CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, MINNESOTA

PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA • SEPTEMBER 21, 2026

COUNCIL CHAMBERS **7:00 PM**

Chairperson
Deb Parrott

Member Adam Barnett	**Member** Chris Huether	**Member** Bill Franzen
Member Heather Molesworth	**Member** Susan Anderson	**Member** Jeremy Geris

1. 7:00 PM - CALL TO ORDER

2. 7:00 PM – PUBLIC HEARING – CONDITIONAL USE – C-26-010 – Fort Chippewa Post 936 (VFW) – Kelly Schienbein

Conditional Use – **C-26-010** – Fort Chippewa Post 936 (VFW) – Kelly Schienbein

3. 7:10 PM – PUBLIC HEARING – CONDITIONAL USE – C-26-011 – Mike Swendsrud dba Swendsrud Construction, Inc.

Conditional Use – **C-26-011** – Mike Swendsrud dba Swendsrud Construction, Inc.

4. OLD & OTHER BUSINESS

1. Final Plat – **"Shady Oaks at AGC"**
2. Final Plat/PUD – **"East Alexandria Townhomes"**
3. Data Center Study – City of Alexandria Interim Ordinance – **TA-26-002**

5. ADJOURNMENT

Conditional Use – C-26-010 – Fort Chippewa Post 936 (VFW) – Kelly Schienbein

Background

This application seeks a conditional use permit to allow the relocation and open and outdoor display of the vintage Sherman military tank in a B-1, "General Business" zoning district.

Index to Exhibits:
Exhibit A – Neighborhood Context Photo and Site Plan

Authorization: This application is authorized by Section 10.11, Subdivision 4.I of the City Code.

Conditional Use, Definition: "A use, which because of special problems of control the use presents, requires reasonable, but special, unusual and extraordinary limitations peculiar to the use for the protection of the public welfare and the integrity of the municipal land use plan." (Source: City Code, Section 10.02.51)

Notification: Minnesota Statutes 462.357, Subd.3 requires that notice of the required public hearing be given to the owners of property located within 350 feet of the project site.

Location: The property is located on the west side of Quincy Street, adjacent to Third Avenue East.

Background: The Sherman tank (which has been on display in front of the VFW post for many years) is proposed to be relocated to the club's parking lot on the west side of Quincy St. The tank is inoperable so will be moved into place in that parking area by a crane.

Access: The site is accessed via both Third Avenue and via Quincy St. No additional or revised access is proposed with this request.

Display Location/Access: Access to the display area is available for vehicles and pedestrians from the public streets and from the parking area. The display will occupy all or portions of three existing parking stalls and will not be placed in the street right of way.

Screening: The City Code requires screening from adjoining residential uses. Since no residential uses adjoin this site, no screening is required for the display area.

Surfacing: The City Code does require that display areas be hard surfaced with either concrete, asphalt, pavers, etc. The existing parking area is paved.

Landscaping: No additional landscaping is required for this request.

Hours of Operation: The applicant indicates that hours of operation for the club are Monday through Saturday, from 1:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. The tank will be on display 24 hours a day. **Question:** Will any accent lighting be provided for the display? If so, the Commission should include a condition for any exterior lighting to be hooded and directed away from the public street.

Recommendation: Since it appears that the subject application meets or exceeds the relevant provisions of the City Code, and assuming satisfactory dialogue with the applicant on the lighting question, recommend approval as requested, based upon the Findings of Fact and subject to the conditions noted in the enclosed Conditional Use Permit Analysis and/or in this memo.

ATTACHMENTS

- VFW Tank C-26-010 Application.pdf
- CUP Analysis Fort Chippewa Post 936.pdf
- Exhibit A - VFW Proposed Location.pdf

LAND USE APPLICATION

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

City of Alexandria
704 Broadway | Alexandria, MN 56308
Ph: (320) 763-6678 | Fax: (320) 763-3511
www.alexandriamn.city

Application #	Date App. Received / Date App. Complete	Fee Collected
C-26-010	8/17/2026 / 8/17/2026	$ 400.00

A. Owner Information

Fort Chippewa Post 936 — Property Owner Name (Last, First, MI) — 320-763-9221 — Phone

1102 3rd Ave E. — Property Owner Address — Alexandria, MN 56308 — City/State/Zip — VFWPOST936@outlook.com — Email Address

B. Applicant Information *(If Different From Above)*

Schieenbein, Kelly K — Applicant Name (Last, First, MI) — VFW Post 936 — Business Name — 320-766-7227 — Phone

1102 3rd Ave E — Applicant Address — Alexandria, MN 56308 — City/State/Zip — KellySchieenbein67@outlook — Email Address

C. Project Location/Description

1102 3rd Ave E — Address of Subject Property

PIN: 63-2487-000

Legal Description *(attach separate if lengthy narrative)*

Present Zoning Classification

Present Comprehensive Plan Classification

Is the property located within 1,000 ft of a lake? ☐ Yes ☒ No _____ Waterbody Name ☐ GD ☐ RD ☐ NE Waterbody Classification

D. Application Information

Check Applicable Request(s):

1. ☒ Conditional or Interim Use Permit — **Complete Addendum A**
2. ☐ Map Amendment : Zoning District (Rezoning) and/or Future Land Use (FLU) — **Complete Addendum B**
3. ☐ Variance — **Complete Addendum C**
4. ☐ Zoning Text Amendment — **Complete Addendum D**
5. ☐ Appeal — **Complete Addendum E**
6. ☐ Other (Specify _____ Attach Narrative)

E. Acknowledgement & Signature

BY MY SIGNATURE BELOW: I certify that the information submitted with the application is true and accurate; I acknowledge that this application is not deemed complete until reviewed by City staff and that I will be notified within 15 days of application submission if the application is incomplete; I understand that submission of the application does not imply approval of this request by the Planning Commission or the City Council; nor does it in and of itself guarantee issuance of any other required permits and licenses and I acknowledge that this application may be tabled until a later meeting if either I or my designated representative is not present at the meeting for which a public hearing is scheduled.

Signature: _____ **Date:** 8-10-2026
Owner or Applicant

Planning Commission Action: **Tabled** _____ **Approved** _____ **Denied** _____

City Council Action: **Tabled** _____ **Approved** _____ **Denied** _____

Comments _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
Zoning Administrator

LAND USE REQUEST - ADDENDUM A
CONDITIONAL/INTERIM USE PERMIT

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT NEATLY
ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS AS NECESSARY

A. Narrative – Project Description

Detailed description and scope of the project:
We would like to move the TANK from the EAST lot, to the west Lot Along 82 facing East and West

Existing land use(s) of the property (e.g., undeveloped, restaurant, auto repair, single family dwelling, etc.):
PARKING LOT

Have any previous conditional use permit applications been made for the property? **YES / (NO) / UNKNOWN** (Circle One)

If so, when:_____

Outdoor Storage or Display? **YES / NO** If yes, what is being stored, how much, and how will it be screened:

Days/Hours of Operation: MONDAY-SATURDAY/ 1pm-1AM Number of Employees: 20-25

B. Site Plan & Supplemental Materials

All items are required, unless waived by City planning staff. *(Applicants are encouraged to review a draft site plan with planning staff prior to submittal.)* **If N/A, please explain.**

A. Existing conditions:
- ☐ Scale of plan (1"=50' or less) and North compass point
- ☐ Existing property boundaries with lot dimensions and area
- ☐ Location, setbacks, and dimensions of all existing buildings and structures
- ☐ Location of buildings on adjacent properties within 100 feet of subject property's boundaries
- ☐ All encroachments
- ☐ Legal description of the property and recorded easements
- ☐ Water features bordering or running through property (ponds, lakes, wetlands etc.)
- ☐ Location, size, and type of water and sewer system mains

B. Proposed Improvements:
- ☐ Required and proposed setbacks from property lines and road right-of-way
- ☐ Location, setbacks, and dimensions of proposed buildings and structures
- ☐ Planned demolition of structures
- ☐ Location, width, and setback of proposed curb cuts and driveways
- ☐ Flow of traffic into, through, and out of property
- ☐ Parking spaces, drive aisles, loading spaces
- ☐ Sidewalks, trails, and walkways
- ☐ Location and type of all proposed outdoor storage and/or display
- ☐ Exterior trash/recycling enclosures (include location, dimensions, details of screening)
- ☐ Proposed service connections to water and sewer mains

C. Supplemental Data, if required:
- ☐ A Grading/Stormwater management plan as specified by the City Engineer
- ☐ A landscaping and screening plan in accordance with City Code
- ☐ Other_____

~ Please email electronic plans to: eanderson@alexandriamn.city ~

Since each proposal is different, the City of Alexandria reserves the right to request additional information to ensure the project follows all City requirements, codes, ordinances, and approvals.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT ANALYSIS

APPLICANT: Fort Chippewa Post 936 (VFW) **Application #** C-26-010

PROPERTY LOCATION: SW corner Quincy and Third Avenue

REQUEST: Relocation and open and outdoor display of the vintage Sherman military tank

