Data Centers: A Plain-Language Toolkit for Ohio Communities

Part of the OEDA Data Center Resources for Ohio Communities.

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OHIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

OML OHIO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
Partnering for Stronger Cities and Villages

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE OHIO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

CREATED AND MAINTAINED BY OEDA
NUMBERED TO MATCH THE
OHIO DATA CENTER REFERENCE GUIDE

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About this Toolkit

What this is. Nine short units, nine resident questions, and ten situation playbooks for local elected officials, school board members, community leaders, and the economic development professionals who share it with them. Behind it sits the Ohio Data Center Reference Guide, the working manual for the economic development professional who facilitates the process, numbered to match: Guide Part 1 goes deeper on Unit 1, Part 5 on Unit 5, and so on through all nine; anyone can read either. This Toolkit explains how things work and gives you one number to hold onto. The Guide has the rest of the numbers, the sources, and the detail of what other Ohio communities did.

Where OEDA stands. OEDA takes no position on whether any community should host a data center. OEDA does take the position that communities decide better when a local economic development professional facilitates the process and when the people who have to decide get the best information available at the time the decision is theirs to make. Where the evidence is contested, and on data centers it often is, this resource does three things: it shows what supporters say and what critics say, drawn from testimony, published research, and Ohio practice; it labels the kind of evidence behind each claim (measured, modeled, forecast, industry-funded, advocacy) in the Reference Guide; and it tells you what to ask about the specific project in front of you, because a statewide average never answers a local question. You won't see a recommendation. And nothing here is legal, tax, engineering, or utility advice; every community should consult its own counsel and advisors.

Where it came from. JobsOhio compiled the underlying reference guide at the request of the Ohio General Assembly's Select Committee on Data Centers. OEDA created this Toolkit, adapted and revised the Reference Guide, and maintains both. The Ohio Municipal League, the statewide association of Ohio's cities and villages and OEDA's partner on this resource, reviewed and commented on the drafts. Staff of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio and county-level practitioners reviewed drafts of this Toolkit and provided comments; review does not constitute endorsement of the Toolkit or of any position on data center development. Staff of other statewide associations of Ohio's local officials are reviewing it as well, and each association's role will be acknowledged here as it confirms it.

OEDA is the association of Ohio's economic development professionals, and its members include the local and regional organizations that field these projects, including some named in these pages. That is why the practitioner's role is written in rather than hidden, and why every contested question shows both sides. For this edition OEDA also read the complete written record of the Select Committee's five hearings, 196 documents from state agencies, the grid operator, utilities, operators, local governments, residents, and advocacy groups on every side, and incorporated it throughout; anything drawn from testimony is attributed to the witness. *Last reviewed: September 30, 2026.*

A living document. This is a first edition, released so that communities facing decisions now have it. It will be revised and expanded: the Ohio examples will grow as communities agree to share their experience, a Template Library is being assembled, every dated figure will be refreshed on a schedule, and the associations reviewing it will shape the next edition. Where OEDA has not been able to confirm a figure independently, the text says where it came from. If you find an error, a gap, or a better source, tell Mike Brice, OEDA's Marketing & Engagement Manager, at mbrice@ohioeda.com.

TOOLKIT

Start where you are

Read the units. They're short, and everything after them assumes you have. Then pick your playbook.

Who are you? A township, a village or city, a county, or a school district. This decides what you can zone, what you can tax or exempt, what rights you hold when someone else grants an exemption, and whether a project can be moved out from under you. Unit 5 sorts it out. Playbook I is written for townships without zoning. Playbook J is written for school boards.

Do you have an economic development professional? Most Ohio counties and many cities do, on staff or through a private nonprofit development corporation, port authority, or chamber. If you do, they're probably already fielding the inquiry and should be reading the Reference Guide alongside this. If you don't, Unit 5 tells you what that role does and how to find who covers your area.

Has anyone contacted you about a data center? No: read the units, then Unit 9, then Playbook I or J if either is yours. Yes: read the units, then the playbook that matches your situation. If a decision is on your agenda within weeks, read Unit 5 and your playbook first and come back for the rest.

How the resources fit together. Four pieces. This **Toolkit**: the units and playbooks, for the people who decide. The **Reference Guide**: a separate document, numbered to match, with the evidence, sources, statutes, and a practitioner playbook for each situation, for the economic development professional and the advisors working with them. The **Template Library**, in development: a collection of documents, not a chapter of either, that will hold the Ohio and peer community ordinances, agreements, NDAs, FAQs, and other materials the playbooks describe, each marked public, shared with permission, or an OEDA model; nothing will be republished without its owner's consent. And a **Glossary**, which lives in the Guide and defines every term used in either document. Every page here ends with what it means for you and a "go deeper" link into the Guide.

TOOLKIT

The Units

Nine short units, in order. Read them all once; everything after them assumes you have.

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UNIT 1

What a data center actually is

A data center is a building full of computers. They store information and run the software behind cloud services, websites, streaming, business applications, and artificial intelligence. They run 24 hours a day, need constant electricity, and give off heat that has to be removed.

The building matters: the investment is in it, the jobs are in it, and it's what your residents will see. It's also the part people understand best. What's easy to miss, and what drives most of what a data center needs from a community and does to it, is what surrounds the building: the substation and power lines, the cooling equipment and any water it uses, the backup generators, the fiber, and the trucks during construction. Two buildings the same size can have completely different utility needs and completely different effects depending on what's inside and how it's cooled.

How big, in square feet. A single hyperscale building is roughly the size of a large distribution center, several hundred thousand square feet, and a campus is several of them on hundreds of acres. A colocation building runs from tens of thousands to a few hundred thousand square feet. An edge facility can be a few thousand. These are typical ranges from Virginia's 2024 legislative audit and industry reporting, not limits (Guide Part 1). So from the road, a data center looks like a warehouse. The difference is what it draws.

How big, in megawatts. The industry measures data centers by electricity, not floor area, because that's what determines their footprint on the community. One number to hold onto: a town of 10,000 people uses about 10 megawatts (MW). A small data center uses 5 to 20 MW. A large one, 100 or more. A hyperscale campus can reach 1,000 MW. When someone says 300 MW, hear "30 towns the size of ours." For comparison with industry you already know: a typical large manufacturing plant draws somewhere in the tens of megawatts, a steel mill's electric arc furnace peaks near 100, and Intel's New Albany semiconductor plant, which is not typical of anything, is set up for about 500. These comparisons are rough figures from public reporting, not engineering data for any particular plant (Guide Part 1). A data center differs from all of them in one way: it runs near full power all day, every day, not in shifts or cycles.

The four types. Hyperscale (one giant company, multi-building campus). Colocation (one operator, many tenants; load can change over time). Enterprise (a company runs its own; rare

now). Edge (small, near users). Most of what's coming to Ohio is hyperscale. The company is a "hyperscaler."

One more kind, worth knowing by name. Cryptocurrency mining and other "flexible" computing sites are in Ohio too: MARA told the Select Committee it operates in Hannibal, Hopedale, and Findlay; Bitdeer is the company behind the Shalersville proposal; Standard Power runs a computing and blockchain campus on a former paper mill site in Coshocton. They employ fewer people than a hyperscale campus, are often cooled by air or by immersing the equipment in fluid rather than by water, and can power down within minutes when the grid is stressed, which their operators present as a benefit. Ask any developer which kind of load this is, firm or flexible, and whether any commitment to curtail is in writing.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Ask for square footage and acreage, because that's what your residents will picture. Then ask for megawatts at opening and at full buildout, because that's what determines everything else in this Toolkit. A project that opens at 50 MW and is designed for 500 is a 500 MW project. And ask what kind of computing it is: round-the-clock load, or flexible load that can curtail.

Go deeper: Guide Part 1.

UNIT 2

Why they're coming to Ohio, and why now

Three things happened at once. Artificial intelligence created a sudden need for far more computing. Northern Virginia, which used to absorb data centers, ran short of power and land. And Ohio had what developers look for: available electricity, land, fiber, water, a proven cluster in Central Ohio, and a state sales tax exemption on data center equipment, which the state stopped accepting new applications for in June 2026 while existing agreements continue.

Is this all AI? No. Basic cloud computing is still the biggest share of what data centers do. Streaming, online banking, your county's records system, your kids' school software: all of it runs in these buildings. AI is the accelerant, not the whole fire. Data centers do two kinds of AI work, and the difference helps explain why Ohio. "Training" builds an AI model; it uses enormous blocks of power and can sit anywhere with electricity and land, which is what Ohio offers. "Inference" runs the finished model when someone uses it; it prefers to be near people. Ohio is getting both, but the very large campuses are mostly built for the first. Nationally, data centers used about 4 percent of U.S. electricity in 2023 and are forecast at roughly 7 to 12 percent by 2028. A lot. Not most of the grid.

Ohio today. The counts differ because the definitions do. The Pew Research Center, working from Data Center Map's listings as of February 2026, counts 166 operating data centers in Ohio and 57 planned, which puts Ohio fourth by operating count and sixth by total; the Ohio Chamber of Commerce says more than 200 and calls Ohio fifth; a University of Virginia study that leaves out data centers housed inside other buildings counts 101 operating and 77 planned. The University of Virginia study finds Ohio has the largest planned pipeline in the Great Lakes, concentrated in Licking and Franklin counties, and by any of these counts a quarter to nearly half of Ohio's eventual footprint hasn't been built. About 9 percent of Ohio's data centers are owned by Ohio companies.

What "$40 billion of investment" means. That figure comes from an Ohio Chamber of Commerce study and counts investment companies have announced, not spending anyone has audited. A typical data center dollar breaks down as about 6 percent land, 20 percent construction, 68 percent computer and cooling equipment, and 6 percent other. The construction fifth is what your local economy sees during the build. The equipment two-thirds is mostly manufactured elsewhere, but when it's installed in Ohio it's normally subject to Ohio

sales and use tax, state and county, where it's installed. That's the tax the state exemption waives (Unit 7).

Why proposals arrive fast. A hyperscale building takes 1 to 2 years to build. The power plants and lines to serve it take 4 to 7. Developers are racing to lock down sites that already have capacity. That's why the first contact may be a land agent under a code name.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Data centers follow power, fiber, and water more than highways. If your community has a substation with spare capacity or a transmission line nearby, a fiber route, a water system with room, and a large parcel that's zoned or could be, you're on someone's list whether or not anyone has called. Unit 9 is what to do about that.

Go deeper: Guide Part 2.

UNIT 3

How electricity works, for this purpose only

Five things explain the most contested question in every data center debate: will this raise my constituents' bills?

1. Three systems, often different owners. Generation makes power. Transmission moves it long distances on high-voltage lines. Distribution delivers it locally through your utility's poles and wires. A substation is where transmission voltage is stepped down for distribution; every large data center needs one on or near the site. A big data center can require upgrades to all three systems.

2. Who serves the parcel. Ohio has four investor-owned utilities (AEP Ohio, FirstEnergy, AES Ohio, and Duke Energy Ohio) regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, or PUCO, the state agency that approves their rates and terms of service. It also has 80 municipal electric systems answering to their councils (the Ohio Municipal Electric Association's count) and 25 electric cooperatives answering to member-elected boards, serving parts of 77 counties (the count of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives, their statewide association). Whichever serves the parcel is obligated to serve a customer that meets its rules. Local government doesn't decide whether a data center gets power. The utility and its regulator do.

3. PJM's auction is in every bill. Ohio is part of PJM, the grid operator for all or part of 13 states and the District of Columbia. A grid operator runs the high-voltage transmission system and the wholesale electricity market across its territory under federal regulation; it doesn't own power plants or serve customers. One of its jobs is making sure there's enough supply for the hottest and coldest days three years out. To do that, every utility must buy "capacity," a standby promise from power plants to be available at peak, to cover its share of projected demand, and PJM sets the price for that promise in an annual auction. When projected demand rises faster than plants get built, the price rises. It went up nearly tenfold in the auction covering June 2025 to May 2026, and Ohio residential bills rose an estimated 10 to 15 percent from that alone. Data centers are the largest driver of the demand forecast. So: data centers raise projected demand across the 13 states, that raises the capacity price, and the capacity price is in your constituents' bills now, whether the data center lands in your county or the next one.

One more thing residents will ask, because several told the Select Committee they had heard the opposite: in a grid emergency, who gets cut first? PJM told the Committee it intends to require

data centers that don't supply their own generation to move to backup before residential load is shed; the rule was filed with federal regulators in August 2026, would apply to loads starting service after June 2027, and awaited approval as of September. Ask your utility where this customer would sit. And note what curtailment means on the ground: a data center that is cut switches to its backup generators (8.9).

4. "Who pays for the new wires" is the local question. A data center needs a substation and often new transmission. Under traditional rules those costs spread across all customers, and if the data center never shows up, everyone pays for unused wires. In 2025 PUCO approved a tariff for AEP Ohio's territory (a tariff is a utility's filed terms of service, including special terms for very large customers) that makes large data centers pay for a minimum share of the power they request whether they use it or not. That tariff applies only to AEP Ohio customers. In May 2026 PUCO directed FirstEnergy's Ohio utilities to create a separate data center tariff as well, and in July AES Ohio filed a rate settlement that includes one, awaiting PUCO's order; what Duke Energy Ohio requires, and what municipal and cooperative systems do instead through their contracts, varies, and your utility is the place to ask where it stands.

Data centers are not yet their own customer class in Ohio; PUCO's chair told the Select Committee they sit in the industrial or commercial class, and how regional costs are divided among classes is being reexamined as the utilities' current rate plans expire. Consumer advocates say the protections don't go far enough. Operators say they intend to pay their own way; Google, AWS, Microsoft, and QTS each said so to the Committee, by different mechanisms. Live dispute.

5. On-site power changes who decides. Some projects build their own generation on site: gas turbines and engines, fuel cells, batteries, and, in other states, proposals for small nuclear. There's an upside: it relieves the grid, and if a third party owns the plant, it's taxed as public utility property (New Albany told the Select Committee that one seven-acre plant owned by a third party is expected to generate $12 million in revenue shared among the schools, the township, and the county; the testimony didn't say over what period). The law behind most of this is House Bill 15 (2025), which lets a large customer, or a third party serving it, own generation on land the customer owns or controls, delivered without the utility's wires. Vantage told the Select Committee it is "a constructive framework"; a resident told the Committee it lets projects "bypass local zoning review"; PUCO's chair described it as adding flexibility where the plant doesn't sit on or next to the customer's site, which means the plant serving a data center may not be on the parcel, or under the zoning, of the data center it serves. Read it with counsel.

The catch: a plant of 50 MW or more is sited by the Ohio Power Siting Board, not your zoning. In New Albany, gas plants of 200 MW and 140 MW were approved in 2025 to serve data center campuses inside the city's business park, close enough to matter for noise, emissions, and appearance. The city had written detailed data center standards, but the setbacks, screening, noise, and location of the plants were the state board's to decide. New Albany told the Select Committee it worked with the gas companies on its standards before and during the Board's process and formally intervened so the Board knew its preferences, and that it has been pleased with the result so far.

