



## **Development Services**

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### **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Christine McLachlan, AICP, Director  
**THROUGH:** Sharon Gilman, County Administrator  
**SUBJECT:** Docket R-26-01 (Data Centers)  
**DATE:** April 7, 2026 Regular BOS Meeting

### **I. BACKGROUND**

This is a staff-initiated text amendment to the Cochise County Zoning Regulations to establish a definition for data centers, require Special Use Authorization in the RU (Rural), GB (General Business), LI (Light Industrial), and HI (Heavy Industrial) zoning districts, and adopt standards governing their siting, development, and operation.

The amendment was initiated in response to the rapid growth of large-scale data centers nationwide and within Arizona. These facilities, driven by increased demand for cloud computing and artificial intelligence technologies, can involve large building footprints, substantial electrical demand, cooling infrastructure, emergency power systems, and heightened security features. Depending on scale and location, such uses may affect water resources, electrical infrastructure, fire protection capacity, transportation networks, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

The Cochise County Zoning Regulations currently do not define data centers as a distinct land use or establish development standards tailored to the operational characteristics of these facilities. In the absence of state-level siting regulations specific to data centers, local zoning authority remains the primary mechanism through which the County can determine where and how such uses may be developed.

This item was first discussed at the January 14, 2026 Planning and Zoning Commission work session and at the February 11, 2026 joint Board of Supervisors and Planning and Zoning Commission meeting to obtain policy direction and feedback. Based on that input, staff prepared the proposed ordinance for formal consideration.

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed amendment at their March 11, 2026 regular meeting. The amendment is intended to establish clear expectations and performance standards prior to the receipt of any specific development applications. Exhibit A reflects the proposed amendments to the Zoning Regulations in strike-through (deletions) and underline (additions).

### **II. SPECIFIC CHANGES**

1. **Definitions (Section 2.03.030)**
    - Adds a new definition for “Data Center” to clearly distinguish the use from accessory server rooms and battery energy storage systems.
    - Clarifies that the definition includes customary cooling, power, and security infrastructure associated with such facilities.
  2. **Use Regulations – Special Use Authorization Required**
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- Amends the following Sections to require Special Use Authorization for Data Centers:
    - 2.15.070 (RU)
    - 2.33.050 (GB)
    - 2.36.050 (LI)
    - 2.39.050 (HI)
  - 3. **New Section 2.51.040 – Data Centers (Site Development Standards)**
    - Establishes intent language recognizing the potential scale and infrastructure demands of Data Centers.
    - Limits the use to approval by Special Use Authorization in the HI, LI, RU, and GB districts.
    - Exempts small, accessory on-site enterprise server facilities (10% or less of a building).
    - Clarifies that off-site transmission, substations, or utility infrastructure remain subject to separate review.
  - 4. **Additional Special Use Application Requirements**
    - Requires supplemental materials addressing:
      - Detailed site plans and equipment layout
      - Operational narrative (cooling systems, generators, hours of operation)
      - Electrical and telecommunication service availability and projected demand
      - Noise analysis (when warranted)
      - Water-Use Plan (including conservation and reclaimed water feasibility)
      - Fire protection and emergency response planning
      - Other site-specific studies proportional to project impacts
  - 5. **Construction Phase Standards**
    - Establishes construction hour limitations.
    - Requires dust control, lighting shielding, traffic management, and maintained emergency access during construction.
  - 6. **Development and Operational Standards**
    - Requires compliance with zoning height and setback requirements, with authority to increase buffering adjacent to residential or rural uses.
    - Establishes screening requirements for equipment yards, cooling infrastructure, and generators.
    - Requires adequate emergency access and fire protection measures proportional to site risk and available services.
  - 7. **Performance Standards**
    - Noise mitigation requirements, including limits on routine generator testing hours.
    - Outdoor lighting standards to minimize glare and spillover.
    - Traffic and delivery limitations if adjacent to residentially used parcels.
    - Utility capacity demonstration requirements.
  - 8. **Water Use Protections**
    - Prohibits routine potable water use for cooling unless non-potable or reclaimed water is demonstrated to be infeasible.
    - Allows conditioning for reclaimed water use, metering, and reporting where appropriate.
  - 9. **Security, Transferability, and Long-Term Site Management**
    - Allows necessary security features while requiring mitigation of visual impacts.
    - Provides that approval runs with the land.
    - Establishes abandonment determination procedures.
    - Requires a Decommissioning and Site Management Plan at building permit stage.
    - Authorizes financial assurance when site-specific features create elevated decommissioning or
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site stabilization risks, and allows such assurance to be used upon a County determination of abandonment.

### **III. Comprehensive Plan Consistency/Staff Recommendation**

Staff finds that the proposed text amendment is consistent with the Cochise County Comprehensive Plan 2045 (CP2045). The requirement for Special Use Authorization and demonstration of infrastructure and water availability supports Land Use Goal: Smart Growth, Right Places, Policy 4, which directs that high intensity uses be located where water and infrastructure capacity can support them without adverse impacts to domestic wells. The amendment is also consistent with the Category D Purpose, which allows intensive non-residential uses in rural areas only where they can be accommodated by existing or planned infrastructure and reliable water availability. Additionally, the ordinance supports Land Use Goal: Investing in People, Powering Industry, Policy 3, by establishing a clear regulatory framework for evaluating emerging industry sectors while ensuring long-term community benefit and protection of public resources.

For these reasons, staff recommends approval of Docket R26-01 as outlined in Exhibit A.

### **IV. Public Comment**

Staff received numerous written comments from residents regarding the proposed data center regulations. Most comments expressed general opposition to data center development in Cochise County rather than addressing the specific provisions of the proposed ordinance.

Common concerns included groundwater availability, electrical demand, environmental impacts, and compatibility with the County's rural character. Some comments recommended additional regulatory measures or further study.

While many comments opposed the data center use itself, staff did not receive comments opposing the establishment of regulations. The proposed ordinance is intended to provide a framework to evaluate and regulate such uses through the Special Use Authorization process. Comments received prior to the Board of Supervisors cut-off date have been included with this item.

### **V. Planning and Zoning Commission Recommendation**

The Planning and Zoning Commission conducted a public hearing on the proposed amendment at their March 11, 2026 meeting and unanimously voted (9-0) to recommend approval of Docket R26-01 to the Board of Supervisors.

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