

WORKSHOP

AI/DATA CENTER MORATORIUM

Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
September 14, 2026 – 3:00 PM

The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1 469-551-3616 and enter code 908825494#

COMMISSIONERS

Mark Hatch, District 3, Chairman
Jody Stephenson, District 1 – Not present
Daniel Wood, District 2 – Not present
Jamie Storey, District 4, Vice Chairman
David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

John Jenkins, County Manager
Roy Bass, Assistant County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator – Not present
Chana Watson, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Brenda Royal, Chief Financial Officer
Christie Zander, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Hatch called the AI/Data Center Workshop to order and welcomed all attendees, thanking everyone for coming.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

Vice-Chairman Storey led the Invocation and Chairman Hatch led the Pledge to the American Flag.

DISCUSSION

AI risks and proposed moratorium

Christine Pearson from Suwannee spoke about concerns regarding the rapid growth of AI data centers and the lack of local regulations. She raised concerns about surveillance, digital identification, control of information, energy and water demand, and potential future misuse of AI. She cited comments attributed to AI researcher Geoffrey Hinton about possible future risks.

Ms. Pearson called for a **12-month moratorium** to allow time to develop local protections. She suggested addressing air quality, utility-ratepayer protections, water use, zoning, noise, and health concerns, and argued that developers should bear the burden of demonstrating that projects would not cause harm.

Chairman Hatch asked that discussion focus on practical local land-use issues as well as hypothetical risks. He expressed concern that a moratorium could define what a developer would need to satisfy to proceed, potentially creating a “playbook,” and could expose the county to legal challenges if its requirements were incomplete. He stated that he was neither wholly for nor wholly against data centers.

Mary Goodrich asked why a proposed moratorium needed to last 12 months and whether a shorter pause could allow the county to study the issue incrementally. Mark responded that he believed the county already had protections in place and questioned whether a moratorium would improve its position.

Natural resources and native plants

Jenny Welch raised concerns about the loss of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers if a large facility were built. She asked for protections for native plants and highlighted *Asclepias tomentosa*, a milkweed she said is unique to Dixie County. Jenny also questioned whether county rules require replacement planting when trees are removed, based on her experience with prior development projects.

Chairman Hatch said that, in his view, the county’s past experience with Dollar General projects showed that development could be negotiated to include landscaping measures. The discussion returned to whether a moratorium or specific development standards would better protect local resources.

Data-center growth, impacts, and uncertainty

Andrew Quincoses discussed the growth and variety of data centers. He cited estimates of approximately 2,500 facilities in the United States in 2021 and approximately 5,500 at the time of the meeting, and described possible economic benefits as well as uncertainty about long-term costs and technology changes.

Mr. Quincoses raised concerns about electricity demand, direct and indirect water use, cooling systems, emissions, noise and infrasound, and the possibility that facilities could become obsolete. He also described potential state and utility proceedings, including confidential filings involving Duke Energy. He emphasized that he did not consider himself an expert and urged the county to proceed cautiously. Andrew supported a moratorium or pause while more information and state guidance became available.

Chairman Hatch disputed Mr. Quincoses’s implication that county officials had signed nondisclosure agreements or were secretly arranging a project. Chairman Hatch stated that he had not signed an NDA. Mr. Quincoses clarified that he was referring to conversations he believed had occurred within the county and did not say that board members had signed NDAs. The exchange did not establish that a data-center project had been proposed or approved in Dixie County.

Mr. Quincoses also recommended considering a surety or decommissioning bond if a project were proposed, to help ensure that commitments are met and that the county is protected if a facility is abandoned.

Planning and regulatory approaches

Leon Wright said the county's land-development regulations and zoning did not specifically classify data centers or establish where they could be located. He favored identifying concerns and developing guardrails—such as site-plan requirements and setbacks—rather than relying only on a ban or moratorium. He warned that state action could potentially override local rules, including if data centers were treated as essential services.

Leon also noted that a moratorium would not resolve the need for longer-term planning. He suggested that nearby counties and planning organizations could share research and approaches.

Attorney Chana Watson described the LPA's recent discussion of potential parameters, including air, water, noise, natural gas, lighting, stormwater, generators, and electrical infrastructure. She said no conclusions had been reached and that the subject required substantial research. Chana discussed the legal and financial risks of adopting incomplete or overly generic rules and said she would prepare language if directed by the board. Chana also discussed her understanding of state-law constraints on changes to comprehensive plans and land-development regulations before October 1, 2027, and noted uncertainty about how those constraints could apply to a local moratorium. She referred to Senate Bills 180 and 484 and said that the county would need to consider the applicable statutes and legal risks before acting.

Mr. Quincoses recommended waiting for an OPAGA study, which he said was expected by July 2027, before finalizing local regulations. Attorney Watson noted that state legislation may provide guidance on some issues but said questions would remain for the county.

Enforcement and financial safeguards

A public commenter raised concern about who would monitor a facility's compliance and enforce environmental requirements. The commenter described a prior experience with alleged improper disposal by a business in another county.

Attorney Watson and Mr. Wright discussed limits on county oversight in some agricultural settings. Attorney Watson said enforcement responsibilities and costs would need consideration.

The group discussed requiring a developer to fund compliance monitoring or enforcement. Chairman Hatch cited Gilchrist County's solar-farm decommissioning provisions as an example of a possible safeguard. Attorney Watson said bonding and decommissioning requirements were among the measures that could be considered.

LPA Update and Recognition

Mr. Wright summarized the LPA discussion and reiterated that the county needs further research and public discussion before settling on an approach. He thanked Sarah Ross for her service on the LPA, and Chairman Hatch and Commissioner David Osteen also expressed appreciation for her contributions.

Board Discussion and Outcome

Board members and speakers discussed the trade-offs between:

- adopting a temporary moratorium while the county studies the issue;
- developing land-use standards and guardrails without a moratorium; and
- waiting for additional state guidance and research.

Topics identified for further consideration included setbacks, site plans, water and power use, air quality, noise, lighting, native vegetation, stormwater, generators, enforcement, developer-funded monitoring, surety bonds, and decommissioning.

No final decision was made on a moratorium, a data-center ordinance, or specific guardrails during this workshop.

Action Items and Follow-Up

- **Further direction is needed from the board** on whether staff or counsel should prepare a moratorium, comprehensive-plan amendment, or land-development regulation language.
- **Attorney Watson** indicated she could prepare draft language once the board provides direction on the desired standards and parameters.
- The county's ongoing research may include reviewing other counties' approaches, considering state legislation and the OPAGA study, and exploring a possible site visit to a data center in Jacksonville.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Vice Chairman Storey.

Meeting adjourned.

PLEASE BE ADVISED that if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearings, he/ she will need a record of the proceedings, and for such purpose, he/ she will need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

"Persons with disabilities requesting reasonable accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact (352) 486-4931 (Voice & TDD) or via Florida Relay Service at (800) 955-8771."

The Board meets the first Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM and the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. Individuals that would like to be placed on the agenda should call Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court, by 4:00 PM on the Friday Preceding the Board meeting, at (352) 498-1200.