Norwich Township, in Franklin County, provides fire protection to a large data center campus in the Hilliard area; when a fuel-cell power plant went through permitting for that campus, the township's fire department was not a notified party, so the people who would respond to an emergency there learned about the plant after the fact. Hilliard residents told the Committee the same plant was approved with no public hearing they knew of. Johnstown's mayor, on the other side of the ledger, described on-site fuel cells at the Cologix campus there under a 15-year commitment as taking grid pressure off her community. All of these accounts come from testimony to the Select Committee (Guide Part 5.7).

If a proposal includes on-site generation, part of it has left your jurisdiction, and your emergency services may not be in the loop unless you put them there. The practical step, since nobody is required to tell you: someone in your government watches the OPSB docket and Ohio EPA's permit notices for your jurisdiction.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Two questions, both for your economic development professional to put to the utility and the developer. First: has the project signed an electric service agreement, or is it in a study queue? A study means the utility is analyzing whether and how it could serve the load and at what cost, and the developer is one of many in line. A signed agreement is a binding contract with capacity, a timeline, and payment obligations. It's the single best indicator of whether a project is real. Second: does the project include on-site generation of 50 MW or more? If so, ask what OPSB will decide instead of you, who will own the plant (which determines whether it's taxed locally), where it will sit, and whether your fire department is a party to the review.

Go deeper: Guide Part 3.

UNIT 4

How cooling and water work

Computers make heat. Getting rid of it is a trade between water and electricity.

Evaporative cooling evaporates water to carry heat away: less electricity, more water. **Closed systems** recirculate fluid and use fans or chillers: less water, more electricity. Most facilities mix the two, and the mix changes with weather and workload. Some new Central Ohio projects use no more water than an office building. Older designs can use far more. "Closed loop" describes what happens inside the building; a facility can recirculate inside while an evaporative tower outside still consumes water.

How much is that, one comparison. A typical data center building in Virginia used about as much water in a year as 60 homes. The biggest used as much as 2,200 homes. Intel's New Albany plant projects about 16,000 homes' worth, with a reclamation facility to recycle part of it. A large factory or food processor in your county may already draw at these scales, and Ohio's paper mills and processors have for a century. Water use like this is not new. What's new is that people are asking about it, and that some of the communities being asked have never had an industrial water customer before.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Water for a data center works the way water for any large industrial customer works. The water provider, which may be your municipal system, a county or regional district, or a private company, decides whether it has the capacity and whether it wants the customer. Your economic development professional's role is to connect the developer with the provider's engineers and facilitate that conversation, not to evaluate cooling designs.

The questions the conversation has to answer are these. What does the project need, on an average day and on the hottest day? Water and sewer plants are built with room to grow, and a customer this size uses up room; how much of the system's spare capacity does this take, and what does giving it up mean for other growth? Is the demand large enough to require plant or main upgrades, and if so, who pays? Ordinary industrial customers pay tap and capacity fees but aren't asked to fund a plant expansion, so a project that would need one is a project where the terms have to be set before the connection is made.

If the answers are good, this is an ordinary industrial connection. If they aren't, the time to set a cap, metering, and cost responsibility is now. And read the water agreement for who is bound to what: an agreement that obligates the community to deliver capacity to the site boundary while leaving the developer's notice of the next phase non-binding puts the planning risk on the public side, and that term can be negotiated before signing.

Go deeper: Guide Part 4.

UNIT 5

Who has the pen

Sometimes local officials underestimate how much they control. The catch: it depends on who you are, and it can be moved. The chair of Norwich Township's trustees put the division to the Select Committee in three sentences: "Cities may exercise zoning authority. Townships may provide fire and emergency services. Counties may oversee emergency management and infrastructure."

City or village. Home rule, under Article XVIII of the Ohio Constitution. Your zoning, planning commission, and council control land use. You can grant or refuse rezoning, attach conditions, offer or withhold property tax exemptions (most people say abatements; the words are used interchangeably here), and sign agreements. The strongest position in Ohio.

One distinction to keep straight: a rezoning is a legislative act of council, which is why residents can take it to referendum where your charter or state law allows; a conditional use or variance is an administrative decision by the planning commission or board of zoning appeals under the standards already in your code, challenged in court rather than at the ballot. Which kind of decision is in front of you changes who decides, what they may consider, and how it can be undone; your counsel can tell you which routes apply under your charter and R.C. Chapters 731 and 2506.

Two things narrow the referendum route, and residents know both. The 2025 state budget raised the signatures needed for a municipal referendum from 10 to 35 percent of the votes cast for governor, effective September 30, 2025 (R.C. 731.29; a bill to lower it was introduced in August 2026). And an ordinance passed as an emergency takes effect at once and is generally not subject to referendum at all. Emergency clauses are a routine tool for economic development legislation, which is exactly why residents notice them on a data center: a Sidney organizer told the Select Committee the site there was annexed and rezoned "through emergency measures," and a Genoa Township trustee, testifying individually, asked the General Assembly to bar emergency measures for any data center approval. Whether an emergency clause always keeps a measure off the ballot is now a live question (in August 2026 the Ohio Supreme Court held that Ashville's emergency resolution did not block a referendum there), and on a contested data center approval the record shows an emergency measure producing a lawsuit or a ballot campaign instead. OEDA takes no position on the clause; counsel should walk you through it.

Township. You may zone unincorporated land only if your voters approved zoning, and many townships have partial zoning or none. Adopting zoning takes months to years; a developer's timeline is usually much faster. Where you do zone, the same legislative-versus-administrative distinction applies: a zoning amendment by the trustees can be referred to the voters (R.C. 519.12; since September 2025 that takes signatures equal to 35 percent of the votes cast for governor, up from 15), while a conditional use decided by your board of zoning appeals cannot.

On incentives you have more than most trustees think: a county can't create an Enterprise Zone in your township, or sign an EZ agreement there, without your board's consent, which in practice usually means a resolution of the trustees, and if you've adopted limited home rule you can create your own Community Reinvestment Area.

Your vulnerability is annexation into a neighboring city or village, which moves the parcel under the municipality's zoning and authority entirely. Your answers to that are formal agreements with the municipality. A Cooperative Economic Development Agreement (CEDA) can allow annexation, or the extension of municipal services without it, while the township keeps a defined share of the revenue. A Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) leaves the land in the township, lets a district board levy the municipality's income tax within the district, and shares that revenue among the parties; forming one takes a petition signed by a majority of the property owners and a majority of the businesses in the district, public hearings in both governments, and months, not weeks (R.C. 715.72). A plain development agreement between the township and the city can also set payments. New Albany and its three townships have

operated one of the state's largest business parks under annexation agreements for years, and they're common across Ohio. Unzoned township: Playbook I. Annexation: Playbook F.

County. You may zone unincorporated land where voters approved it (most haven't). Commissioners can create CRAs and Enterprise Zones in unincorporated territory (EZs with township consent; whether a county CRA in a township requires the trustees' consent is a question to put to counsel), can create an Enterprise Zone inside a city or village with that municipality's consent (R.C. 5709.63), and often hold the incentive pen when a township can't. The auditor puts negotiated payments on the tax list.

Commissioners also hold a piece of annexation: a petition to move land from a township into a municipality is filed with the board, which hears and decides a regular petition under statutory standards and has narrow discretion on the expedited ones once a complete petition and the required consents are in (Playbook F). And the county has a stake in the state equipment exemption most people miss: it waives county sales and use tax as well as the state's, so when equipment is installed in your county without the exemption, part of that tax is yours (Unit 7). One more thing the record says about counties: a Licking County commissioner told the Select Committee that commissioners "often have limited direct siting authority over data centers," yet "are often among the first public officials residents turn to for information, guidance, and accountability." Playbook H is written with that in mind.

Whoever runs the fire department. Often a township or a joint fire district, and often not the government that zones the parcel or the one the state notifies. Norwich Township told the Select Committee that Hilliard was notified of a fuel-cell plant and the township whose fire department covers it was not, and that the applicant declined to share plans the township wanted for emergency preparedness. If you provide fire and EMS to a site you don't zone, put yourself in the process, because nobody is required to.

School district. A party, not a bystander. When a local government exempts property tax on a data center's buildings, the district doesn't receive the tax on those buildings unless an agreement provides for it, and Ohio law gives school boards notice of most exemptions at least 14 days before the vote (R.C. 5709.83) and an approval right when an exemption goes above 75 percent: for a CRA created after 1994, approval is required unless the taxes still paid, plus any payments to the district, reach 25 percent of what would have been owed; for an Enterprise Zone, unless the average over the term stays at or below 60 percent (R.C. 3735.671 and 5709.62 to 5709.63).

Where approval is required, the agreement has to be certified to your board at least 45 business days before the vote, and your board answers at least 14 days before it. Joint vocational school districts receive notice but generally don't vote. A CRA or Enterprise Zone can't reach the land, so land taxes flow to you regardless; a TIF is different, because it can capture the growth in land value too (Unit 7). What an exemption does to your state funding depends on your district's position under the funding formula; your treasurer can model it. Playbook J.

Your economic development professional. Nearly every Ohio county and many cities have one or more: a county or city economic development office, a private nonprofit development corporation, a port authority, a community improvement corporation, or a chamber. This person's job is to take the inquiry, hold the confidential conversation, coordinate the utility and the schools, know the tools, and manage the developer's clock against yours. A private nonprofit can sign a confidentiality agreement and hold the early conversation with fewer of the public records and open meetings constraints a public office works under, which is one reason communities create one; a public office can sign one too, with counsel, and Playbook D explains the difference. The Reference Guide is this person's working manual; the Toolkit is what they'll hand you. If you don't have an economic development professional or organization working for you, your commissioners, your JobsOhio regional network partner, or OEDA can tell you who covers your area.

Who else holds a piece. Your utility and its regulator: whether the project gets power and who pays. The Ohio Power Siting Board: on-site power plants of 50 MW or more and major transmission, including the route of any new high-voltage line serving a project, which may cross townships that see none of the project's revenue (a resident near Sidney told the Committee the utility had informed her neighbors a 138 kV line would run through their rural neighborhood). Residents will also ask why a county or township gets a formal say on a large solar or wind farm under Senate Bill 52 and none on a gas plant serving a data center; the plain answer is that the law treats them differently, and counsel can explain how. The Ohio Tax Credit Authority and the Department of Development: the state sales tax exemption on equipment (paused for new requests since June 2026) and other state incentives.

Your building department, or the state's where you have none, and the fire code officials: how the building gets built and inspected. Ohio EPA: air permits for generators, and water discharge permits where a project discharges directly (most send wastewater to the local sewer plant, whose capacity and rules then govern). Federal agencies: wetlands, waterways, endangered species, and historic resources, which matter when raw land is being developed and are usually settled once a site is zoned and prepared.

Your county or regional planning commission: it doesn't approve the project, but it shapes the comprehensive plan and the code it's judged against, and it's who to call when Unit 9 says "decide what you'd want." Your metropolitan planning organization, where you're in one, plans the region's roads and transit, not land use, and may weigh in on traffic and road impacts. JobsOhio and its regional network partners (Team NEO, Lake to River, Regional Growth Partnership, One Columbus, Dayton Development Coalition, REDI Cincinnati, OhioSE): they connect and advise, often receive the first inquiry, and decide nothing on this list.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Write down who you are, who your economic development professional is, and which decisions are yours. Then write down the ways you could lose decision-making authority, annexation and on-site generation, and the options available to you for each.

Go deeper: Guide Part 5, especially 5.7 and 5.9.

UNIT 6

How a project actually shows up

Not at a council meeting. Usually by phone, months earlier, and not in a fixed order. Every project is different, and what follows describes what usually happens, not what always does. This is also how economic development has long worked, for a factory or a distribution center as much as a data center: companies don't show their cards while they're deciding, and the public learns of a project when it needs a public decision. What's changed is the size of these projects and the attention on them, not the process.

The inquiry. A land agent, a site selection consultant, a developer, or occasionally the company itself asks about a parcel and available power. The call may go to your economic development organization, to your utility's economic development staff, to a JobsOhio regional network partner, to JobsOhio itself for a statewide search, or to a landowner, and often to more than one. It often comes under a project code name, and the company that would occupy the building may not be named or even decided. Some inquiries aren't from a developer at all but from someone trying to lock down land to sell to one later; part of your economic development professional's job is figuring out which you're dealing with. Your site is one of several being screened, and most screened sites are dropped.

The utility conversation. Often happens before anyone local knows. The developer asks the utility to study whether it can serve the load. A study is not a commitment; under AEP Ohio's tariff, less than half of studied requests became signed agreements. Your economic development professional can ask the utility where a project stands; how much a utility will say about a specific customer's request varies, and often the answer comes only with the developer's consent.

Confidentiality. Likely but not universal, and now governed by state law as well as contract. Ohio's confidentiality provisions for economic development information were rewritten twice in 2026; House Bill 479, effective September 23, narrows what public bodies must keep confidential to individualized compensation and payroll information. What a nondisclosure agreement can add on top of that, who signs it, and how it meets public records law are questions for counsel, and OEDA's August 2026 confidentiality webinar materials are available from OEDA. Playbook D.

Land control and due diligence. The developer secures the right to the land, by option or purchase, sometimes through an intermediary, and studies it: title, wetlands, soils, floodplain,

utilities, access. Who owns the land varies as much as everything else: a farmer, an industrial park, the economic development organization, a nonprofit, or the public entity itself. In a township, this is the moment to ask whether the land could be annexed.

How long it takes. For scale, three Ohio timelines. In Erie County, Aligned bought a former bearing plant in Perkins Township in August 2023 and expects its first building to open by the end of 2026. In Van Wert, the first QTS building is projected for 2029 and the full campus for 2032. Microsoft told the Committee in June that site preparation had begun at its Licking County campuses, with vertical construction planned for 2027 and completion by the end of 2029; its own July construction updates put two of those campuses in site preparation through 2026 with the vertical start not yet determined. Three years from land to a first building is fast for this industry; a full campus is a decade of construction, which is the trades' point in Unit 7.

The public ask. At some point the developer needs something only a public body can grant: a rezoning, a property tax exemption, a water or sewer connection, a road, an annexation. Now the project is public, and this is where local influence is greatest. How your economic development professional brings it to you depends on the project; the school district and the county may be in the room already, or the EDO may be socializing the idea with them in parallel. What matters is that they're brought in before the deal is fixed.

The public learns of it. Which can happen at any point above and often does before the public ask. Residents rarely learn of a project by rumor alone; they find it in PJM's large-load filings and utility rate cases, in a farm bought by an LLC nobody recognizes, in an OPSB pre-application notice or an Ohio EPA draft permit. A Clermont County resident told the Select Committee that "Everyday Ohioans should not have to spend their evenings submitting records requests and digging through utility filings just to understand what is happening around their homes." Expect residents to arrive with filing-level facts before your body has been briefed.

When they do, people who weren't part of writing the comprehensive plan or the zoning code, which is most people, feel the decision was made without them. That reaction is legitimate and it's the reason for two things in this Toolkit. Unit 9 is about having the community conversation as planning, before a project, so the plan and the code reflect what residents actually want. Playbook H is about engaging in good faith when a project has landed and residents weren't part of that earlier conversation, because "you should have come to the planning meetings" is true and useless. Communities that have done both report the smoothest processes.

