

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 that operate 24-7. These servers store, process and transmit data to power AI, cloud computing, e-commerce, and other uses.

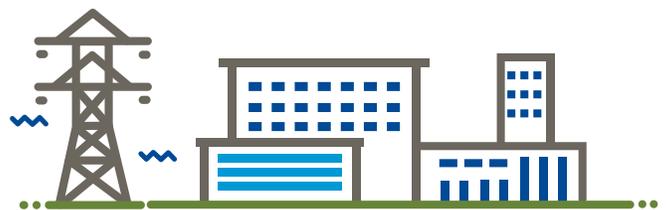
Key Considerations

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. Water providers should understand the cooling options available to developers and consider if requiring “waterless” cooling systems could mitigate water resource constraints and emergency water outage risks; however, these system do 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 can produce dozens of high-skilled, high-wage technical positions.

Community Impact: Land and infrastructure requirements can vary in size. Local leaders should determine community impact and consider opportunities for repurposing of underutilized retail or industrial corridor sites to mitigate loss of green space. 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 and reliability and ensure that cooling technologies match local water constraints.
- ✓ Exercise your local oversight 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 project planning discussions

WATER PROVIDERS – Consider impacts to infrastructure and water supply resources and establish parameters for water use, communicate drought and emergency planning protocols.

LOCAL LEADERS – Support policies for balanced, resilient growth

Additional Data Center Information & Resources



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