Full Land Assembly

ZMA26-001 is not an isolated parcel. It is the third in a series of rezoning requests filed by the same applicant along the same corridor. Two adjacent parcels were rezoned from EIA to Light Industrial in December 2025, also through Natelli Holdings via Beth Trahos. All three sit along US-158 Business in the Triangle North Vance area, between Pine Meadow Trail and Horseshoe Bend Road, opposite the Carolina Pines neighborhood.^{1,3}

Case	PIN	Owner	Acres (GIS)	Status
ZMA25-003	0413 02020	Guin, Faye C / Strickland, Gayla C	33.22	Approved Dec 16, 2025
ZMA25-004	0413 02025	Capps, John L / Capps, Sue Trustees	38.84	Approved Dec 16, 2025
ZMA26-001	0414 01005	Galloway, Patricia (Clearbrook, MN)	40.57	Vote: April 20, 2026

Source: Vance County Tax Parcel Viewer (vance.ustaxdata.com); Vance County Planning Board minutes, Nov. 13, 2025 and Feb. 12, 2026

Total Natelli rezoning footprint: approximately 113 acres across three contiguous parcels. Natelli does not currently own any of these parcels. A search of Vance County tax records returns zero deeds under Natelli Holdings, Natelli Communities, Michael Natelli, or Tom Natelli. The company appears to hold option agreements or purchase contracts with the landowners, not recorded ownership.



Parcel map showing Natelli rezoning parcels (cyan) and adjacent Poplar Creek Partners / Triangle North land (yellow) along US-158 Business. Source: Vance County Tax Parcel Viewer.

Adjacent to these three parcels, the former Triangle North Corporate Park land (originally assembled by Kerr-Tar Regional Economic Development) was recently sold in two simultaneous transactions recorded in Deed Book 1455:

Owner	Mailing Address	Key Parcel (PIN)	Total Acres	Deed
Poplar Creek Partners	2495 Barker Rd, Oxford NC	0413 02017 (118.51 ac) + others	~292	Book 1455, Pg 0677
Crews Family Farm LLC	Raleigh, NC	0412 01008, 0412 02007, 0413 02021	~214	Book 1455, Pg 0744

Source: Vance County Register of Deeds; Vance County Tax Parcel Viewer

Combined, the Natelli rezoning parcels (~113 acres) plus the former Triangle North parcels (~506 acres) form a corridor of approximately 619 acres along US-158 Business between I-85 and Horseshoe Bend Road. Additional EIA-zoned parcels in the corridor (Jones, Capps, Bunch, Owen families, totaling roughly 140 additional acres) remain in their current zoning and could be subject to future rezoning requests.

Who Is Natelli Holdings?

Natelli Holdings is a subsidiary of Natelli Communities, a privately held real estate company headquartered in Gaithersburg, Maryland. The parent company, founded in 1993, has developed over 75 residential and mixed-use communities across the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, totaling more than 25,000 homesites.⁴

Natelli operates as a **land developer** rather than a data center operator. Their business model involves rezoning and preparing shovel-ready sites, then attracting end users to build and operate on them. No development plan has been submitted with the Vance County rezoning application, and no end user has been publicly named for the site.^{4,5}

The Natelli family entered the data center business in 2021 when Tom Natelli invested in and joined the board of Quantum Loophole, a company developing a 2,100-acre data center campus on a former Alcoa smelting plant in Frederick County, Maryland. That project encountered significant regulatory and environmental challenges, including more than 70 construction-related violations. Tom Natelli departed the board after the project's private equity partner, TPG, took full operational control in December 2024.^{6,54}

Other Natelli data center projects in the region:

- A proposed 250-megawatt facility near Apex, NC, was withdrawn in March 2026 after significant community concern.⁷
- A 300-megawatt facility in Calvert County, Maryland, was presented to commissioners in March 2026 and remains in the proposal stage.⁸

Understanding a developer's background and business model is part of informed decision-making. These are facts the community should weigh alongside any commitments made during the rezoning process.

What Happened in Apex

In September 2025, Natelli filed to annex 189 acres near Duke Energy's Shearon Harris Nuclear Plant into the Town of Apex and rezone it for a 250-megawatt data center campus. The proposal included six 70-foot buildings and approximately 80 diesel backup generators.⁷

Michael Natelli told WRAL that average daily water use would be 300,000 to 450,000 gallons per day, scaling to 1 million gallons on the hottest summer days. That peak figure equals roughly one-fifth of Apex's entire average daily water consumption.^{7,9}

Residents organized under the Protect Wake County Coalition. A petition collected approximately 4,700 signatures. U.S. Rep. Valerie Foushee publicly opposed the project. On March 5, 2026, Natelli withdrew all applications. The developer told the Triangle Business Journal that Apex did not have "the appetite politically" to support the project. Five days later, the Apex Town Council voted unanimously to draft a one-year moratorium on data center applications.^{7,10}

That same developer is now asking Vance County for the same thing Apex refused.

A Second Data Center?