Things to be aware of. No full-buildout number yet. An application for "light industrial" or "warehouse" that doesn't name the use; it may well be one, and you should know. A timeline

that doesn't leave room for your process; you have to move at the speed of business, and you also have to do what your code requires. An unexplained on-site power plant. Nobody on your side coordinating the utility, the schools, and the county.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

The developer has usually been working the site for months before the public ask reaches you, and your economic development professional has usually been in the conversation from the inquiry. If you don't have one, that's the first thing to fix. If you do, get to know how they handle inquiries, confidentiality, and the utility and school conversations, so that when a project reaches your agenda you understand the process it came through and can explain it to residents.

Go deeper: Guide Part 6.

UNIT 7

What the project pays and where it goes

Economic development serves a community's broader purposes: its well-being, the competitiveness of its businesses, its infrastructure, opportunity for its workforce, and responsible use of its land. When a specific project is on the table, though, elected officials weigh two measures most often: jobs and the tax revenue that pays for public services. Investment is the signal of how big a project is; jobs and taxes are what the community gets. Every economic development project is a trade between what the community provides, in exemptions, infrastructure, and services, and what the project provides back. Residential development often doesn't cover the fire, EMS, and road costs it creates; a data center's trade usually runs the other way, with fewer ongoing service demands than housing and a large tax base, though its batteries, fuel, and high-voltage equipment call for fire and emergency planning that small and volunteer departments may not be equipped for. The question is how the revenue is structured.

Jobs, compared. Put three buildings of the same size side by side. A distribution center employs hundreds at around $37,000 a year. A factory employs a few hundred at Ohio's manufacturing average, about $76,500 in 2024 (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages). A data center employs about 50 at around $100,000 or more. So a data center can have fewer jobs than either of the other two, depending on the building and how automated it is; what it has is pay, the highest of the three, so its payroll tends to hold up against a warehouse's, and it arrives with something like ten times the investment.

Fifty permanent jobs at $100,000 is $5 million in payroll, the same as 135 jobs at $37,000; contractors and construction workers are counted separately. For a rural county, 200 permanent jobs at that pay is $20 million a year in payroll, and where the site is in a city or village, or in a JEDD, the municipal income tax that comes with it. A township can't levy an income tax, and a school district income tax, where a district has one, follows where employees live, not where they work. Data centers are a tax-base and payroll-quality project, not a headcount project. That's a legitimate thing for a community to want, and a legitimate thing to decide it doesn't.

Construction is separate. About 1,500 workers at peak per building, 12 to 18 months per building, five years or more for a campus. It's real, and it matters to the trades, who told the Select Committee that a multi-building campus can keep crews working for years. It's also project-based, which is why economic developers evaluating a project count the ongoing jobs and taxes and treat construction as a bonus rather than the basis for a deal. Hold both halves of what the trades said: an electrician's union reported more than 1,000 workers on one Columbus-area campus for eight years and counting, and another reported members traveling in from three regions of the state to build it.

The sales tax on equipment: the state's money, and part of it the county's. Two-thirds of a data center's cost is servers and cooling equipment. When that equipment is installed in Ohio it's normally subject to sales and use tax, state and county, where it's installed. The exemption reaches further than servers: it also covers the electrical gear that powers the facility and the building and construction materials incorporated into it, which a contractor would otherwise pay tax on (R.C. 122.175; Ohio Adm. Code 122:28-1-02).

It waives the state and county shares alike, at a cost the state put at about $1.6 billion in 2025 (the Department of Taxation's figure, reported to the Select Committee by the Department of Development) against the $136 million the Department of Taxation had forecast for that year in its November 2024 Tax Expenditure Report. That $1.6 billion is forgone state revenue; whether the county and transit shares are counted with it is not stated. One reason the forecast missed, offered to the Committee by an Allen County engineer who supports data centers: the exempted purchases aren't a one-time build-out. Servers are replaced every three to five years and AI-class equipment costs an order of magnitude more per rack, so the exemption's value grows with every refresh, and any local estimate that scores it once will miss the same way.

The Governor paused new exemption requests in June 2026 while the Legislature studies it; three companies, Amazon, Meta, and Google, hold statewide agreements under which new sites don't need separate approval, so a new project for one of them may carry the exemption anyway, and the first question is which agreement, if any, covers the project in front of you. It's a state decision. Applications typically carry local support letters, so a request for one may reach your body, and the Department of Development told the Committee it will provide technical assistance to local governments that ask. But a county commissioner is right to notice that the county's share of the tax on equipment installed locally is part of what's being waived, and that without the exemption it would be county revenue. Cities, villages, and townships don't share in it either way.

Real property tax on the buildings is your money, if the project comes, and it lasts longer than the exemption. Cities, counties, and limited home rule townships can exempt property tax on new buildings and improvements through a CRA, and cities and counties through an Enterprise Zone (a county zone can sit in a township with the trustees' consent or in a municipality with its council's consent, R.C. 5709.63), up to 100 percent and up to 15 years, or redirect the new tax through TIF to pay for infrastructure. A CRA or Enterprise Zone never reaches the land, so land taxes keep flowing to every jurisdiction. A TIF is different: it can capture the growth in the land's value along with the buildings and redirect it, though the value the land had before the TIF keeps paying tax as it always did (R.C. 5709.40 defines the exempted "improvement" as the growth in a parcel's assessed value).

Two things to hold onto. First, CRAs come in two kinds: those created before 1994, where the exemption is automatic at the terms set when the area was created, often 100 percent, and those created since, where percentage and term are negotiated project by project, and 100 percent for 15 years is the ceiling, not the norm. Enterprise Zones are negotiated the same way. Second, the buildings outlive the exemption. Industrial buildings pay property tax for decades, and after the exemption term ends the full value is taxable, so the deal's revenue doesn't stop at year 15. New Albany's anchor deal is a 15-year, 100 percent exemption on improvements paired with a minimum payment; what happens in year 16 is a question to put to New Albany.

Structuring the deal, and PILOTs. A property tax exemption doesn't have to be all or nothing. If a community exempts 75 percent and asks for nothing in return, every taxing entity (city, county, schools, library, fire and other levies) receives 25 percent of what it would have. If a community exempts 100 percent and negotiates a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT), that payment usually goes to the schools and the community decides where the rest goes.

The strongest Ohio version of a PILOT is a minimum service payment that attaches to the land, binds any future owner, and is collected like property tax. New Albany sets its minimum at what the land would have generated as office or manufacturing; that's how it answers the "not many jobs" objection. A New Community Authority, which can levy a standing charge on a district and is organized through the municipality or, outside one, the county commissioners, is another mechanism New Albany layers in.

Best practice, whichever way you go, is an adopted incentive policy that says in advance what kinds of projects get what kinds of terms, by type, location, jobs, and tax generation, so you're applying a policy rather than negotiating from zero each time. New Albany told the Select Committee its incentives "are driven by formulas that provide predictable revenue streams by

industry," endorsed by all three of its school districts through compensation agreements; that is the Ohio example of a policy adopted before any deal.

Schools. Taxes on the land's value before the project were flowing to the district before and still are; that's not new money. Growth in land value once the project is built is new money for the district, unless a TIF captures it. What's negotiated is the district's share of the new revenue from improvements: a percentage of the PILOT (Sidney), fixed annual amounts (Marysville), or land value plus a per-building payment (Piqua). Where a city or village grants the exemption and the new payroll at the project, construction workers included, reaches a statutory threshold (a base of $1 million a year for most exemptions and $2 million for a CRA, both indexed), the municipality must negotiate a compensation agreement with the district; if none is reached within six months, it owes the district half of the municipal income tax on the new payroll, less a capped allowance for infrastructure costs (R.C. 5709.82(C) and (D)). The dollar thresholds are indexed each year, so ask counsel for the current figures. Districts hold approval rights above the thresholds noted in Unit 5; joint vocational districts receive notice. Playbook J.

Less than projected. Slower or smaller buildout, equipment refreshed on a different schedule, valuation appeals, a change of owner. Each brings in less than the fiscal analysis showed, which is why minimum payments and obligations that run with the land exist. It's a loss only where the community fronted money: a TIF-backed borrowing, a water line extension, a road. One thing to read for in the agreement itself: whether the investment and job figures are commitments or "good faith estimates" that don't limit the exemption. In a sample Ohio agreement released through public records requests they're estimates, which is why New Albany's protection isn't in the job and investment figures but in a separate clause of the same agreement that conditions the exemption on a minimum annual payment, backed by a lien on the land.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Talk with your economic development professional about a fiscal impact analysis and what it will take. Depending on the deal and the jurisdictions involved, that may be an estimate they can run with the tools they have, or a study you hire a firm to do, which costs money and takes time; large, layered, or contested deals usually need the outside work. Either way, what you want is the same: what the project generates for your jurisdiction, the county, and the school district under the scenarios on the table, over the life of the agreement and after it, and what it would generate with no exemption. An economic impact analysis is a separate and useful thing; it adds the indirect and induced effects, the spending by the people the project employs, to the direct jobs and taxes. Then decide whether the trade is one you're comfortable with and can explain. That judgment is yours. If the community is fronting any money, ask what happens to it if the project builds slower or smaller.

Go deeper: Guide Part 7.

UNIT 8

The nine things residents will ask you

Nine questions you'll hear at the grocery store before you hear them at a meeting. For each: the case supporters make, the case critics make, and what to ask about this project. Both sides draw on testimony to the Ohio General Assembly's Select Committee on Data Centers, which held five hearings in May and June 2026 (the Reference Guide covers who sat on it and what it heard), and on published research and Ohio practice. The Toolkit doesn't referee: each column states that side's case as its own advocates make it, drawn from the record, and OEDA endorses neither.

These nine questions are a framework; several Ohio communities have answered them for their project and posted the answers on a project web page, others have used town halls and handouts, and many of the officials who've been through it say they wish they'd started the conversation sooner. The ninth, on generators and air, was added after OEDA read the full hearing record: residents raised it more than anything but water, and neither the earlier questions nor most Ohio zoning codes had a place for it. Guide Part 8 takes up the same nine questions in the same order, with the sources.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.1 Will my electric bill go up?

Bills have already risen, for reasons that include data centers, and that part doesn't depend on where the data center lands. As Unit 3 explains, the regional capacity price that rose nearly tenfold in 2025 is in every Ohio bill, and it rises with projected demand across 13 states. So the local question isn't whether bills rise. It's whether your community gets the tax revenue and jobs from a project whose regional costs you'll bear either way, and who pays for the local wires.

The case supporters make. The regional cost is sunk whether or not this project comes to your community, so refusing it forgoes the local benefit without avoiding the cost. On the local wires, the tools now exist to protect other customers: in AEP Ohio's territory, the tariff makes large data centers pay for a minimum share of the capacity they request whether they use it or not, so a project that shrinks or never arrives doesn't leave ratepayers with the substation bill. Large customers also spread a utility's fixed costs across a bigger base. Some operators are building their own generation on site, which adds supply rather than drawing it. And the Ohio Manufacturers' Association, no friend of the tariff, told the Committee that "electricity prices were on the rise long before data centers came along."

The case critics make. Data centers are the single largest reason PJM's demand forecast is rising, and every Ohio ratepayer is already paying for that through the capacity price with no say in it. The AEP tariff protects against stranded local wires but does nothing about the regional generation shortage, and it applies only in AEP territory; customers of other utilities and of munis and co-ops don't yet have equivalent protection. If the projected load doesn't materialize, ratepayers across the region will have paid for capacity nobody used; the Ohio Manufacturers' Association's reading of PJM's own market monitor is that forecasts of unbuilt data centers added more than $21 billion to regional capacity costs over three years. The tariff covers the substation and local wires, not the transmission built to serve a project, which OMA told the Committee "can cost up to hundreds of millions of dollars per data center" and is still spread across everyone. The Ohio Consumers' Counsel has urged a "bring your own new generation" or credible supply planning framework for large loads.

Ask about this project. Has it signed an electric service agreement with the utility, or is it in a study queue? Who pays for the substation and any transmission, and does a large-load tariff apply to this utility? Is it bringing its own generation, who will own it, and who regulates it? Who pays for transmission upgrades, this project or all customers? And in a grid emergency, where does this customer sit in the curtailment order, and does its service agreement include interruptible terms?

Go deeper: Unit 3; Guide Part 8.1, then Part 3.2.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.2 Will it drain our water?

If your residents are on wells. Much of rural Ohio drinks groundwater, and the water question rural residents put to the Select Committee most often was about their own well, not the city's plant. "When a data center lowers a neighboring farm's water table and that family's well goes dry, who pays for that?" a Warren County resident asked. A Shalersville trustee testified that the developer there said it didn't intend to drill wells and that the township's counsel believed it couldn't stop them if it did.

Some facts. A facility that draws its own groundwater above 100,000 gallons a day must register with ODNR, and ODNR told the Committee it will investigate conflicts between well owners; below that, and for effects on neighbors, state law says little, which is why the Miami Conservancy District, steward of the sole-source aquifer serving more than a million people in southwest Ohio, asked the Committee for early planning on withdrawals and recharge.

What to ask: does the project draw from its own wells or a public system, and from which aquifer? Has anyone modeled drawdown on neighboring wells? Will nearby private wells get baseline testing before construction? Is a well-monitoring or well-remedy commitment in the agreement? And don't answer a well complaint the way a Lancaster, Ohio resident told the Committee she was answered: "don't worry, maybe you can tap into city water sometime in the near future."

The case supporters make. Water use at this scale isn't new; Ohio has served paper mills, food processors, and chemical plants that draw at these rates for a century, and a large factory in your county may already do so. Newer cooling designs use far less water than the industry's reputation suggests, and some Central Ohio projects use no more than an office building. Virginia, with the largest data center concentration in the country, found data centers used less than half a percent of the state's water. Where water is a concern, a cap and metering can be written into the service agreement, as New Albany does for most of its data centers. Operators told the Committee their newest Ohio designs use little or no water for cooling after the first fill; AWS said its Ohio facilities use cooling water about 3 percent of the year; and Microsoft said that where system improvements are required, it funds them "so the community does not shoulder the cost."

The case critics make. Averages hide the problem. Water systems are built for the hottest day, and a facility that averages modest use can draw several times that on a July afternoon when every household is running sprinklers. "Closed loop" describes the inside of the building; the cooling tower outside may still evaporate large volumes, and the 3 percent of the year AWS describes is the hottest stretch of summer, which is what a water system is sized for. Industry compares its use to golf courses, restaurants, and car washes, and pledges to be "water positive," which is measured globally and adds no capacity to your system.

And the state doesn't track how much municipal water goes to data centers, because it's buried in the system's total; ODNR's director told the Select Committee the state has no visibility into it. The water provider's meter does record it, but the figure usually isn't public, so residents have no way to check what they're told. In Marysville, two facilities reportedly take about a tenth of the city's daily supply.

