

More than 100 locales—from major hubs like Seattle and Charlotte to small rural towns—have implemented moratoriums or zoning restrictions, according to Interconnected Capital LLC.

Hyatt Bosman notes that community sentiment is now a top-tier consideration, rivaling the traditional requirement for grid access. “We look for power and if there is a moratorium,” she said.

Navarre, CEO of Tennessee-based Keyni Consulting, attributes this to the scale of resources AI demands. “This is a fundamental change about power, water and grid capacity,” he noted, pointing to broader anxieties regarding AI’s impact on jobs and the environment.

Consulting firm McKinsey & Co. projects that data centers will require \$6.7 trillion worldwide by 2030 to keep pace with computing demand.

THE MAP IS SPANNING OUT

David Rubenstein, a Seattle-based attorney with Polsinelli who specializes in data center developments, explains that the industry is being forced to look further afield. As Northern Virginia—a primary data hub—approaches capacity, developers are eyeing new territory in the Midwest, the South and beyond.

Some U.S. states, including Florida, Louisiana and Alabama, were previously avoided due to hurricane risks, but the sheer volume of capital and the race to deploy AI infrastructure are forcing developers to cast a wider net. “The map has been sort of spanning out,” Rubenstein said.

‘FUTURE PROOFING’ INFRASTRUCTURE

Data centers’ strain on infrastructure could be considerable, opponents contend.

The International Energy Agency expects U.S. data center power consumption to climb 130% by 2030. Water usage is equally critical; a single large facility can consume 5 million gallons daily. Researchers at the University of California, Riverside, estimate that a 100-word AI prompt consumes about 16.9 ounces of water.

Rubenstein said developers must do better at

addressing public concerns, arguing that water usage at data centers is often lower than in other sectors.

However, Navarre emphasizes that local governments must “future proof” their deals.

“This requires experts,” Navarre said, noting that small towns are often negotiating against the world’s wealthiest corporations. Communities need legal and infrastructure expertise to ensure they aren’t left with a “graveyard of AI data centers” should technology shifts render older sites obsolete.

FROM NDAS TO TRANSPARENCY

Previously, non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) were standard practice to protect proprietary site-selection data. That, too, is shifting. As public opposition mounts, developers are increasingly abandoning these confidential pacts to foster local trust. “No one’s doing NDAs anymore,” Rubenstein said. “We have learned that communities really don’t like them. It feels shady.”

A PROXY FOR THE AI DEBATE

The rise in opposition serves as a proxy for the broader national debate on AI. While corporations see productivity and innovation, local skeptics often fear for their livelihoods and the rise of a machine-dominated future.

Derek Willis, a lecturer at the University of Maryland, suggests that data centers have become a tangible focal point for the abstract anxieties surrounding AI.

“A lot of the modern economy isn’t very visible,” Willis said. “You don’t think much about how a package from Amazon ends up on your doorstep. [But] data centers are different. It’s visible. It’s the one part of the process where people actually have power.”

As developers race to market, the tension between speed and community acceptance remains a big hurdle for data centers to power the AI wave. With moratoriums spreading, the clock is ticking.

“Twelve months is a lifetime in this industry,” Rubenstein said.

A longer version of this appears online at <http://datacenterdiscord.adamsmultimedia.com>. We used Google Gemini to trim the story down for print.

Ten questions about AI data centers

- 1 **What is a data center?**

A data center is a physical location that stores computers along with related hardware and technology infrastructure, such as servers, data storage drives, and network equipment.
- 2 **How do they fit into the growth of artificial intelligence?**

Expanding data center bandwidth is key to keeping up with the increasing computing and memory needs generated by AI’s expected exponential growth.
- 3 **How many data centers are there now in the U.S.?**

Data centers have been around for years serving technology networks. Recent estimates range 4,300 data centers nationwide, according to Data Center Map and Programs.com, to more than 5,400 according to another estimate by Apollo Global Management.
- 4 **How many AI data centers are being proposed in the U.S.?**

Again, there are varied estimates. According to Axios and the American Edge Project, there are close to 3,000 new data centers proposed or under construction. An analysis by Pew Research Center shows more than 1,500 new projects under development.
- 5 **Where are those proposed projects located?**

Data centers are being proposed across the U.S. A website operated by consumer advocate Erin Brockovich has received more than 5,000 reports on new data center projects. Top markets include Virginia and Texas as well as the Pacific Northwest, California, Phoenix and Chicago with substantial potential growth in Atlanta, Utah and Ohio.
- 6 **Why is there such a big wave of new data centers proposed and planned?**

Big technology firms as well as companies across multiple industries are betting big on AI. That includes some massive, projected increases in needed data center capacity to process AI-driven data, machine learning and connected robotics.
- 7 **How much spending and investment are being made as part of the AI data center wave?**

According to a May report by Goldman Sachs, capital expenditures on AI (including data centers, energy to power them and computer capacity) will total \$7.6 trillion from 2026 to 2031.
- 8 **Who are the biggest users for proposed AI data centers?**

Hyperscalers are the biggest players in the data center and AI waves. Big tech firms such as Amazon Web Services, Alphabet/Google, Meta Platforms (i.e. Facebook), Microsoft and Apple as well as AI firms Chat GPT and Anthropic are at the forefront.
- 9 **Who is opposing AI data centers?**

AI data centers are generating concerns and opposition from environmentalists, not-in-my-backyard neighbors and property owners as well as those worried about the loss of farmland and open space, and the potential societal and economic changes AI could bring.
- 10 **What’s next?**

A number of states and localities across the country are considering or have passed data center moratoriums. The idea is to give jurisdictions time to craft new zoning ordinances and conduct more due diligence related to potential projects. Some data center developers and users are looking at how to best navigate community concerns and opposition. Other AI technology players are looking at the potential for new AI data centers in ocean waters or space.

About this series: Digital forums

Adams MultiMedia (AMM) will host upcoming forums online featuring experts in the artificial intelligence (AI) data center space, as well as our journalists from across the country who have been covering projects and community concerns. Original article and all reporting were completed by Adams MultiMedia journalists.

For more news and content on AI data centers and information on digital forums check out <http://datacenterdiscord.adamsmultimedia.com>.

What’s driving opposition to AI data centers?

Artificial intelligence data centers are being proposed across the country. They are generating opposition for various reasons. Here are some of the main drivers.

 **Energy**
AI data centers are projected to use significant energy. Opponents say high energy consumption will stress power grids and drive up utility rates. Some new data centers are eyeing nuclear energy options, sparking safety worries.

 **Water**
Data centers’ cooling systems and power sources can require significant amounts of water. This could stress local water supplies and ecosystems.

 **E-Waste**
Hardware upgrades and equipment replacements can produce significant amounts of electronic waste. Data centers developers and users face community questions on how waste will be handled.

 **Land**
There are concerns about AI data centers gobbling up farmland and open spaces, impacting local infrastructure as well as properties that could be used for other uses.

 **Noise**
Some critics worry about the noise from AI data centers’ cooling systems, generators, and utility substations and how that will impact neighborhoods and ecosystems.

 **Fear**
There are wider worries about AI taking jobs and livelihoods and resulting in some kind of Orwellian, dystopian future akin to those in science fiction movies and books.

 **Equity**
AI data center skeptics worry that more projects will land in lower-income, working-class, and rural areas than in affluent cities and suburbs.

SOURCES: Brockovich Data Center Reporting, World Resources Institute, Harvard University