

SPRINGFIELD CHARTER TOWNSHIP



SEAN R. MILLER, CLERK

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Data Centers Discussion

Springfield Township
12000 Davisburg Road, Davisburg, MI 48350
January 6, 2026
2:30 PM

PRESENT: Richard L. Davis, Township Supervisor
 Greg Need, Township Attorney
 Julia Upfal, Giffels Webster
 Jill Bahm, Giffels Webster
 Danielle Sink, Supervisor's Assistant/Recording Secretary

Supervisor Richard L. Davis convened the meeting and led a working discussion regarding data center zoning, process considerations, and ordinance framework.

Planner Julia Upfal opened by referencing prior issues in Saline Township involving rezoning, exclusionary zoning arguments, and subsequent litigation, and asked how much discretion the Planning Commission would have to deny a special land use application if a proposed data center met conditions, particularly if the site were the only industrial-zoned property located along a transmission line.

Attorney Greg Need advised the Township has authority, but that exclusionary zoning is fact-specific, and case law is limited. He explained the distinction between statutory and common-law exclusionary zoning claims and stated Springfield has several months to develop an ordinance positioned to withstand challenge, noting Saline's weakness appeared to stem from having no appropriately zoned land use defined for data centers.

Supervisor Davis asked clarifying questions about Saline's ordinance posture and emphasized Springfield's ability to proactively plan and strengthen regulations before any formal application is submitted.

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Jill Bahm cautioned that while the Township has a limited window to prepare, public engagement will be significant and residents will raise extensive concerns, requiring time for deliberation and revisions.

Supervisor Davis asked about the Township's ability to extend the moratorium timeline; Attorney Need confirmed extensions are possible but require demonstrated good-faith effort and progress rather than repeated delays. Supervisor Davis noted the Township has not received an application, only an inquiry, and emphasized that transparency is driving public awareness.

Ms. Upfal presented a draft zoning ordinance amendment and explained her intent to address data center land use definitions and zoning-based standards, while operational reporting requirements such as annual inspections and ongoing water/electrical usage reporting may need to be placed in the general code rather than the zoning ordinance. Ms. Upfal summarized the proposed classifications: accessory data centers (such as server closets) permitted in various commercial/industrial districts if incidental to the principal use and not offering off-site services; minor data centers (10,000 square feet or less) proposed as permitted uses in the I-1 and I-2 districts; and enterprise and hyperscale data centers proposed as special land uses in the I-2 district due to intensity, large scale, and the presence of generators, cooling equipment, and substantial utility demands.

Supervisor Davis asked what triggers the differing treatment; Ms. Upfal responded that larger facilities are more intensive and require greater scrutiny.

Ms. Bahm provided context on zoning structure, noting permitted uses are allowed throughout a district, while special land uses may be appropriate in the district but require additional conditions and site-specific review due to potential impacts.

The group discussed setbacks and residential adjacency, including Ms. Upfal's proposed residential buffers (50 feet for minor; 200 feet for enterprise/hyperscale) and the concept of mitigation-based reductions.

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Supervisor Davis referenced the earlier inquiry meeting and stated the representative suggested purchasing adjacent homes at triple market value to address residential concerns, asking whether acquisition would negate buffer requirements.

Ms. Upfal and Attorney Need explained that if acquired properties were used to support the development or counted toward buffer compliance and the site plan, rezoning would likely be required; however, the use could also be designed to comply without acquiring homes, depending on building placement and setbacks.

Ms. Upfal added that regardless of ordinance requirements, political pressure may drive buyouts, and she raised concerns about displacement and loss of affordable housing as a likely public comment issue.

Noise impacts were discussed in detail. Supervisor Davis noted backup generator testing could create significant noise, and Ms. Upfal referenced community complaints in other jurisdictions about persistent humming sounds.

Ms. Upfal proposed noise study requirements and post-construction verification; Attorney Need advised heightened requirements are more defensible for hyperscale and enterprise facilities than for smaller “minor” data centers.

Ms. Bahm emphasized aligning data center standards with existing Township noise performance standards and ensuring the Township can clearly explain that requirements are consistent with broader industrial regulation.

Utility impacts and water use were addressed as central concerns. Ms. Upfal explained she drafted a zoning standard encouraging water-based cooling systems to use closed-loop circulation and to allow alternative methods if equal or lower net water consumption is demonstrated, noting the difficulty of regulating water and electrical use purely through zoning.

Supervisor Davis highlighted that location and water/sewer service availability matter, distinguishing municipal supply from private well and wastewater systems, and emphasized public concern about aquifer impacts and contamination. The group discussed potential

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reporting, monitoring, and testing needs, with Supervisor Davis stating the Township should consider mechanisms to track water usage and verify system integrity.

Ms. Bahm raised additional technical questions about geothermal systems and whether discharge temperatures could affect hydrogeology.