"Zero water" also describes the cooling design, not what the water system has to build: the utility still has to deliver capacity to the site for fire protection, redundancy, and future phases, and in a sample Ohio water services agreement released through public records requests in 2026, the

host community commits to deliver that capacity to the site boundary at its own expense while the developer's notice of its next phase sits in the non-binding section (Guide Part 4.2).

Ask about this project. What cooling system, and what are the annual and peak gallons, withdrawn and consumed? Will use be metered and reported? Can the water and sewer systems meet peak demand without affecting other customers, and if plant or main upgrades are needed, who pays? Which provisions of the water agreement bind the developer and which bind us, is expansion notice binding, and who pays for storage and mains built for this project? Are the chillers air-cooled or evaporative, and what happens on the hottest day? Is the water figure in the promotional materials written into the agreement, with metering and a remedy (a Shalersville attorney put it to the developer there: "Your promotional materials claim this facility will only use 3,000 gallons of water a day")? If the system expands for this customer, what happens to everyone else's water rate? Ohio has about 4,700 public water systems, a former Consumers' Counsel reminded the Committee, so a small system can't spread the cost the way an electric utility can.

And the water that leaves. Most data centers send wastewater to the local sewer plant; Ohio EPA told the Committee it has issued one direct discharge permit for a data center in the state. So the plant's capacity and its pretreatment rules govern, and the questions are the plant's: how much treatment and collection capacity does this customer take, is that also the room other growth would have used, and has the plant been told what's in the flow, since cooling additives are often proprietary? A village whose plant is small relative to the discharge can ask Ohio EPA to require an Indirect Discharge Permit. Northeast Ohio's regional sewer district told the Committee that not all permits require notice to the sewer utility, so ask whether yours is a notified party. Ohio EPA proposed a general permit for direct discharges in 2026 and withdrew it in July after public comment; direct discharges are permitted one at a time.

Go deeper: Unit 4; Guide Part 8.2, then Part 4.2.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.3 What about noise?

The case supporters make. A data center is quieter than most factories and far quieter than a highway. Cooling equipment produces a steady hum that setbacks, enclosures, and berms handle well; New Albany has reported four noise complaints in 15 years across 40 facilities, and officials from Van Wert who toured it came back comparing it to a home air conditioner. Backup generators run in outages and scheduled tests, and testing hours can be limited by agreement;

AWS told the Committee its mitigation "strives to reduce both low frequency and tonal sound characteristics" and that its generators test briefly at mid-day under local noise and permit rules.

The case critics make. Virginia's auditors documented persistent low-frequency hum that residents near data centers found intrusive and that standard decibel limits don't capture, because those limits weren't written for a constant tone. A campus with dozens of generators testing on a schedule is not silent, and generators may also run during grid emergencies or for demand response, not only in outages and tests. On-site gas plants add a new and louder source. A resident near an operating campus in Lancaster, Ohio told the Committee the hum carries up to two miles; Wilmington's ordinance allows 60 decibels by day and 55 at night at the property line against what a resident described as the area's baseline of 35 to 40; and Virginia's audit found about a third of that state's facilities within 200 feet of homes. Ask what counts as a complaint, because a count depends on the definition. And "we've had no complaints" depends on how far the nearest home is; a facility built into a master-planned park tells you little about one proposed next to a subdivision.

Ask about this project. What noise standard will apply, how will compliance be measured, and against what starting point? Some communities require a baseline sound study at the nearest home before construction, Chandler, Arizona by ordinance and Lancaster, Pennsylvania (not the Ohio city) by contract; whether to require one is your call, and without one there's nothing to measure against. What are generator testing hours, and will the developer commit in writing to low-frequency and tonal limits and daytime-only testing, as AWS described? And go listen: New Albany hosts visiting officials twice a week, and the applicant's own operating site is the better visit if it has one (Shalersville's trustees went to Massillon). Bring a decibel meter, ask to hear the side nearest homes and the side without the berm, and talk to a neighbor.

Go deeper: Guide Part 8.3.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.4 Are we giving up farmland forever?

This depends on the land. If the parcel is already zoned industrial, the farmland question was answered when it was zoned; the community decided then what that land was for. The question is live when the project needs a rezoning or sits in a township with no zoning.

The case supporters make. A few hundred acres of data center pays far more tax than the same acres in corn, and does so without the service demands of housing. Developers prefer land that's already zoned and served, which is usually not prime farmland. Brownfield sites avoid

farmland entirely and reuse infrastructure that already exists: Coshocton's two campuses sit on a retired coal plant and a former paper mill, and Aligned's Perkins Township site in Erie County is a former bearing plant. Statewide, a plumbers' union told the Committee, data centers occupy about 0.015 percent of Ohio's farmland, a figure that is statewide and a year old, and says nothing about your township. And New Albany told the Committee it believes its buildings "can easily be converted into manufacturing and warehouse facilities" if a data center ever leaves (8.8).

The case critics make. Converted farmland and its drainage patterns don't come back, and in the Virginia counties with the most data centers they were a fifth to a third of all development for a decade. Data centers generally provide fewer jobs per acre than many industrial uses, and a community with limited developable land should weigh that against its other objectives for the site. The Ohio Farm Bureau has urged "intentional, transparent planning at all levels of government," and a comprehensive plan that never contemplated this use isn't a mandate for it. A separate question for landowners along the routes: the data center doesn't hold eminent domain, but the utilities that serve it do, and the Farm Bureau told the Committee it is watching proposals to allow "quick take" of property before payment.

Ask about this project. What does our comprehensive plan say this land is for, and does this fit? If we're rezoning, what are we choosing not to have there instead? How far is the site from the nearest school, childcare center, library, and park, not only the nearest home? What happens to the land at end of life is question 8.8.

Go deeper: Guide Part 8.4.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.5 How many jobs, really?

The case supporters make. The permanent jobs are few but they're among the best-paid a community can attract, $100,000 or more, and they come with training partnerships that build a local pipeline, as QTS and Van Wert's Vantage Career Center (no relation to Vantage Data Centers) are doing. QTS itself told the Committee that "on-site operational employment is relatively modest" while the construction pipelines are substantial and long-term, and New Albany said it has been "surprised at how many more jobs are created at hyperscale data centers than originally anticipated." Payroll produces income tax. As Unit 7 shows, a data center's total payroll can match a warehouse with several times the headcount, on ten times the

investment. Then add years of construction work for the trades, who told the Committee their careers are built from a series of so-called temporary jobs.

The case critics make. About 50 jobs per building is the documented norm in Virginia, some of them contractors, and the Ohio filings so far are in the same range. Construction workers often come from outside the county and leave when the building is done; an electricians' local told the Committee its members have traveled to Central Ohio from three other regions of the state for five years to build these campuses. Two-thirds of the investment buys servers and equipment, most of it manufactured outside Ohio; only the construction fifth is spent locally. When a presentation says a campus produces revenue "equivalent to a $178 million payroll," that is an equivalence in income tax receipts, not in households, spending, or students; a factory with that payroll would be a different community. Measured in operating jobs per acre or per dollar of exemption, a data center generally ranks below many industrial uses; a community should compare that measure with its other objectives for the site.

Ask about this project. Permanent employees and contractors at full buildout, separately, with wage ranges, and construction workers at peak and over the build as a third number? Direct jobs, or jobs "supported" (AWS told the Committee its Ohio data centers support 9,500 jobs; the state's filing for the same company counts 1,541 direct)? How many of the permanent staff will be based on site, and how many will live in the county? Who projected the number, and on what basis? A Perry organizer told the Committee that proposals in Perry, Shalersville, Conneaut, and Cleveland's Slavic Village each promised about 200 jobs, which he called a consultant's number; the Van Wert projection reported in the press is also 200. Ask for the basis. Local hire and apprenticeship commitments in writing, for construction and for operations? How will we know? Exemption agreements carry annual reporting to the Tax Incentive Review Council, which can recommend that an agreement be modified or canceled; ask what's reported and what happens if commitments are missed.

Go deeper: Unit 7; Guide Part 8.5, then Part 7.1.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.6 How much will it pay in taxes, and how much are we giving up?

Residents should ask this and often don't. Answer it before they have to.

The case supporters make. Land taxes flow from day one regardless of any exemption, and a well-structured PILOT or minimum payment can deliver millions a year to schools and local government from a single building; the Ohio Business Roundtable told the Select Committee

that New Albany-Plain schools received nearly $2 million from data center land alone, before any negotiated share. The buildings pay full tax after the exemption ends and stand for decades. The state exemption's cost falls on the state and the county, not on the city, village, or township, and it's a large part of why Ohio drew the investment other states wanted; Johnstown's mayor called it "the chip local governments use to get investment to the table and keep it there," and Van Wert's economic development director told the Committee the pause puts Ohio at a competitive disadvantage against the 37 states that still offer one. Vantage told the Committee the Ohio Chamber's study found about $2.10 in tax revenue and broader benefit for every incentive dollar.

The case critics make. The state sales tax exemption on equipment cost $1.6 billion in 2025 against the $136 million the Department of Taxation had forecast, and state revenue funds schools and local government too, so "not your money" understates it; the county's share of the equipment tax is real, which is why the County Commissioners Association told the Committee the exemption "should not continue in its current form." This side of the ledger is not only opponents: Coshocton's mayor, who hosts two campuses, told the Committee he does not believe special tax incentives should be necessary, and the Buckeye Institute, which wants the state exemption kept, said local abatements "deserve harder scrutiny" because they shift the burden onto residents and other businesses. The Ohio Chamber's own 2026 update puts the 2025 exemptions at 0.90 times their cost at central assumptions, so the same study supports both columns depending on the horizon (Guide Part 7.2). Local deals vary enormously in what the community gets back, and a 100 percent, 15-year exemption with a weak PILOT gives away most of what the community controls. Announced investment figures count equipment made elsewhere and tell you little about local revenue.

Ask your own economic development professional. What does this project pay, by year, to each jurisdiction and the school district, under the deal on the table, during the exemption and after it, and what would it pay with no exemption? What did comparable Ohio communities get, and what have peer communities in other states negotiated that Ohio law would allow here? Where does the county sit, since Washington County's commission president asked the Committee for a county vote on the state exemption, in full, in part, or conditioned on a benefits agreement, and that idea is in the record whatever the Legislature does with it? And the whole picture, not just the tax line: taken together, what does the community get from this project, in revenue, infrastructure, and written commitments, against what it gives up?

Go deeper: Unit 7; Guide Part 8.6, then Part 7.2 and 7.3.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.7 Will it lower my property value?

As of September 2026, OEDA is not aware of any study of this in Ohio. What exists comes mostly from Virginia, measures whole ZIP codes or counties, and says little about the dozen houses that share a fence line with a campus. Keep that in mind on both sides.

The case supporters make. The studies that have looked haven't found the drop. Virginia's 2024 legislative audit found no measured reduction in nearby home sale prices. A George Mason University analysis of 2023 home sales across Northern Virginia, the densest data center market in the world, found no statistical evidence that being near a data center lowers a home's value; homes closer to data centers sold for more, which the authors credit to the roads, utilities, and jobs that drew the data centers there in the first place. A 2026 University of Rochester study tracked Virginia ZIP codes before and after data center permits were issued and found the effect on prices small and slightly positive, with enough data to rule out a substantial decline. The National Association of Realtors' September 2026 report found that counties with ten or more data centers had median home values about two and a half times those of counties with none, and appreciated faster over the decade. And land near a campus, farm or industrial, tends to sell for far more than it did before.

The case critics make. Every one of those studies measures the average across a ZIP code, a county, or a mile and a half, and the average is not the house next door. An appraisal analysis prepared in early 2026 to support a proposed Indiana data center found that homes within a mile and a half of existing facilities had appreciated less than their county in three of the four counties studied, by 1, 6, and 9 points. Virginia's results come from a housing market with far more buyers than homes, where nearly anything sells; a rural Ohio township is a different market. The Realtors' own survey found its members split on whether data centers help or hurt nearby home values, and the report says plainly that there is no single data center effect.

Its data covers only operating facilities, so it says nothing about the years between announcement and opening, and that is where the Ohio accounts sit: a realtor asked the Committee "Who is going to want to build or buy a home beside thousands of megawatts worth of industrial infrastructure?"; a Tiffin witness described a buyer reconsidering a move to Monroeville once a data center was proposed; a Hilliard witness said neighbors of the fuel-cell plant there were considering selling; a Waterville Township resident said land options under NDA were splitting lifelong neighbors before any announcement; and Commercial Point homeowners said they learned of the Amazon site next to their new subdivision from a neighbor and Facebook, not the builder, and could not get out of their contracts. And where the

documented noise problems are (8.3), the homes affected are the nearest ones, exactly where the studies are thinnest.

Ask about this project. How far is the nearest home, and how many homes sit within a half mile of the fence line? What setback, screening, and noise standards apply at the property line, and how will they be enforced (8.3)? Your county auditor holds the record of every sale in the county; ask your economic development professional to have the auditor pull sales near a comparable Ohio facility over time, because that record exists and, as of September 2026, OEDA has not found anyone who has assembled it. And ask the developer what it has done for immediate neighbors elsewhere: larger setbacks, berms and landscaping, or commitments written into the agreement.

Go deeper: Guide Part 8.7.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.8 How long will it last, and what happens when it's done?

Residents who watched wind and solar projects arrive with decommissioning bonds will ask this, and Ohio law answers it for wind and solar and not for data centers. Some facts first. The building is a concrete and steel shell built to stand 50 years or more. The servers inside are replaced every three to five years, sometimes stretched to seven or ten; the chillers, generators, and electrical gear every 15 to 25. Operators plan on 30-year lives. So a data center doesn't wear out the way people picture. It renews itself in pieces, and "end of life" has so far meant a tenant leaving or a building being refit, not a campus being torn down. New Albany's first data center opened in 2010, and OEDA has found no record of a large Ohio facility closing, so there is no Ohio record to point to.

The case supporters make. The end-of-life risk is smaller than it looks. New Albany told the Select Committee it believes the buildings "can easily be converted into manufacturing and warehouse facilities": they sit on land with a substation, fiber, and water already in place, which is exactly what a manufacturer or a distribution center looks for. Because the servers turn over every few years anyway, a facility doesn't age out all at once. If a tenant leaves, the infrastructure is what makes the building worth re-leasing. The land pays property tax whatever happens to the building (Unit 7). And where a community wants a guarantee, operators have accepted decommissioning security in peer agreements, and AEP Ohio's tariff, approved by PUCO in July 2025, already makes large customers pay for at least 85 percent of the capacity they subscribed to for up to 12 years, with exit fees and financial assurance, so a campus that empties out keeps

paying for the wires; PUCO's chair told the Committee that exit fees and collateral collected for load that never arrives flow back to the other ratepayers.

The case critics make. OEDA's research found no documented decommissioning of a hyperscale campus, so there is no measured cost and no record of who paid. The closest Ohio experience is the one the Southeastern Ohio Port Authority described to the Committee: two coal plants whose owners had "limited financial assurance requirements," left "aging, partially remediated," with the burden shifted "quietly and without anyone's explicit consent" to the community, until the port authority took them on. Its president, who says plainly that he wants data centers in his region, told the Committee that hyperscale facilities "are not easily repurposed," that decommissioning one could cost tens of millions to more than a hundred million dollars, and that surety bonds and letters of credit are already standard in mining, landfills, and utility-scale renewable energy: "not anti-development. It is pro-development done right."

