

# TWO DATA CENTER ORDINANCES

## Current Data Center Ordinance vs. Model Data Center Ordinance

### A quick guide for Columbia County residents

This one-sheet compares the Current Data Center Ordinance adopted December 2, 2025 with the Model Data Center Ordinance dated August 12, 2026 and presented to the Board of Commissioners on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

### The central difference

**The Current Data Center Ordinance is primarily a zoning-code amendment.** It creates a D-C Data Center District and sets standards for siting, buffers, noise, generators, lighting, fencing, utilities, landscaping, and cessation.

**The Model Data Center Ordinance is a full lifecycle framework.** It adds detailed approval procedures, independent technical review, public disclosure, development agreements, financial assurance, continuing monitoring, enforcement, decommissioning, remediation, and economic-development conditions.

### SIDE-BY-SIDE SUMMARY

| Topic                  | Current Data Center Ordinance                                                            | Model Data Center Ordinance                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Regulatory approach    | Zoning amendment creating a D-C district.                                                | 22-article, lifecycle oversight system.                                                                                                                                                    |
| Approval process       | Existing zoning, conditional-use, and site-plan framework.                               | Complete technical package, peer review, written findings, and recorded development agreement.                                                                                             |
| Residential separation | 500-foot buffer near residential/agricultural uses, with possible berm-based reductions. | 2,640-foot (1/2 mile) building setback from any existing residence plus a 500-foot residential-zoning buffer.                                                                              |
| Noise                  | 70 dB at exterior property line; sound studies at rezoning and before occupancy.         | Noise-sensitive-property standards, 50 dB (day) and 45 dB (night) at exterior property line, low-frequency and tonal analysis, recurring testing, reporting and corrective action process. |
| Generators             | Backup/emergency use with testing, maintenance, and commissioning allowances.            | Diesel generators generally prohibited unless a narrow exception is justified; detailed limits and reporting.                                                                              |
| Water and utilities    | No wells; County water service required; applicant pays County utility upgrades.         | Establishes threshold and process for Large Quantity Users, accounting, conservation and reuse, utility-capacity analysis, reporting, and ratepayer protections.                           |
| Closure                | Notice after defined cessation; removal and agricultural restoration within 12 months.   | Meaningful-operations trigger, funded decommissioning, environmental closure testing, remediation, and final inspection.                                                                   |

# WHAT THE MODEL ORDINANCE ADDS

## 1. MORE INFORMATION BEFORE APPROVAL

The Model Data Center Ordinance requires studies covering electrical demand, water, wastewater, air quality, noise, traffic, fire protection, fiscal impacts, community impacts, closure, and financial assurance. Developer funded and County-selected consultants independently peer-review the package before the Planning Commission hearing.

## 2. MORE PUBLIC NOTICE AND DISCLOSURE

The Model Data Center Ordinance establishes a 45-day public-review period, a public project webpage, posted technical studies and peer reviews, public information meetings, outreach, complaint-response deadlines, and an annual public compliance hearing. The Current Data Center Ordinance does not create a comparable data-center-specific reporting system.

## 3. MORE ONGOING OPERATING REQUIREMENTS

The Model Data Center Ordinance requires recurring reports on water, electricity, generators, noise, air quality, environmental incidents, complaints, financial assurance, renewable energy, incentives, jobs, wages, and community benefits. It also provides for inspections, quarterly compliance review, corrective-action plans, and escalating enforcement.

## 4. FINANCIAL PROTECTION FOR CLOSURE AND CLEANUP

The Model Data Center Ordinance requires separate security for construction, environmental remediation, and decommissioning/reclamation. The Current Data Center Ordinance requires removal and restoration after cessation but does not establish a comparable multi-instrument financial-assurance program.

## 5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Only the Model Data Center Ordinance addresses restrictions on tax incentives, PILOT agreements, school-tax abatements and mandates local hiring, wages, benefits, workforce reporting, incentive clawbacks, community-benefit negotiations, and possible community ownership or revenue-sharing mechanisms for residents located within the zone of high development impact.

## QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION

|                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How should the County reconcile the Current Ordinance's 500-foot buffer and berm-reduction provisions with the Model Ordinance's 2,640-foot residential setback? | Which noise limits, measurement methods, and time periods should apply?                                               |
| Should closure be triggered by zero electrical load or by the Model Ordinance's "meaningful operations" standard?                                                | Which requirements belong in zoning, and which require separate utility, tax, environmental, or incentive agreements? |

**Bottom line.** The Current Data Center Ordinance is a focused zoning framework. The Model Data Center Ordinance is substantially broader, more prescriptive and more resource-intensive for applicants and the County. It provides stronger lifecycle oversight and requires careful coordination with the existing zoning code and Georgia law.