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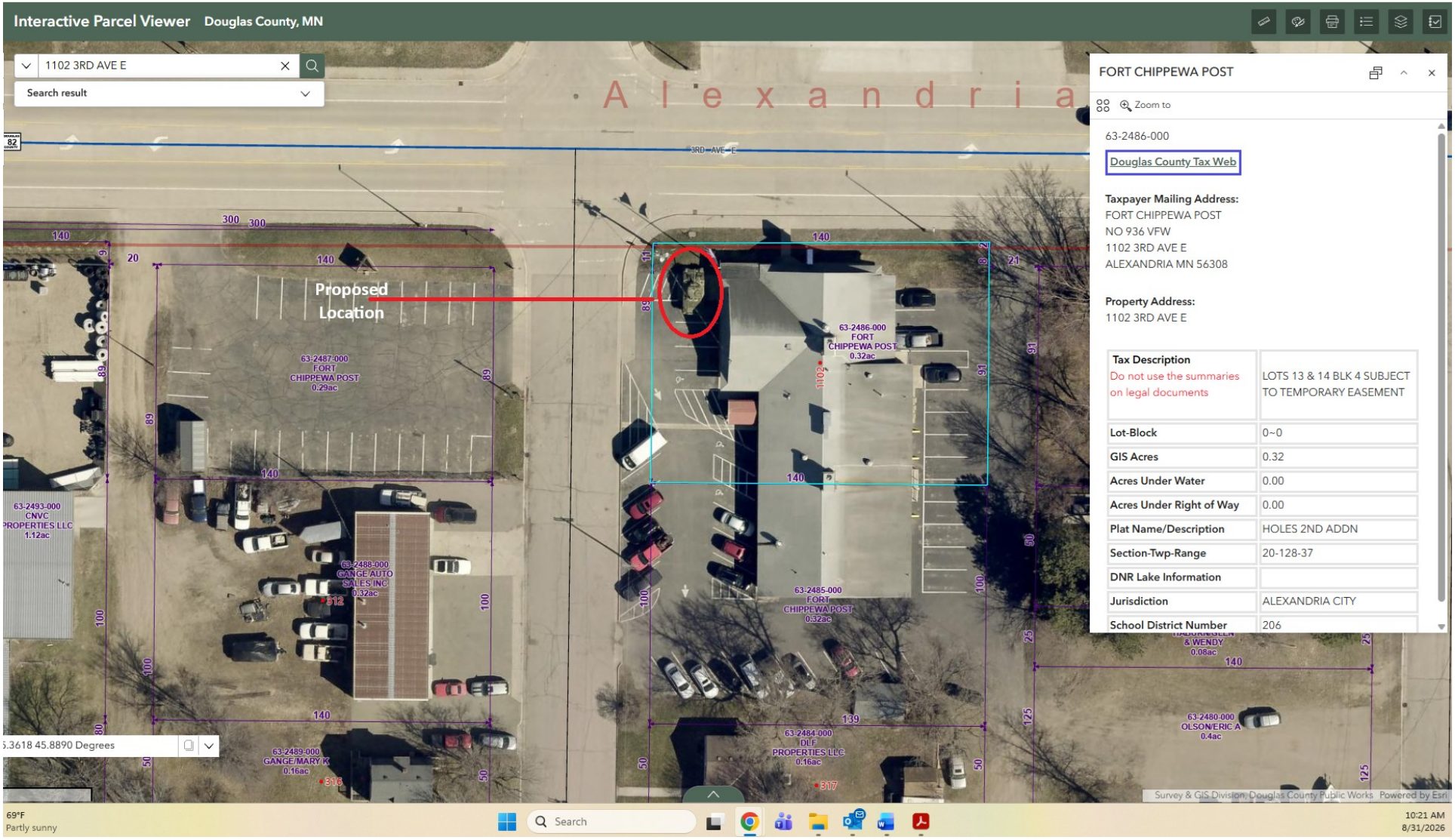
WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS OF FACT?	YES	NO	BASIS FOR FINDING FACT
1. Is the request consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan?	✓		CP = "Commercial"
2. Does the request meet land area, setback, shoreland, floodplain, and wetland requirements?	✓		Area Req'd = 200 sf. Provided =12,000 sf
3. Will the request depreciate the surrounding area?		✓	Existing commercial use
4. Is the request consistent with the character of the surrounding area?	✓		Existing use
5. Are existing or proposed utilities adequate to accommodate the request?	✓		N/A for this request
6. Are existing or proposed streets adequate to handle the request?	✓		Existing – Quincy and Third Avenue
7. Will the request place undue financial burden the City?		✓	No City role

WHAT CONDITIONS ARE NECESSARY?	YES	NO	CONDITIONS
1. Land Area & Setbacks		✓	
2. Residential Screening		✓	
3. Federal/State/City Permits		✓	
4. Signage		✓	
5. Off-Street Parking		✓	
6. Utilities		✓	
7. Street/Traffic		✓	
8. Parking Screening		✓	
9. Outdoor Sales Screening		✓	
10. Outdoor Storage Screening		✓	
11. Lighting	✓		Any exterior lighting to be hooded and directed away from public streets and residential uses
12. Drainage		✓	
13. Building/Site Appearance		✓	
14. Shoreland Requirements		✓	
15. Environmental Studies		✓	
16. Other		✓	

RECOMMENDATION: See memo

Exhibit A

VFW - C-26-010



Conditional Use – C-26-011 – Mike Swendsrud dba Swendsrud Construction, Inc.

Background
This application seeks a conditional use permit to allow a non-residential parking lot in a residential area for up to five (5) vehicles as an accessory use to an existing non-conforming commercial storage building. The site is zoned R-1, "Single-Family Residential".

Authorization: This application is authorized by City Code Sections 10.03.Subd.5.K., which reads: **K. Non-Residential Parking Lots. Any parking which is accessory to a non-residential principal use and which is located in either a "R-1" or "R-2" District shall require a conditional use permit as set forth in Section 10.23 of this Ordinance.**

Index to Exhibits:
Exhibit A – Proposed Site Plan
Exhibit B – Accessible Stall Options
Exhibit C - Neighborhood Context Aerial Photo

Background: The existing commercial warehouse/storage building was constructed in 1951. No parking has ever been provided on the site. The Code requirement for parking for a storage use is ½ stall per 1000 square feet of building area. The building is approximately 6042 square feet in area, so four (4) stalls would meet the current Code.

Location: The proposed parking area is on the south side of the existing building.

Notification: Minnesota Statutes 462.357, Subd.3 requires that notice of the required public hearing be given to the owners of property located within 350 feet of the project site.

Access: The parking area is proposed to take its access from Oak St. A right of way/driveway permit will be required.

Drainage: The parking lot permit application process will require a drainage plan for the subject site. That plan submittal and approval should be a condition of any approval granted to this request.

Landscaping: The City's landscape ordinance requires that parking and drive

aisle areas exceeding 5000 square feet must be landscaped. The proposed plan covers approximately 2500 square feet, so no landscaping is required.

Accessory Outdoor Storage: No outdoor storage is being sought with this application.

Parking Screening: City Code requires the screening of parking lots from abutting or surrounding residential districts. The adjacent district to the east is R-1, "Single-Family Residential" so screening along the east side of the parking area is required. This screening can be in the form of solid fencing or of dense vegetative cover at least six (6) but not more than eight (8) feet in height. The twenty (20) feet of required screening for the east property can be coordinated with the construction of the parking lot.

Parking Area Design: The City Code does establish minimum requirements for stall, aisle, and driveway design. These standards for 90° angle parking include stalls of not less than 19' depth, drive aisles of not less than 24', and perimeter curb setback of not less than five (5) feet from all property lines. The proposed plan complies with all of these requirements. (See also "Accessible Parking", below.)

Accessible Parking: The Building Code and the Zoning Ordinance both establish minimum standards for the number of accessible parking stalls required for a use. Those requirements are a floating number based on the total number of stalls provided. The total required accessible stalls in a five-stall parking lot is one (1), and that must be van-accessible. (**See attached Exhibit B for more information**.) As a condition of this permit, the applicant should provide the minimum number of required stalls, which can be located in any of the parking areas being provided. Appropriate signage is required. (Even with the additional width required for the accessible stall, no landscaping is required.)

Signage: Signage for this parking lot is limited to one (1) sign at the entrance, not exceeding six (6) square feet in area nor three (3) feet in height. A separate sign permit is required.

Recommendation: Since this application appears to meet or exceed the relevant provisions of the City's zoning ordinance, or since reasonable accommodations can be made, and assuming satisfactory dialogue between the applicant and the Commission regarding the parking screening, recommend approval of the request, subject to the Findings of Fact and Conditions as noted in the enclosed Conditional Use Permit Analysis.

ATTACHMENTS

- C-26-011 Swendsrud Application.pdf
- CUP Analysis Mike Swendsrud 09.26.pdf
- Exhibit A - Swendsrud.pdf
- Exhibit B - Swendsrud.pdf
- Exhibit C - Swendsrud.pdf

LAND USE APPLICATION

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

City of Alexandria
704 Broadway | Alexandria, MN 56308
Ph: (320) 763-6678 | Fax: (320) 763-3511
www.alexandriamn.city

Application #	Date App. Received	Fee Collected
C-26-011	8 / 18 / 2026	$400.00
	Date App. Complete 8 / 18 / 2026	

A. Owner Information

Swendsrud Mike L. 3207609100
Property Owner Name (Last, First, MI) Phone

PO Box 115 Alexandria MN 56308 Swencons t G Yahoo. Com
Property Owner Address City/State/Zip Email Address

B. Applicant Information *(If Different From Above)*

Applicant Name (Last, First, MI) Business Name Phone

Applicant Address City/State/Zip Email Address

C. Project Location/Description

324 N. Oak St. 323 OAK ST N PIN: 63-0497-000
Address of Subject Property

Sec. 17 T 128 N R 37 W
Legal Description *(attach separate if lengthy narrative)*

Commercial
Present Zoning Classification Present Comprehensive Plan Classification

Is the property located within 1,000 ft of a lake? ☐ Yes ☒ No _____ ☐ GD ☐ RD ☐ NE
Waterbody Name Waterbody Classification

D. Application Information

Check Applicable Request(s):

1. ☒ Conditional or Interim Use Permit — **Complete Addendum A**
2. ☐ Map Amendment : Zoning District (Rezoning) and/or Future Land Use (FLU) — **Complete Addendum B**
3. ☐ Variance — **Complete Addendum C**
4. ☐ Zoning Text Amendment — **Complete Addendum D**
5. ☐ Appeal — **Complete Addendum E**
6. ☐ Other (Specify _____ Attach Narrative)

E. Acknowledgement & Signature

BY MY SIGNATURE BELOW: I certify that the information submitted with the application is true and accurate; I acknowledge that this application is not deemed complete until reviewed by City staff and that I will be notified within 15 days of application submission if the application is incomplete; I understand that submission of the application does not imply approval of this request by the Planning Commission or the City Council; nor does it in and of itself guarantee issuance of any other required permits and licenses and I acknowledge that this application may be tabled until a later meeting if either I or my designated representative is not present at the meeting for which a public hearing is scheduled.

