



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 11, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Stella Koch, Chairman *Stella M. Koch*
Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC)

SUBJECT: Data Centers in Fairfax County

Data centers are increasingly seeking to locate in Northern Virginia.

Data centers are high consumers of both power and water and can have a significant impact, especially when multiple data centers come into an area. The Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) is concerned that they will place a strain on providing both electricity and water.

A great concern for EQAC in the siting of these data centers in the Occoquan Reservoir watershed, the source of drinking water for much of Fairfax County.

Barbara Byron, Director of the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development, wrote a letter on February 23, 2022, to Prince William County's County Executive primarily focusing on the impacts that might occur if the Prince William Comprehensive Plan is amended to change land now designated Agricultural or Estate and Environmental/Resources to Technology/Flex. This change would then allow the construction of data centers up to 27.6 million square feet of building in an area previously not designated for that kind of development. The letter cites the potential negative impacts on tree cover, streams, floodplains and wetlands. The letter states that the "proposed data centers would not be compatible with the critical need to protect the Occoquan Reservoir."

The Fairfax Water letter of March 21, 2022, to the Prince William County Executive requests that before Prince William initiate any Comprehensive Land Use Plan changes in those areas that they request the Occoquan Policy Board to convene and oversee a comprehensive study of these proposed changes to evaluate their impact on the water quality of the Occoquan Reservoir. EQAC would seek that type of study for all data centers wishing to locate in the Occoquan Reservoir watershed.

Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC)
c/o Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 533
Fairfax, Virginia 22035
Phone 703-324-7136 TTY: 711
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/eqac/

While not all the locations that might be selected as data center sites would potentially affect the Occoquan Reservoir and our drinking water, all sites could have significant negative impacts on various water resources and supplies throughout the county and might affect the demand on water supplies in the future potentially requiring expensive water supply capacity upgrades.

Data centers have the potential to negatively affect the county's ability to reach its goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. For the county to meet carbon neutrality, additional renewable energy will need to be developed to accommodate data center needs. Therefore, projections of data center energy needs should be provided to Dominion Energy so that they can develop the necessary renewable energy to achieve carbon neutrality.

EQAC recognizes that these data centers can help grow the economy of Fairfax County, but also recognizes that the energy and environmental concerns of such growth must be addressed in the process.

The Sully District Council and Western Fairfax County Citizens Association, and the Great Falls Group of the Sierra Club have also taken positions that share our concerns with many of these issues.

Therefore, EQAC asks that Board of Supervisors direct staff to prepare possible mitigation strategies associated with the placement of additional data centers within Fairfax County. To assist review of future data center applications, mitigation strategies should include guidance for inclusion in future comprehensive plan amendments, as well as any other appropriate means to guide the county in addressing these expected data center applications and create specific criteria that address the cumulative impacts they bring with them.