A letter to the editor published in the Henderson Dispatch on April 13, 2026, from Lisa A. Baltimore of Manson, states: "I have heard there is another Data Center planned in the Watkins area of the county." No company name or confirmed details have been published. This remains unverified but is consistent with the land assembly pattern visible in the area.²

2. What Citizens Said on April 6

Approximately 150 residents attended the Board of Commissioners meeting on April 6, 2026. The overflow crowd filled the stairwell. More than 20 citizens spoke during the public hearing. Every speaker from the community opposed the rezoning except two: Eddie Ferguson and Donnie Cruz, who have worked for over 25 years to develop the Triangle North Corporate Park and spoke in support of the rezoning to attract economic development.³

The concerns raised were specific and substantive:

Water

Tyler Matthews, a resident of the Watkins community, provided the most detailed water analysis. The Kerr Lake Regional Water System draws approximately 6.9 million gallons per day from Kerr Lake and distributes it across six counties (KLRWS 2019 IBT Annual Report, NC DEQ). Matthews estimated Vance County's share at roughly 2 million gallons per day. A data center consuming 300,000 to 1 million gallons daily would add 4 to 15 percent to the total regional system draw. He noted that the Army Corps of Engineers is simultaneously evaluating Franklin County's request for 15.7 million gallons per day from the same reservoir.³

Power

Natalie Stone, a senior in computer engineering at NC State University, broke down the power math. Kerr Lake Dam's installed generating capacity is 227 megawatts. The Natelli project rejected by Apex was 300 megawatts. Even a smaller facility would consume the equivalent of thousands of homes. She raised the issue of non-disclosure agreements, warning that once a data center arrives, its actual water and energy consumption is typically classified as confidential business information.³

Transparency

Mitsy Parrot identified Natelli Holdings as a data center developer through a simple internet search, something the planning board application did not disclose. She noted that two prior parcels were rezoned under the same circumstances in December 2025 with no public discussion of intended use. Anne Rivera, a Henderson resident and educator, challenged the framing of "economic development" for a building that houses servers, not people.³

Health and Quality of Life

Multiple residents raised concerns about noise, infrasound, heat radiation, and air quality. Garland Askew of Carolina Pines mapped the impact zones: within a half-mile, approximately 110 homes in Carolina Pines, Hunter's Ridge, and Westwood Hills. Within two miles: Vance-Granville Community College, Dabney Elementary School, Henderson Country Club, and the Huntstone subdivision with 217 homes.³

The Board's Response

Commissioner Tommy Hester (District 7) made the motion to continue, saying he wanted more facts. Commissioner Leo Kelly (District 5) stated he would vote against the data center, citing noise, environmental impact, and quality of life. A third commissioner said she would vote no "tonight and any other time." The board voted unanimously to continue the matter. On April 16, Chairperson Carolyn Faines called a special meeting for Monday, April 20, 2026, at 4:00 PM to "consider and take action" on the rezoning. The special meeting notice was issued with four days' notice, the legal minimum under North Carolina open meetings law.³

3. Water: What the Numbers Say

How Much Water Do Data Centers Use?

Data centers use water primarily for evaporative cooling, the dominant technology in the industry. Roughly 70 to 80 percent of withdrawn water evaporates into the air and never returns to the watershed.¹¹

Facility	Water Consumed (2023-2024)	Context
Google, Council Bluffs, Iowa	1 billion gallons in 2024	Single facility; 2.7 million gal/day
Google, global operations	6.4 billion gallons in 2023	95% from data centers
Microsoft, global operations	1.7 billion gallons in FY2023	34% increase year-over-year
U.S. data centers total (LBNL)	17 billion gallons direct	Projected to double by 2028

Sources: NASUCA, Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, corporate sustainability reports

What This Means for Kerr Lake

The Kerr Lake Regional Water System currently draws approximately 6.9 million gallons per day from the reservoir to serve Henderson, Oxford, Warren County, Granville County, Franklin County, and a dozen smaller municipalities. The system is authorized for 20 million gallons per day but uses only about 35 percent of that allocation.¹²

For context: The KLRWS draws approximately 6.9 million gallons per day from Kerr Lake to serve Henderson, Oxford, Warren County, Vance County, Franklin County, and a dozen smaller communities. Natelli told WRAL that the Apex project would use 300,000 to 1 million gallons per day. A single data center using evaporative cooling could add 4 to 15 percent to the entire regional system's daily draw. That water evaporates. It does not return to the lake. (Source: KLRWS 2019 IBT Annual Report, NC DEQ)

Franklin County is simultaneously requesting 15.7 million gallons per day from the same reservoir. That request is a separate, new allocation on top of the existing 20 MGD KLRWS authorization. If approved, the total authorized draw from Kerr Lake would jump to 35.7 million gallons per day, nearly double what is currently authorized.¹²

Cumulative Demand on Kerr Lake

Every existing and proposed use draws from the same conservation pool. The Corps confirmed that all existing agreements combined currently use approximately 3 percent of the conservation pool. But the Corps also acknowledged there is a threshold beyond which further reallocation begins to impact hydropower generation, recreation, and downstream flows. Here is how the demands stack up:^{12,33}

User	Authorization / Request	Status
KLRWS (Henderson / Oxford / Warren)	20 MGD authorized	Using ~6.9 MGD (35%)
Virginia Beach pipeline	Up to 60 MGD capacity	Using ~30 MGD
Franklin County (new request)	15.7 MGD	Pending USACE feasibility study
Data center (if evaporative cooling)	0.3 - 1.0 MGD each	No water application filed

Sources: KLRWS 2019 IBT Annual Report (NC DEQ); USACE NEPA Scoping Session, March 26, 2026; Kerr Lake Report v2

The Army Corps of Engineers confirmed at the March 26 scoping meeting that it will **not model cumulative future demand** from data centers, population growth, or additional reallocation requests as part of its feasibility study. The Corps stated: "All we're doing is looking at this specific proposal, how it impacts the project now." Land use decisions, building permits, and industrial water demand are considered matters for state and local government.³³

This means no federal entity is evaluating the combined impact of Franklin County's 15.7 MGD request alongside the water demands of data centers already permitted or under development in the region. Each request is evaluated in isolation. The cumulative picture is left to the communities themselves to assemble.

Evaporative vs. Closed-Loop Cooling

The technology matters. Evaporative cooling, the industry standard, consumes more than 0.5 gallons of water per kilowatt-hour of computing load. Closed-loop systems, which circulate coolant in sealed networks, consume roughly 94 percent less water.^{11,13}

Unless a developer is legally required to use closed-loop cooling, they will default to evaporative. It is cheaper to build and operate. No amount of verbal commitment changes this. Only binding permit conditions with enforcement mechanisms matter.

