MILL OPPORTUNITY COALITION

November 27, 2026

The Honorable Ray Lewis, Mayor
Sean Schmidt, President, and Members of Village Council
Village of McDonald
451 Ohio Avenue
McDonald, Ohio 44437

Re: Request Immediate Lift the Data Center Moratorium and Consider the Proposed Campus on the Former McDonald Works Site

Dear Mayor Lewis, President Schmidt and Members of Council:

McDonald has a once-in-a-generation opportunity: to clean up the former steel mill site at no cost to residents, while bringing new jobs and the largest increase in tax revenue the Village has seen since U.S. Steel left. The 350 acres north of Ohio Avenue have produced almost nothing for McDonald in more than four decades.

We write to ask Council to lift the moratorium on data centers so that this proposal can move forward for full public consideration. Ordinance No. 3340-26 bars the "acceptance, processing, consideration or approval of any application, permit, zoning request, variance, or approval" related to a data center, and suspends every deadline for the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals and Council to act.[1] As a result, the Village cannot even accept a conditional use or zoning request for this project, and without a proposal before the Village there is nothing to negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement around. Lifting the moratorium would not approve the project. It would allow the Village to review the actual proposal on its merits, so McDonald can decide on its own terms.[2]

The Mill Opportunity Coalition is made up primarily of McDonald business owners, joined by labor, residents and property owners who want to see the mill site renewed. We pay taxes here, employ our neighbors and depend on a Village that can keep its streets, water lines and schools in good repair.

We respect every resident who has spoken at recent meetings, and their questions deserved answers. But the voices being heard so far do not speak for all of McDonald. Many of our customers, employees and neighbors support this project and have not yet spoken in public as we believe the vocal minority is preventing our opportunity to be heard. This letter is meant to add our voices to the record.

[1] Village of McDonald, Ohio, Ordinance No. 3340-26, An Ordinance Declaring a Moratorium Not to Exceed One (1) Year on the Acceptance, Processing, Consideration or Approval of Any Application Related to Data Centers (passed Sept. 16, 2026).

[2] Oppidan, What the McDonald Data Center Campus Could Mean for You: Community FAQ (Nov. 2026), posted on the Village of McDonald website. https://oppidanconnect.com/

“The voices heard most often so far do not speak for all of McDonald,” said Nat Gallo, a lifelong resident and business owner. “We can’t let a vocal minority cost this Village a generational opportunity before the rest of us have even had a chance to hear the facts.”

We also wish to correct the record on several points. Much of what has circulated about data centers describes projects in other states, built on farmland or beside neighborhoods, under very different rules. A data center in one community cannot fairly be judged by what happened in another.[3] Some coverage has also suggested that this project was handled in secret. In fact, Oppidan held a public open house on September 15, 2026, has posted written answers to residents’ questions, has committed to publishing its environmental and sound studies, and has stated plainly that there will be no eminent domain, no nondisclosure agreements, no secret deals and no tax abatements, PILOTs or grants.[4]

The developer has also listened. After hearing from residents at the open house, Oppidan scaled its plan back to five buildings, a reduction of nearly 50 percent in square footage.[4] That is what a good-faith process looks like, and it is exactly the process the moratorium has stopped.

“This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to clean up the mill site while creating long-term economic growth and revenue for the Village,” said Jeff Politano, a business member of the Mill Opportunity Coalition. “Right now, the moratorium means Council can’t even sit down and talk about a benefits agreement or the rules that would protect residents. Lift it, hear the proposal and let McDonald decide on the facts.”

As you know, McDonald was planned as a company town around Carnegie Steel’s McDonald Works, and at one time it is our understanding that U.S. Steel paid up to 85 percent of the Village’s operating budget. U.S. Steel left in 1980. McDonald Steel kept part of the plant running until it shut down in July 2024, facing more than $60 million in needed upgrades, and took with it the Village’s last major industrial taxpayer.[5]

Today the site pays about $64,769 a year in property taxes and supports few jobs.[4] The cost of running the Village has shifted onto the homeowners south of Ohio Avenue:

- Roughly 49 percent of Village revenue now comes from water and sewer fees.
- The Village has no bond rating and cannot borrow in the municipal bond market, so a major water main break or sinkhole has no clear way to be paid for.
- McDonald Local Schools has one of the smallest property tax bases in Ohio and relies on the state for more than 75 percent of its revenue.

[3] Ohio Business Roundtable, Data Centers in Ohio: Fact vs. Fiction (June 2026). https://www.grovecityohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4942/Ohio-Business-Roundtable-Data-Centers-Fact-vs-Fiction; Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber, Data Centers: Myth vs. Fact (2026).