Signature: _____ **Date:** 8-18-26
Owner or Applicant

Planning Commission Action: **Tabled** _____ **Approved** _____ **Denied** _____

City Council Action: **Tabled** _____ **Approved** _____ **Denied** _____

Comments _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
Zoning Administrator

LAND USE REQUEST - ADDENDUM A
CONDITIONAL/INTERIM USE PERMIT

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT NEATLY
ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS AS NECESSARY

A. Narrative – Project Description

Detailed description and scope of the project:
Small tar parklot and gravel
Building is Storage only

Existing land use(s) of the property (e.g., undeveloped, restaurant, auto repair, single family dwelling, etc.):
Storage

Have any previous conditional use permit applications been made for the property? YES / (NO) / UNKNOWN (Circle One)

If so, when: _____

Outdoor Storage or Display? YES / (NO) If yes, what is being stored, how much, and how will it be screened:

Days/Hours of Operation: 5 days Number of Employees: 1

B. Site Plan & Supplemental Materials

All items are required, unless waived by City planning staff. *(Applicants are encouraged to review a draft site plan with planning staff prior to submittal.)* **If N/A, please explain.**

A. Existing conditions:
- ☑ Scale of plan (1"=50' or less) and North compass point
- ☑ Existing property boundaries with lot dimensions and area
- ☑ Location, setbacks, and dimensions of all existing buildings and structures
- ☑ Location of buildings on adjacent properties within 100 feet of subject property's boundaries
- ☑ All encroachments
- ☑ Legal description of the property and recorded easements
- ☑ Water features bordering or running through property (ponds, lakes, wetlands etc.)
- ☑ Location, size, and type of water and sewer system mains

B. Proposed Improvements:
- ☐ Required and proposed setbacks from property lines and road right-of-way
- ☐ Location, setbacks, and dimensions of proposed buildings and structures
- ☐ Planned demolition of structures
- ☐ Location, width, and setback of proposed curb cuts and driveways
- ☐ Flow of traffic into, through, and out of property
- ☐ Parking spaces, drive aisles, loading spaces
- ☐ Sidewalks, trails, and walkways
- ☐ Location and type of all proposed outdoor storage and/or display
- ☐ Exterior trash/recycling enclosures (include location, dimensions, details of screening)
- ☐ Proposed service connections to water and sewer mains

C. Supplemental Data, if required:
- ☐ A Grading/Stormwater management plan as specified by the City Engineer
- ☐ A landscaping and screening plan in accordance with City Code
- ☐ Other _____

~ Please email electronic plans to: eanderson@alexandriamn.city ~

Since each proposal is different, the City of Alexandria reserves the right to request additional Information to ensure the project follows all City requirements, codes, ordinances, and approvals.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT ANALYSIS

APPLICANT: Mike Swendsrud – Swendsrud Construction, Inc **Application#** C-26-011

PROPERTY LOCATION: 323 N. Oak St.

REQUEST: To allow a non-residential parking lot in a residential area

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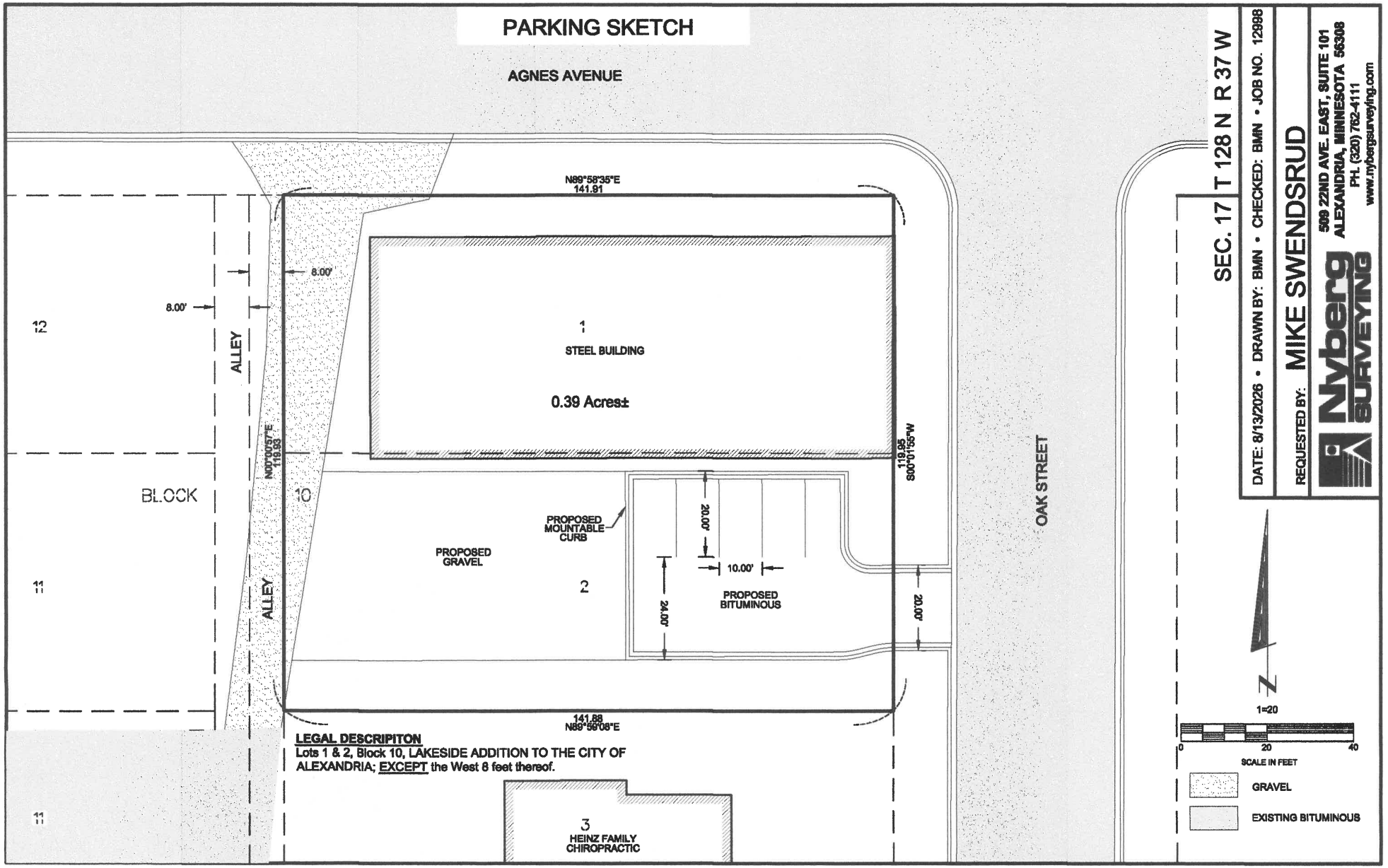
WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS OF FACT?	YES	NO	BASIS FOR FINDING FACT
1. Is the request consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan?	✓		CP = "Commercial"
2. Does the request meet land area, setback, shoreland, floodplain, and wetland requirements?	✓		Area req'd = 4750 sf. Provided = 4750 sf
3. Will the request depreciate the surrounding area?		✓	Existing non-conforming use (1951)
4. Is the request consistent with the character of the surrounding area?	✓		Existing non-conforming use
5. Are existing or proposed utilities adequate to accommodate the request?	✓		N/A for this request
6. Are existing or proposed streets adequate to handle the request?	✓		Existing Oak St.
7. Will the request place undue financial burden the City?		✓	No City role

WHAT CONDITIONS ARE NECESSARY?	YES	NO	CONDITIONS
1. Land Area & Setbacks		✓	
2. Residential Screening		✓	
3. Federal/State/City Permits		✓	
4. Signage		✓	
5. Off-Street Parking		✓	
6. Utilities		✓	
7. Street/Traffic		✓	
8. Parking Screening	✓		Screening as per memo
9. Outdoor Sales Screening		✓	
10. Outdoor Storage Screening		✓	
11. Lighting	✓		Any exterior lighting to be hooded and directed away from public streets and residential uses
12. Drainage	✓		Drainage plan as part of grading and filling permit
13. Building/Site Appearance		✓	
14. Shoreland Requirements		✓	
15. Environmental Studies		✓	
16. Other		✓	

RECOMMENDATION: See memo

Exhibit A

Swendsrud C-26-011



Van accessible spaces must (pick option #1 or #2)

Option #1

- Be at least 132 inches wide
- Have an access aisle at least 60 inches wide
- Have no more than a 1:48 (2.08%) slope in all directions

Option #2

- Be at least 96 inches wide
- Have an access aisle at least 96 inches wide

Limited Parking

Where parking spaces are limited to four or fewer spaces:

