

BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP BOARD SPECIAL MEETING WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026

**BIG RAPIDS TOWNSHIP HALL, 14230 NORTHLAND DR.
BIG RAPIDS, MI 49307
7:00 PM**

AGENDA

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m. ROLL CALL: __Borkovich, __ Bechaz, __Everett, __ Marek, __ Saez, __ Teceno, __Welch,

PUBLIC COMMENT:

This special meeting was called by Supervisor Borkovich to discuss the following:

- 1. Assessor's Contract**
- 2. Data Center Discussion**
 - a. Introduction**
 - b. Description of a Data Center**
 - c. Purpose of Public Hearing**
 - d. What townships can and cannot do (restrictions)**
 - e. What has been done (Moratorium), joint meeting with the Board and the Planning Commission, data center overview, master plan highlights**
- 3. Rules for Speaking:**
 - a. Please sign in to speak, and leave your cell phone number if you wish to be added to the Township texting list**
 - b. Please state your name, and jurisdiction of residence**
 - c. You will be limited to 3 minutes (this is to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak)**
 - d. Please be orderly and respectful – especially to others who may not share your opinion.**

PUBLIC COMMENT:

ADJOURNMENT:

Big Rapids Charter Township will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audiotapes of printed material, if individuals with disabilities, upon five business days notice to the township. Individuals requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact Hannah Saez, Big Rapids Charter Township Clerk, 14212 Northland Drive, Big Rapids, MI 49307- call 231 796 3603 or fax request to 231 796 2533.

DATA CENTERS

BRUCE BORKOVICH, BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR

I have hopefully created a 'digestible' primer on data centers (DCs), intended for elected officials, municipal administrators, land use/conservation groups, or others who want to be more informed about the interest and need in the construction and operation of DCs. I am in no way an expert on data centers, nor am I a physicist or any kind of engineer. I am an average citizen in a position of leadership in a township with the responsibility to protect the people and environment in our community and facilitate appropriate business development. I hope to describe the nature and operation of DCs, the reason why the need for DCs is increasing, and potential impacts on both people and the environment in communities, especially communities in rural Michigan.

WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?

A data center (DC) is basically a giant warehouse full of computers, that runs 24-7. They may also be referred to as a HPC (high performance computing). These differ from office computers, as they are powerful servers stacked tightly in rows, processing and storing massive amounts of information. Every time you stream Netflix, use Google, store photos in the Cloud, send emails, use social media, or ask ChatGPT a question, the data is processed and stored in a data center somewhere. They never shut down, and as a result, they generate substantial heat which requires considerable amounts of water for cooling, and they have a constant demand for electricity.

WHAT PROPERTIES ARE SOUGHT FOR DATA CENTERS?

Data center developers seek properties based upon several factors:

- Adequate acreage based upon the footprint of the building (hyperscale DCs house over 5000 servers and have a footprint ranging from 10,000 square feet to several million square feet)
- DCs require sites near electric transmission lines sufficient to provide the substantial amount of electricity necessary to run the operation
- DCs require low-latency fiber optic cable to connect to the internet
- If the DC will be cooled with water (most will) the location must be sited near an adequate water source (river/lake, well/aquafer, public water supply)
- Developers prefer locations that offer tax exemptions or other financial incentives

DO THEY REALLY USE MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF ELECTRICITY?

According to the U.S Department of Energy in 2023, DCs consumed 4.4 % of all electricity generated in the U.S. I suspect that number has increased significantly by the end of 2025.

The energy and water draw is directly related to the size of the facility. A small to medium facility would be considered 50,000 to 100,000 square feet. Small to medium facilities would use from 5-20 megawatts of power (a megawatt is equal to 1,000,000 watts, or 1,000 kilowatts).

The large DC's are 500,000 square feet and over, some requiring over 900 acres. They use from 100-1,000 megawatts of power, which is equivalent to a medium to large city- for perspective, the average home in the U.S. uses about 30 kilowatt hours per day (1,000 watts), while a large DC can use as much power as 80,000 to 100,000 homes.

Currently, Michigan utilities DTE and Consumers Energy are making deals to produce almost 14 gigawatts to meet the increasing demand for the operation of DCs. I had to look this up, but a gigawatt is 1,000,000,000 (one billion) watts. This is the equivalent to adding six or seven major cities to the grid in just 2-3 years.

This becomes even more interesting when you consider that Michigan **legally mandated** clean energy commitments are 100 % clean energy by 2040; this seems to indicate a colossal collision is looming- the irresistible force of demand for DCs and the subsequent plan to drastically increase current-technology (fossil fuel) energy production vs the immovable force of the government and law. According to the Energy and AI, IEA (International Energy Agency) report in 2025, the current demand for energy for DCs will double by 2040.