[4] Oppidan, Community FAQ (Nov. 2026). https://oppidanconnect.com/; “McDonald Residents Want Data Center Ban on Ballot,” Tribune Chronicle (Nov. 18, 2026). https://www.tribtoday.com/news/local-news/2026/11/mcdonald-residents-want-data-center-ban-on-ballot

[5] “Major Data Center Planned for McDonald Steel Site,” The Business Journal (Youngstown, Ohio). https://businessjournaldaily.com/major-data-center-planned-for-mcdonald-steel-site/; see also note 4.

- The State declared the school district in fiscal emergency in October 2009, with a certified deficit of about $2 million, and state oversight continued until February 2012.[6]

It is a credit to Village leaders that McDonald has held together as well as it has. But the north side has waited more than 40 years for a use that can pay its way again.

“Our parents and grandparents worked that mill, and their paychecks built this Village,” said Curt Guisler Jr. “That land has given almost nothing back for 40 years. Without this project, nobody has a plan to clean it up. We’re asking Council to simply lift the moratorium so the project can continue its due diligence and be considered.”

The required environmental cleanup could cost $10 million to $50 million,[7] and commercial or residential reuse would cost far more. The site’s access roads could not carry the traffic of a large retail center, and a 350-acre subdivision would overwhelm Village services. Meanwhile, trespassers ride dirt bikes on the slag piles, and thieves have stripped parts from engines stored on the property.

The campus would turn a site that costs McDonald money into one that pays for the Village’s future.

The vocal minority’s unsuccessful appeal to the Ohio EPA is proof they are not serious about the clean-up. We recently learned that the same group speaking at council meetings asked the Ohio EPA to reclassify the former mill site as a landfill. That move would have delayed the cleanup. The Ohio EPA rejected the request, finding that the buried materials did not meet the regulatory definition of a landfill, and it declined to hold the public hearing the group had asked for.[8] 21 News reported plainly what the resident leading the effort, Lori Gawdyda, wants: "Ultimately, her goal is to prevent the facility from being built."[8] She has also said she plans to file another request with the Ohio EPA.[8]

By contrast, Oppidan has committed to pay 100 percent of the cleanup the Ohio EPA requires, under the state’s Voluntary Action Program (which the Ohio EPA runs) with ongoing groundwater monitoring, and to make its environmental reports public.[7] Asbestos, PCBs and lead have already been removed from the former plant buildings at no cost to the Village. Without this project, there is no plan for whether or when the site would be cleaned up.[7]

Electric bills and Power Generation. The most recent allegations and red Harring is related to power plants. The proposed site does not require a natural gas power plant.

Oppidan has committed to pay the full cost of transmission and grid upgrades, two new metered FirstEnergy substations and on-site infrastructure, so those costs are not passed on to residential customers.[7] In AEP Ohio’s service area, state regulators already require large data centers to pay

---

[6] Ohio Auditor of State, McDonald Local School District, Trumbull County: Termination of Fiscal Emergency (2012). https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2012/McDonald_Termination.pdf

[7] Oppidan, Community FAQ (Nov. 2026). https://oppidanconnect.com/

[8] “Ohio EPA Dismisses Citizen Effort to Delay Data Center Progress,” WFMJ 21 News (Nov. 2026). https://www.wfmj.com/news/local-news/ohio-epa-dismisses-citizen-effort-to-delay-data-center-progress/article_5c6a7448-24aa-4115-80ac-50c63747561a.html

for at least 85 percent of the power they contract for over 12 years, even if they use less,[9] and legislation introduced in the Ohio House would extend that model statewide.[10] Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and other major operators have also signed the White House's voluntary Ratepayer Protection Pledge.[11] The U.S. Senate recently passed bipartisan federal legislation forcing data centers to pay for their costs.[12]

The other allegation is the capacity market demand and the PJM grid's ability to meet demand because of this project. This too fall flat with facts. Jus this month PJM filed a proposal with FERC defining a new 50 MW Large Computational Load category to prevent large loads from making sudden, destabilizing disconnections or load transfers during grid disturbances—such as a July 22 event where nearly 3.9 GW of data centers unexpectedly shifted to onsite power.[13] It is also noteworthy that this issue has not been flagged for other major industrial users in the region that are not data centers that also pull power off the PJM grid.

Water. Cooling water could come from the Mahoning River under the site's existing permit, not from the Village's drinking water. Oppidan estimates use of at most about 25 million gallons a year, roughly 4 percent of what McDonald Steel used in 2022, and water returned to the river must meet Ohio EPA's draft discharge permit for data centers.[14] Most modern data centers cool with closed-loop systems that recirculate the same water.[15] The Ohio Legislature is also considering this requirement at the Statehouse.