- One van accessible parking space must be provided
- A sign identifying the accessible space is not required



Exhibit C

Swendsrud - C-26-011

16

Douglas County, MN

Find address or place

SWENDSRUD CONSTRUCTION INC

Zoom to

63-0497-000

Douglas County Tax Web

Taxpayer Mailing Address:
SWENDSRUD CONSTRUCTION INC
PO BOX 115
ALEXANDRIA MN 56308

Property Address:
323 OAK ST N

Tax Description Do not use the summaries on legal documents	LOTS 1 & 2 BLK 10 EX W 8'
Lot-Block	0~0
GIS Acres	0.39
Acres Under Water	0.00
Acres Under Right of Way	0.00
Plat Name/Description	LAKESIDE ADDN
Section-Twp-Range	17-128-37
DNR Lake Information	

63-0489-000 MDG 6 LLC 0.5ac
401
63-0492-000 NANEEK PROPERTIES LLC 0.29ac
406
0.2ac
63-0482-000 BARNACK/DENNIS L & JULIE A 0.61ac
402
324
63-0504-000 BARNACK/DENNIS L & JULIE A 0.37ac
323
63-0497-000 SWENDSRUD CONSTRUCTION INC 0.39ac
63-0503-000 MAE BIRD INVESTMENTS LLC 0.19ac
316
311
63-0498-000 HEINZ/MELISSA A 0.37ac
307
63-0494-000 PRIME ESTATES LLC 0.92ac
312
63-0502-000 MAE BIRD INVESTMENTS LLC 0.19ac
63-0501-000 BILLY LLC 0.37ac
302
305
63-0500-000 BILLY LLC 0.39ac
63-0511-000 WUSSOW/DONA 0.21ac
903
63-0510-000 CARLSON/SHARON A 0.21ac
911
63-0509-000 JOHNSON/RYAN L 0.21ac
917
923
63-0508-000 SVEE/DONALD R & MAXINE S 0.21ac
-95.3653 45.8945 Degrees
Survey & GIS Division, Douglas County Public Works Powered by Esr

Planning Commission
704 Broadway
Alexandria, MN 56308

SCHEDULED
INFORMATIONAL (ID # 10666)

Meeting: September 21, 2026
Department: Planning Department/Commission
Category: Report
Prepared by: Erin Anderson
Department Head: Mike Weber
DOC ID: 10666

Final Plat – "Shady Oaks at AGC"

Background

The preliminary plat was approved by the Commission and Council in July, 2026. The plat is presently undergoing review by the Douglas County Surveyor and is expected to be available for final plat review by the Commission as early as October.

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Planning Commission
704 Broadway
Alexandria, MN 56308

SCHEDULED
INFORMATIONAL (ID # 10667)

Meeting: September 21, 2026
Department: Planning Department/Commission
Category: Report
Prepared by: Erin Anderson
Department Head: Mike Weber
DOC ID: 10667

Final Plat/PUD – "East Alexandria Townhomes"

Background

The preliminary plat was approved by the Commission and Council in August 2026 subject to the following Conditions:

1. Connection to public utilities as per ALP/ALASD requirements, including the payment of any associated connection or other fees.
2. A Final PUD application shall be submitted as a building or grading/filling permit, part of the building permit application and review process.
3. A final plat creating the conveyable parcels, common lot(s), public street, etc. be submitted for review by the Commission and Council
4. A final drainage plan is submitted to and approved by the City Engineer.
5. A full landscaping plan be submitted for review and approval prior to the final plat approval.
6. Proper evidence of title is presented to the City Attorney prior to release of the final plat for recording.
7. Payment of the required park dedication contribution of $11,345 prior to release of the first phase final plat for recording, with appropriate credit given for a Regional stormwater pond (if available).
8. Draft property owners association agreement, covenants, etc., governing the ongoing maintenance of the project, including open space.
9. Recording of the approved final plat within one-hundred (100) days of the date of Council approval. After that date the approval and plat shall be considered void unless the plat is already recorded.

No update has been provided by the Developer. The submittal deadline for a final plat for the October Commission meeting for is September 30th.

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Planning Commission
704 Broadway
Alexandria, MN 56308

SCHEDULED
INFORMATIONAL (ID # 10660)

Meeting: September 21, 2026
Department: Planning Department/Commission
Category: Report
Prepared by: Erin Anderson
Department Head: Mike Weber
DOC ID: 10660

Data Center Study – City of Alexandria Interim Ordinance – TA-26-002

Background

We anticipate having Josh Waldorf, ALP's Manager of Electric Distribution, at the September meeting. He will provide general information regarding data center power usage and specific information regarding the existing data center's capacity and usage.

Since the August Commission meeting you have received links to nine (9) video presentations (in support of, in opposition to, or containing general information) regarding data centers. These videos will become part of the permanent record of decision for this Study and may become the basis for whatever regulatory decisions the Commission may recommend to the Council.

Also, as has become the norm, additional news updates are enclosed with this memo for your reference.

ATTACHMENTS

- Echo Press 5-29-26 Interim Ordinance.pdf
- MinnPost 7-29-26 - Pausing Data Centers.pdf
- Star Trib 8-9-26 - North Loop Residents.pdf
- TimberJay 8-20-26 - Impacts of Date Center Boom.pdf
- Star Trib 8-20-26 - Google Scales Back NE MN.pdf
- Star Trib Columnist 9-8-26 - Data Centers Uniting Dems and GOP.pdf
- Star Trib Columnist 9-10-26 - Imagining Data Centers.pdf

Council places one-year moratorium on data centers

The council voted to place a moratorium on data centers within the city of up to one year for the construction, expansion, application for any permit, or application contemplating construction or expansion for data centers.

Data centers are massive centralized hubs used to house computer networks, storage and computing infrastructure. According to information from CBS news, data centers for Artificial Intelligence use huge amounts of electricity and water, driving up costs and climate concerns.

At an Alexandria Planning Commission on May 18, City Planner Mike Weber said that data centers have been in the spotlight across the state recently. Cities and counties have been presented with opportunities to approve such facilities, often without having taken the time to consider the potential, likely, or certain impacts on public utilities, infrastructure, and long-term economic benefit to the community, he said.

Ted Cash, general manager of ALP Utilities spoke in favor of the moratorium at the commission's meeting. He said similar organizations are dealing with this type of land use and he said he feels the moratorium is prudent.

Scott Gilbertson, executive director of Alexandria Lake Area Sanitary District, echoed Cash's comments.

In some cases, that lack of preparation has resulted in fear-based denial of applications, or (where an application has been approved) with lawsuits against the approving jurisdiction alleging clandestine actions, spot-zoning and inadequate environmental review, Weber said, adding that the hearing was not intended to address the issues surrounding the development, approval/denial, or construction of data centers.

If approved by the council, the ordinance would direct the Planning Commission, city staff, and consultants to do the study.

"We would regularly invite testimony from local and regional utility providers, assessing staff, economic development staff, and other regulatory agency staff," Weber said. "These testimonies will not be in the form of public hearings. The hearing(s) will occur at the end of the study period when the planning commission is ready to make its recommendations to the council."

In Pausing Data Centers, Minnesota Courts Did What Local Officials Wouldn't

Rulings in cases built around environmental concerns and other issues have altered the trajectory of the developments.

BRIAN AROLA | MINNPOST JULY 29, 2026



A cyclist rides toward the Douglas Trail past a Land O'Lakes plant on June 12, 2026, in Pine Island, Minnesota. A proposed 482-acre data center, "Project Skyway," which would be placed right behind the plant, is receiving backlash from residents of the town which houses almost 4,000 people. (Photo by

Ellen Schmidt / MinnPost through CatchLight Local/Report for America)

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This story was originally published by MinnPost. We're sharing it here as part of In the Shadow of the Server, a Next City series on the fight over urban technology infrastructure — who builds it, who benefits, and how local leaders can push back.

If city leaders and a developer had their way, shovels would be breaking the soil in Pine Island by now.

July was supposed to be the starting month of construction that would transform a sprawling farm field in this southeastern Minnesota town into Google's next hyperscale data center. Local leaders were fine with the timeframe and ready to push ahead, despite vehement opposition by a citizen group.

The project sits stuck in the mud, however, by order of another authority — a Goodhue County judge who has paused its construction, giving opponents time to plead their legal case against it.

This summer, across Minnesota and the country, concern over data centers has grown into a full-blown movement, capturing the press, focusing alarm at emerging AI technology and becoming a litmus test for political candidates.

But while opponents are channeling much of their energy into turning the court of public opinion against these projects, Pine Island's case shows that rulings coming out of actual courtrooms can alter the trajectory of developments.

Courts have long been arbiters for major issues in the United States, noted Sam Temple of Faribault. As a candidate for Rice County Board this year, he welcomed a recent ruling slowing down a data center development in the city.

People place hope in the judiciary when they lose it in elected officials, he said. "(The court is) not the ideal tool, but it certainly is a tool, and it's a tool that is a result of local organizing."

What are lawsuits alleging, and where have they been filed?

Legal arguments against data center projects vary. Lawsuits allege that cities allowed lax environmental reviews, withheld information from public records requests, and that leaders discussed secret plans in defiance of open meeting laws.

The specifics aren't always the same, but common frustrations underlie the cases, said an attorney involved in suits against data center projects.

"People are feeling like they don't have information or a say in these massive projects that seem like they're moving ahead at lightning speed," said Luke Norquist of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. "As Meta fights Google fights Microsoft to try and become the next AI overlords, that sort of local resistance is happening across the nation."

