

Smithfield Town Council approves ordinance to prevent construction of data centers

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SMITHFIELD, R.I. (WPRI) — The Smithfield Town Council voted Tuesday to approve an ordinance that is meant to prevent data centers from being built in the community.

Gregory Guertin, Smithfield's director of planning and economic development, said the amendment lists data centers as "not permitted" in each of the town's zoning districts.

According to Town Councilor Rachel Toppi, the council had already drafted the amendment prior to learning that developers were looking into building a business park that could include a data center in the Hanton City area.

"For clarity, I want to emphasize that this amendment was drafted as a proactive measure in anticipation of potential developments, rather than in response to recent news about a data center construction interest in Smithfield," Toppi explained in a statement she read at Tuesday's meeting. "It is essential for residents to understand that this initiative was not reactive, but rather a precautionary step."

Toppi said the amendment was drafted over concerns that a data center would put a strain on water consumption and energy costs in the town.

"We cannot let these facilities in before we understand what they do to our grid, water table, health and economy," Toppi noted.

During the meeting, more than a dozen Smithfield residents voiced their

opposition to building a data center in the community, including Kelly DeAngelis.

"Our town is for our residents," DeAngelis said. "We should care about people. We should care about future generations. I want my children to grow up here and have a positive environment."

The ordinance passed in a 4-1 vote, with only Councilor Thomas Winfield dissenting.

In an email to 12 News, Winfield underscored that his vote was not an endorsement of data centers.

"A data center is not a good fit for us and it is not a permitted use," Winfield said, "but I think a moratorium would have been the best option."

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