Communities Where Wells Went Dry

In Morrow County, Oregon, Amazon data centers worsened a water crisis that was already affecting residents. Oregon DEQ fined the Port of Morrow \$727,000 for 880 water permit violations. One resident's well tested at 52 milligrams per liter of nitrates, more than five times the legal limit. Rolling Stone called the situation "the precedent is Flint."¹⁴

In Newton County, Georgia, a Meta data center built in 2018 led to multiple households reporting well water failures and deteriorating water quality. The county is now projected to reach water deficit status by 2030 without major infrastructure upgrades.¹⁵

Franklin County's Request and What It Means for Henderson

There is a water story unfolding alongside the data center debate that directly affects Henderson's finances. Franklin County has filed with the Army Corps of Engineers for 15.7 million gallons per day from Kerr Lake's conservation pool, requesting 10,200 acre-feet of storage reallocation. Franklin County has also issued a request for qualifications for a \$200 million raw water pipeline and independent treatment plant.^{12,54}

Here is why this matters to every Henderson resident: Franklin County currently purchases treated water from Henderson through the Kerr Lake Regional Water System. That revenue supports Henderson's water infrastructure and its three co-owning partners (Henderson at 60 percent, Oxford at 20 percent, and Warren County at 20 percent). If Franklin County builds its own independent system, that revenue disappears from Henderson's books.^{53,55}

Under a Corps water storage agreement, the reallocation fees are deposited as miscellaneous receipts into the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The money leaves the region entirely. When Franklin County buys water from KLRWS, every dollar stays local.⁵⁶

The economics raise a basic question: Why build a \$200 million parallel system when the existing regional system has unused capacity? KLRWS currently draws approximately 6.9 million gallons per day from Kerr Lake (2019 IBT Annual Report, NC DEQ) against a Corps-authorized allocation of 20 million gallons per day. A \$109 million treatment plant expansion already under construction will bring capacity to 15 million gallons per day, with a path to the full 20 million. The system is using roughly a third of what it is authorized to draw.^{12,55}

Franklin County's request of 15.7 million gallons per day is nearly three times the entire current output of the regional system that already serves six counties and a dozen municipalities. Henderson Mayor Melissa Elliott stated publicly: "Franklin County, who contributes nothing to Kerr Lake, wants to stick a straw in it."⁵⁴

The regional approach, expanding what already exists and keeping the revenue local, serves Henderson's interests. The independent approach, building a parallel system and sending reallocation fees to the federal treasury, does not. Citizens and officials in Henderson and Vance County should be paying close attention to how this plays out, because it will shape the region's water economics for the next 50 years.

4. Power and Your Electric Bill

Duke Energy's Rate Hike Request

Duke Energy has filed for a combined rate increase of approximately \$1.7 billion annually across its two Carolina subsidiaries. For Duke Energy Carolinas (serving the western half of NC including Vance County's neighbor Person County), the request is for \$1 billion, a 15 percent increase. For Duke Energy Progress (serving the eastern half), the request is \$729 million, a 15.1 percent increase.¹⁶

The residential bill impact: an increase of \$17 to \$28 per month depending on which Duke subsidiary serves you, with additional increases the following year.¹⁶

Duke Energy made \$4.9 billion in profits in 2025 and has described data center demand as a growth driver. The company's own pipeline includes approximately 6 gigawatts of data center demand in the Carolinas, with data centers projected to account for roughly 80 percent of future energy demand growth.^{17,18}

What Happened in Virginia

Virginia is the world's largest data center market. Here is what happened to residential customers after two decades of data center growth:

- Dominion Energy was approved for a \$565.7 million rate increase for 2026 and \$209.9 million for 2027, adding approximately \$16 per month to average residential bills.¹⁹
- By 2040, Dominion projects residential customers will pay an additional \$14 to \$37 per month driven largely by data center infrastructure costs.¹⁹
- Data centers consumed 26 percent of Virginia's total electricity supply in 2023.²⁰
- In July 2024, a single equipment failure caused 1,500 megawatts of data center load to drop simultaneously across 60 facilities, nearly triggering a cascading blackout across the Mid-Atlantic grid.²¹

North Carolina is not Virginia yet. But Governor Stein has warned: "Do we really want to subsidize data centers' consumption of energy and electricity when they make everyone else's power bills go up?"²²

North Carolina's Clean Energy Goals and What Data Centers Did to Them

In 2021, North Carolina passed HB 951 with bipartisan support, requiring Duke Energy to achieve a 70 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 (from 2005 levels) and carbon neutrality by 2050. It was the most significant clean energy law in the Southeast.⁶³

In July 2025, the General Assembly passed SB 266, which eliminated the 2030 target. Governor Stein vetoed it, calling it a potential \$23 billion cost to ratepayers. The Republican supermajority overrode the veto with help from a handful of House Democrats. The 2030 carbon reduction mandate is gone.⁶⁴

Data center demand was the central justification. Duke Energy's 2025 resource plan, filed three months after SB 266 became law, lays out the consequences:⁶⁵

- **9.7 gigawatts of new natural gas capacity** proposed by 2033, five combined-cycle plants and seven combustion turbines.
- Carbon emissions projected to **increase until 2036** before declining toward the 2050 goal. For the next decade, emissions go up, not down.
- Coal plant retirements pushed from 2035 to **2040** for some units, used as a "bridge" while gas plants are built.
- **Wind power eliminated** from the planning period through 2040.
- New gas plants planned for Person County (near Microsoft's data center site), Richmond County (near Amazon's campus), Catawba, Rowan, and Rockingham counties.