The MCEA nonprofit is behind lawsuits challenging local data center regulatory processes. Those include cases in Pine Island, Faribault, Hermantown and Monticello. The first two sites had recent, favorable rulings for data center opponents.

North Mankato was once on the list before MCEA dropped its lawsuit after no project materialized. The city will soon hear residents out on whether to pass a moratorium during an upcoming public hearing.

Citizen groups also brought cases against projects. Stop the Hermantown Data Center has an active case, while the Coalition for Responsible Data Center Development filed a suit in Farmington.

Paul Fish, who lives about a mile from Hermantown's proposed data center site, is named in a lawsuit as a resident who questioned city leadership about the development. He didn't realize he'd show up in court filings until friends told him, but said the exchange from a meeting in December shows how much of a head start the project had in local government.

Non-disclosure agreements enabled plans to advance before residents could mobilize in the early stages.

"This was planned way before we knew anything about it," he said. "By the time the city of Hermantown stuff came forward that people knew about, we were already a year behind."

How are courts responding so far?

In Pine Island, MCEA's lawsuit alleged that the city performed an "insufficient and illegal" environmental review before ushering the development forward.

The judge's ruling was more a slow down for the project than a decisive blow. Allowing the project to move forward without resolving the lawsuit would cause irreparable harm, the judge stated in a court order.

Any win, minor or major, felt good at that point, said Aubree Derksen, a local activist against the project.

"Getting the injunction, finally, getting that victory, it's like f— yeah, Derksen said. "We're the smallest town in the state fighting this and it's a small nonprofit that's putting you in your place."

Asked about the next steps for the project, city administrator Elizabeth Howard said the city doesn't comment on pending litigation.

Faribault provides another example of a court ruling halting a data center development's progress. An MCEA suit against the city and developer Archer Datacenters went to the Minnesota Court of Appeals.

Judges sided with MCEA's argument in a June opinion, stating that the city needed to conduct a more rigorous environmental review. That ruling kicked the process back to the city, and City Council members responded by extending a deadline for Archer to submit more information for review to 2027.

For its part, the city plans to develop and consider new data center standards for water usage, electric usage, air emissions and more.

Cities and counties could've already been doing this in anticipation of data centers, Temple said. He thinks elected officials should be more proactive in regulating data centers.

"What the court ruling has shown, specifically at the city level, but I see it politically at the county level, as well, is not corruption, is not malicious intent, but it is simply passivity," he said. "And I think people want a more proactive local government."

Why courts are an imperfect venue for recourse

Courts weren't the first place Minnesotans in these communities turned to in their quest to stop data centers.

Before courtrooms, they went to city hall. Elected officials were more OK with data centers than they were.

They went to the Capitol. Every bill to rein in data centers last session failed.

They're turning data centers into an election issue this fall, although any electoral shifts will take months to be reflected in policies.

So courts are another lever to pull. As Cathy Johnson of the Coalition for Responsible Data Center Development sees it, lawsuits are for when "our local officials aren't listening to us and the state Legislature is too tied up in gridlock."

But even more than time, lawsuits take money. Data center opponents don't have either in abundance compared to projects backed by big tech companies.

The financial toll came up at a Stop the Hermantown Data Center group gathering last week. In a township hall, speakers stressed the need for donations to help the cause. Johnson knows this struggle well, saying her group in Farmington "desperately needs funding" to continue its lawsuit.

Fish is hopeful that courts will rule in the Hermantown group's favor, but he knows cases don't look like they do on Court TV. A dramatic resolution is no guarantee, and it may not land anytime soon.

"And it's costly, that's the thing," he said. "For a citizens group to have the resources to fight Google off? (Google) could walk away from this whole thing and write it off."

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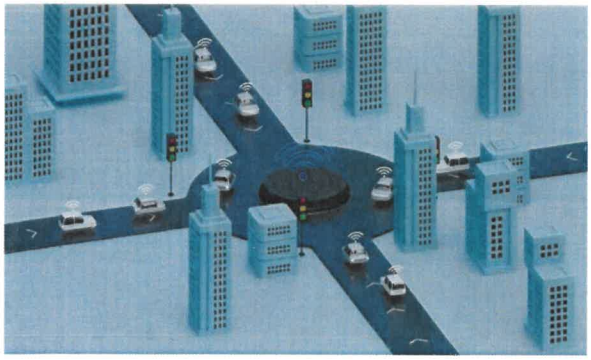
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Brian Arola is MinnPost's Greater Minnesota reporter.

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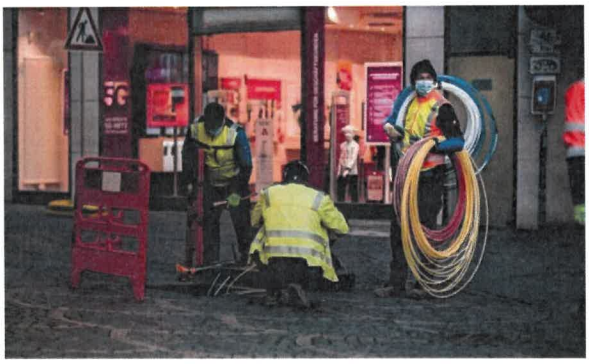
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The Minnesota Star Tribune

REAL ESTATE

North Loop residents blast developer's data center plans for former Star Tribune printing plant

Legacy Investing envisions a mixed-use development on the prime downtown Minneapolis property.

By Katie Galioto
The Minnesota Star Tribune

AUGUST 20, 2026 AT 1:57PM



Virginia-based Legacy Investing signed an agreement to purchase the Minnesota Star Tribune's printing plant, a 13-acre property in Minneapolis' trendy North Loop neighborhood. The sale is contingent upon city approval of a conditional use

permit. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

Hundreds of people attended the first public airing of a developer's plans to build a data center in the Minnesota Star Tribune's shuttered printing print on Wednesday, revealing tensions over the future of one of downtown Minneapolis' last remaining large industrial sites.

The dozens of residents, workers and visitors who spoke at a North Loop Neighborhood Association (NLNA) meeting lambasted the proposal from Virginia-based Legacy Investing, which signed an agreement to purchase the property from the Star Tribune last month.

Wary attendees largely focused on two main concerns: the impact to neighborhood vibrancy and environmental concerns that mirror the growing backlash against data centers across Minnesota and the nation.

The developer plans to transform the printing plant into a data center for artificial intelligence and cloud computing companies, similar to a system it built at downtown Minneapolis' Sleep Number Building.

Other parts of the 13-acre site would be redeveloped for uses such as housing, retail or parkland, Legacy officials said. Ari Chernikoff, Legacy's vice president of development, told the crowd Wednesday the firm would seek neighborhood input to determine "whatever's best for the community."

Attendees in the packed Itasca Event Gallery responded with questions, concerns and criticism of the developers, who attended the gathering remotely. The at-times hostile public comment period raised worries ranging from water and power usage to noise and economic benefit.

Communities across the country are grappling with similar angst as AI creates booming demand for data centers. Several state and local governments, including Minneapolis, are mulling new regulations for the rapidly expanding industry.

A data center at the Star Tribune property, located at 800 N. 1st St., is perhaps especially controversial due to its prime location at the edge of the trendy North Loop, just west of the Mississippi River.

The media company's sale of the site is contingent upon city approval of a conditional use permit needed to develop a data center. The NLNA does not have power to deny or approve the permit, but it can submit a letter of support or opposition to be considered by the Minneapolis Planning Commission.



A few hundred people crowded into the Itasca Event Gallery for the North Loop Neighborhood Association's monthly planning and zoning committee meeting Wednesday. Those in attendance largely opposed a proposal to redevelop the Minnesota Star Tribune's printing plant into a data center. (Katie Galioto)

Neighborhood backlash

In their presentation, Legacy officials emphasized the economic boost data centers can deliver in the form of property taxes, franchise fee revenue and jobs. Daniel English, one of the firm's managing partners, said economic and architectural challenges would make it difficult to repurpose the printing plant building for any other sort of use.

The developers also sought to quell fears related to data centers' heavy demands on water and electricity, attempting to distinguish their 20-megawatt proposal from the 100-plus-megawatt data centers being built by Big Tech companies in rural and suburban areas.

Chernikoff said Xcel Energy has confirmed downtown Minneapolis' grid infrastructure has available power capacity to support more data centers. The printing plant project would use air-cooling technology that could reduce the property's water consumption to the equivalent of two to four residential homes, he added.

"I think we can address these concerns in a very sort of effective manner to minimize or eliminate any impact on our neighbors," Chernikoff said. "Daniel and I are standing in front of you today because this is important to us."

Nearly every claim from the developers was met with skepticism from the audience. A person who identified himself as a tech worker and 10-year resident of the North Loop argued data centers create temporary construction jobs but few long-term positions. A mechanical engineer pushed back on the assertion that noise pollution could be completely eliminated. Much of the North Loop's population lives in former warehouses, another speaker said, so why could this property not be similarly repurposed?

"Short-term tax revenue is not a long-term opportunity," said Blake Slette, an urban design and planning professional. "We have the ability to do something better here."

NLNA planning and zoning committee members expressed frustration when the developers could not answer detailed questions about their aspirations for the site, particularly the non-data center elements. Many projects that come before the group provide extensive blueprints, several members stated.

Chernikoff pledged to follow up with additional details but said some specifics would not be determined until Legacy closed on the sale of the property later this year.

Chris Iles, spokesman for the Minnesota Star Tribune, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

The committee ultimately voted to write a letter to the city requesting a one-month delay of hearings related to the permit application to give the NLNA time to seek more information on the proposal. The NLNA board will consider the committee's recommendation at its meeting next Wednesday.