The buildings proposed now are far larger and more specialized than anything that has been converted to a warehouse. If the demand behind them is overestimated, and less than half of the requests AEP Ohio studied under its tariff became signed agreements (Unit 6), a community could approve a seven-building campus and end up with two buildings and a substation sized for seven. Grid upgrades built for a load that leaves are paid for by everyone else (Unit 3). Servers are electronic waste at a scale no county solid waste plan anticipates. And Ohio requires a decommissioning plan and a performance bond for every large solar and wind project, prepared by an engineer and updated every five years, while requiring nothing of the kind for a data center, so any protection a community gets, it has to write into its code or its agreement itself.

Ask about this project. Does our zoning or the agreement require a decommissioning plan, and what triggers it? Peer ordinances use a period of no operation, twelve to fifteen months, and require removal and restoration within a year after that. What security backs it, who sets the amount (an engineer's estimate, updated on a schedule, is the wind and solar standard), and does the obligation run with the land so a buyer inherits it? What happens to the substation and the lines if the load leaves, who owns them, and who pays (Unit 3)? If the community fronts any infrastructure, what covers it if the campus stops at phase one (Unit 7)? And a different guarantee for a different failure: what assures completion if the developer walks away mid-build, which Washington County's commission president told the Committee current law doesn't cover, and which a performance bond or letter of credit can? And ask the developer directly: how long do you expect to operate here, and what has your company done with facilities it has left?

Go deeper: Guide Part 8.8; Part 6, Stage 7; Part 7.7.

UNIT 8 · THE NINE THINGS RESIDENTS WILL ASK YOU

8.9 What about the generators and the air?

Residents raised this to the Select Committee more than any question except water, and most Ohio zoning codes have no place for it. Some facts first. Every data center has backup generators, usually diesel, sized to run the whole building if the grid fails; a large campus can have dozens to hundreds. They run during outages and on a testing schedule, usually a short run each month, and they need an Ohio EPA air permit, which for a larger installation carries a public comment period; "emergency" status is not a blanket exemption from air rules. Ohio EPA told the Committee its air division had permitted 4,916 backup generators and six behind-the-meter power stations. Some projects add on-site gas plants or fuel cells that run all the time (Unit 3), which is a different scale of emissions, permitted separately.

The case supporters make. Backup generators are backup: they run in outages and on brief scheduled tests, and new units have to meet federal emission standards. AWS told the Committee its testing is brief and at mid-day and must meet local noise and permit requirements. Where communities have asked, operators have written testing hours into agreements. On-site plants add supply the grid needs and, when a third party owns them, pay local tax (Unit 3); Johnstown's mayor described the fuel cells at the Cologix campus there as taking grid pressure off her community "at no cost to other ratepayers." The permits exist, the standards exist, and the way to make them local is the agreement.

The case critics make. The permit is for each unit; nobody adds up a campus, and nobody local is measuring. A Wilmington resident told the Committee of 252 generators planned 200 feet from her home; Norwich Township counted 272 fuel cells at the Hilliard plant, which residents described as next to neighborhoods and elementary schools; a Springfield resident described homes within 1,000 feet of a site with about 50 generators. Testing is not rare when dozens of units test in rotation, and generators may now also run for grid emergencies or demand response (8.3). Norwich Township repeatedly asked for independent air monitoring inside and outside the facilities near it, and the state permits didn't include it. OEDA does not adjudicate residents' health claims; the point critics make is narrower and harder to answer: the data that would settle it isn't being collected.

Ask about this project. How many generators, of what fuel and emission tier, at full buildout, and how many test at once? What are the testing hours? Is on-site generation proposed, and if so, what, where, and who owns it? How far is the generator yard, not the property line, from the nearest home, school, childcare center, and park? Will the developer fund air monitoring beyond what the permit requires, with the data public, as Norwich Township asked? When does the Ohio

EPA draft permit go out for comment, and who in your government will file one? And does a later addition come back for review: a Hilliard resident told the Committee she didn't object to the data center four years ago and objected only when fuel cells and generators were added afterward.

Go deeper: Guide Part 8.9; Part 1.4; Part 5.4.

UNIT 9

What to do before anyone calls

A June 1 witness put the premise of this unit in one sentence: "Anything can be done well or can be done poorly." Once a proposal arrives, the window can be as short as weeks. Most of what follows is work your economic development professional, your planning commission, your staff, and your counsel may already be doing under the authority you've given them. The point of this unit is that you know where your community stands on each item, so you can speak to it with residents and so you can direct the work where it hasn't been done.

1. **Know who your point of contact is.** Usually your economic development professional. If a developer, reporter, or resident wouldn't know who speaks for the community on a project, fix that first.
2. **Know what your zoning code says, then improve it.** Does it mention data centers? Most Ohio codes don't. Ask your economic development professional and zoning administrator: by right, conditional, or unaddressed, and at what megawatt threshold the use should become conditional. Unzoned township: Playbook I.
3. **Know what you'd need if one came.** Not whether you want one. Setbacks, measured to homes and to schools, childcare centers, libraries, and parks. A noise standard, sound modeling before approval, and how you'd measure compliance. Water terms. Screening. Dark-sky lighting. Generator limits. Decommissioning security. Your planning commission and your economic development professional can draft; OEDA is assembling model provisions for the Template Library.
4. **Have the community conversation as planning, not reaction.** What kinds of development does your comprehensive plan call for, and does it speak to this? A public conversation about that now is planning; the same conversation after a proposal lands is Playbook H.
5. **Know your confidentiality policy.** Who signs, whose template, how long, how it meets public records law and the state's new provisions. Your economic development professional and counsel set it; you should understand it. Playbook D.

6. **Know your utilities.** Who serves each industrial parcel, what type, what spare capacity, what tariff. Your economic development professional usually goes to the utility's economic development staff for this, and what comes back varies: some utilities are thinly staffed, some treat substation headroom as confidential, and none will discuss another customer's request. Often the developer has already worked this out with the utility before anyone local hears of the project; don't assume it, and don't assume the answer will be shared with you.
7. **Know where your school district and career center stand.** Your economic development professional should be talking with them before there's a deal to react to. Playbook J.
8. **Know who you'd call for counsel and a fiscal review, and roughly what it costs.** Your economic development professional should know. Van Wert brought in specialized counsel early. Ask prospective counsel the standard conflicts question: whether the firm represents data center developers or operators in Ohio, and how it handles that. Many statewide firms do both; what matters is that you know before you hire.
9. **Read what others signed, whole.** New Albany hosts visiting officials twice a week and shares its documents. Sidney, Marysville, and Piqua agreements are public records; read them as examples of structures, not as models to copy, because each was negotiated for its project and each has critics at home. Two cautions. New Albany's CRA agreement works because of the minimum payment clause inside it and the New Community Authority beside it; borrow the structure, not just the form. And a tour shows you what the host chooses to show; set your own itinerary, bring a skeptic and a reporter, and talk to a neighbor.
10. **Know your fire department's capacity, and put the chief in early.** A data center brings batteries, diesel or gas, and high-voltage equipment at a scale a volunteer department may never have entered. Norwich Township told the Select Committee that "no firefighter should be expected to enter a facility of this scale without a complete understanding of the hazards they may encounter," and the Ohio Mayors Alliance asked the state for fire-safety and emergency-response guidance. Until it exists, the pre-incident plan, the hazard and shutoff information, the access, and the training before opening come from the agreement (Playbook E), and the chief should be in the room before there is one.

11. **Know your own brownfields.** Which former industrial or generation sites in your area already have a substation, water, and rail, and who owns them. Coshocton's two campuses sit on a retired power plant and a paper mill; Aligned's Perkins Township site is a former bearing plant. Developers told the Committee they look first for sites a community has already prepared (Aligned said it avoids sites that need "complex rezoning"; QTS said it seeks "communities that are eager to work with us"), which cuts both ways: preparation is where a community sets its terms, and it is also where the discretionary review has already been spent.

SO WHAT FOR YOU

Get up to speed on how your economic development professional and counsel handle each of these, so you can speak to them intelligently when residents ask. A community that has done this work can say yes on its terms, say no, or shape a project in the time a developer gives it. One that hasn't picks from the developer's menu.

Go deeper: Guide Part 9.1 and 9.2.

TOOLKIT

The Playbooks

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Pick the situation you're in. Each playbook describes what's usually happening, who does what (your economic development professional facilitates; you prepare and decide), what to ask your economic development professional about so you can make an educated decision, Ohio examples, things to consider, and where to go deeper. Most communities are in two or three at once. The Reference Guide carries a matching practitioner playbook for each letter from the economic development professional's side. The examples here come mostly from the Select Committee record; the OEDA Data Center Working Group is gathering first-hand accounts from Ohio practitioners, and the examples will be expanded and, where the community agrees, told in their own words.

PLAYBOOK A

A developer just contacted us

What's usually happening. Someone is checking whether your community could host a data center. It may be a land agent, a site selection consultant, a developer, an agent for the company itself, or occasionally the company. Some inquiries come from people trying to lock down land to sell to a developer later, and part of vetting an inquiry is figuring out which you're dealing with. They may have reached your economic development organization, your electric utility, a JobsOhio regional network partner, or JobsOhio itself, and often more than one. The company that would occupy the building is usually not named and may not be decided. Your site is one of several being screened, and most screened sites are dropped. They want to know about a parcel, power and water capacity, your zoning, and whether the community is open to the idea.

The sequence from here varies more than any diagram suggests. The utility conversation may have happened before anyone local knew. A confidentiality agreement is likely but not universal. Land may already be under option. The one constant is that nothing has to come before a public body until the developer needs something only a public body can grant: a rezoning, a tax exemption, a water or sewer connection, a road, an annexation. That could be weeks away or a year. Records a public office holds may be public before then, which is one reason the confidentiality policy in Playbook D matters.

Who does what. Your economic development professional facilitates this stage. That's the job: take the inquiry, hold the confidential conversation, gather the information the developer needs and the information you'll need, bring in the utility and, when the time is right, the county and the school district, and manage the developer's timeline against yours. If your EDO is a private nonprofit development corporation, it can sign a confidentiality agreement and hold the early conversation with fewer of the constraints Ohio's public records and open meetings laws put on a public office. If your EDO is a public office, it can sign one too, but it can't promise to withhold what public records law makes public, and its board deliberates in public except where executive session is allowed, so the document goes to counsel first (Playbook D). Either way, if the inquiry reached you directly, the right move is to hand it to your EDO the same day.

What's yours is preparation and judgment, not logistics. Do you have an adopted plan that says what kind of development the community wants, and does it speak to this? Does your zoning code address data centers, and if not, have you decided whether it should? Have you thought about what you'd need from a project like this if one came? Unit 9 covers those questions, and the plain answer for most Ohio communities is that they haven't been asked yet. This inquiry is the reason to start.

WHAT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

Not to do things. To tell you things, so that when a decision reaches you, you're making it with information. One caveat: under a confidentiality agreement your EDO may not be able to share project specifics even with you, which is why it's worth talking in advance about how inquiries are handled in general.

- What kind of project this appears to be, and the electric demand at opening and full buildout, if the developer has shared it.
- Whether the project has a signed electric service agreement, is in a study queue, or hasn't reached the utility yet.
- Whether it includes on-site power generation.
- What public action the developer will eventually need from your body, and the earliest it could reach your agenda.
- What confidentiality has been agreed to, by whom, and what can be said publicly and to the school district.
- Whether your EDO thinks the community needs outside counsel or a consultant for this one, and what that costs.
- Who the end user is, and if the developer won't say, whether it will disclose the beneficial owner and controlling parent before any abatement vote. An Allen County cloud engineer who supports data centers told the Select Committee about a roughly $500 million project in his county negotiated for 15 months under an NDA with a Delaware shell company, with engineering details redacted from a public permit as proprietary; the company behind it was later identified in press reports. His point was that every other safeguard depends on knowing who the customer is.
- What the developer's other host communities say about it. Coshocton's mayor gave the Committee a reference-check list without meaning to: the operators there "maintained open communication with local officials, supported community events, contributed to local schools and recreational facilities, assisted with infrastructure-related funding opportunities, and consistently operated with transparency." Ask the last town.

Ohio examples. Van Wert didn't get a cold call. Its economic development corporation had spent nearly twenty years positioning a 1,500-acre site near the U.S. 30 interchange with power and fiber in place, then ran a deliberate two-year search for an end user, reporting to city council through 36 meetings, before QTS emerged. When the $10 billion, 500 MW proposal came into focus, the corporation brought in specialized counsel early and borrowed New Albany's documents. The council's role throughout was to be informed, to set the terms it cared about (water and noise were named as non-negotiable from the start), and to decide. Washington County's commission president told the Select Committee that the board's decision to sign a confidentiality agreement gave the county "a voice at the table" in negotiating with the developer. Shalersville Township's trustee testified about a 750 MW proposal on light-industrial land with no code definition to judge it by.

Things to consider. A study request is not a project. A code name is normal, not a sign of bad faith. An official who signs a confidentiality agreement individually has taken on obligations the body may not want; that's a question for counsel and your EDO before anyone signs. The community's real bargaining position comes later, at the public ask, which is why Unit 9 matters more than anything you do this week.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook A; Part 6, Stage 2; Part 5.2.

PLAYBOOK B

We're being asked to rezone or approve a conditional use

What's usually happening. The developer needs the parcel classified so a data center is a permitted or conditional use, or needs a conditional use permit. This is the point where a project becomes public, and it's the local decision with the most consequence for how the project is built. What arrives may be an application for the first phase of a larger campus. It may name the use plainly or come in as "light industrial" or "warehouse" under a code that never defined data centers. It may or may not include on-site power generation.

Who does what. Your code decides who decides. A rezoning goes through the planning commission to the legislative body. A conditional use may be decided by the planning commission or a board of zoning appeals without ever reaching council or the trustees. A by-right use gets administrative review by staff with no hearing at all; that discretion was spent when the code was written. Your zoning administrator and counsel run whichever process applies. Your economic development professional often facilitates: managing the applicant, keeping the timeline honest, and making sure the information the deciding body needs reaches it before the hearing. What's yours, when the decision reaches you, is the vote and the conditions. A rezoning or conditional use lets you attach conditions that relate to land use: setbacks, screening, lighting, noise standards, generator testing hours, stormwater, truck routes, decommissioning security, and a requirement for a development agreement. Fiscal terms belong in the agreement (Playbook E), not in zoning conditions.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- What use the application actually requests, in the words of your code, and whether a data center is a defined use there. If it isn't, what exactly is being approved.
- Which body decides this application under your code, and whether it reaches you at all.
- The full-buildout site plan and megawatts, and whether later phases would need to come back.
- Whether any on-site generation is proposed and whether it moves part of the review to the Ohio Power Siting Board.
- What conditions comparable Ohio communities attached, and which your code allows.
- Whether acoustic, utility, or land-use expertise is needed before the hearing, and whether someone independent of the applicant will review the applicant's noise, lighting, and water studies, and who pays for that review. A Wilmington resident told the Committee the city hired no acoustical expert, so she did, and that the port authority's lighting figure for the project was corrected only after she caught a discrepancy in the applicant's site plan.
- What else is proposed or operating within a few miles, and the combined water, load, and generator count. A Commercial Point resident counted four hyperscale proposals within 14 miles in June 2026; no agency reviews them together.
- Whether a later addition of on-site generation or major equipment comes back to you, or is approved administratively. A Hilliard resident who accepted the original project objected only when fuel cells and generators were added later.
- Whether the approval lapses if construction doesn't start by a date, since some land is optioned as a placeholder with no project behind it.
- Your statutory notice periods and hearing dates, and whether the measure is being proposed as an emergency (Unit 5).