Ms. Upfal suggested hydrogeological studies may be warranted for geothermal installations more broadly, not only for data centers, and Attorney Need reiterated that zoning governs location/appropriateness while operational reporting and monitoring typically belong in the general code.

Ms. Upfal reviewed additional provisions including equipment screening, outside agency approvals, and the concept of requiring the applicant/operator to notify the Township of violations or enforcement actions. The group discussed which agencies might apply (including EGLE permits for certain water withdrawals) and how notice and inspection expectations might be structured, with an understanding that annual inspection/reporting requirements likely belong in the general code.

Phased development and “campus” build-out was discussed through a proposed general development plan process, including public hearing requirements, Planning Commission review and recommendation, and Township Board approval or denial. Supervisor Davis emphasized the importance of clearly defined standards for approval/denial to manage public expectations and ensure defensibility. The group discussed incorporating construction staging and logistics into phasing, including worker parking, material storage, fencing expectations, and maintaining safe access and clear egress routes during construction. Supervisor Davis referenced current challenges with Dixie Self Storage and expressed that screening, fencing, or buffering, particularly adjacent to residential properties, should be installed early where feasible to reduce disruption and ongoing complaints. The group agreed these construction and screening sequencing issues may extend beyond data centers and could warrant broader ordinance attention.

Ms. Upfal then reviewed decommissioning requirements for enterprise and hyperscale facilities, including a decommissioning plan approved with the final site plan, proposed trigger events, and site restoration expectations. Ms. Upfal asked about including a discontinuation time period (e.g.,

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18 months) as a trigger; Attorney Need cautioned that nonuse timeframes can be vulnerable when challenged, and that abandonment standards are the typical legal basis.

Supervisor Davis asked how the Township would enforce decommissioning; Attorney Need indicated performance guarantees/financial assurance would allow the Township to act if the owner fails to perform, and the group acknowledged the scale of bonding likely required.

The conversation returned to electrical impacts and community concerns such as rate effects and reliability, including potential brownouts. Supervisor Davis asked whether the Township could require DTE evaluation data or impose standards addressing service impacts.

Ms. Bahm noted electric utility regulation is largely state controlled, while Attorney Need suggested the ordinance can require utilities to be adequate to support approved uses, though additional conditions may face preemption challenges. The group agreed it is appropriate to attempt to require information and include standards where defensible, recognizing the novelty of the issue and limited long-term impact data.

Community benefit concepts were discussed. Supervisor Davis asked how to address community benefit narratives, anticipated revenue, local jobs, and broader impacts.

Ms. Upfal advised that zoning decisions must be tied to public health, safety, and welfare, and community benefit provisions typically exist as separate, general-code ordinances rather than zoning language.

Ms. Bahm noted parallels to prior marijuana ordinance experiences where promised benefits did not materialize as expected, and Attorney Need stated the Township would need to research how other communities structure community benefit provisions.

Ms. Upfal raised a broader ordinance issue unrelated solely to data centers: Springfield's current height limitations (approximately 28.5 feet across districts) may be overly restrictive and could limit modern industrial/manufacturing development.

Ms. Bahm agreed that similar communities have revised industrial height standards to support newer uses, potentially with additional setbacks to protect adjacent residential areas.

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Ms. Upfal noted Springfield's lack of widespread water/sewer can attract outdoor storage uses and that ordinance flexibility may help attract higher-quality development.

The group discussed parking standards as a practical operational concern, including ensuring sufficient parking distribution across large sites and addressing contractor and construction parking. Ms. Upfal stated she did not want excessive parking mandates given low staffing levels, while Supervisor Davis emphasized contractors, maintenance, visitors, and ADA requirements.

Ms. Bahm proposed flexibility through an applicant-submitted parking plan or study rather than strict minimums, and Attorney Need confirmed parking standards can vary by use type.

Safety and fire-related considerations were discussed at length. Supervisor Davis stated from a fire marshal perspective that first responder access, on-site training, life safety hazards, and suppression systems are critical. He noted that large facilities require coordination, remote monitoring, and suppression systems appropriate to sensitive equipment, and raised concerns regarding lithium-ion batteries, thermal runaway, and fuel storage for generators.

Ms. Upfal referenced training guidance presented in a recent webinar and stated she would locate and provide the materials to support Township planning. The group discussed gate placement, apparatus access, and ensuring entry design accommodates emergency vehicles.

Supervisor Davis emphasized that adopted code requirements, particularly the International Fire Code and building code, address many items and noted the Township's current process of updating to newer code editions.

Attorney Need acknowledged codes can lag emerging technology and the Township may still want supplemental standards, while recognizing the fire marshal's authority to require additional measures were justified. The group discussed fuel storage and agreed it is preferable from an environmental standpoint to require above-ground storage where feasible, with secondary containment and applicable state and fire code compliance.

Supervisor Richard L. Davis thanked everyone for their time and participation, noted the Township would proceed with next steps as discussed, and adjourned the meeting.

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