

Addressing Impacts

As data center development has accelerated, state and local governments have taken steps to address data-center impacts. Various states including Florida, as noted above, have new or pending policies pertaining to data centers and their electric-power requirements.

The highest concentration of data centers in the U.S. is in northern Virginia outside Washington, D.C. The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), a large non-profit conservation and regional planning organization, has been deeply involved in the data-center policy in that region.

Among PEC's suggestions is the need to integrate planning for data centers with comprehensive planning for the communities in which they are to be located. In Florida, while regulating electrical utilities is a state responsibility, planners at the local level are best positioned to address land-use issues presented by data centers, with the support of regional water management districts and relevant state agencies.

Questions for planners to consider in evaluating applications to site data centers:

Community Compatibility & Equity

- How close would the data center be to sensitive public facilities, such as schools, parks, wildlife trails, elder-care centers and hospitals?
- Would the data center be located near low-income communities?
- What noise impacts would cooling systems and generators create for any neighboring communities or future development?
- What limits on lighting for industrial-scale data centers would be needed to curtail negative impacts on the environment and on the quality of life of nearby communities?
- What buffers and design requirements would be needed to make a data center more compatible with its neighbors?
- What limits on height and intensity would be needed to make a data center more compatible with neighboring land uses?

Land-Use Compatibility & Growth Implications

- What other land uses might be incompatible with a data center — e.g., commercial, tourism?
- If located near undeveloped land, would the data center spur price increases for land that inhibit future residential or mixed-use development in the region?
- Would the data center and the electrical infrastructure supporting it consume productive agricultural land?
- What would be the impacts on neighboring land use of the electrical infrastructure needed to support a data center?
- What other kinds of development would be attracted by that electrical infrastructure?

continued on next page