NC State University researchers found that eliminating the 2030 target will cost residential customers approximately \$87 million per year in additional purchased power costs and increase fuel costs by \$23 billion through 2050.⁶⁴

The Southern Environmental Law Center, representing the Sierra Club and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, has called Duke's gas buildout "unnecessarily risky," arguing that renewables paired with battery storage could meet data center demand more cheaply without locking the state into decades of fossil fuel dependence. They also flagged that Duke's proposed Roxboro gas plant in Person County would generate higher levels of carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds than the coal plant it replaces, located across the street from an elementary school.⁶⁶

The original 12.5 percent renewable energy standard (Senate Bill 3, 2007) still applies. Duke has met it. But that standard is now a floor, not a ceiling. The bigger question is whether the state's clean energy trajectory will be shaped by community need or by data center demand. Right now, data centers are winning that argument, and residential ratepayers are paying the bill.

5. Jobs: What Communities Actually Got

The standard data center pitch promises a billion-dollar investment, thousands of construction jobs, and steady tax revenue. The documented results from North Carolina tell a more specific story.

Facility	Investment	Subsidies	Permanent Jobs	Cost Per Job
Apple, Maiden, NC	\$1B+	\$321M	50	\$6.4M
Google, Lenoir, NC	\$1.2B	\$254M	~400	\$635K
Meta, Forest City, NC	\$1B+	\$11.4M	225+	\$51K
Amazon, Richmond Co., NC	\$10B	County only	500 promised	TBD
National average (GJF)	Varies	Varies	30-200	\$2.0M

Sources: Good Jobs First, EDPNC, Business NC, county records

Construction jobs are real but temporary, lasting 18 to 24 months. Permanent operational staff at a typical hyperscale data center ranges from 30 to 200 people, many in specialized technical roles. Of 36 states with data center tax incentives, 16 have no minimum job creation requirement at all.²³

Google in Lenoir: The Strongest NC Case

Caldwell County is Tier 1 distressed, similar to Vance. Google's Lenoir campus employs approximately 400 people and contributes \$5.2 million per year in property taxes, nearly 10 percent of the entire county's property tax collection. Google also funded a \$2 million Energy Impact Fund for low-income weatherization and school energy efficiency. This is the best-case NC outcome.²⁴

Apple in Maiden: The Cautionary NC Case

Apple's \$1 billion Maiden facility permanently employs fewer than 50 people. The subsidy package totaled \$321 million, or \$6.4 million per permanent job. The town did build a new town hall and fire station from the tax revenue while lowering the local tax rate. But the per-job cost is the highest documented in Good Jobs First's database.²⁵

What Does This Mean for Vance County?

Vance County's median household income is \$46,943. An entry-level data center technician earns \$60,000 to \$90,000 nationally. The jobs, if they come, pay well. The question is how many of them there will be, whether they go to local residents, and whether the county gets the terms in writing with enforcement mechanisms.

6. Tax Revenue: What You Are Not Being Told

North Carolina's Data Center Tax Breaks

A "Qualifying Data Center" investing at least \$75 million gets sales and use tax exemptions on electricity, equipment, and software. An "Eligible Internet Data Center" in a Tier 1 county like Vance gets exemptions at the \$250 million threshold on electricity and business property. There is no minimum job creation requirement. The exemption has no expiration date. North Carolina is one of only seven states where the exemption never sunsets.²⁶

The state currently loses \$45 to \$57 million per year in foregone sales tax revenue from existing data center facilities. If all planned data centers are built, that figure could reach \$450 million annually in ongoing exemptions, plus \$1.5 to \$2.3 billion in one-time construction-phase exemptions.²⁷

What Virginia Learned Too Late

Virginia's data center sales tax exemption cost the state \$1.6 billion in FY2025, up from \$685 million just two years earlier. That exemption now accounts for nearly 80 percent of all economic incentive spending in the state. Good Jobs First projects the annual loss at \$1.9 billion and growing. To qualify, a company must invest \$150 million and create approximately 50 jobs.²⁸

Ten states now each lose more than \$100 million per year to data center tax exemptions. Texas revised its cost projection from \$130 million to \$1 billion in just 23 months. States that have calculated their return on investment report they lose 52 to 70 cents for every dollar invested in data center subsidies.²⁹

The Secrecy Problem

Of 36 states with data center incentives, only 11 disclose which companies receive them. None of those 11 disclose the corporate parent. Companies routinely hide behind subsidiary LLCs. In North Carolina, Google's employee count is classified as a trade secret, and the company's energy, water, and sewer usage is confidential. The state maintains no centralized tracking of data center water consumption.^{30,31}

7. What Other Communities Did

Some communities rejected data center proposals outright. Others negotiated terms that turned a potential threat into a measurable benefit. Both approaches offer lessons for Vance County.

Communities That Set Boundaries

Community	What Happened	Outcome
Apex, NC	Natelli withdrew after 4,700 petition signatures	Moratorium drafted
Port Washington, WI	First anti-data center referendum in U.S., 66% voted yes	Large tax breaks now require voter approval
Tucson, AZ	City council unanimously rejected Amazon "Project Blue"	Water concerns were deciding factor
Warrenton, VA	Residents voted out all council members who supported rezoning	New council reversed course
Cascade Locks, OR	Voters recalled two Port Authority officials	New board canceled the project

Communities That Negotiated Well

Community	What They Demanded	What They Got
Cedar Rapids, IA	Wage floor + performance-linked tax break	70% exemption only if 31+ jobs at \$26.20/hr minimum; \$18M community fund over 18 years
Lancaster, PA	Hard water cap	20,000 gallons/day maximum in writing
Richmond Co., NC	Infrastructure investment	\$1.5M fire station, two trucks, fiber/water upgrades county-wide, workforce pipeline with community college
Lea County, NM	Comprehensive policy before any developer arrived	Closed-loop cooling required, no rate increases, mandatory decommissioning, PILOT payments to all taxing entities

What These Models Got Right and Where They Fell Short

No model is perfect. Citizens deserve the honest picture, not just the highlights.

