

**AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENT
STAFF REPORT**

Case Number: ZA-R-262

Hearing Date: July 6, 2026

ISSUE / PURPOSE:

Amend the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of Augusta, Georgia by creating Section 24-A, Data Center and High-Density Computing Facilities Zone.

To establish zoning regulations governing the location, review procedures, design standards, operational requirements, infrastructure coordination, environmental protections, and abandonment requirements for Data Centers (DCs) and High-Density Computing Facilities (HDCFs) within Augusta-Richmond County.

BACKGROUND:

The increasing demand for data storage, cloud computing, artificial intelligence processing, cryptocurrency operations, and other computing-intensive activities has resulted in growing interest in the development of Data Centers and High-Density Computing Facilities throughout Georgia and the Southeast.

These facilities often require substantial electrical infrastructure, specialized cooling systems, continuous operations, emergency power generation, and large-scale site improvements. While such facilities may provide economic development opportunities, they can also create land use impacts related to noise, utility demand, environmental resources, visual character, transportation infrastructure, and compatibility with surrounding properties.

The proposed ordinance establishes a comprehensive regulatory framework to ensure that Data Centers and High-Density Computing Facilities are in appropriate areas and developed in a manner that protects public health, safety, and welfare while preserving natural resources and supporting orderly growth and development.

Key provisions of the proposed ordinance include:

1. Limiting consideration of Data Centers and High-Density Computing Facilities to the HI (Heavy Industrial) zoning district.
2. Requiring approval through a Special Exception process with public hearings and findings of fact.
3. Establishing minimum setback, buffering, screening, lighting, and noise standards.

4. Requiring coordination with utility providers, Engineering, Utilities, Environmental Services, Emergency Management, and other applicable agencies.
5. Establishing standards for cooling systems, water use, emergency access, waste management, and site maintenance.
6. Requiring annual compliance certifications and establishing procedures for enforcement, discontinuation, and site restoration.

ANALYSIS:

The proposed amendments are intended to provide clear and predictable standards for the review of Data Centers and High-Density Computing Facilities while addressing potential impacts on surrounding properties, public infrastructure, environmental resources, and community character.

The ordinance establishes objective application requirements and performance standards while preserving Augusta's ability to evaluate each proposal through a public review process. The proposed standards are designed to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses, coordinate infrastructure needs, protect natural resources, and provide appropriate safeguards for long-term operation and eventual site restoration.

Staff finds that the proposed text amendment is generally consistent with the goals of the Augusta Comprehensive Plan by promoting orderly development patterns, protecting public infrastructure, and providing a framework for evaluating emerging industrial land uses.