Ohio examples. New Albany wrote its data center standards into a master-planned business park before the first facility arrived in 2010: what's screened, how far from homes, what the water agreement says, what the design looks like. Rezonings there are routine because the rules were set in advance, and forty facilities later the city reports four noise complaints. Shalersville Township faced a 750 MW proposal on land zoned light industrial with no definition of the use in its code and no definitive answer from county attorneys on whether light industrial covered it; the trustees adopted a moratorium to write standards they didn't have. One community had the standards before the application; the other had to stop the clock to write them.

Things to consider. Approving phase one can lock in the design for phase four; ask how later phases return, and expect more than one: QTS told the Committee that "rarely does one data center get built in an area." An application that doesn't name the use isn't necessarily hiding

anything, but you should know what you're approving. If a text amendment or rezoning is being sought while a specific project is under a confidentiality agreement, the deciding body should at least be told that a project motivates it, even unnamed; in Wilmington, residents told the Committee that a person who argued for a data center text amendment was under NDA to the developer at the time, and the dispute is now in federal court. Your hearing schedule protects you; a developer's deadline doesn't require you to shorten it.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook B; Part 9.3; Part 6, Stage 5.

PLAYBOOK C

We're being asked for a property tax exemption

What's usually happening. The developer is asking your government to exempt real property tax on the new buildings and improvements, through a Community Reinvestment Area agreement, an Enterprise Zone agreement, or Tax Increment Financing, and in return the community will structure a deal that produces new revenue it didn't have. Under a CRA or an Enterprise Zone the land can't be exempted, so land taxes flow to every jurisdiction from the start; a TIF can capture the growth in land value as well (Unit 7).

The terms depend on the instrument. A CRA created before 1994 exempts at the percentage and term fixed when the area was created, often 100 percent, more or less automatically. A CRA created since 1994, and any Enterprise Zone, is negotiated project by project, up to 100 percent and up to 15 years, and full exemption for the full term is the ceiling, not the norm. Most people say abatement; the words are used interchangeably here.

One rule of the road: a CRA agreement in a post-1994 area has to be signed before construction starts (R.C. 3735.671), and the Department of Development's Enterprise Zone guidance says the same of an EZ agreement; an agreement signed after the fact can't reach what's already built, so the developer's schedule and your legislative calendar have to be reconciled early.

The structure is the deal. Exempt 75 percent with no payment, and every taxing entity (your government, the county, the schools, the library, the fire and other levies) receives 25 percent of what it would have. Exempt 100 percent and negotiate a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT), and that payment usually goes to the schools while the community decides where anything else goes. Layer in a minimum service payment that runs with the land, a TIF that redirects the new tax to infrastructure, or a New Community Authority charge, and the shape changes again. New Albany's minimum payment, pegged to what the land would yield as office or manufacturing, is one approach among several. There's no single right structure, and communities with an adopted incentive policy, one that says in advance what kinds of projects get what kinds of terms by type, location, jobs, and tax generation, negotiate from that rather than from zero.

Who does what. Your economic development professional structures the deal, working with the developer on one side and with your community's designated contact on the other (whoever your body has named for that: a mayor, manager, or administrator, a commission president, a trustee, a fiscal officer), then runs it through counsel and the approval process, and socializes it

with the school district along the way. Whether the district signs its own agreement depends on the structure. Counsel reviews before approval; an outside consultant runs or validates the fiscal analysis when the deal is large or complex. The Tax Incentive Review Council reviews the agreement every year after and can recommend that it continue, be modified, or be canceled; your body must vote on that recommendation within 60 days (R.C. 5709.85). What's yours is the vote and the judgment behind it: whether this structure, on this project, is a deal the community should make. That's a decision, not an analysis, and only you can make it.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- The fiscal impact analysis: what the project generates for your jurisdiction, the county, and the school district under the structures being considered, over the life of the agreement and after it, and with no exemption at all. Your EDO should be preparing this or arranging for it, and should tell you which, and what it will cost.
- The proposed structure and why: percentage, term, PILOT or not, minimum payment or not, TIF or not, and what each taxing entity receives under it.
- Whether the community has an incentive policy this fits, and if not, whether it should.
- Whether any payments bind the land or only the current company.
- Whether the investment and job figures in the agreement are commitments with remedies or good-faith estimates that don't affect the exemption.
- What reporting and remedies attach, including clawback language if commitments aren't met, and who verifies.
- Whether any public money is at risk if the project builds slower or smaller than announced, for example TIF-backed borrowing or infrastructure the community fronts. If none is, a project that doesn't happen costs you nothing.
- Where the school district and the career center stand.

Ohio examples. Four communities, four structures, each a public record. Two of them, Piqua and Sidney, face resident-initiated ballot measures aimed at their projects in November 2026 (the State page), a reminder that the terms of a deal and its acceptance in the community are separate questions. Sidney's deal directs 50 percent of the project's PILOT to Sidney City Schools and Upper Valley Career Center, about $50 million over 15 years, distributed the way property taxes would be. Marysville's routes fixed amounts through its community improvement corporation: $903,000 a year to schools, $38,500 to Ohio Hi-Point, $100,000 to the city, for 15 years, with municipal income tax on the new payroll split 50/50 with the district. Piqua's has the property owner paying the schools the full service payments on land value plus $100,000 per

data center building each year. New Albany's sets a minimum payment equal to what the land would have produced as office or advanced manufacturing, met through income tax, TIF, and a New Community Authority charge, with a cash payment only to cover any shortfall.

Sidney's is also the deal an organizer described to the Select Committee from the other side: land annexed and rezoned "through emergency measures," trustees, commissioners, and council members who all said they didn't know what was planned, and six months of requests for a pause before a unanimous council vote. The deal is public record, the organizer's account is in the hearing record, and the ballot petitions followed. OEDA is gathering what other Ohio communities have done; this list will grow.

Things to consider. The exemption and the revenue structure are one decision, not two. Revenue projected from building value comes in below projection when valuations are appealed or buildout slows; a minimum payment guards against that. A CRA agreement borrowed from New Albany's form without its minimum service payment clause (in the sample agreement, the exemption is conditioned on a minimum annual revenue stream, treated as a minimum service payment under R.C. 5709.91 with a recorded lien) and without the New Community Authority beside it is the exposure without the protection.

Districts must approve above the statutory thresholds and should be consulted below them; joint vocational districts receive notice. The buildings pay full tax after the exemption ends, for decades. The Tax Incentive Review Council reviews the agreement every year and your body must vote on its recommendation; that lever belongs to trustees and commissioners, not only school boards, and the Ohio Township Association told the Committee that "once construction is complete, the permanent local benefit may be much smaller than what was initially discussed."

And one question worth putting to any developer: Microsoft told the Select Committee in June 2026 that "Microsoft will not seek property tax abatements from local communities," naming its Licking County campuses. Whether the pledge travels to a greenfield township is a fair question; so is asking any developer why this project needs one.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook C; Part 9.3; Part 7.5, 7.6.

PLAYBOOK D

We're being asked to sign a confidentiality agreement

What's usually happening. A developer or consultant wants information kept confidential before sharing details, typically the identity of the company and sometimes the project's scale and location. This is how economic development has long worked, for a factory or a distribution center as much as a data center: a company deciding where to invest doesn't show its hand to competitors or to the market, and no community gets the project by promising to announce it early.

What's new is that residents object, and the objection isn't really to the agreement. It's that people who weren't part of writing the comprehensive plan or the zoning code feel a decision was made without them. Confidentiality agreements were among the most common grievances in the Select Committee's public testimony, and as OEDA reads that testimony, this is much of the reason. Whether to sign depends on the project, applicable law, and the community's disclosure policy. What reduces the grievance is having the community conversation about what's wanted before a project arrives (Unit 9), a clear policy on who signs and what gets disclosed when, and good-faith engagement when the project becomes public (Playbook H).

Ohio law now also sets the floor: House Bill 479, effective September 23, 2026, narrows what public bodies must keep confidential to individualized compensation and payroll information, after an earlier 2026 provision had swept in nearly everything.

Who does what. Whether this is a problem depends on who your economic development organization is. A private nonprofit development corporation or a port authority can sign and hold the conversation; that's part of why communities create them, and for most Ohio communities that's where the agreement goes. A public office can sign but is subject to public records and open meetings law (a public body may go into executive session to consider an applicant's confidential information or to negotiate economic development assistance, on a unanimous roll-call vote and only for the programs the statute lists, R.C. 121.22(G)(8)), and the document needs counsel before anyone signs.

Elected officials generally shouldn't sign individually; New Albany's don't, and its practice (city staff sign the city's own template, which tells the company that public records law will eventually require disclosure) exists because its economic development function sits inside city

government. Your EDO handles the negotiation. Your counsel advises on what the agreement can and can't do under public records law, which is more complicated than any summary here; OEDA may be able to refer you to practitioners and attorneys who work this daily.

What's yours is the policy: deciding in advance who in your community signs these, on whose template, and what you expect to be told even when a company's name can't be.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL AND COUNSEL ABOUT

- Who is being asked to sign, and whether that's the right party under your structure.
- What the agreement covers and for how long, and what triggers disclosure.
- What you can be told, and when. Most agreements allow a public body to know that a large project is under discussion without the company's name.
- How the agreement interacts with public records law and the state's confidentiality provisions after September 23.
- Whether the district and the county can be brought in under the agreement, and when.
- What the agreement requires when a public records request arrives: how fast you must notify the company, how long it has to object or go to court, who decides what is released, who pays, and who is representing the public's interest in disclosure.
- Whether the community has its own template, and if not, whether to adopt one.
- Whether the fire chief and the county emergency management director can receive facility hazard information whatever else stays confidential. Norwich Township told the Committee the applicant for the fuel-cell plant near it declined to provide plans the township needed for emergency preparedness: "Public safety cannot become a casualty of confidentiality."
- Which service providers are bound. An Adams County witness told the Committee the county's water department had signed an NDA and its soil and water district was afraid to speak, which left nobody able to answer a capacity question in public. Ask what each bound party can still say.
- Whether the developer will disclose the beneficial owner before any public commitment, whatever the agreement keeps confidential in the meantime (Playbook A).

Ohio examples. New Albany's practice is a rule, not a reaction: its own template, signed by the city manager, with a clause requiring the city to notify the company of any public records request. Microsoft has pledged in writing not to use NDAs with local governments. Washington County's commissioners judged a confidentiality agreement worth signing because it gave them a voice at the table; a county resident told the Committee it violated the principle of transparency. Where individual officials sign separately, there's no policy, obligations are

inconsistent, elected officials are personally bound, and nobody is in a position to say what the community as a whole may disclose.

Things to consider. An agreement doesn't override Ohio public records law; it governs what you volunteer, not what a records request can reach, and the line between those is a question for counsel every time. An agreement with no end date or no disclosure trigger deserves a second look; some templates rely on public records law rather than a term to set the limit, so ask counsel what the limit actually is. A clause under which the company indemnifies the community and controls the defense if it sues to stop a release means the company pays your legal costs; it also means the company's lawyers run that case, though you may have your own counsel in the room, so decide in advance whether that's acceptable. "We signed an NDA" should never become "we can't tell you anything."

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook D; Part 6, Stage 2; Part 5.7; Part 7.3.

PLAYBOOK E

We're negotiating a development or community benefits agreement

What's usually happening. The project has cleared, or is about to clear, its land-use step, and the community and developer are putting into a contract the things zoning can't capture: who pays for infrastructure, water terms, workforce commitments, community contributions, reporting, remedies, and end of life. Ohio communities call these development agreements, host community agreements, or community benefits agreements. The names overlap; what matters is what's in the document and whether it's enforceable. This is where the templates matter most, and where OEDA's library will be deepest.

Who does what. Your economic development professional facilitates the negotiation between the community and the developer, bringing in the engineer, the water provider, counsel, and whoever else the terms require; the EDO's responsibility is getting the deal done, not being the expert on every term. Counsel drafts. This is the stage where the EDO most often brings in specialized help, and where communities that did report satisfaction and communities that didn't report regret. If the school district is signing its own agreement, it happens alongside this one. What's yours is the agenda and the signature: what the community wants that the law doesn't already require, which commitments must survive a sale of the property, and whether the finished agreement is one you'll vote for.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- The community's list, by category. Money: payments, school share, and infrastructure cost responsibility (this overlaps with Playbook C by design; the tax structure and the agreement are one deal). Operations: water caps and metering, who pays for offsite water capacity and storage, binding expansion notice, noise standards, generator hours, emissions and air-quality monitoring for generators and any on-site plant beyond what the Ohio EPA permit requires, local hire, decommissioning with security. Construction: haul routes, hours and any variances, road condition surveys before and after, weight limits, construction lighting, contractor conduct, a complaint line, and who pays for road repair; Johnstown's mayor told the Committee "the negotiation has to happen before the shovel goes in the ground," and a builders' association conceded that contractor incidents "dominate local Facebook groups and fuel opposition." Public safety: a pre-incident plan written with your fire department, hazard and shutoff information, site access and training before opening, and cost reimbursement. Community: contributions the developer commits to as part of the agreement, scholarships, a community fund, whatever the community has asked for and the developer has agreed to, sometimes as a condition of the exemption. Enforcement: public reporting, a complaint process, cure periods, remedies, a letter of credit or bond, obligations binding future owners, and completion assurance if the developer walks away mid-build, which is a different guarantee from decommissioning.
- Which of those attach to the land and survive a sale.
- What the remedy is for each missed commitment and who enforces it.
- What comparable agreements in Ohio and elsewhere contain, and where this one is weaker.
- Whether specialized counsel is recommended for this agreement.
- Whether the developer will put in the binding section what two operators said on the record: Meta told the Committee that when it needs new water or road infrastructure "we pay for it to be built," and Microsoft that it funds required system improvements "so the community does not shoulder the cost."

