



# SIERRA CLUB

## NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

### New Jersey Data Center Community Organizing Toolkit

*Last Updated May 2026*

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## Overview of Data Centers in New Jersey

### What are Data Centers?

A **data center** can refer to a building or group of buildings that house servers, hardware, networking equipment, and other computing technologies. Growth is primarily driven by demand for computing power for cloud processing and artificial intelligence (AI).

### Summary of Harms of Data Center Development

The rapid expansion of data centers is significantly altering landscapes and causing land-use conflicts nationwide. Proposed sites often impact sensitive wetlands, mature forests, and wildlife



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habitats. Noise, light pollution, and the visual impact of these industrial facilities with a large footprint are driving down property values for nearby homes.

Harms include:

- **High energy usage** straining the grid
- **Spiking energy prices and utility bills** for ratepayers due to the huge energy demand
- **Air and noise pollution** from diesel and dirty gas generators and from the servers
- **High water usage** straining drinking water supplies, can exacerbate drought conditions
- **Irresponsible siting:** on or near farmland, wetlands, green space, aquifers, communities
- **Threats to wildlife:** habitat loss and fragmentation
- **High temperatures** from servers can create "[heat islands](#)"
- **Lack of transparency:** no regulation or reporting, backdoor financial deals (NDAs)
- **Tax Breaks** for Big Tech corporations

## What can we do?

To mitigate the impact of data centers on our communities in New Jersey, we need a community-centered approach grounded in transparency, accountability, and justice. Data centers want our power and water, we should demand that they be good neighbors in return.

[Pemberton Township](#) (Burlington County), [Waterford Township](#) (Camden County), [Phillipsburg](#) (Warren County) and many more towns have already begun putting restrictions on data centers at the local level.

This toolkit will provide resources and steps you can take in your community to mobilize your neighbors and influence local restrictions and ordinances.

***Step 1: EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY***

***Step 2: TALK TO YOUR LOCAL REPS AND ATTEND PUBLIC MEETINGS***

***Step 3: PASS LOCAL ORDINANCES AND SUPPORT STATE LEVEL LEGISLATION***



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### Advocacy & Outreach Resources

#### Talking Points

These are general talking points to inform your public comment, but each project will vary depending in size and location.

Feel free to **make a copy** of the document below to customize your points for your specific project. General things to look out for are the zoning designations, especially sensitive environmental areas, permit status, etc.

[→](#)  NJ Data Center Talking Points (General).pdf

#### Overview of Municipal Decision Makers & Criteria to ask Planning Boards, Town Councils, Legislators

Every municipality has several key decision makers involved in decision-making regarding planning and development. The three major ones are the Township Council, Zoning Board, and Planning Board.

- 1) **Township Council.** These are elected officials who serve as the legislative body for a municipality. For the purposes of planning, a Township Council is responsible for enacting ordinances, reviewing appeals and “use” variances from the Zoning Board, and adopting a map based on the municipal Master Plan.
- 2) **Zoning Board.** Similar to Planning Boards, Zoning Boards are guided by the NJ Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL), the NJ Residential Site Improvement Standards (RSIS), the Township Master Plan, and Municipal Code.
- 3) **Planning Board.** Planning Boards are responsible for developing a Township Master Plan—a document meant to guide the use of municipal lands in a manner to protect public health and safety, and promote general welfare—every 10 years. When making decisions, Planning Boards must consider a development application’s compliance with MLUL, RSIS, the Township Master Plan, and the Municipal Code.

*NOTE : Some municipalities have a **combined land use board** rather than separate zoning and planning boards. Check out your local municipality’s website for more information on the form they use.*

New Jersey municipalities can operate under several different types and forms, including the Borough type, Township type, Mayor-Council form, Council-Manager form, and more. With the



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various types and forms of local government structures available to municipalities in New Jersey, many operate with slightly different power distribution.




**Take a look at your town's website for more information on the specific description and details of each decision-making body and their powers!**

*For a bit more information on the structure and powers of each decision-making body, as well as some criteria and strategies to use when making asks of local officials, use the document below.*

  [Overview of Municipal Decision Makers & Criteria to ask Planning Boards, Town Council...](#)

## Guidance for Public Meetings and Comment

It is important to ensure your community is organized when attending public meetings. Below are tips from us on how to prepare properly.

- 1) **Research and identify the decision makers or decision making body for the project (planning board, zoning board, Mayor, town councils, etc.)**  
Depending on which body you are appealing to, this informs your “ask.”
- 2) **Connect with your community members before the meeting.** Joining or creating a “private” Facebook group, Signal chat, Slack to organize and communicate with people in your community can be effective! You can also [connect with organizers](#) to host a meeting or zoom call to prepare. Share links to news stories about other communities and their actions on data centers.
- 3) **Decide on a meeting location.** Typically, this can be outside the building where the public meeting will occur.
- 4) **Decide on attire that will make a statement.** How will you and the local officials recognize you and the breadth of your support? This can include matching colors, pins, or hats.
- 5) **Bring printables!** These resources can be handed out to other community members and elected officials who attend the meeting. Check out our printable factsheet here:
  -  [NJ Data Centers Public - Fact Sheet](#)
- 6) **Prepare public comment, if applicable!** During public meetings, it is not uncommon for community members to be allowed to come to the podium and give comment and feedback on proposed actions. Public comment should be short and to the point, about 3-5 minutes. Check out our public comment guidance here:
  -  [4 Public Comment Guidance](#)
  -  **Tip: Don't get angry:** If the attorney gets aggressive, stay calm. It makes *them* look unprofessional to the Planning Board.