Linn County, Iowa passed the strongest rural county ordinance in the country in February 2026. Eight days later, Google walked. The company pursued annexation into the City of Palo (population 1,407), which had no data center ordinance and had been secretly negotiating with Google for months. A KCRG investigation obtained records showing the Palo mayor publicly denied involvement while legal invoices referenced a "Google Annexation Project." The data center would consume 14 million gallons of water daily from the Cedar River, a fact not disclosed at the town hall where residents asked about water. The lesson: a strong county ordinance without regional coordination just pushes the problem next door.⁵⁷

Loudoun County, Virginia eliminated by-right development in 2025, but 300-plus existing data centers are grandfathered. Residents near the Vantage complex in Sterling describe "debilitating physical and emotional cost" from natural gas turbines running around the clock. Sound measurements from the CloudHQ facility reached 90 decibels. The county received a dozen noise complaints in 2025; none were determined to violate the existing ordinance, because the 55-decibel limit was written for general industrial noise, not the specific tonal frequencies data centers produce. The lesson: noise ordinances must account for low-frequency and tonal sound, not just overall volume.⁵⁸

Fairfax County, Virginia requires both pre- and post-construction noise studies. But violations can only be appealed through the court system. There is no administrative complaint pathway. If a facility passes its study on testing day but operates differently under full load, the burden falls on residents to prove it in court. The lesson: enforcement pathways matter as much as standards on paper.⁵⁹

Quincy, Washington is the 20-year success story: poverty cut in half, new schools, new medical center. But the grid is now maxed out with 79 pending data center applications. Washington's residential electricity rates climbed 12.6 percent in one year. Former Mayor Patty Martin warned: "During shortages, data centers will be prioritized. You don't cool it, it's going to overheat. So it's all about the data centers." The lesson: even success stories have a carrying capacity.⁶⁰

Cedar Rapids, Iowa negotiated performance-linked wage floors with Google and QTS. But the facilities are not yet operational, so compliance has never been tested. Meanwhile, Alliant Energy is building a 720-megawatt natural gas plant to power the data centers, raising questions about Iowa's clean energy trajectory. The lesson: wage floors and community funds mean nothing without public tracking and willingness to enforce clawback provisions.⁶¹

Chandler, Arizona set a water cap per square foot in 2015 that drove CyrusOne to zero-water cooling. But in December 2025, the city council still voted 7-0 to reject a \$2.5 billion AI data center because the 2015 cap was not designed for AI-era demand. One resident: "We know we have a water crisis; we've seen electric bills going up and up and up." The lesson: standards written for one generation of technology may not protect against the next.⁶²

These are not reasons to reject every ordinance. They are reasons to write better ones. The best provisions from these communities, combined with the enforcement mechanisms they are still learning they need, form the basis for what Vance County should demand.

NC Counties Taking Action Now

About a dozen North Carolina communities have passed or are planning moratoriums on data center development as of April 2026. Gates County passed one in December 2025. Boone voted unanimously in March 2026. Chatham County passed one in February 2026. Swain County was scheduled to vote April 21. An Elon University poll found 44 percent of North Carolinians oppose data centers in their community, with 24 percent in support and 32 percent unsure.³²

In Edgecombe County, David Batts defeated four-term incumbent Commissioner Donald Boswell in the March 2026 Democratic primary by running explicitly on an anti-data center platform. The vote was 337 to 162.³²

8. Noise, Health, and Daily Life

Data centers generate continuous noise from cooling towers, air chillers, diesel backup generators, and tens of thousands of server fans. This is not occasional construction noise. It is 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

In Prince William County, Virginia, residents report data center noise routinely exceeding 60 decibels, comparable to a running washing machine sustained continuously. The \$24.7 billion Digital Gateway project is currently tied up in three separate lawsuits from community groups.³³

In Chandler, Arizona, residents of the Brittany Heights neighborhood reported "a constant humming noise coming from the facility that never stopped, even at night." The city council unanimously voted against a new proposed data center, with noise as a primary factor.³³

At the April 6 meeting, Garland Askew mapped the potential noise impact for Vance County. Within a half-mile of the proposed site: Carolina Pines, Hunter's Ridge, and Westwood Hills, approximately 110 homes. Within two miles: Dabney Elementary School, Vance-Granville

Community College, Henderson Country Club, and 217 homes in Huntstone. Within three miles: all of West Henderson, Crossroads Christian School, and everything in between.³

Most local noise ordinances were written for construction sites and block parties, not for continuous industrial operations. Documented health complaints near data centers include headaches, vertigo, nausea, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, heightened anxiety, and cardiovascular symptoms from sustained low-frequency sound.³⁴

9. The Lea County Model: How to Say Yes Responsibly

On February 26, 2026, the Lea County Commission in New Mexico unanimously passed Resolution 26-FEB-057R, the most comprehensive county-level data center regulation documented in the United States. Lea County did not ban data centers. It set the terms before any developer arrived.³⁵

The resolution requires:

- **No evaporative cooling.** Cooling must be accomplished via closed-loop, recapture, or refrigeration. No evaporative system is permitted. This alone eliminates the most significant water consumption risk.
- **No utility rate increases to existing customers.** An individualized contract must be negotiated to ensure residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the county see no electric rate increases from data center operations.
- **Mandatory PILOT payments** to the county, school districts, community college, hospital districts, and municipalities. Not just the county general fund.
- **Mandatory decommissioning agreements** with a parent company guarantee, ensuring the developer, not the county, pays for cleanup and site restoration when the facility reaches end of life.
- **Annual water usage reporting** with developer-provided estimates at the outset and public reporting of actual consumption each year thereafter.
- **Opposition to any state or federal legislation** that weakens local control over data center regulation.

Lea County is a rural, energy-producing county in the Permian Basin. Their commissioners understood that a county's bargaining position is strongest before a company shows up, not after. Once rezoning is approved without conditions, the leverage is gone.