City mulls regulations

The city's Planning Commission will eventually host a public hearing on Legacy's permit application before voting to approve or deny it. That decision is final unless it is appealed to the City Council.

Requests for conditional uses are generally allowed, city planning manager Jason Wittenberg said in a recent presentation on data centers. Cities can require developers to meet certain conditions to mitigate neighborhood impacts, but they do not have legal basis to deny applications that meet statutory standards.

Debate surrounding Legacy's proposal will likely get tied into the Minneapolis City Council's ongoing efforts to devise updated zoning regulations for data centers.

City staff revealed their draft recommendations during a Tuesday council meeting. The proposal would limit the size of data centers to 175,000 square feet of "white space," an industry term used to refer to the area containing server equipment. Server rooms could not be located within 20 feet of an exterior wall or 100 feet of a housing unit.

New or expanded data centers of this size would be allowed in downtown and would require a conditional use permit. The city would require new data centers to be placed in existing buildings, and the properties must have a different primary use.

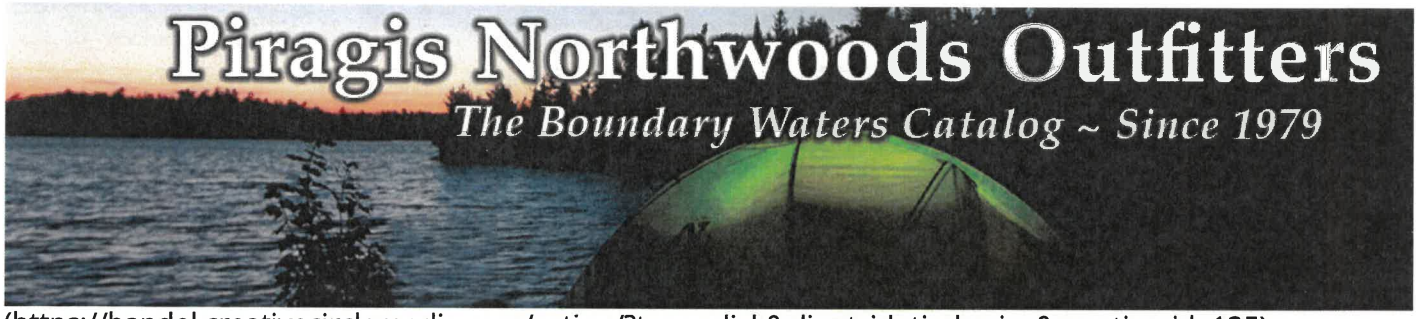
Staff also floated the possibility of a zoning overlay district that would allow the city to review data center proposals outside of downtown on a case-by-case basis.

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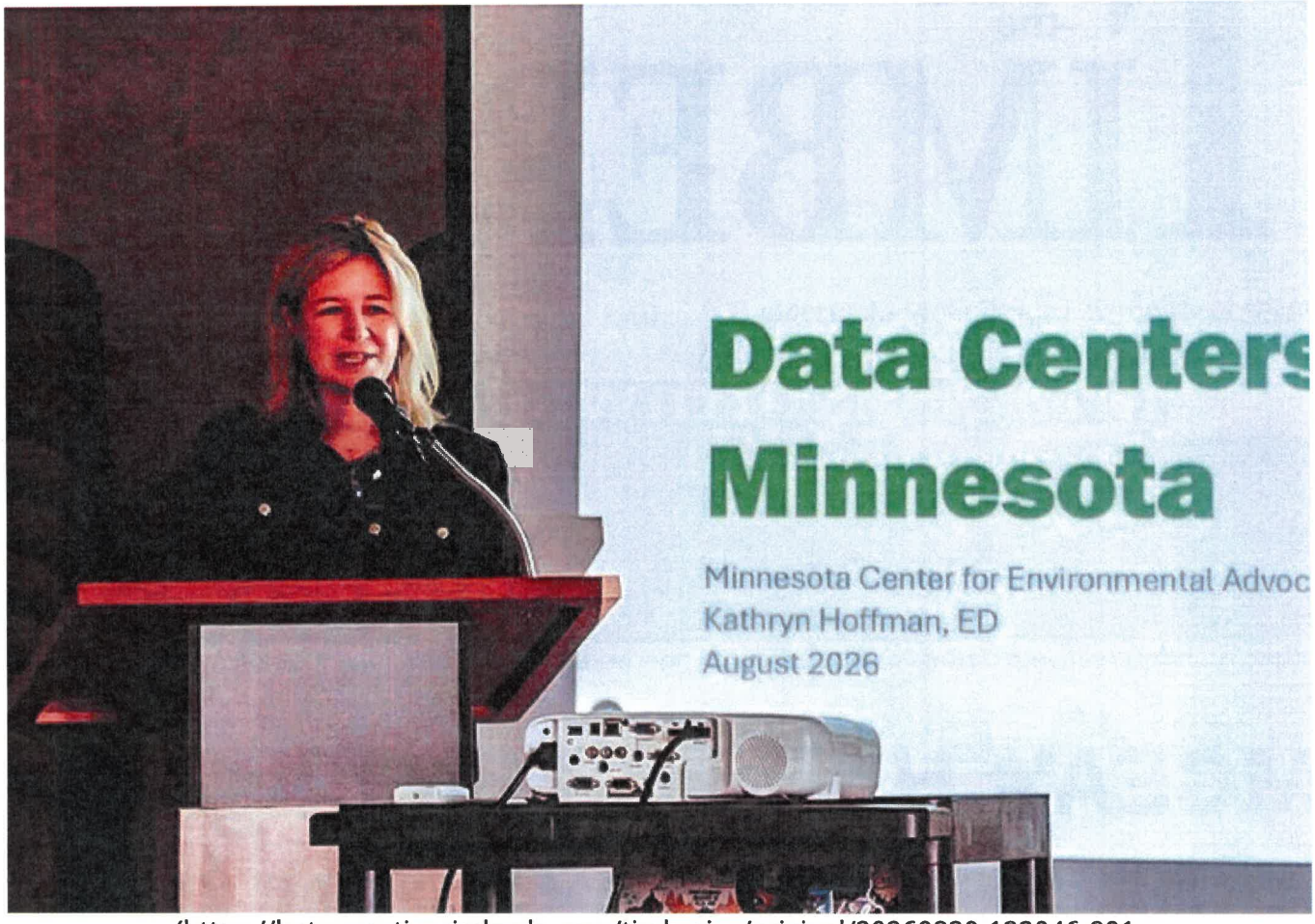
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MCEA's Hoffman highlights impacts of data center boom

Facilities facing growing backlash over fears of AI, higher energy costs and resource overuse



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Kathryn Hoffman, CEO of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy spoke to the Tuesday Group in Ely earlier this month.

B. AUSTIN

Posted Thursday, August 20, 2026 10:52 am

Ben Austin

ELY—Kathryn Hoffman, CEO of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, spoke earlier this month to a Tuesday Group gathering about AI data center projects in Minnesota and their environmental implications.

Data centers are already common around the state of Minnesota — "data center" acting as a catchall term for rooms full of computers that store and share data — but the recent trend of hyperscale data centers is new, resulting from the exponentially growing demand for data storage and computational power created by large language models associated with AI.

Hyperscale data centers are recognizable by their enormous physical size, modular scalability, and need to consume enormous amounts of electricity. They use components that allow new additions to be easily added and can individually consume as much power as entire cities.

"It just looks like a warehouse, so you wouldn't necessarily distinguish it from the outside from Amazon or, you know, some other big company's warehouse," Hoffman said.

The hyperscale data centers are also known for their noise, often described as a loud, low hum, as well as their water and use of critical minerals and other resources. Hoffman noted that the high material demand created by the centers drives mining, especially because the chips used in the data centers must be replaced every few years.

The main companies building hyperscale data centers are Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud Platform (GCP), Meta Platforms, and Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI).

According to Cleanview, a market intelligence firm, there are 30 active data centers within the state. Of these, only two are hyperscale centers: Meta's two buildings in Rosemount, which have power capacities of 168 MW and 140 MW. According to Hoffman, Minnesota is a potential new location for companies looking to build hyperscale centers, especially as Virginia and Texas — two states that have led the country in data center construction — begin to fill. Minnesota's availability of water and electricity makes it a prime target.

Hoffman said that it would not take many data centers to massively increase electricity demand in the state, citing a statistic from the Star Tribune which reported that if just ten of these facilities were built, they would consume as much electricity as every household in the state. She warned that the increased energy demand would likely raise energy bills for taxpayers in the state and make it far more challenging for Minnesota to meet its goal of becoming carbon-free by 2040.

Several hyperscale projects have been proposed around Minnesota, although often under the cover of non-disclosure agreements signed with city officials. A lack of transparency has surrounded many of the proposed projects. Hoffman said that a whistleblower was the first to alert environmental groups about the proposals.

"A state employee called us and said, 'You know what? I'm seeing a lot of places around the state where the cities are wanting a lot more water, in order to provide cooling water to data centers,'" Hoffman said.

One notable example of this practice was in Hermantown, where more than 25 officials signed NDAs related to a proposed Google data center. The NDAs prevented officials from the state, city, county and utilities groups from discussing what was being planned. The Hermantown project is now caught up in a lawsuit over its environmental review as well as a separate zoning lawsuit.

Angela Campbell, a member of Ely's city council, was at the meeting and clarified during the Q&A session that the Ely City Council has not signed any non-disclosure agreements, nor have any come before the council.

Hoffman explained that the non-disclosure agreements also affect environmental studies by preventing certain information from being shared.