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- 7) **Come prepared with questions!** Data centers are currently not obligated to disclose their resource use, so it is essential to ask questions to help understand the impact they will have on your community.
- a) **Recommended Questions for Public Meetings:**
1. How much water will this use? Is our water infrastructure able to handle this increased demand?
  2. How much power will this use? Will it require new power infrastructure including substations and transmission lines?
  3. How much tax revenue will this generate?
  4. How many permanent jobs will this create (after construction)?
  5. Who is going to pay for the power and water infrastructure upgrades?
  6. What will the lighting look like? Who will monitor the noise levels?
  7. How long is the lease for? If we give them tax incentives, do they pay them back if they leave early?
  8. What is the end of life plan for the data center?
  9. What is the onsite backup power generation plan? Will you rely on diesel generators?
  10. Who gets the water during drought protocols?
- 8) **Invite the press!** Especially if public comment is being taken, this is an excellent opportunity for community member's voices to be amplified.
- 9) **Be prepared to be in a room full of opponents.** When heading into public meetings, it is common to be met with other groups and individuals who do not think the way you do. Be prepared and do your research beforehand, and do your best to foster conversation. Avoid taking swipes at opponents, this can waste valuable meeting time and reinforce their position.
- 10) **Follow up with everyone you meet!** Send thank you's to local elected officials, invite community members to your chat, Facebook group, or next meeting, and follow up with the press.

## Sample Outreach Language

Below is a sample email draft to use when reaching out to county commissioners, city council, and planning/zoning committees if a data center is planned in your area!

### County Commissioner or City Council Email Template

Subject: Protect Against Data Centers in **insert locality name**, New Jersey

Dear **Commissioner/council member Name**,



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I am concerned about the impact of data center operations on our community. These facilities consume vast energy and water, produce harmful noise pollution, and offer little local economic benefit.

As a {neighborhood} community member, please consider passing a local ordinance restricting data centers in our area as well as rules to make sure they are good neighbors. Strong local legislation is essential to protect our resources and residents.

Insert personal story as applicable.

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon.



Sincerely,

Name

## Sample Municipal Ordinances


→  [Sample Data Center Ordinance - NJ Sierra Club.pdf](#)

### Examples from Other States:

- [Mesa, AZ Model Ordinance](#)
- PA Model Ordinances:
  -  [DATA CENTER ORDINANCE TOWNSHIP BOILERPLATE](#)
  -  [Model Ordinance\\_ Data Centers FWW.pdf](#)

## Sierra Club Resources

### New Jersey Sierra Club Resources:

- [NJ Sierra Club Data Center Webpage](#)
- NJ Sierra Club Factsheet,  [NJ Data Centers Public - Fact Sheet](#)
- [NJ Sierra Club Webinar, "From Big Tech to Your Backyard" Recording](#), April 2026
- NJ Sierra Club Webinar, "Communities Standing Up to Big Tech in NJ" Recording, May 2026 – [coming May 20th](#)

### National Sierra Club:

- [National Demanding Better Website](#)
- [Data Center State Policies, 2026](#)



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Other Sierra Club State Chapters:

- [Virginia Data Center Report](#)
- [Georgia Data Center Organizing Toolkit](#)
- [Delaware Data Center Fact Sheets](#)
- [Wisconsin Data Center Toolkit: Big Tech Unchecked](#)

Current Data Center Action Alerts

- [Tell Your Legislators to Support a Package of Data Center Bills to Hold Big Tech Accountable!](#)
- [Tell Your Town to Pass an Ordinance to Regulate Data Centers!](#)
- [Demand Answers from Vineland City Council on Massive Data Center and Gas-Powered Generation Impacts!](#)
- [Tell East Greenwich Town Committee: Reject American Tower Data Center!](#)

## Contact Us!

Ready to take action or have questions about a specific topic related to data centers? Reach out to our **New Jersey Chapter Organizer, Maegan Kuhlmann** with questions, information on how to get involved at [maegan.kuhlmann@sierraclub.org](mailto:maegan.kuhlmann@sierraclub.org) or take the Volunteer Interest Survey [here](#).

If you are interested in **passing a local ordinance in your area to mitigate data centers**, please contact NJ Sierra Club Conservation Program Manager, Taylor McFarland at [taylor.mcfarland@sierraclub.org](mailto:taylor.mcfarland@sierraclub.org).

If you are interested in joining our **volunteer-led Warehouse and Data Center Team**, contact co-chairs Gary Frederick and Stan Greberis by email at [garyfrederick@sierraclub.newjersey.com](mailto:garyfrederick@sierraclub.newjersey.com) and [sgreberis@newjersey.sierraclub.org](mailto:sgreberis@newjersey.sierraclub.org) to learn more. Currently, we meet on Zoom once a month.