What Vance County Can Do Under North Carolina Law

Under NC General Statutes Chapter 160D, Vance County has the authority to:³⁶

- Require a **special use permit** for data centers, with conditions related to water, noise, traffic, buffering, and environmental impact.
- Use **conditional zoning** to attach negotiated community benefits as legally binding conditions of any rezoning approval.
- Pass a **moratorium** on data center development under G.S. 160D-107, with a public hearing and defined timeline, to study and adopt a data center use ordinance before approving any applications.

What the county cannot do at the county level: regulate utility rates (that is an NC Utilities Commission matter) or mandate specific energy sources on private property. These require state action, which Governor Stein's task force is currently considering.²²

10. Two Developers, Two Approaches

What most residents do not yet know is that Vance County is not facing one data center proposal. It is facing two, from two different developers, operating through two different government bodies. This creates both risk and opportunity.

Natelli Holdings: The County Proposal

Natelli Holdings, a Maryland-based developer, filed rezoning request ZMA26-001 with Vance County for approximately 40 acres off US-158 Business. The rezoning application did not state the intended use. Their attorney told the Board of Commissioners that "no development plan has been submitted." Two prior parcels in the same area were rezoned in December 2025 under the same applicant. A previous Natelli proposal near Apex, NC, was withdrawn in March 2026 after substantial community concern.^{3,7}

Residents deserve to know who is proposing what, and what the specific plans are, before any rezoning is finalized. That is a reasonable expectation regardless of the developer.

Engineered Land Solutions: The City Conversation

Separately, the Henderson City Council has been in preliminary discussions with Engineered Land Solutions (ELS), a Charlotte-based land development firm that specializes in preparing shovel-ready sites for large-scale data center operators. ELS presented to the council and requested that the presentation remain confidential, not to avoid public scrutiny permanently,

but to allow the company to prepare a full public rollout on its own terms, with project details, community impact data, and an opportunity for public engagement built into the process from the start.⁴²

That timeline was disrupted when details reached social media prematurely, generating community concern before ELS could execute its planned transparency process. The incident illustrates both the community's deep desire for openness and the challenge developers face in preparing a responsible public engagement strategy when trust has already been eroded by other proposals.⁴²

ELS is a Charlotte-based firm with active projects across North Carolina, including a large-scale campus in Stokes County near Duke Energy's Belews Creek plant. Their business model centers on identifying sites near existing power infrastructure, navigating the rezoning and utility process, and delivering shovel-ready sites to large-scale data center operators.^{43,44}

If ELS follows through on its stated intent to conduct a public engagement process, that would represent a fundamentally different approach from what Vance County has seen so far. A developer willing to come to the community openly, present project details, answer questions about water, power, noise, and community benefits, and build public input into the process from the beginning is closer to the model this report advocates for.

What This Means for the Community

The existence of two different developers with two different approaches creates an opportunity that few communities get. Rather than a simple yes-or-no vote on a single opaque proposal, residents and officials can set the standard and evaluate every proposal against it:

- If a developer plans to engage the public transparently, that process should be protected and supported. The community should welcome good-faith engagement and hold it to the standards outlined in this report.
- If a developer refuses to state the intended use of a rezoning request, the board has every right to ask why before voting.
- Every proposal should be evaluated against the same benchmarks: What are the water requirements? What cooling technology will be used? How many permanent jobs at what wages? What community benefits are guaranteed in writing? What happens if promises are not kept?

The goal is not to reject every proposal. It is to ensure that any proposal that moves forward does so with the informed consent of the community, with enforceable protections in place, and with terms that genuinely serve the people who live here. A data center built the right way, with

the right protections, could bring real value to Henderson and Vance County. The standard should be high precisely because the stakes are.

11. The Bigger Question: Technology, National Interest, and Local Rights

The US-China AI Competition Is Real

There is a genuine and serious technology competition between the United States and China. This is not propaganda. It is documented policy on both sides.

The United States has responded with the CHIPS and Science Act (\$52.7 billion for domestic semiconductor manufacturing), export controls restricting advanced Nvidia chips to China, and the Stargate Project (\$500 billion in announced AI infrastructure investment). China has invested an estimated \$50 to \$70 billion annually in AI chips and data centers. Both governments treat AI capability as a strategic national priority.^{45,46,47}

Data centers are a necessary part of this infrastructure. That is not in dispute.

What Is Not Supported by Evidence

Some voices in the national debate have suggested that communities opposing data center projects are unwittingly serving foreign interests or undermining American competitiveness. This claim is not supported by any evidence from any source.

- No U.S. intelligence agency has issued any statement, report, or finding linking domestic data center opposition to Chinese government influence or any foreign interference campaign.⁴⁸
- The United States has approximately 5,388 data centers, more than ten times China's documented count of roughly 449. The United States is not losing on infrastructure volume.⁴⁹
- MIT Technology Review reported in March 2025 that up to 80 percent of China's newly built AI computing resources remain unused. China has a surplus problem, not a capacity advantage.⁵⁰
- The AI competition is determined by chip capability, model quality, research talent, and supply chain security, not by whether any specific rural county approves a particular rezoning next to its drinking water reservoir.

Asking "what is in this for our community?" is not unpatriotic. It is responsible governance. The two are not in conflict.

The Nuclear Power Lesson

There is a useful comparison to be made with nuclear energy. Nuclear power's public reputation was shaped by three incidents across 70 years: Three Mile Island in 1979 (zero deaths, zero measurable health effects), Chernobyl in 1986 (a Soviet-era reactor design the West never used), and Fukushima in 2011 (tsunami-caused, one confirmed radiation death). Fear-based opposition to nuclear energy held back a technology that has prevented an estimated 1.8 million deaths by displacing coal and gas power, according to a NASA and Columbia University study.⁵¹

The data center industry now invokes this same logic: do not let fear hold back progress.