"What that means is that all of that information, like that it's a data center or how much energy it uses or how much water, is withheld from the environmental study," Hoffman said. "Well, you can imagine an environmental study that doesn't even say what the project is, let alone its environmental impacts, is pretty useless to the people that live in that city."

These problems have been exacerbated by the speed at which companies are attempting to build data centers.

"The desire for speed by the developers and the tech companies behind them has really overwhelmed the ability of cities and the state to sort of effectively manage the impacts because we don't have laws in place specific to hyperscale data centers," Hoffman said.

Rep. Emma Greenman, DFL-Minneapolis, tried to pass a bill banning municipalities from entering NDAs that prevent the municipality from disclosing information to the public and requiring municipalities to disclose when they do enter a non-disclosure agreement. The bill stalled last session but could make another appearance this year.

Hoffman said that the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy has two goals as the state

sees an influx of hyperscale proposals: to see a democratic and transparent process and to mitigate or eliminate environmental harms.

The group hopes to pass a two-year moratorium on data center projects through the Legislature next session. It also hopes to pass a bill that would require facilities that use large quantities of water to go through additional sustainability and transparency requirements, including a mandatory EIS. There are also multiple proposed bills that would reduce tax breaks that data center developers currently enjoy in the state.

With bipartisan opposition to data center construction, the upcoming legislative session is likely to be filled with data center regulation. With this in mind, Hoffman said that the gold standard would be if companies building data centers had to provide their own green energy.

"Bring your own new clean energy, at least enough to power your data center, and maybe even a little bit more than that," Hoffman said. "I think that would go a long way towards resolving a lot of these issues, particularly if it's enough clean energy so that you can do an air-cooled rather than a water-cooled and mitigate those water impacts as well."

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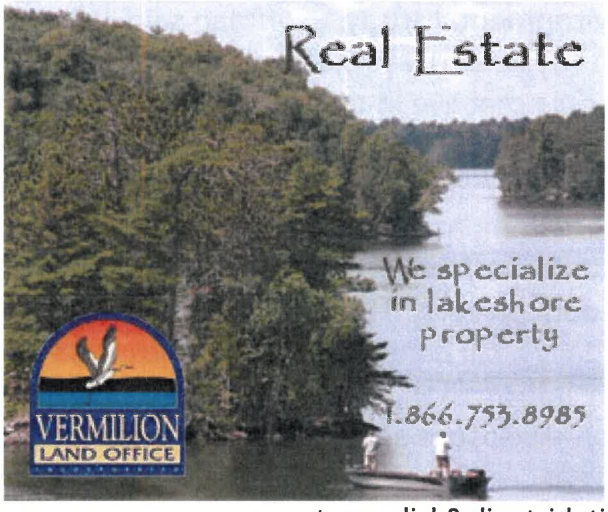
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The Minnesota Star Tribune

DULUTH

Google scales back proposed data center in northeast Minnesota

The power capacity of the Hermantown data center is expected to range between 300 and 600 megawatts.

By Jana Hollingsworth
The Minnesota Star Tribune

AUGUST 20, 2026 AT 3:22PM



Google representative Tyler Huebner, center, speaks with residents at an open house in Hermantown on August 19, 2026. (Jana Hollingsworth /The Minnesota Star Tribune)

HERMANTOWN, MINN. - Google has scaled back its plans for a proposed data center campus in Northeast Minnesota in response to community concerns, the tech giant said this week.

The initial 1.8 million square-foot campus planned for Hermantown is now expected to be 1.66 million square feet, shrinking from four data center buildings to three, reducing the amount of disturbed wetlands and land.

The project, kept secret by city officials for a year, has fueled enormous pushback in this town of 10,000 near Duluth. Since it was revealed as a data center last year through a Minnesota Star Tribune public records request, the project has generated a lawsuit, and inspired political candidates and a highly organized grassroots opposition group protesting everything from tax subsidies to nondisclosure agreements.

"We've been listening," Google representative Tyler Huebner said at a Monday Hermantown City Council meeting.

Feedback from the environmental review and a June open house has informed the company's plans, he said, and they've revised those plans in response.



Across the country, communities have opposed new data centers with fears about noise, environmental harms, property values, and water and energy use. Companies behind the projects say they need the storage and energy they provide for the growing needs of artificial intelligence and everyday internet usage. Google said the Hermantown project is for its growing artificial intelligence model, Gemini, along with various other products like Google Cloud.

The Hermantown project is the company's second proposed data center in Minnesota, with the first in Pine Island, near Rochester. Nearly a dozen large-scale server farms are proposed throughout the state.

Google employees presented new details at several public meetings this week in Hermantown, where disruptions and protests resulted in removal of some attendees by

police.

Some residents at the Monday meeting said the size reduction didn't change their opposition to the project.

"Go away, Google. That's what we're saying," Jeffrey Donahue, who lives a few miles from the proposed site, said at the City Council meeting. "We're not saying shrink it from 1.8 to 1.66. We're saying it's not the appropriate spot for a data center."



Google offered cookies to attendees of an open house in Hermantown, where they discussed a proposed data center on August 19, 2026. (Jana Hollingsworth/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

The second environmental review of the 234-acre project, which was recently released publicly, revealed new details:

- The data center's electricity consumption would be between 300 and 600 megawatts, a range that runs from large to massive in terms of data center scale. Of that, 10% to 15% would go toward cooling, a Google employee said Wednesday night at an open house.
- Sixteen generators would represent the fewest used on a Google project, making it Google's "most environmentally conscious" data center, Huebner said. If the power grid fails, computing would wind down and cooling systems and networking equipment would continue to work.

- Noise levels would be lower than first proposed, said to be similar to the sound of a refrigerator at nearby homes once walls and other buffers are in place.

The project has been assessed by a Minnesota planning and review process that is less robust than an environmental impact statement, the state's strongest mechanism of review. A redo was conducted after an environmental protection nonprofit and Hermantown residents filed a lawsuit against the city, accusing the first review to be inadequate.

Many attendees of the Google-hosted open house Wednesday asked why Google wouldn't go through the more stringent process. An attorney said a review was redone in response to the lawsuit, and not enough project details were known then to perform an environmental impact statement.

Huebner defended the review process used by the company.

"I'm not aware of literally any other state in the nation that requires an environmental report like this before you move into the permitting process," he said at the open house. "The bar for Minnesota is already extremely high."

The deadline for state agencies to comment on the new review, which must be approved by Hermantown's City Council before the project can go forward, is next week.

All of the property on the proposed site is under purchase agreement or ownership has already transferred to a Google subsidiary, a representative from project partner Mortenson said Wednesday.

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The Minnesota Star Tribune

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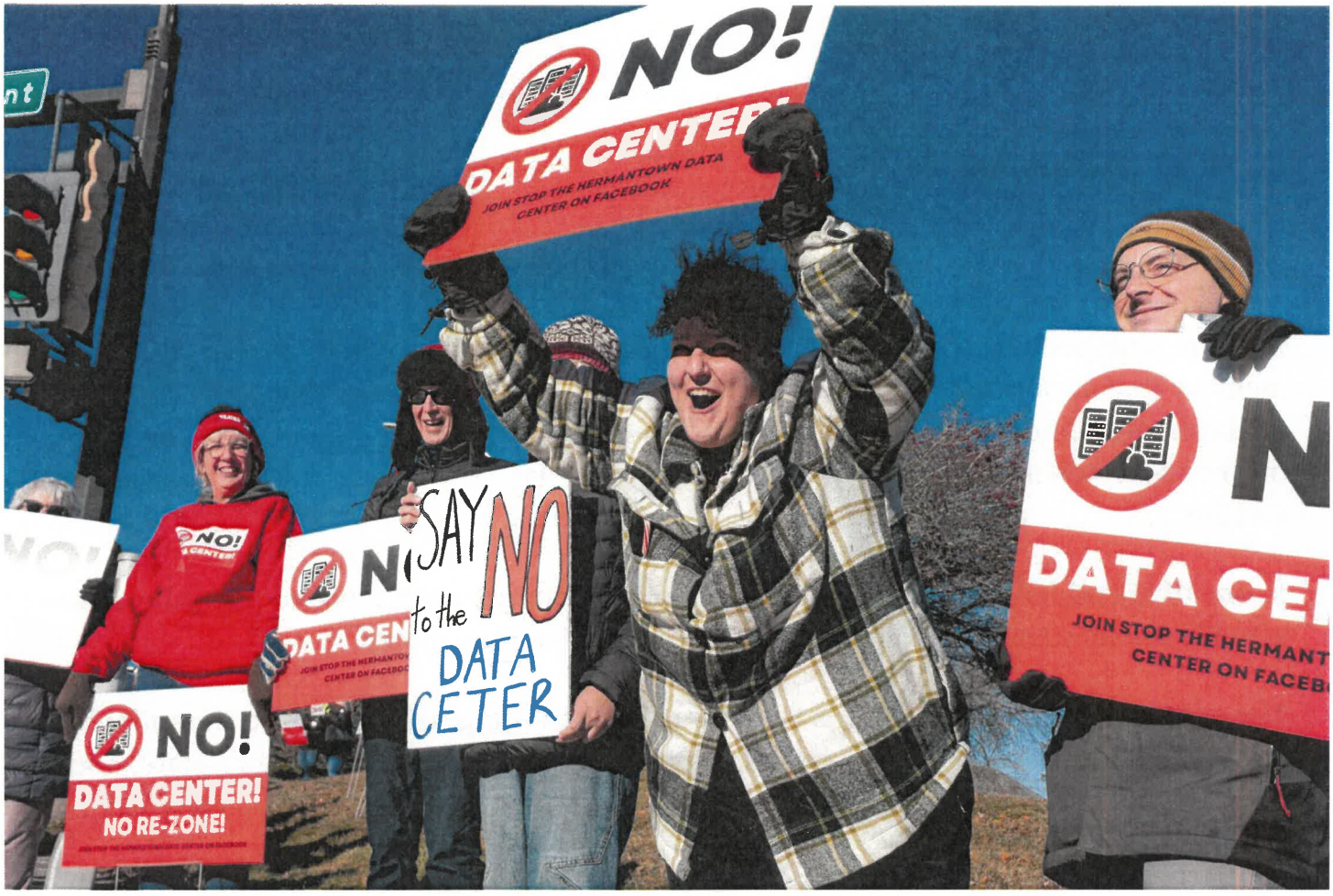
Washington: Despite fueling AI's wrong answers, data centers are uniting Dems and the GOP

Politicians from both sides of the aisle are raising strikingly similar concerns about water, energy and costs. The question is how long the unity will last.



