Draft Watertown
10/28/26

Data Centers

(1) General Provisions and Applicability

(a) Classification of Data Centers. Data centers shall be classified according to the cumulative gross floor area devoted to data center operations, as follows:

1. **Data Center (Hyper-Scale or Campus):** More than 300,000 square feet.
2. **Data Center (Large-Scale):** Between 175,000 square feet and 300,000 square feet.
3. **Data Center (Edge-Scale):** More than 50,000 square feet but less than 175,000 square feet.

(b) Independent Data Centers Under 50,000 Square Feet. Independent data centers containing less than 50,000 square feet of cumulative gross floor area shall be classified as **Light Industrial** land uses pursuant to Section 550.03.14. Such facilities shall comply Light Industrial land use requirements.

(c) Calculation of Facility Size. Data center classifications shall be based on the cumulative gross floor area of all buildings devoted to data center operations within a development site or integrated campus. Buildings on contiguous or adjacent parcels under common ownership or control, or developed as part of a coordinated project, shall be considered collectively. Phased development shall be classified based on the total gross floor area identified in the development plan.

(2) General Performance Standards Applicable to All Data Centers. The following standards shall apply to all data centers classified in Subsection (a)1. through 3.

(a) Utility Capacity and Infrastructure. The applicant shall submit utility plans and an analysis of anticipated water, wastewater, electrical, and other utility demands at full buildout. The City Engineer, in coordination with applicable utility providers, shall review the analysis to determine whether adequate infrastructure capacity is available without adversely affecting existing utility service. The City may require additional engineering studies and infrastructure improvements to address identified deficiencies.

(b) Emergency Backup Generators. Emergency backup generators shall comply with applicable noise, air quality, and other performance standards. Routine testing and maintenance shall occur during daytime hours, except as required for emergency operations, utility reliability, or regulatory compliance. Generating electricity for delivery to the electrical grid is prohibited.

(c) Noise Impact Study. A noise impact study prepared by a qualified acoustical professional shall be submitted with the site plan application. The study shall evaluate anticipated noise from cooling systems, mechanical equipment, transformers, emergency generators, and supporting infrastructure under reasonably anticipated operating conditions. It shall demonstrate compliance with Section 550.06.31 and evaluate tonal, low-frequency, and other distinctive noise characteristics, including octave-band or frequency analysis where appropriate. Necessary mitigation measures, including equipment placement, screening, enclosures, or operational limitations, shall be identified and incorporated into the approved site plan.

(d) Equipment Screening. All ground-mounted cooling, ventilation, generator, power supply, and other operating equipment shall be screened by a non-vegetative, noise-reducing and sound-absorbing wall or other physical barrier designed to substantially mitigate noise transmission to adjacent properties and completely screen the equipment from view. Equipment and screening shall be located in the rear yard or along the rear building façade. Where this location is infeasible, the Plan Commission may approve an alternative location, provided screening and noise mitigation requirements are maintained. Roof-mounted equipment shall comply with Section 550.07.40.

(e) Building Design. Primary building entrances shall be visually distinguished through variations in materials, patterns, textures, colors, or architectural accents or articulation. At least 20% of each street-facing building façade shall incorporate windows, doors, or similar features, including faux windows, distributed generally across the façade.

(f) Parking. Minimum and maximum parking requirements shall comply with Section 550.06.06.

(3) **Data Center (Hyper-Scale or Campus):** A facility or integrated campus housing technology infrastructure, including servers, storage, and networking equipment, for processing, managing, and storing data. Supporting infrastructure may include cooling systems, electrical substations, power distribution and generation equipment, and security systems. Hyper-Scale or Campus Data Centers contain more than 300,000 square feet of cumulative gross floor area devoted to data center operations. In addition to the general performance standards in subsection (2), the following requirements shall apply:

(a) Campus Development. Where multiple buildings are proposed as part of an integrated campus, the applicant shall submit a coordinated development plan identifying existing and proposed buildings, development phases, utility infrastructure, access and circulation, outdoor equipment areas, and required buffering and screening.

(b) Residential Separation. Outdoor mechanical, cooling, and power generation equipment shall be located at least 1,000 feet from the boundary of any residential zoning district.

(c) Traffic Impact Analysis. The Zoning Administrator, in consultation with the Director of Public Works, may require a traffic impact analysis where construction activity, employment, truck traffic, or other operational characteristics may significantly affect the surrounding transportation network. The analysis shall be prepared by a qualified transportation professional and identify necessary improvements or mitigation measures.

(d) Bufferyard. A Class D bufferyard shall be provided along all property boundaries.

(4) **Data Center (Large-Scale):** A facility housing technology infrastructure, including servers, storage, and networking equipment, for processing, managing, and storing data. Supporting infrastructure may include cooling systems, electrical infrastructure, emergency backup power generation, and security systems. Large-Scale Data Centers contain at least 175,000 square feet but not more than 300,000 square feet of cumulative gross floor area devoted to data center operations. In addition to the general performance standards in subsection (2), the following requirements shall apply:

(a) **Residential Separation.** Outdoor mechanical, cooling, and power generation equipment shall be located at least 600 feet from the boundary of any residential zoning district, except equipment located entirely within a completely enclosed building.

(b) **Bufferyard.** A Class D bufferyard shall be provided along all property boundaries adjoining property not zoned Heavy Industrial (HI).

(5) **Data Center (Edge-Scale):** A facility housing technology infrastructure, including servers, storage, and networking equipment, for processing, managing, and storing data. Supporting infrastructure may include cooling systems, emergency backup power generation, and security systems. Edge-Scale Data Centers contain at least 50,000 square feet but less than 175,000 square feet of cumulative gross floor area devoted to data center operations. In addition to the general performance standards in subsection (2), the following requirements shall apply:

(a) **Electrical Substations.** On-site electrical substations are prohibited.

(b) **Residential Separation.** Outdoor mechanical, cooling, and power generation equipment shall be located at least 300 feet from the boundary of any residential zoning district, except equipment located entirely within a completely enclosed building.

Commented [SK1]: Only allowed as CUP in the IOA (Intensive Outdoor Activity) zoning district. Alternative would be to outright prohibit 300,000 sf +, though this would require review by the Attorney.

Commented [SK2]: Only allowed as P in the HI zoning district.

Could change to CUP in HI

or, could change the size scales so that this is only possible in IOA (Combined with Hyper)

Commented [SK3]: Allowed as P in the LI and HI zoning district.

(c) **Bufferyard.** A Class C bufferyard shall be provided along all property boundaries adjoining residentially zoned property.