But the nuclear power lesson cuts both ways. Nuclear energy's comeback did not happen because the industry told communities to stop asking questions. It happened because the industry answered the questions. They built safer reactors. They accepted the most rigorous regulatory framework in American energy, overseen by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. They earned public trust through accountability, not by calling concerned citizens foreign agents.⁵²

The data center industry has the opportunity to follow the same path. Some developers are choosing transparency and community engagement. Others are filing opaque rezoning requests and hiding behind NDAs. The difference between those two approaches will determine whether data centers become a trusted part of our infrastructure or a source of lasting community conflict.

We are not against technology. We are not against progress. We are asking the same questions that made nuclear power safer: What are the risks? Who is accountable? What protections are in place? The nuclear industry answered those questions and earned public trust. Data center developers should do the same.

12. What a Good Deal Looks Like

Data centers are coming to North Carolina. The question is not whether they will arrive but whether communities will be prepared when they do. The difference between a bad deal and a good deal is not luck. It is preparation, policy, and the willingness to demand terms in writing before a vote is taken.

The Lea County Standard (Section 9, above)

Lea County, New Mexico, set the national benchmark: closed-loop cooling required, no residential rate increases, mandatory PILOT payments to all taxing entities, decommissioning agreements, and annual public reporting. They passed these rules before any developer arrived.³⁵

The Best Negotiated Deals in the Country

Community	What They Demanded	What They Got
Cedar Rapids, IA	Performance-linked tax break	70% exemption only if 31+ jobs at \$26.20/hr; \$18M community fund over 18 years
Lancaster, PA	Hard water cap	20,000 gallons/day maximum in writing; clean energy required; noise limits
Richmond County, NC	Infrastructure investment	\$1.5M fire station + 2 trucks; fiber and water upgrades county-wide; community college workforce pipeline
Henrico County, VA	Revenue directed to need	\$60M in data center revenue allocated to affordable housing trust (750 homes)
Quincy, WA	Water sustainability	Microsoft built a water reuse utility; closed-loop cooling; poverty rate cut in half over 20 years

Demands Worth Making

Vance County currently has two proposed sites of very different scale: approximately 40 acres on US-158 Business (Natelli Holdings, county level) and approximately 700 acres adjacent to Henderson's residential neighborhoods (ELS, city level). The scale of a project determines the scale of what the community should expect in return. The following demands are calibrated to documented precedent from communities that negotiated well. Every item has been achieved somewhere.^{37,38,39}

Water

- Closed-loop cooling only. No evaporative cooling. No drinking water for industrial cooling, period. Municipal water service limited to restroom and office use. (Adopted: Lea County, NM; Marana, AZ; Susquehanna County, PA; Albemarle County, VA)³⁵
- No groundwater extraction for data center operations. (Adopted: Albemarle County, VA)
- Hard daily water withdrawal cap in gallons, written into a binding contract. (Adopted: Lancaster, PA at 20,000 gal/day; Chandler, AZ at 115 gal/day per 1,000 sq ft)⁶⁶
- Water Use Agreement with the county required before construction, including drought curtailment protocols tied to Kerr Lake reservoir levels. (Adopted: Linn County, IA)⁵⁶
- Annual public reporting of actual water consumption.

Power

- Developer-funded dedicated electrical substation. The developer pays 100 percent of the cost of substations, transmission lines, and distribution infrastructure required to serve the facility. No infrastructure costs passed to residential ratepayers. (Precedent: Virginia SCC GS-5 rate class requires developers to fund distribution infrastructure; Google funded 100% of its substation in Botetourt County, VA; Meta funded a new 230 kV line and substation in Mesa, AZ through Salt River Project; Arizona Public Service requires \$1.5-2 million per megawatt in collateral from data center developers before proceeding)⁶⁷
- Binding commitment that residential and small business utility rates will not increase as a result of the facility's demand. (Adopted: Lea County, NM)³⁵

Noise, Setbacks, and Buffers

- Sound barriers on all mechanical equipment, reducing noise to 60 dBA or below at the property line. Both A-weighted and C-weighted (65 dBC) measurements to capture low-frequency cooling hum. (Precedent: Stafford County, VA requires "sound barriers or muffling materials" on all mechanical equipment; York County, VA adopted C-weighted limits; Prince William County, VA uses 60 dBA residential limit)⁶⁸
- Minimum 200-foot vegetated buffer with mature tree preservation on all sides adjacent to residential areas. (Adopted: Stafford County, VA, Ordinance O25-29, October 2025; Calvert County, MD requires 30% minimum open space)⁶⁸
- Pre-construction and post-construction noise studies required. Annual noise monitoring for at least 10 years after operations begin. (Adopted: Stafford County, VA)⁶⁸
- Minimum 1,000-foot setback from any occupied residence. (Adopted: James City County, VA; Linn County, IA)⁵⁶
- Backup generators restricted to emergency use only. Minimum 300-foot separation from residential lot lines. (Adopted: Stafford County, VA; Fairfax County, VA)

Jobs, Wages, and Workforce

- Minimum wage floor of \$26 per hour for all permanent positions, indexed to inflation. Job count and contract duration specified in a binding agreement with clawback provisions if commitments are not met. (Precedent: Cedar Rapids, IA negotiated \$26.20/hr minimum for 31+ jobs, ramping to \$31.44 over the contract period)⁶⁰
- At least 50 percent of the permanent workforce hired from Vance County and adjacent counties, with a goal of 60 percent. This would exceed the NAACP Community Benefit Agreement template recommendation of 40-50 percent local hiring and would set a new standard for data center development in North Carolina. (NAACP CBA Template, 2026, Article IV Section 4.3.4)⁶⁹
- Workforce training partnership with Vance-Granville Community College, funded by the developer, with a data center technician certificate program modeled on Gateway Technical College's Datacenter Academy in Wisconsin. (Precedent: Amazon/Richmond Community College partnership; Microsoft/Gateway Technical College, WI)²⁴