By Robin Washington
The Minnesota Star Tribune

SEPTEMBER 8, 2026 AT 4:58AM



Kassie Gibbons, 35, of Duluth, chants as cars pass by during a protest organized by community members from the "Stop the Hermantown Data Center" group on Nov. 15, 2025. (Erica Dischino/For the Minnesota Star Tribune)

Opinion editor's note: *Strib Voices publishes a mix of material from 10 contributing columnists, along with other commentary online and in print each day. To contribute, click*

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•••

All right, poli-sci class – clear your desks for a pop quiz. Match policy proposals (1) and (2) to the appropriate governor or former gubernatorial candidate (A) or (B).

For data centers, the state should:

(1) Impose a one-year moratorium on new data-center construction while determining the projects' actual costs and developing protections against their effects on utility customers and the environment.

(2) Halt pending data-center grid approvals until projects undergo an audit of their power and water consumption, taxpayer subsidies, ownership and effects on neighboring communities.

Said by:

(A) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott

(B) Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate Francesca Hong (who lost in the primary)

If you're stumped, we could make it an open-book test to allow you to refresh your memory that Abbott is as far right a Republican as you can find, and that Hong ran an unabashedly democratic socialist campaign. But that makes their statements even more of a head-scratcher because they're so strikingly similar. (For the record, the answer is 1-B and 2-A.)

In one of the odder moments in American politics, many Democrats and Republicans are actually on the same side of an issue, and not a benign one, either.

The exception, not surprisingly, is President Donald Trump, who doesn't differentiate party affiliation in stating, "If I were the mayor of a town or the governor of a state, and I had a chance to get a big plant in, an AI plant or a data center, I would absolutely want it."

And if there are two political sides to the issue, for the moment it's Trump and much of the tech industry versus an extraordinary assortment of Democrats and Republicans.

The question is how long the strange bedfellows will last.

I've seen this before, or something like it. At an East Coast civil rights event some years back, I sat with the local leader of the Nation of Islam on one side of me and the head of the regional Anti-Defamation League office on the other. The seating was accidental, but with me being both Black and Jewish, it was fitting to serve as a bridge between the two.

At first, they didn't need one, with both applauding the speakers and the program's topics. But then they must have remembered they were political adversaries and got into a heated argument, with me ducking their pointing fingers. They were still going at it when the event ended.

Data centers first came on my radar with a proposal by Google to site one in Hermantown, which is fairly close to Lake Superior with a nearly unlimited supply of cooling water. Because it's a Republican-leaning enclave that's the closest thing resembling a suburb to DFL-dominated Duluth, I initially thought any dispute would fall along party lines.

But opposition grew, and not a small part of it homegrown. Some of those torch-and-pitchfork bearers had to be Republicans.

It's a mistake to assume party positions don't change. Republicans trying to recruit Black voters by calling themselves the party of Lincoln and castigating Democrats as the enforcers of Jim Crow conveniently forget those party loyalties changed dramatically over the course of the 20th century. More recently, Republicans who once denounced Trump in apocalyptic terms evolved into some of his biggest enablers, including the late Sen. Lindsey Graham. And speaking of evolution, President Barack Obama famously or infamously "evolved" on gay marriage.

However long it lasts, I noticed decidedly Republican antipathy to data centers when covering four legislative candidates in Wisconsin's GOP primary in August. One was solidly conservative and the other three were very – *very* – conservative. The closest any came to endorsing them was to suggest they fall under local control – and even then not the more massive centers.

All of them also cited environmental and energy concerns, items not usually on a Republican campaign platform.

There was another AI issue on which all four agreed. I asked whether tech companies should be held liable when their AI bots provide false information. All said yes, though one tried to walk his answer back a bit before eventually talking himself into it again.

They have a point. In fact-checking this column, Chatty – my ChatGPT assistant – kept insisting that Lindsey Graham was still alive. It's the type of egregious error that's one more reason to press the pause button on data-center expansion.

Otherwise, those AI bots might slurp up half of Lake Superior trying to resurrect the dead.

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COLUMNISTS

Brown: Imagining data centers for people who hate data centers

What if we acknowledge the need for computing power without giving a blank check to massive companies?



By Aaron Brown
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The Meta data center, the largest data center built in Minnesota so far, photographed in Rosemount on Aug. 28. (Elizabeth Flores/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

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Most people are at least skeptical of data centers, if not outright opposed. And yet, if you follow tech news, data centers are presented as inevitable. If we allow them, we risk

consequences. We're told the same goes if we don't allow them. This coming collision between public opinion and economic drive threatens to shake our society in a way that demands preparation and creative thinking.

Gallup polling earlier this year showed 71% of Americans and 76% of Midwesterners opposed the construction of data centers in their area. This opposition cut across every demographic, including partisan identification.

And we know this polling shows something real. Except for President Donald Trump and a steadfast minority of technocrats and union construction labor, Democrats and Republicans are scrambling to oppose data centers for the upcoming election. This sort of thing only happens when consultants across the spectrum are panic-stricken by secret numbers.

The same Gallup polling shows energy costs as the chief reason for the opposition. People worry that massive new data centers will drive up their electricity bill or even limit their access to home energy. I'll address that in a minute.

This visceral opposition runs deeper than mere home economics, however. Massive data centers symbolize the rise of artificial intelligence, a widely perceived menace to employment and critical thinking skills.

Young adults are seeing their entry-level jobs affected first by AI, all while their parents and grandparents mindlessly share AI videos on Facebook. It's weirdly terrifying for all concerned.

The tech industry isn't helping. They were the first to suggest that AI would cause massive economic disruption. This helped them generate vast fortunes from investors who imagined great profits in a laborless society. But it scared the dickens out of everyone else. Now our fragile economy is propped up by these untold billions of dollars, with no clear idea of how this can end well.

In podcasts and social media videos, the techies talk about "compute" like it's some kind of street drug. We need to use more, make more, sell more. For the general population, it sounds like a TV crime procedural.

"Can you believe it, Rocco? They were peddling an exaflop of compute right across the street from an elementary school."

"Forget it, Jake; it's Data Town."

Opposition to data centers contains nuances. Gallup shows that people generally see the economic benefits of data centers, and many of us have begun using AI – some begrudgingly, some with enthusiasm.

What if we right-sized the data center debate? What if we acknowledge the need for computing power without giving a blank check to companies who consume resources with reckless abandon?

Minnesota already has more than 73 enterprise data centers, mostly housed in government and corporate facilities. The controversy surrounds so-called hyperscale data centers of 10,000 square feet or more. Only one such facility, a 715,000-square foot campus in Rosemount, is currently under construction in this state. Several more, including Google proposals in Hermantown and Pine Island, are navigating the regulatory process and growing local opposition.

Last week, I tried to sort out the practical realities of data centers with Wannie Park, CEO of California-based Pado AI. Park's company creates software that maximizes energy efficiency in data centers. His background is in the energy sector of computing, determining how much power is needed and how it can be conserved. Not surprisingly, he sees data center growth as a critical part of our economic future. But he warns of a "hype cycle" that comes with disruptive new technology like this.

"If you are fully trusting your destiny of your personal life or your business to AI, you're bonkers," said Park. "You can't do that yet. Maybe at some point you can. But it's not happening in the next year or two. A lot of evolution and improvement needs to be done."

Beyond AI fears, Park said opposition to data centers boils down to energy and water usage. Both can be dramatically improved, he said. His company sells software that manages computing loads in midsized data centers to create efficiencies so that companies don't have to build larger data facilities. Essentially, they get more computing out of existing capacity. If you ever had a PC that benefited from occasional defragmentation of the hard drive, that's what Pado's software does for data centers.

Park said companies are learning from the disastrous public relations of early AI and data center technology. Early secrecy and demand for nondisclosure agreements tainted data center construction across the country, but especially here in Minnesota.

"These data centers are asking for gigawatts of power," said Park. "Just think about how underutilized they are when you see the leakage. That's where there's a problem. And that's also probably where people are saying, it's ridiculous. You're using all our water,

you're losing all our power, rates are going up. I'd rather have a nuclear reactor in my backyard than a data center."

Now, Park said, tech firms are willing to pay not only for their own facilities and utilities, but for the long-term infrastructure tab.

"If you need grid modernization, [these projects] create all these great values," said Park. "Let's have the data center operators pay for it. They're willing to pay for it."

Park's company isn't the only one selling data center efficiency. But we are sorely in need of a data conservation movement. Building out data centers is not only unpopular, but also irresponsible if energy, water and capital are wasted just to achieve market position.

Building up existing infrastructure with sustainability in mind should be our public priority. We must establish goals for the public good, not just for those investing billions in the most expensive technology that most people still don't want.

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