Noise. Oppidan has committed to a limit of 55 decibels or less at the property line, about the level of moderate rainfall, with an added penalty for any steady hum, and to publish its full sound study. The closest home on the draft site plan is about 900 feet away, and backup generators would be enclosed and tested only on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.[14] McDonald does not yet have its own noise standards, which is one more reason to write clear rules now and lift the moratorium to do that.[14] Ohio communities such as Marysville have shown that setbacks, berms and landscaping keep noise from reaching homes.[16]

---

[9] AEP Ohio, "AEP Ohio Proposal on Data Centers to Protect Ohio Consumers Adopted by PUCO" (July 9, 2025). https://www.aepohio.com/company/news/view?releaseID=10326

[10] "Ohio House Bill Would Extend Data Center Tariff to Rest of State," WYSU 88.5 FM (Mar. 2, 2026). https://wysu.org/ohio-news/2026-03-02/ohio-house-bill-would-extend-data-center-tariff-to-rest-of-state

[11] The White House, Ratepayer Protection Pledge (Mar. 4, 2026). https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/03/ratepayer-protection-pledge/; "The Ratepayer Protection Pledge: Who's Signed On?," American Nuclear Society, Nuclear Newswire (July 29, 2026). https://www.ans.org/news/2026-07-29/article-8255/the-ratepayer-protection-pledge-whos-signed-on/

[12] "Senate Approves Bill to Speed Up Permitting Reviews, Force Data Centers to Pay for Energy Costs," Associated Press (Nov. 19, 2026). https://abcnews.com/US/wireStory/senate-backs-bill-speed-permitting-reviews-force-data-138308460; "US Senate Passes Bill Requiring Data Centers to Pay More for Grid Infrastructure," DatacenterDynamics (Nov. 20, 2026). https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/us-senate-passes-bill-requiring-data-centers-to-pay-more-for-grid-infrastructure/

[13] "PJM Proposes New Rules to Protect Grid Reliability as Data Center Demand Grows," PJM Inside Lines (Nov. 16, 2026). https://insidelines.pjm.com/pjm-proposes-new-rules-to-protect-grid-reliability-as-data-center-demand-grows/

[14] Oppidan, Community FAQ (Nov. 2026). https://oppidanconnect.com/

[15] Ohio Business Roundtable, Fact vs. Fiction. https://www.grovecityohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4942/Ohio-Business-Roundtable-Data-Centers-Fact-vs-Fiction; U.S. Department of Energy, Cooling Water Efficiency Opportunities for Federal Data Centers (Jan. 9, 2019). https://www.energy.gov/cmei/femp/cooling-water-efficiency-opportunities-federal-data-centers

[16] City of Marysville, Ohio, Data Center FAQs (retrieved Aug. 17, 2026). https://marysvilleohio.org/772/Data-Center-FAQs; see also note 15.

Air and health. Data centers have no smokestacks and produce no industrial process emissions, and their backup generators must go through Ohio EPA air permitting.[17] Data centers do not emit ionizing radiation, and there is no evidence linking them to cancer. This has been routinely misrepresented by the vocal minority at council meetings without subject matter experts or clear data to backup the false claims.

Traffic. The campus would generate about 255 vehicle trips a day once operating, roughly a quarter of the traffic at Kimberly-Clark's Warren plant, routed north to Robbins Avenue and south toward Salt Springs Road, with the developer paying for any required road upgrades. Oppidan has committed to meet every year with the school district on bus routes and student safety.[18]

Home values have been misrepresented. In 2015, New Albany approved its first hyperscale data center, an Amazon Web Services facility. Ten years later, the city is home to roughly 40 operating data centers, run by companies including Amazon, Google, Meta and QTS. That is more than any other single community in Ohio. Over the same decade, New Albany's home values rose by double digits and its public schools stayed among the best in the state. In Hilliard, where Oppidan has an existing data center and where Amazon has several campuses, home values rose over 29 percent over the past five years. The facts are undisputable that data center do not negatively impact home values.

New revenue for schools and the Village has not even been contemplated. Oppidan currently estimates the campus would pay about $5.2 million a year in property taxes once complete, compared with about $64,769 today, and it is seeking no abatements, PILOTs or grants.[18] It is our understanding that the schools' share would be about $1.04 million a year, which is 20% of $5.2 million. That would be a 53% increase over the district's current property tax revenue of about $1.96 million.