Revenue and Community Investment

- Minimum annual community benefit payments in a binding contract, not projections. For context: Google pays \$5.2 million per year in property taxes in Caldwell County on a \$1.2 billion investment across approximately 400 acres. QTS in Cedar Rapids committed to \$300,000 per year per project phase (\$18 million over 18 years). Amazon's Richmond County project (\$10 billion, 800 acres) included a \$1.5 million fire station investment plus county-wide fiber and water upgrades. A 700-acre campus in Vance County should deliver proportionally: a realistic floor based on documented precedent would be \$5-10 million per year in combined tax revenue and community payments for a mid-scale campus, scaling higher with investment value.^{24,60}
- PILOT payments distributed to all taxing entities: county general fund, schools, Vance-Granville Community College, fire departments, and hospital district. Not just the county general fund. (Adopted: Lea County, NM)³⁵
- Infrastructure improvements that serve the broader community: broadband expansion, water system upgrades, public safety investments. (Precedent: Amazon Richmond County funded a fire substation, two trucks, and two years of staffing)²⁴

Transparency and Accountability

- No non-disclosure agreements that prevent elected officials from informing their constituents about data center proposals. (Pending legislation: Minnesota; adoptable by county or city resolution without state authorization)⁵⁶
- Mandatory pre-application public meeting held by the developer before any zoning hearing. (Adopted: Linn County, IA)⁵⁶
- Full public disclosure of all incentive terms before any vote.
- Annual public dashboard reporting water use, energy use, jobs, wages, and tax revenue.
- Decommissioning bond at 100 percent of estimated site restoration cost, set by a third-party engineer, updated every five years for inflation. Facility must be decommissioned within 12 months of end of useful life at full developer expense. (Adopted: Franklin County, PA; Susquehanna County, PA)⁵⁶
- Community benefit agreement with enforceable terms, independent monitoring, and community standing to enforce. Not a press release. A contract. (Framework: Good Jobs First; NAACP CBA Template 2026; Lancaster, PA executed CBA, November 2025)^{39,69}

These are not theoretical. Every item on this list has been achieved or adopted somewhere in the United States. The question is whether Vance County and Henderson will hold their proposals to the same standard that communities from Iowa to Arizona to Virginia have already set.

13. Questions Worth Asking

These questions come from Brookings Institution reports, National Association of Counties guidance, Good Jobs First analysis, and the real experiences of communities that went through this before us. They are not confrontational. They are the same questions any responsible board would want answered before making a decision that lasts decades.^{37,38,39}

Before any vote:

- Has any commissioner, county staff member, or appointed board member signed a non-disclosure agreement with the developer or any related party?
- Has any environmental impact study been conducted for this site?
- What is the specific intended use of the property? If the developer will not say, why are we rezoning?
- Why was a general use rezoning filed instead of a conditional use application that would allow the county to attach conditions?

If a data center is proposed:

- What cooling technology will be used? Is evaporative cooling prohibited in writing?
- What is the maximum daily water withdrawal in gallons? Is there a hard cap in the permit?
- How many permanent jobs are guaranteed, at what minimum wage, for how many years?
- What are the clawback provisions if investment or job commitments are not met?
- Who pays for power grid upgrades? Is there a binding commitment that residential rates will not increase as a result of this facility's demand?
- What community benefit agreement is being offered? Does it include payments to schools, fire departments, community college workforce programs, and broadband expansion?
- What noise mitigation is required? What decibel limits are enforceable at the property line?
- What is the decommissioning plan? Who pays for site restoration when the facility closes?
- Will all terms be public? Will annual reports on water, energy, jobs, and tax revenue be published?

The fundamental question:

Kelly Wade Perdue, a Vance County property owner adjacent to the proposed site, said it best at the April 6 meeting: "Policy must come before projects. Right now, there is an ask to make a decision that opens the door to a wide range of industrial uses without the ability to place conditions once it's approved. This is not proactive planning. This is reactive decision-making."³

14. The Bigger Picture

The Scale of What Is Happening Nationally

Between May 2024 and early 2026, \$64 billion in data center projects have been blocked or delayed across the United States by community opposition. Cancellations quadrupled in 2025 compared to 2024. The number-one reason cited in contested projects: water use, appearing in more than 40 percent of cases. At least 142 activist groups across 24 states are now organized around data center accountability.⁴⁰

What Governor Stein Said

On April 8, 2026, Governor Josh Stein asked the NC Energy Policy Task Force to consider either repealing data center tax exemptions entirely or overhauling them with mandatory conditions tied to carbon-free energy use and public reporting of water and energy consumption.²²

His words: "When this tax break was enacted in 2006 and then widened in 2015, we lived in an entirely different world. Those days are long gone. Given the trillions of dollars of capital that is flowing freely into data center construction, they simply do not need economic incentives."²²

What Vance County Has at Stake

Vance County is classified as Tier 1 under North Carolina's economic distress rankings, among the 40 most distressed counties in the state. Median household income is \$46,943. The poverty rate is 19 percent. Child poverty reaches 36.7 percent. The county needs investment. That is not in dispute.⁴¹

The opportunity is real. So are the risks. The difference between a good outcome and a bad one is whether the community has the information and the framework to negotiate from a position of knowledge rather than urgency.

Kerr Lake is the largest body of water in the Carolinas. It draws a million visitors per year, supports a \$70 million tourism economy, and provides drinking water to six counties across two states. It is an asset that belongs to all of us, and any decision that affects it deserves the full weight of public scrutiny.¹²

The decisions being made now will shape this county for decades. An informed community, one that understands the facts, asks the right questions, and holds its officials to a high standard, is the best tool we have to make sure those decisions serve the people who live here.

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