



Planning Department

March 23, 2026

Honorable Mayor and Councilors
City Manager
City Attorney
Clerk of Council

This application comes at the request of Columbus Consolidated Government.

A request to amend the text of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to provide for Technology Overlay Districts; establishing underlying zoning districts where such overlay districts are permitted; to redefine Developments of Regional Impact; and for other purposes.

Recommendations:

The Planning Advisory Commission (PAC) considered this text amendment at their meetings on March 4 and March 18, 2026. PAC recommended **conditional approval** by a vote of 5-1. The recommended condition is: increase the buffer requirement from 200-feet to 500-feet in Section 2.5.25.(d).E. *Minimum buffer requirements*.

The Planning Department recommends **conditional approval**. The recommended conditions are: 1) add the term “hyperscale” to Section 2.5.25.(a). *Purpose*: “an overlay to permit and regulate **hyperscale** data centers...”, and 2) add the term “non-residential” to Section 2.5.25.(d).D. *Buffers and setbacks*: All **non-residential** buffers and setbacks shall conform...”.

UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE REVISIONS
(Explanation of Revisions)

1. Explanation of Revisions: Create Section 2.5.25.

Chapter 2 of the UDO is hereby amended by inserting a new Section 2.5.25. to read as follows:

Section 2.5.25. – Technology Overlay District.

- (a) *Purpose.* The purpose of this section is to provide an overlay to permit and regulate data centers and related technology uses, as provided herein, and which supports and encourages the siting of new technologies, computer systems, data infrastructure and data hosting.
- (b) *Underlying zoning.* The underlying zoning of a property shall remain unaffected.
- (c) *Use regulations.* *Within the Technology Overlay District,* data centers and related technology uses shall be permitted subject to the requirements of this section.
 - A. Uses permitted as *Data centers and related technology uses* include:
 - Computer systems and facilities design, programming operation and management.
 - Data processing, storage, hosting and related services.
 - Information product research and development.
 - Internet website design and hosting.
 - Public utility facilities.
 - Software design and development.
 - Solar, renewable and alternative energy facilities.
 - Technology consulting and management
 - Telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity facilities.
 - B. Uses NOT permitted as *Data centers and related technology uses* are:
 - The commercial process by which cryptocurrency transactions are verified and added to the public ledger, known as the block chain, and the means through which new units of cryptocurrencies are released, otherwise known as cryptocurrency mining, which is not permitted as a Data Center. See Section 3.2.77. – Cryptocurrency Mining.
 - C. *Accessory uses.* Structures and land may be used for uses customarily incidental to any permitted use.
- (d) *Development standards.*

- A. *Data Center Development.* A Data Center Development shall mean and refer to the entire contiguous tract of land presented for development as a Data Center.
- B. *Height regulations.* Buildings shall not exceed a height of seventy-five (75) feet, measured from structure pad level. Height limitations shall not apply to accessory structures such as water towers, conveyer belts, HVAC equipment, generators and other incidental and uninhabited parts of the structure.
- C. *Minimum acreage:* seventy-five acres.
- D. *Buffers and Setback:* All buffers and setbacks shall conform to the Development Agreement, as defined in paragraph N. below, the requirements of this code section, or the requirements of the underlying zoning district, whichever is most restrictive.
- E. *Minimum buffer requirements:* In addition to required setbacks, a minimum 200-foot wide buffer, which can include required setback, shall be required along all property lines which abut a residential district in order to provide a visual screen.
- F. *Air conditioning units and HVAC systems.* Air conditioning units and HVAC systems shall be thoroughly screened from view from the public right-of-way and from adjacent properties by using walls, fencing, roof elements, or landscaping. This requirement shall not apply where the equipment is more than 200 feet from adjacent property lines.
- G. *Front building facade.* The front building facade of all principal buildings shall be oriented toward street fronts or adjacent arterial street fronts. This requirement shall not apply if the front of the building is greater than 500 feet from the public right-of-way or not visible from the public right-of-way.
- H. *Security fencing and structures.* Security fencing and walls shall not be located within the required buffer unless it complies with the general regulations pertaining to fencing for the underlying zoning classification. Fences and walls outside the required setback and buffer provided above shall not be subject to height limitations. Guard houses and secured entry features shall be permitted at public road entrances.
- I. *Exception for internal lots.* Required setbacks and buffers shall only apply to external property boundaries with other properties not part of the data center campus. Minimum lot frontages, width and acreage shall not apply to subdivided lots within the data center campus, so long as the entirety of the contiguous data center campus complies with the requirements of this ordinance, and so long as the subdivided lot has adequate frontage on public or private roads to allow service.
- J. *Private roads.* Private roads are permitted within data center campuses.
- K. *Dark sky lighting.* Exterior illumination shall be shielded, downcast and of a luminosity designed to maintain the existing night sky darkness and to prevent light trespass onto adjacent properties. In order to obtain that objective, the following criteria shall be met:
 - i. all fixtures shall be full cut-off type fixtures,
 - ii. light poles shall be no taller than 25 feet in height,

- iii. all light poles must be setback a minimum of 10 feet from any exterior property line
- iv. maximum foot-candles at the property line shall be 0.5

The Director of Inspections and Code may require a photometric lighting plan which shows conformity with these requirements as part of any building permit application.