Local jobs for our trades and our businesses have not been given consideration. A data center project brings hundreds of skilled construction jobs during the build and this project is projected to also create over 200 permanent jobs.[19] Once operating, the campus would need HVAC technicians, electricians, diesel mechanics, landscapers, snow removal and janitorial services. Oppidan has committed to meet with local contractors and schools to fill those roles locally, and all positions would be subject to the Village's municipal income tax.[18] The significant permanent jobs created will be a massive boost to the Village revenue through municipal income tax. Based on the FAQ, calculations could reach as high as a 41% increase to the Village budget.

Room to invest in community needs. Oppidan has committed to propose a Community Benefits Agreement to the Village, which could fund roads, water lines, safety forces, parks or give an income tax break.[18]

---

[17] Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber, Myth vs. Fact; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Air Act Resources for Data Centers (July 17, 2026). https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/clean-air-act-resources-data-centers; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Understanding the Stationary Engines Rules (June 22, 2026). https://www.epa.gov/stationary-engines/understanding-stationary-engines-rules; see also note 14.

[18] Oppidan, Community FAQ (Nov. 2026). https://oppidanconnect.com/

[19] Ohio Business Roundtable, Fact vs. Fiction (citing Union County, Ohio, Understanding Data Centers: Community & Economic Impacts (presentation, Feb. 20, 2026)). https://www.grovecityohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4942/Ohio-Business-Roundtable-Data-Centers-Fact-vs-Fiction

A broader lift for the Valley. At a recent council meeting a resident made the claim that Council should not consider the voices or local businesses, labor, or member of the academic and workforce community. That's a false narrative. This project has significant tertiary impacts for regional local business and interested parties and should be considered as such. Residents have raised questions but often are routinely providing misinformation to council. Multiple regional businesses are eager for this project to move forward and the company has committed to sourcing local.

What We Ask of the Village

We are not asking anyone to take promises on faith. We are asking Council to let this proposal be heard, with protections in writing.

1. **Lift the moratorium so the project can move forward for consideration.** Section II of Ordinance No. 3340-26 bars the Village from accepting, processing or considering any application, permit or zoning request related to a data center, and Section III suspends all deadlines for the Village to act on one.[20] Section IV allows Council to end the moratorium at any time by ordinance.[20] Lifting it would not approve anything. It would let the project be heard through a data center ordinance or conditional use permit, public hearings and Ohio EPA review, the process the developer has said it will follow.[21]
2. **Adopt data center rules now.** Let the Planning Commission consider the draft ordinance and let Council's new data center advisory committee consider a Community Benefits Agreement, so they are in place before any final approval or site plan is proposed. Under Section IV, adopting data center ordinances would also end the moratorium.[22]
3. **Make every commitment binding.** Require a signed development agreement and Community Benefits Agreement.[22]

The men and women who worked the McDonald Works built this Village, and their paychecks paid for its schools, parks and streets. That mill has been gone for more than 40 years. A project that would clean up the land, create jobs and restore McDonald's tax base, without asking residents for a dollar, may not come again.

Every concern raised deserves a clear, factual answer, and we believe this letter shows that those answers exist. What McDonald should not do is let this opportunity pass because of fears that rest on misinformation by a vocal minority or on projects in other places. A blanket ban, whether by ordinance or at the ballot box, would close the door before residents have even seen the facts of McDonald's own project.[22] We urge Council not to let the objections of a vocal minority cost

[20] McDonald Ordinance No. 3340-26.

[21] Oppidan, Community FAQ (Nov. 2026). https://oppidanconnect.com/

[22] Tribune Chronicle, "Data Center Ban on Ballot." https://www.tribtoday.com/news/local-news/2026/11/mcdonald-residents-want-data-center-ban-on-ballot; Ohio Business Roundtable, Fact vs. Fiction. https://www.grovecityohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4942/Ohio-Business-Roundtable-Data-Centers-Fact-vs-Fiction; Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber, Data Centers Local Checklist: What to Ask When Approached; Key Considerations (2026); see also note 20.

McDonald this generational opportunity to clean up the mill site while creating long-term economic growth and revenue for the Village.

We respectfully ask Council to lift the moratorium, to put strong rules and a binding agreement in place, and to give the people of McDonald the chance to see the mill site work for the Village again.

Respectfully submitted,

The Mill Opportunity Coalition

About the Mill Opportunity Coalition

The Mill Opportunity Coalition is a group made up primarily of McDonald business owners, joined by residents and mill site property owners, who support the responsible redevelopment of the former McDonald Works steel site. The coalition advocates for a transparent process, strong local protections and a redevelopment that restores the Village's tax base and creates local jobs.