Ohio and peer examples. Van Wert told QTS from the first conversation that water and noise were non-negotiable, then made them binding: closed-loop cooling described as a one-time fill every six to seven years, a commitment to fund 100 percent of required energy infrastructure with no impact on existing customers, a Community Betterment Fund shaped by public input, and $100,000 for Vantage Career Center. New Albany tied its exemption to scholarships, a community center, cultural programming, and an arboretum. Lancaster, Pennsylvania shows the enforcement side: water capped at 20,000 gallons a day per campus, noise held to pre-existing ambient levels with testing before and after operations begin, annual reporting to council and a public complaint portal, a letter of credit the city can draw on for a missed payment, and

remedies up to discontinuance of operations after a cure period, with every obligation passing to any buyer. Cleveland made the practice standing policy: any incentive over $250,000 requires a community benefits agreement, and construction can't start until it's signed.

Things to consider. A commitment that binds the company and not the land can disappear with a sale. A jobs promise with no definition of a job can't be verified. An agreement with no cure period and no remedy is a statement of intent. And taxpayer concentration can complicate enforcement: a council may hesitate to confront its largest taxpayer, a point a Wilmington resident put to the Committee as a concern for "the feasibility of enforcement." That is the argument for clear remedies, independent verification, and third-party monitoring that run on their own.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook E; Part 7.3 through 7.8.

PLAYBOOK F

Annexation is on the table

What's usually happening. The owners of the parcel petition to move it from your township into a neighboring city or village, usually at a developer's urging and often with the municipality's encouragement, most often to obtain municipal water and sewer, sometimes to obtain zoning or incentive authority the township can't or won't provide. Annexation moves the parcel under the municipality's zoning and authority entirely and can move tax revenue with it. Chapter 709 of the Revised Code contains several procedures with different tests, notice requirements, and township rights, and which one is being used determines nearly everything about your position; the Legislative Service Commission's members' brief on annexation (March 2023) is the plain-language guide to them, and counsel can walk you through the one in front of you.

Who does what. Counsel identifies the procedure and your rights under it, the day you hear the word, because petitions run on statutory clocks. The petition itself goes to the county commissioners, who hear and decide a regular petition under the statutory standards and have narrow discretion on the expedited procedures once a complete petition and the required consents are in front of them. Your economic development professional, often the county's, works the alternative. A Cooperative Economic Development Agreement or a Joint Economic Development District has to be created, by agreement between the township and the municipality, before it can do anything (and a JEDD also needs a petition signed by a majority of the district's property owners and businesses, so it is months, not weeks), and a plain development agreement between the two governments can set payments without either. What's yours is the decision whether to object, to negotiate, or to agree, and on what terms.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL AND COUNSEL ABOUT

- Which Chapter 709 procedure is being used, and what notice, objection, and agreement rights the township has under it.
- Whether a CEDA, a JEDD, or a township-municipality development agreement is available, and what revenue and service terms each could preserve. A fiscal impact analysis of the township's position under annexation versus each agreement belongs here.
- What the municipality's code permits on the parcel after annexation, whether it addresses data centers, and what rezoning or conditional use process the project would go through there once it's in.
- If you're the city: whether you're prepared to extend service, who pays, whether your code is ready for the use you're about to inherit, and what the annexation does to your own fiscal picture, service costs against the revenue, not just the township's. Also how you will hear the neighbors across the line, who don't vote for you and can't refer your rezoning; a Galena resident told the Committee that Sunbury's annexations had left the city "nearly 50% light industrial" with no say for the people next door.
- If you're the township: whether the petition is being proposed as an emergency measure, and what that does to your residents' referendum rights (Unit 5).

Ohio examples. Township-municipality agreements are common across Ohio and have been for decades; New Albany's annexation agreements with its three townships, which compensate them for fire and EMS and reimburse revenue affected by the city's abatements, are simply the ones the Select Committee heard most about. Gathering more of those agreements is one of this resource's main purposes.

Things to consider. Learning about the petition from the newspaper means the clock started without you. The township doesn't have a veto under every procedure. Fighting the annexation and negotiating the revenue are different strategies, and the second is often the one that works. And annexation is how a township's no can be undone: the Ohio Township Association told the Committee that a developer whose project a township has denied or paused can buy the land, seek annexation for water or sewer, and proceed under the municipality's authority, so ask counsel about that exposure before the vote, not after (Playbook G).

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook F; Part 5.7, 5.9; Part 6, Stage 1.

PLAYBOOK G

We're considering a moratorium

What's usually happening. A proposal has arrived, or news of one has, and your code doesn't address the use. A moratorium is a temporary pause on accepting or approving applications while you write standards. It was the most visible Ohio response of 2026 and, for many townships and villages, the only tool they saw. It is not a decision about data centers. It's a decision to decide later, with better tools, and its value is entirely what you do during it.

Who does what. Counsel confirms your authority, the permissible duration, whether the pause reaches applications already filed, and the legal risk, which exists: a moratorium that runs too long, lacks a stated purpose, or catches a project with vested rights invites challenge. Your economic development professional and zoning administrator draft the work plan: defining the use, setting a megawatt threshold for conditional review, adopting noise, water, setback, screening, and decommissioning standards, setting the community's confidentiality policy, and meeting with the school district. What's yours is the vote on the moratorium and, more important, the vote on the work plan, which should happen the same night.

Two Ohio views, both in the record. Shalersville Township adopted a moratorium for a 750 MW proposal its code never anticipated, extended it, held public meetings, and visited an operating site; its trustee told the Select Committee the township still had no definitive answer on whether its light-industrial zoning covers the use and asked the state for help extending the pause. New Albany's practitioners tell the officials who visit twice a week not to, and to adopt standards instead; their concern, from their own experience, is that a moratorium signals to every kind of employer, not just data centers, that the community is closed.

Both are right about something. The community that passes a moratorium and does the work ends up where New Albany started. The community that passes one and does nothing ends up with the same code, a headline the manufacturer it wanted also read, and possibly a lawsuit.

The record is filling in. As of September 18, 2026, the Ohio Capital Journal counted more than 125 active local data center moratoria in Ohio; OEDA is gathering what each community did during its pause and how it turned out, which is the most useful thing this playbook could hold. A few entries already: Tiffin adopted a 12-month moratorium in April 2026 and passed it as an emergency; Grove City adopted one in June after a proposal was withdrawn; Commercial Point adopted 18 months in May and was sued by the developer in the Ohio Supreme Court; the Ohio

Township Association asked the Committee for statutory moratorium authority for townships, especially unzoned ones, and no bill has followed. And one township said no without a moratorium: New Russia Township, in Lorain County, denied a 622-acre rezoning around the county's proposed megasite in February 2026, and the trustees upheld the denial unanimously in March.

Where residents can put questions on the ballot themselves, they have: as of mid-September 2026, 18 Ohio communities had a data center measure on the November ballot, among them nine local prohibitions on facilities above 25 MW, a full ban and a recall in Piqua, a 7.5 MW charter amendment in Urbana, referendums in Wilmington and Ashville, and a voter-approval requirement for heavy industry in Grove City (the State page). A moratorium adopted by the body and a prohibition adopted by the voters are different things with different legal footing; counsel should walk you through both. The count is the Ohio Capital Journal's, published September 14, 2026; boards of elections hold the current list.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL AND COUNSEL ABOUT

- Whether you have the authority, for how long, whether it applies to anything already filed, and what the legal exposure is.
- The work plan: what specifically will be adopted during the pause, who drafts it, and on what schedule. Have counsel assess the duration and its legal risk against the work plan rather than borrowing a number from another community.
- What other employers and prospects will hear, and how the community will explain it.
- What happens the day after it expires.

Things to consider. A township without zoning has nothing to pause (Playbook I). A moratorium with no work plan attached is the outcome New Albany is warning about. Each standard you adopt during the pause needs a documented local basis; Shalersville's trustee told the Committee the township needs "independent data on our specific water table" so its rules can't be attacked as arbitrary. And a moratorium doesn't reach a parcel that is annexed (Playbook F).

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook G; Part 9.3.

PLAYBOOK H

Residents are organizing

What's usually happening. Word of a project has reached the public, often before it reached you formally and often incomplete. Residents are asking about electric bills, water, noise, farmland, and jobs, and they're getting answers from each other. Nothing formal has been asked of you, but the information environment has been set without you, and every other playbook just got harder. This is the tip of a much larger subject, how communities engage residents on development at all, and this resource will grow a deeper treatment of it as OEDA researches what's working.

Who does what. This one depends on your community more than any other playbook. Your economic development professional can assemble the facts and is often the natural point of contact, but where residents perceive competing interests, some communities benefit from an independent facilitator. Some have brought in a community foundation, a community development organization, a university extension office, or a planning agency to convene the conversation, because those bodies are seen as neutral. Who convenes is a local judgment. What's yours is to be visible, to say plainly which decisions are yours and which belong to the utility, PUCO, OPSB, or the state, and to make sure the school district is at the table in public. Johnstown's mayor put it to the Select Committee this way: "when people don't have information, they fill the vacuum with fear," and the answer is honest answers, "even when the honest answer is 'we don't know yet.'" Being the source of the information, on your timing, with sources attached, improves the conversation. It doesn't guarantee a calm room.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- What's known, what isn't, and what can't be said yet and why, so the community can say so.
- The nine resident questions from Unit 8, answered for this project with sources, and the two residents ask first that aren't on the list: who is the customer, and why here and not the next town over. Say plainly when the customer's name is confidential and when it will be disclosed; give the honest siting answer, which is usually power, fiber, land, and who said yes.
- The engagement format that fits your community: a project web page (Marysville, New Albany, Van Wert), a "science fair" open house with experts at tables, a town hall with handouts, a site visit (Van Wert took more than 50 people by bus to New Albany; one village brought a decibel meter; set your own itinerary and invite the skeptics and the press), one-on-one meetings, or a neutral convener.
- A plain statement of which decisions are local and where residents should direct concerns about the ones that aren't, and whether the serving utility will send someone to the meeting or answer written questions on the record. Residents will put the utility's questions (load forecasts, tariffs, who pays for upgrades, what happens in a grid emergency) to the developer and to you if nobody else is there to answer them. The same goes for Ohio EPA: about 200 Lima residents came to an agency meeting and, a resident told the Committee, heard "we don't know" to the generator emissions question, so agree the questions in advance or get the agency's answers in writing. And give residents a real address for rate questions: the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is the state agency that represents residential utility customers at PUCO.

Ohio examples. Johnstown's mayor described two experiences. In the first, the Intel project's early days, silence around land acquisition let rumors outrun facts, and local businesses went into survival mode over things that weren't true. With the data center, the city engaged early, with information, legal support, and an open line to constituents, and negotiated a $7 billion Cologix project with 90 permanent jobs averaging over $111,000 into what she called part of the fabric of the community. Same city, two very different outcomes.

Van Wert, facing organized opposition, built a website answering 135 council-generated questions, made a video featuring local residents, held one-on-one meetings, and ran a science fair at Vantage Career Center. Practitioners who did substantial community engagement before any project arrived report the smoothest processes; OEDA is collecting those accounts.

Organized residents move fast: several of the towns whose residents testified on June 1 had a data center measure on the November ballot within four months. And not every resident in the room wants a ban; a Medina resident who asked the Committee to hold off on approvals also listed what would satisfy her (efficiency and water standards tied to any tax benefit, public reporting, inspections, large loads paying for grid upgrades), which is most of Playbook E.

Things to consider. Don't characterize residents' motives or funding. Witnesses on both sides of the hearings accused the other of being manipulated or paid, and it was the charge residents resented most: "Disagreement is not disinformation. Asking questions is not obstruction," a former mayor told the Committee. Answer the question asked, whoever else is asking it.

When your role really is narrow, explain the procedure and name what you do control; a Fairfield County resident told the Committee that county staff said they had no say over what was built and a village administrator felt the project would proceed regardless, and what residents heard was abdication. Give notice beyond the statutory minimum to the people across the township line and to residents who work days, with a written and an evening way to participate; a Millersport-area resident learned of three public meetings after they had happened.

"We signed an NDA" is not a reason to say nothing. A community informational meeting is not a substitute for the public hearing your code or the statute requires; hold both, and say which is which. Letting the developer's community meeting be the only one leaves the developer as the only source of information. Announcing a decision before the process has run confirms the suspicion that the process didn't matter. And transparency about data centers raises the question of transparency about everything else; a community should decide what its standard is.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook H; Part 9.6; the Ohio Record.

PLAYBOOK I

We're a township without zoning

What's usually happening. Someone has optioned land in your township or asked the utility about it, and you have no land-use tool. This is the most common situation in the Ohio hearing record and the one every other playbook assumes away. Large areas of Ohio have partial or no township zoning; OSU Extension's township zoning map, built from an Ohio Township Association survey, shows it. A developer knows this before calling.

Who does what. Your county's economic development organization facilitates, because your only formal influence runs through the county: the commissioners hold most of the incentive authority for unincorporated land, and they can't create an Enterprise Zone in your township or sign an EZ agreement there without your board's consent. If your county has no EDO, OEDA can tell you who covers your area. Counsel can tell you whether adopting zoning under Chapter 519, or limited home rule under Chapter 504 (which lets you create your own Community Reinvestment Area), is realistic on any timeline that matters. What's yours is your consent on incentives, your voice with the commissioners, your participation in any development agreement the county requires, and public information. And the longer question: whether to put zoning before your voters, which is the only way this situation changes for the next project.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- Which incentives the developer will need and which require the township's consent.
- Whether the county will require a development agreement and whether the township can be a party.
- What annexation into the nearest city would do to the township, and whether a CEDA or development agreement gets ahead of it.
- What the utility and Ohio EPA will require, and how the township can comment. Ohio EPA's director walked the Committee through it: application, review, a draft permit, public notice (posted online and sometimes in a newspaper), a comment period, a hearing if one is requested, then the final permit. The comment window opens at the draft, notice may be online only, and a township can request the hearing, so assign someone to watch Ohio EPA's notices and the OPSB docket for your township.
- What it would take to put zoning or limited home rule before your voters, and what it costs. The Ohio Township Association told the Committee a comprehensive plan alone runs $25,000 to $100,000, and the zoning question goes on the ballot.
- Where the money for expertise comes from. Shalersville's trustees told the Committee they would petition their county commissioners for it; the county is a legitimate place to ask.

Ohio examples. Licking Township amended its zoning resolution in 2023 and covered agriculture, residential, commercial, manufacturing, and solar farms, but not data centers, in the county that now has 65 of them. Two former legislators traced the gap statewide to a failed 1997 to 1998 bill that would have given counties more planning and zoning tools. A township administrator gave the Select Committee the question it kept returning to: not whether data centers should exist, but who should decide where and how they're built. If you have no zoning, right now the answer is the developer and the county.

Things to consider. A moratorium isn't a tool you have: it pauses applications under a zoning code, and with no zoning there are no applications to pause. Your consent to an Enterprise Zone is a real say in the deal; the time to raise what the township needs from the county's development agreement is before your board votes on that consent, not after. The Ohio Township Association gave the Committee the list: roads and bridges, stormwater, water and wastewater, fire and EMS equipment, emergency response training, and a share of the revenue, because "the host township should not be treated as an afterthought while other political subdivisions receive the benefit." New Albany's annexation agreements with its three townships, which cover fire and EMS and reimburse revenue lost to abatements, show what that looks like when it's written down (Playbook F). Waiting for the county to call you is a plan for being told.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook I; Part 5.7, 5.9; Part 9.3.

