METRO WATER DISTRICT ISSUES BRIEFING

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Preparing for Data Center Growth in Metro Atlanta
A Guide for Local Governments

Metro Atlanta has become a leading national hub for data centers, particularly those built to power AI technology. This document serves as a guide for local government officials and other stakeholders to support effective, long-term decision-making when evaluating data center proposals.

Data center in Atlanta near the Beltline

What is a Data Center?

Data centers are secure facilities that often house large volumes of computer servers. These servers store, process and transmit data to power AI, cloud computing, e-commerce, and other uses. They must operate 24-7 and can put pressure on local resources if not properly planned.

Key Considerations

Water Resources: Data centers can use large amounts of water for cooling – a challenge in metro Atlanta, which relies on surface water and is prone to droughts. "Closed loop" cooling systems that circulate a coolant through servers use far less water than evaporative cooling and mitigate emergency water outage issues, but they require substantially more energy.

Economy & Jobs: Data centers generate tax revenues and offer opportunities for community reinvestment in areas such as affordable housing, public safety, parks and open space. The facilities produce a limited number of high-skilled, high-wage technical positions.

Community Impact: Data centers can be larger than a big box store, placing pressure on nearby homes and other development and could lead to loss of trees and green spaces. Facilities may require installation of high voltage power lines, and noise may be generated from backup generators and cooling systems during operation.

How local governments should prepare for potential data center development

Plan Thoughtfully

- ✓ Give your community time to update codes and comprehensive plans as needed, with opportunities for public engagement.
- ✓ Balance the benefits of data center investment with the realities of land use, infrastructure, and environmental impacts.

Establish Financial Priorities

- ✓ Create a financial plan that identifies your community's long-term priorities and builds resilience for future changes in revenue streams.

Define Water and Energy Expectations

- ✓ Set clear expectations early for water availability, cooling needs, and reliability and ensure that cooling technologies match local water availability.
- ✓ Understand your options and establish agreements that protect the community during droughts, outages, or emergencies.

Other steps to consider

Require buffers between data centers and adjacent properties.

Plan for fire and safety

Consider lighting ordinance requirements

Manage stormwater runoff to prevent flooding and protect water quality

Consider noise ordinance requirements

Consider requiring 'Tier IV' generators that reduce emissions

CALL TO ACTION

DEVELOPERS – Engage with water utilities early in the process

UTILITIES – Consider requiring closed-loop cooling, update drought management plans, and communicate water delivery terms with developer

LOCAL LEADERS – Support policies for balanced, resilient growth that benefit your community in both the short and long term

Additional Data Center Information & Resources

https://northgeorgiawater.org/residents-schools-businesses/conserve-our-water/data-centers-and-water-resources-in-our-region/