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## AS LAWMAKERS MULL BILLS, PA. COMMUNITY PUSHBACK ON DATA CENTERS IS WIDESPREAD



**By Ford Turner,  
PA Reporter,  
The Center Square**

As crowds gather again and again in local meeting rooms around the state to grapple with the potential impacts of proposed data centers, a slew of potentially relevant bills awaits action by state lawmakers in Harrisburg.

Currently, there are no comprehensive regulations in state law specific to data centers. Meanwhile, the local public meetings often filled with questions and aggravation.

"We are seeing public opposition across the political spectrum," said Ginny Marcille-Kerslake of Chester County, senior organizer for the advocacy nonprofit Food & Water Watch. In some places, she said, huge projects are being "fast-tracked" by the state when local approvals have not been received.

A bill that was referred in April to the House Energy Committee, sponsored by Republican Rep. Craig Williams of Delaware County, would codify in state law provisions of agreements recently signed by Gov. Josh Shapiro, and also by President Donald Trump. Those include the president's "Ratepayer Protection Pledge" issued by proclamation last month.

The bill that has received the most attention recently is a new set of data center rules that passed the House in a feisty debate and now is awaiting action in a Senate committee where Sen. Lisa Boscola of Northampton County is the top Democrat.

Boscola said on Friday there is urgency to get legislation in place.

"Data centers are necessary in our Commonwealth. This is the future. They are coming," said Boscola, who wants to see local communities where data centers are built benefit from an impact fee or a "community benefit agreement."

At least two public meetings related to high-profile data center pitches took place Thursday evening. One was in Montgomery County and the other in Lower Mount Bethel Township in Northampton County.

At the latter meeting, developers behind a

proposed 1.2GW data center held a town hall to address community concerns and gather feedback for the development process.

Much of that feedback was clear and consistent: residents want to preserve the area's rural, agricultural, and river-based character, and they don't want it. Several said they would rather pay higher taxes than see a data center built on what is now farmland.

The developers, J.G. Petrucci Company and Peron Development, highlighted the project's potential benefits, including millions of dollars in tax revenue. Residents, however, voiced concerns over potential noise, light pollution, and environmental impacts, particularly on local wildlife and water resources.

Meanwhile, in Limerick Township in Montgomery County, the Planning Commission held a three hours-plus meeting in a school auditorium in connection with a proposal to build a campus of eight two-story data center buildings with about 2.8 million square feet of space.

Ultimately, the commission voted to recommend to township commissioners that they not consider the "conditional use" needed for the proposal unless a laundry list of conditions are met. Those include a "closed loop" system for cooling; additional analysis of vibration; a requirement that the "hum will not be perceptible" outside the boundary of the data center property; and an annual sound study.

State Sen. Katie Muth of Montgomery County said money is a top motivator for many people with prominent voices in the data center conversation, including big tech companies, developers, and politicians.

"There is this rush to buy land and get approvals that doesn't correspond" to the actual needs of the projects, Muth said.

Boscola is against the concept of a moratorium on data center development. Muth is all for it and plans to submit a bill laying out a three-year moratorium on "hyper-scale data center development."

On Friday, she said, "The only honest entity is the general public, coming out with their concerns."

*Lauren Jessop contributed to this report.*