PLAYBOOK J

We're the school district

What's usually happening. A data center is proposed in your district and a property tax exemption is being negotiated by a city, village, county, or township. You're named as a party in every Ohio deal and rarely handed a playbook.

What's on the table for you is your share of new revenue: a CRA or Enterprise Zone can't exempt land, so land taxes keep flowing to you regardless (a TIF can redirect the growth in land value, which is why Piqua's district negotiated its share of it); school boards get notice of most exemptions at least 14 days before the vote (R.C. 5709.83) and hold an approval right when an exemption goes above 75 percent (for a post-1994 CRA, unless the taxes still paid plus any payments to the district reach 25 percent of what would have been owed; for an Enterprise Zone, unless the average over the term stays at or below 60 percent; R.C. 3735.671 and 5709.62 to 5709.63), in which case the agreement is certified to the board at least 45 business days ahead and the board answers at least 14 days before the vote; joint vocational districts receive notice but generally don't vote; and where a city or village grants the exemption and new payroll at the project, construction included, reaches the statutory threshold (a base of $1 million a year for most exemptions, $2 million for a CRA, both indexed), the municipality must negotiate a compensation agreement with you and, failing one within six months, pay you half the municipal income tax on that payroll less a capped infrastructure allowance (R.C. 5709.82(C) and (D); the dollar thresholds are indexed, so ask counsel for the current figures).

Whether an exemption changes your state funding depends on your district's position under the funding formula.

Who does what. The granting government's economic development professional prepares the fiscal impact analysis and structures the deal. Your treasurer takes that analysis and runs the district's own numbers, including the funding-formula effect, which is beyond what an economic development professional can model for you. Counsel reviews any compensation agreement. What's yours is deciding what model of revenue share you want before someone proposes one to you, and deciding whether to approve, waive, or negotiate when the request comes. Don't wait to be invited to the table; Ohio districts that were in the room got the deals below.

The frame that matters. Compare the district's revenue under the proposed agreement, under normal taxation with no exemption, and under the other outcomes realistic for the site,

including no project, and ask how each one changes state aid to the district. The land was producing whatever it produced before and will keep producing land taxes. The question is your share of revenue from improvements that didn't exist. A share of a very large number can be the largest revenue event in your district's history, and it doesn't end with the exemption: the buildings pay full tax after the term, for as long as they stand.

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR TREASURER AND THE GRANTING GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL ABOUT

- Projected valuation by year, split between land (yours regardless) and improvements (the negotiation).
- Your revenue under each structure on the table, during and after the exemption, and what it does to state aid under the formula for your district specifically.
- Which approval or waiver rights you hold for this program at this exemption percentage and term.
- Whether the payment runs with the land and what happens if the project shrinks or sells.
- Who reports to you annually and how. The county's Tax Incentive Review Council reviews every agreement each year and can recommend that it continue, be modified, or be canceled; the granting body must vote on that recommendation within 60 days (R.C. 5709.85). That's your lever after signing, so know who sits on the council.

Ohio examples. The Ohio Business Roundtable told the Select Committee that New Albany-Plain Local Schools received $1.93 million from data center land alone, before any negotiated share, and all three New Albany-area districts endorsed the city's payment formula through compensation agreements; the city says data center revenue kept the district off the ballot for several years. Sidney's schools receive 50 percent of the PILOT, about $50 million over 15 years. Marysville's receive $903,000 a year fixed plus half the income tax on new payroll. Piqua's receive the service payments on land value plus $100,000 per building.

A Lima contractor told the Select Committee that payments to the local district from a data center under construction there are expected to add nearly $250,000 a year to its general fund, and the Ohio Business Roundtable told it that Johnstown-Monroe received $2.5 million from data center land, about 9 percent of its operating budget, and Licking Heights $2.67 million; those are a business group's figures, so confirm them with the district.

Each of these districts negotiated a share of revenue from improvements that didn't exist before. Whether the share was the right one is a question each district answered against its own alternatives, and yours should be too.

Things to consider. Waiving your rights because the timeline is tight. Being told it's all or nothing: a Wilmington resident told the Committee that records showed the school board there was told to accept the PILOT or lose the project, so ask the granting government's economic development professional whether that's true and whether another structure is on the table. Modeling only full buildout, or only the exemption term. Not publishing the comparison: a public school educator asked the Committee for a side-by-side of what a district receives under the deal against normal taxation, and it is the most common school question residents raise. Not being in the room when the local government votes.

Go deeper: Guide Practitioner Playbook J; Part 7.2, 7.5, 7.6; Part 5.2.

TOOLKIT

What the State Is Doing Right Now

Dated page, refreshed with each edition from OEDA's weekly data center briefing. As of September 30, 2026.

Confidentiality law. In early 2026 new language in the Revised Code broadly required public bodies to treat nearly all information tied to economic development assistance as confidential, with potential criminal liability for disclosure. House Bill 479 narrows that requirement to individualized compensation and payroll information, effective September 23, 2026. OEDA's August 18 webinar with Bricker Graydon Wyatt, OML, CCAO, and MORPC covers the current provisions; the materials are available from OEDA.

The state sales tax exemption. On May 27, 2026, Governor DeWine directed the Ohio Tax Credit Authority to pause consideration of new data center exemption requests while the Select Committee studies the issue. The TCA stopped accepting new proposals after June 1. Existing agreements continue. The 2025 budget had repealed the exemption; the Governor vetoed the repeal. The exemption cost about $1.6 billion in 2025 against the $136 million the Department of Taxation had forecast in its November 2024 Tax Expenditure Report. The pause does not reach the statewide agreements Amazon, Meta, and Google hold, under which new sites need no separate approval; projects for those companies have continued to proceed under them.

The Select Committee on Data Centers. Co-chaired by Representative Adam Holmes and Senator Brian Chavez, it held five hearings from May 27 through June 11, 2026, and requested the reference guide this resource is built on. As of this date it has issued no findings or recommendations and scheduled no further hearings. OEDA reviewed the complete written record of the five hearings for this edition; every account drawn from it is attributed to the witness.

Other legislation. The bill that moved furthest, Sub. HB 646, passed the House 97-0 in March 2026 as a study-commission bill; the Senate rewrote it in June into a regulatory bill (a 50 percent state exemption for new projects and 75 percent for brownfield or on-site power sites, a 50 percent cap on local abatements, a PUCO data center rate class, and water reporting), took no floor vote, and re-referred it to committee; the Senate is not scheduled to return until after November 3.

Still in committee: HB 706 (long-term service agreements, minimum billing demand, exit fees, and no cost-shifting to other ratepayers), HB 695 (a ban on local officials signing economic

development NDAs), HB 126 (a nuisance-liability shield for lawful industries, in the Senate), and HB 116 (the Blockchain Basics Act, in the Senate). SB 294, which would redefine the state's energy policy toward sources with a 50 percent capacity factor and direct OPSB to weigh it, passed the Senate in June and awaits the House.

The 2025 budget (HB 96) raised the signatures for a municipal referendum from 10 to 35 percent of the votes cast for governor and for a township zoning referendum from 15 to 35, effective September 30, 2025; HB 985, introduced in August 2026, would lower the zoning threshold to 20. Nothing has given townships statutory moratorium authority, which the Ohio Township Association asked the Committee for.

Proposals in the record run from state preemption of local zoning, which NetChoice called a playbook Ohio "can run again," to local opt-in, under which Timberlake's mayor would require voter approval for any large facility near homes; OEDA reports both and recommends neither. In other states, 2026 bills in Kentucky and Oklahoma to require decommissioning plans and financial assurance for large data centers did not pass.

Ballot measures. *Updated September 28, 2026.* The proposed statewide constitutional amendment to prohibit new data centers above 25 MW of peak monthly load did not qualify for the November 2026 ballot; its sponsors say they are aiming for 2027. The action has moved local. As of September 14, 2026, 18 Ohio communities had a data center measure on the November ballot: local 25 MW prohibitions in Conneaut, Defiance, Granville, Oregon, Pataskala, Piqua, Sunbury, Trenton, and Upper Sandusky; a full ban in Hubbard and, by special election, in Piqua, where a recall of the mayor and commissioners is also on the ballot; a 7.5 MW charter amendment in Urbana; a voter-approval requirement for heavy industrial projects in Grove City; zoning measures in two Adams County townships; a zoning ordinance and four referendums in Wilmington; a referendum in Ashville; and three petitions in Sidney headed for a special election after a court ruling. Piqua and Sidney are cited as deal examples in Unit 7 and Playbooks C and J.

Since that list was published: the Ohio Supreme Court kept a Wilmington citizens' initiative off the ballot on September 18 while the referendums there proceed; it held on August 7 that Ashville's emergency resolution did not block the referendum there; and Grove City's measure is a charter amendment requiring voter approval of projects over 50 acres, 20 MW, or 500,000 gallons a day. The list is the Ohio Capital Journal's (September 14, 2026); county boards of elections hold the current one, and this page will be updated after November 3.

PUCO. AEP Ohio's data center tariff is in effect in AEP territory. The Ohio Consumers' Counsel has urged a "bring your own new generation" or credible supply planning framework for large

loads. In May 2026 PUCO directed FirstEnergy's Ohio utilities to create a separate data center tariff; AES Ohio filed a rate settlement in July that includes one, with a PUCO order expected by year end; Duke Energy Ohio's terms are a question for that utility. Data centers are not yet a customer class of their own in Ohio.

PJM. Capacity auctions for 2026-27, 2027-28, and 2028-29 cleared at the federally approved cap; the December 2025 auction fell short of its reliability requirement for the first time, and the 2028-29 auction added only about 525 MW of new generation. In April 2026 FERC extended the price cap and floor through the 2029-30 auction. Two PJM filings were pending at FERC as of this date: a rule under which new large loads that don't bring their own generation would be curtailed before existing customers in an emergency, and a backstop procurement of roughly 6.8 GW of new supply under long-term contracts, with its bidding window opening September 30.

OPSB. On-site generation for data centers is being certified in New Albany (Meta subsidiary, 200 MW gas, approved June 2025; EdgeConneX, 140 MW gas, approved July 2025), and three more gas plants serving data centers were before the Board as of this date: up to 800 MW in Ashville (decision due by November 22), up to 1,300 MW plus about 1,000 MW of battery storage in Millersport (hearing held September 17), and a third New Albany plant of about 430 MW (local hearing October 22). Local governments participate as intervenors, not decision-makers. The Ohio Mayors Alliance asked the Committee for state fire-safety and emergency-response guidance for data centers; none has been issued.

Ohio EPA. The agency proposed a general permit for direct discharges from data centers in 2026 and withdrew it on July 21 after public comment; discharges are permitted individually. Most data centers discharge to a municipal sewer plant and need no Ohio EPA discharge permit.

What the Committee named and didn't hear. The Committee's mission statement listed electromagnetic fields, wildlife and production animals, and light emissions among its study areas; the hearings produced almost no testimony on any of them, so the record there is thin, not settled.

Go deeper: Guide Part 3.1, Part 5.4, and the Ohio Record.

TOOLKIT

Go Deeper: The Reference Guide

The Ohio Data Center Reference Guide is the working manual for the economic development professional who facilitates this process, and it carries a practitioner playbook matching each letter above. Its nine parts are numbered to the nine units: the part number is the unit number.

Part 1. What a Data Center Is (Unit 1). **Part 2. Why Ohio, and Why Now** (Unit 2). **Part 3. Electricity** (Unit 3). **Part 4. Cooling and Water** (Unit 4). **Part 5. Who Decides** (Unit 5, Playbooks F and I). **Part 6. How a Project Unfolds** (Unit 6, Playbooks A and B). **Part 7. Where the Money Goes** (Unit 7, Playbooks C, E, and J). **Part 8. The Evidence on the Nine Resident Questions** (Unit 8, question by question: 8.1 in the Guide answers 8.1 here). **Part 9. What You Can Do** (Unit 9, Playbooks D, G, and H).

After the nine parts. The Ohio Record: Select Committee testimony, practitioner data, and the Van Wert, New Albany, and Coshocton County case studies. The **Practitioner Playbooks**, A through J. The **Glossary**, which defines every term in both documents in plain language. The **Template Library**, a separate collection in development, which will hold the documents the playbooks describe and mark which are public, shared with permission, or OEDA models. **Sources**, which lists every source behind both documents.

REFERENCE

Terms used in this Toolkit

The Reference Guide's Glossary defines every term in both documents. These are the ones this Toolkit uses most, in one line each.

Beneficial owner. The person or company that ultimately owns or controls a project entity, behind any shell company or LLC that holds the land or signs the agreement.

CEDA. Cooperative Economic Development Agreement: a contract between a township and a municipality that can allow annexation or municipal services while the township keeps a defined share of revenue.

CRA. Community Reinvestment Area: an area in which a municipality, county, or limited home rule township may exempt property tax on new buildings by agreement.

Emergency ordinance. Legislation passed with an emergency clause; it takes effect immediately and is generally not subject to referendum. Routine for economic development agreements, and the act residents cited most often in the hearing record (Unit 5).

EDO, EDP. Your economic development organization or professional: the office, nonprofit development corporation, port authority, or chamber that receives inquiries and facilitates the process.

Enterprise Zone (EZ). A designated area in which a municipality or county may exempt property tax on new buildings by agreement; in a township, only with the trustees' consent.

JEDD. Joint Economic Development District: leaves the land in the township, lets a district board levy the municipality's income tax inside the district, and shares the revenue. Takes a petition from a majority of the district's property owners and businesses, hearings, and months (R.C. 715.72).

MW. Megawatt, one million watts: the unit data center demand is stated in. A town of 10,000 uses about 10 MW.

HB 15. The 2025 law that lets a large customer, or a third party serving it, own generation on land the customer owns or controls, delivered without the utility's wires; the basis for most on-site power at Ohio data centers (Unit 3).

NCA. New Community Authority: a body that can levy a standing community development charge on a defined district.

NDA. Nondisclosure agreement: a promise to keep project information confidential. It doesn't override public records law.

OCC. Ohio Consumers' Counsel: the state agency that represents residential utility customers before PUCO; where to send residents' rate questions.

OPSB. Ohio Power Siting Board: certifies power plants of 50 MW or more and major transmission lines, including on-site plants serving data centers.

PILOT. Payment in lieu of taxes: a negotiated payment that replaces some or all of the tax an exemption removes.

PJM. The regional grid operator for Ohio and 12 other states; its capacity auction price is in every Ohio bill.

PUCO. Public Utilities Commission of Ohio: regulates investor-owned utilities and their tariffs.

TIF. Tax increment financing: redirects the growth in property tax value on a parcel to pay for public improvements.

TIRC. Tax Incentive Review Council: the county body that reviews every CRA, Enterprise Zone, and TIF exemption annually and can recommend that an agreement continue, change, or end.

This toolkit is educational. It does not recommend for or against any project and is not legal, tax, engineering, or utility advice. Every community should consult its own counsel, its economic development professional, and its advisors.