L. *Noise.* In order to ensure that data centers and related technology uses do not contribute to noise pollution within the City, all data centers will be subject to the following standards:

- i. Data center operations shall not produce continuous sound that exceeds an average of 65 decibels over any 30-minute period from 8 AM to 6 PM, measured at any adjacent property boundary between the data center site and a residential property. Nor shall data center operations produce continuous sound that exceeds an average of 55 decibels over any thirty-minute period from 6 PM to 8 AM, measured at any adjacent property boundary between the site and residential property. Violations of these sound levels may be prosecuted in the same manner as other zoning ordinance violations.
- ii. After issuance of the certificate of occupancy for each data center building, the City may obtain sound studies or require the data center operator to provide a sound study to verify that the operation is in compliance with the requirements of paragraph (i) above. If a data center is found to be in violation of the requirements of paragraph (i) above, the City may issue a notice of violation, which may direct that the data center take appropriate steps to operate within the requirements of paragraph (i) above. The City manager may require the data center operator to propose a solution, and a time period for implementation. If the City Manager approves such solution, and the data center fails to successfully implement that solution within the time approved, the violator shall be subject to a fine up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each day that the violation exists until full compliance is obtained.
- iii. The data center operator shall continue to bear the costs of any sound test or study required to monitor violations in paragraphs (i) or (ii).

M. Developers of data centers desiring local utilities must request and receive from the city prior to any permits being issued or beginning construction a utility availability letter.

N. All cooling and ventilation equipment within property boundaries must operate on a closed-loop system and must follow Watershed standards for usage and disposal with flushing and refills to be regulated by Columbus and the Columbus Water Works.

O. Prior to the issuance of land disturbance permits, certificates of occupancy, or other development approval the data center developer shall enter into a development agreement reasonably acceptable to the City whereby the Developer will be financially responsible for

any system upgrades required in providing for the installation of required project improvements and addressing the provision of public utilities to serve the project. Developer shall be required to put up a surety/maintenance bond. If the City is unable to reasonably provide the required utilities to serve the project, then the City may decline to enter into a development agreement with the developer and therefore no land disturbance permits, certificates of occupancy or other development approval will be granted.

P. Creating a Technology Overlay District for a property shall follow the requirements of Chapter 10.2 – **Zoning Changes** of the Unified Development Ordinance of the City Code.

2. **Explanation of Revisions: Amend Table 3.1.1**

Chapter 3 of the UDO is amended by revising Table 3.1.1. by permitting the following use in the following districts under the subheading of Communications, Mining, Transportation and Utilities and revising the Legend to add TO = Technology Overlay:

Use	H I S T	R E 10	R E 5	R E 1	R T	S F 1	S F 2	S F 3	S F 4	R M F 1	R M F 2	M H P	U P T	C R D	N C	R O	C O	G C	S A C	L M I	H M I	T E C H	N O T E S
Technology Overlay District		T O	T O	T O												T O	T O	T O		T O	T O	T O	

Legend:	see Article 2.
Blank=Prohibited Use P=Permitted Use	
SE=Special Exception Use TO=Technology	
Overlay *=Additional standards apply	

3. **Explanation of Revisions: Amend Section 10.2.9**

Article 2 of Chapter 10 of the UDO is hereby amended by striking Section 10.2.9. in its entirety and substituting a new section 10.2.9. in its place to read as follows:

Section 10.2.9. – Development of Regional Impact.

Any application that would result in a zoning change that meets or exceeds any of the thresholds listed at <https://dca.georgia.gov/community-assistance/coordinated-planning/regional->

[planning/developments-regional-impact](#), or as otherwise adopted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, shall be considered a Development of Regional Impact (DRI).

4. Explanation of Revisions: Add a definition for Hyperscale Data Center to Chapter 13. Definitions.

Hyperscale Data Center is a massive data center that provides extreme scalability capabilities and is engineered for large-scale workloads with an optimized network infrastructure, streamlined network connectivity and minimized latency.