CENTRALINA REGIONAL COUNCIL

Our Communities. Our Region. Our Future.

DATA CENTERS BRIEF

PURPOSE AND IMPACT

An Artificial Intelligence (AI) data center is a facility that provides the powerful computers, storage, and networking needed to run AI applications and process large amounts of information quickly.

AI data centers support innovations that many people use every day, from healthcare and financial services to online search, automation, and generative AI tools. By providing the computing power behind these technologies, they help organizations work more efficiently, make better decisions, and develop new products and services.

TYPES OF DATA CENTERS

Hyperscale AI Data Centers: Operated by large tech companies (Google, Meta, Amazon) and built for massive scale. Most data centers in our state are hyperscale facilities.

Neocloud AI Data Centers: Often focus on niche AI workloads, flexible deployment, and specialized services.

Colocation AI Data Centers: Offer AI-ready infrastructure for clients to rent space. Lower barrier to entry for organizations that don't want to build their own.

Hybrid AI Data Centers: Combine local infrastructure and cloud services to scale AI workloads efficiently.

WHY NORTH CAROLINA

- North Carolina offers tax exemption for data center equipment.
- No statewide moratoriums.
- Reliable power supply with expanding renewable energy options.



NUMBERS ARE DECEIVING

Data center reporting is currently inconsistent due to varying local approval and tracking practices. The type, size, and extent of data center development are not reported uniformly across jurisdictions. Because data centers have existed in the region for many years and new facilities continue to be developed, estimates of both the number of facilities and their characteristics often vary by source. As a result, any reported figures should be reviewed carefully and validated against multiple sources whenever possible.

CENTRALINA
Community Economic Development

For More Information

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR DATA CENTER DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Data centers can drive economic growth and technological advancement, but their long-term benefits depend on thoughtful planning and responsible development. Careful evaluation of economic, environmental, workforce, and sustainability factors helps ensure growth aligns with community goals while minimizing potential challenges and resource demands.

Economics

Data centers can boost local economies through investment, tax revenue, and infrastructure upgrades, while creating opportunities for long-term growth. Communities should weigh these benefits alongside their future economic goals.

Physical

Data center development requires adequate land, reliable power and water, transportation access, regulatory support, and robust digital infrastructure. Communities should evaluate their readiness to meet current and future development needs.

Environmental

Data centers can place additional demands on energy and water systems, making environmental planning an important consideration. Communities should evaluate resource use, sustainability goals, and environmental impacts to support responsible long-term development.

Labor

Successful data center development depends on having enough skilled workers to meet construction and operational demands. Communities should assess labor availability and potential workforce impacts using tools such as Lightcast and other labor market data sources.

Community

Project success often relies on clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and a demonstrated commitment to the community. Effective engagement helps build trust and ensures economic development aligns with local goals and expectations.

Longevity

The long-term success of AI-driven data centers depends on the ability to adapt to evolving technologies. Communities should evaluate an operator's plans for growth, modernization, and eventual decommissioning to better understand the project's lifecycle.

CONSIDERATIONS QUESTION BANK

- What measures can be taken to maximize local economic returns from a data center project?
- How can communities balance infrastructure upgrades for data centers with other local priorities?
- What strategies can help minimize environmental impacts while meeting the needs of future growth?
- What partnerships with educational institutions or training programs could strengthen long-term workforce readiness?
- How can community input be incorporated into project planning to ensure local priorities are meaningfully addressed?

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT & LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Centralina is developing programming for local governments in Fall 2026 to support regional collaboration and local decision-making on this emerging issue. Stay tuned for more programming information and technical assistance from our departments.

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