

**Testimony of the Montgomery County Civic Federation
Expedited Bills 19-26 and 24-26—Data Center Moratoriums
Montgomery County Council Public Hearing
June 16, 2026**

Good afternoon, Council President Fani-González and members of the County Council. My name is Cheryl Gannon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Montgomery County Civic Federation is an umbrella organization of civic associations across the county. Our member associations work hard every day to help residents understand and respond to land-use, transportation, environmental, infrastructure and public-safety decisions that affect their neighborhoods. Again and again, our communities find themselves struggling to evaluate major proposals only after those proposals are already well advanced.

That is why the Montgomery County Civic Federation supports a meaningful pause in data center permitting and urges the Council to enact Expedited Bill 24-26, establishing a two-year moratorium. We thank Councilmember Jawando for introducing this important bill. A significant pause is needed to deal with very complex issues, some of which are under the purview of state or federal regulators and get this right for the future of the county.

We are unable to support Bill 19-26 for two reasons. First, six months is not enough time to develop a complete regulatory framework, obtain the necessary technical information, engage affected communities and ensure that County residents are protected from costs and negative impacts. One example is that the cost allocations of electrical infrastructure and upgrades and requires coordination with state and federal regulators. The County must coordinate with state and regional agencies, evaluate technical studies, develop zoning and environmental standards, determine fiscal and utility impacts, create an acceptable tax rate for these sites which may also require state action and provide communities with a meaningful opportunity to participate.

Second, the bill carves out an exception for the Dickerson site, which is already proceeding even though we do not have a regulatory or permitting structure here for data centers. The site is proceeding in the Planning department process under a structure designed for cable communications. We need to first establish a structure for data centers before proceeding. We also ask that the Council ask the Planning Department to halt consideration of the Dickerson site until a regulatory structure is in place. A two-year moratorium does not mean rejecting data centers permanently. It means taking the time necessary to determine where, at what scale and under what enforceable conditions they may be appropriate.

This is not a position against technology or economic development. Data centers support essential digital services and with appropriate regulations and tax structure, they may provide tax revenue and opportunities to reuse previously developed industrial land.

But the newest hyperscale and artificial-intelligence data centers are not ordinary commercial buildings. They are large industrial facilities whose demands for electricity, water, cooling, backup power and supporting infrastructure can affect not only the immediate community but residents and ratepayers throughout Montgomery County.

The proposed data-center campus at the former Dickerson station makes these concerns especially urgent. Publicly available materials describe a campus with a potential electrical capacity of approximately 360 megawatts, together with substations, backup generators, battery storage, warehouses and cooling infrastructure near the Potomac River, Agricultural Reserve and C&O Canal.

A project of this scale could contribute to regional transmission and generation needs, utility costs, emergency-response demands, environmental impacts and infrastructure decisions affecting residents far beyond the site itself. It could also establish a precedent for how data centers are reviewed elsewhere in Montgomery County.

Yet the County still lacks publicly available, independently reviewed answers to fundamental questions.

How much electricity would the campus use at full buildout? What transmission, generation and substation improvements would be required? Who would pay for them? How would the County ensure that residential and small-business customers are not required to subsidize private development through higher electric bills? It is not enough to say we will require data centers to pay the costs. That result will require working with federal and state regulators. It cannot be done by County Council fiat.

How much Potomac River water would be withdrawn during ordinary operations and during the hottest and driest periods? How much would be consumed rather than returned? What protections would govern discharge temperature, chemicals and drought operations? Once through cooling should be banned, but refrigeration is required to prevent changes in water temperature, and the refrigeration will increase electrical use. There are many such tradeoffs to be considered.

How many diesel generators or other forms of backup generation would be installed? What would be the cumulative effects on air quality, greenhouse-gas emissions and noise?

What risks would be created by a very large battery-energy-storage facility? Does Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service have the specialized equipment, training and staffing necessary to respond? Who would pay for that additional capacity?

What would be the net fiscal benefit to the County after tax incentives, infrastructure costs, emergency services, environmental monitoring and other public expenses are considered?

These questions matter to civic associations because they reflect a broader concern that communities often face: major projects are presented as economic opportunities before the full public costs, tradeoffs and long-term effects have been disclosed.

Montgomery County should not approve a new class of intensive industrial development first and develop the governing rules afterward. Residents and civic associations need access to clear, understandable information early enough to influence decisions—not after essential approvals have been obtained.

A campus drawing hundreds of megawatts of electricity, potentially using river water and relying on extensive backup-power and battery systems requires its own clear definition and standards.

Those standards should address, at a minimum:

- total and peak electricity demand;
- responsibility for grid and infrastructure costs;
- water withdrawal, consumption, discharge and drought curtailment;
- air emissions and backup generation;
- continuous, low-frequency and nighttime noise;
- battery-storage and fire-safety risks;
- setbacks from homes, schools, parks and environmentally sensitive areas;
- protection of forests, agricultural land and historic resources;
- construction traffic and road damage;
- emergency-response costs;
- tax rates and incentives and net fiscal benefits;
- ongoing monitoring and public reporting; and
- decommissioning requirements and financial assurance.

The Civic Federation is particularly concerned that standards must be based on cumulative impacts, not evaluated one facility or one component at a time. The cumulative effects on electricity demand, transmission infrastructure, water resources, air quality, noise, roads and public services could be far greater than the impact of any single site. We know for example that there is a large privately owned parcel in Germantown that is being marketed as a potential data center site.

Claims that information is proprietary should not prevent disclosure of a project's resource consumption, environmental effects, infrastructure demands, public costs or compliance with County standards.

The Council should establish a transparent process involving civic and community associations, environmental and agricultural organizations, ratepayer advocates, public-safety officials, utility and water agencies, technical experts and industry representatives.

Montgomery County should welcome responsible innovation. But responsible innovation requires complete information, clear rules, meaningful community participation and assurance that private development will not transfer its costs and risks to residents.

The fundamental principle should be simple: establish the protections first, and issue permits afterward.

For these reasons, the Montgomery County Civic Federation urges the Council to enact Bill 24-26 and ensure that the moratorium applies to pending as well as future data-center proposals.

Thank you for your consideration.