WILL MY ELECTRIC BILL GO UP AS THESE DATA CENTERS ARE BUILT?

In Michigan, PA 181 of 2024 was passed, offering DCs sales and use tax exemptions worth millions. In exchange, the new law prohibits DCs from receiving a rate that causes residential customers to subsidize infrastructure and costs required to service the facility. This sounds like a good law, but as with anything, what protections will exist regarding future developments in the industry? For instance, the billions of dollars that are being invested in new DC developments could become 'stranded assets' if DCs don't materialize as predicted, or if they downsize or are obsolete due to new technology, or if the public outcry that we are observing prohibits or greatly restricts the development of new and larger DCs. The Michigan MPSC administrates and applies this law, and the reputation of the MPSC in Michigan seems dubious to many. The MPSC also sets consumer utility rates, and establishes rate-making policy.

As mentioned, DCs require 24/7 reliable power. According to the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, U.S. electricity demand is estimated to increase by 50% by 2050, based in great part on the development of DCs. Michigan law includes a 'safety valve' that would keep fossil fuel electricity operational if renewable energy cannot fulfill this increased demand, in spite of the 2040 clean energy mandate.

So, will rates increase? The state may say no, the developers may say no, and the energy producers (Consumers, DTE) may say no...but obviously there are no guarantees, and this type of electrical use, and the expansion necessary to produce the massive energy demands, makes me skeptical.

IS IT TRUE THAT THEY NEED A GREAT VOLUME OF WATER?

Computers, especially high-capacity servers stacked tightly indoors, generate tremendous heat when they are operational, which is 24-7 in a DC. The water demand for cooling ranges from hundreds of thousands of gallons per day to millions of gallons per day. A mid-sized DC (100,000 square feet and up) needs approximately 300,000 gallons of water per day, which is the equivalent to the water used by 1,000 homes. A hyperscale or mega-DC needs from 1-5 million gallons per day, which is equivalent to the needs of a small city.

The water used for cooling evaporates in the cooling process, and obviously is not returned to the watershed in the area. It appears that technology to create 'closed loop' systems (systems that recover water vapor and reduce or eliminate the demand for removing water from the ground), dry-air cooling (which conserves water but demands more energy) and hybrid systems are being developed, and may actually be available, but I have no idea if they are cost prohibitive, or being considered by the operators of DCs.

It seems reasonable that in rural communities, the removal of the water necessary for cooling a DC could result in lower water tables, depleted wells, competition for municipal water supplies, and reduced stream flows that would affect local ecosystems and watersheds.

DOES THE STATE OR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REGULATE WATER USE FOR DATA CENTERS?

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) regulates water withdrawal, with a goal of protecting the state's environment from significant impacts caused by large-volume water consumers. A DC, using traditional water evaporative cooling, must obtain prior approval before operating pumps capable of removing a minimum of 70 gallons per minute. Further permitting is required in sensitive areas or when large quantity water withdrawal owners seek new or increased withdrawals exceeding 2,000,000 gallons per day. Also, Michigan's Safe Drinking Water Act requires that these facilities maintain adequate capacity and reliability for existing customers.

My experience with the state environmental protection laws and agencies has been dubious; it seems that the pendulum swing in Michigan for the past several years has leaned towards the politicalization of these processes, becoming more and more "friendly" to developers and operators.

For the most part, the federal government does not regulate water use, with a few exceptions (construction/removal near federally designated historical waters/streams, etc.)

DO DATA CENTERS PRODUCE WASTE WATER?

Typically, yes. Evaporative cooling systems can generate waste water with an altered PH, and other high concentrations of conditioning chemicals and biocides, which are used to minimize the growth bacteria. These changes and chemicals can strain local water treatment operations, and obviously, they should not be returned to the local environment, where they could contaminate aquifers, wetlands, or local water sources. Such discharges would require discharge permits, but confidence in the state and local permit processes is not high.

DO DATA CENTERS PRODUCE EMISSION INTO THE AIR?

Certain DCs may not directly, under normal operations, release emissions into the air, but the electricity required from the grid obviously produces emissions, and the greater the demand, the greater the amount of emissions.

DCs do require generators to guarantee operation during power outages. These generators typically are fueled by natural gas or diesel. Emissions will obviously be determined by the number and size of the generators, but any generator produces noxious emissions. Again, EGLE would regulate these emissions, but they are not eliminated.

DO DATA CENTERS PRODUCE NOISE?

Yes, they produce substantial noise, due to the high number of servers, the use of cooling fans, high-capacity HVAC systems, back-up generators, etc. Hundreds of high-capacity fans are needed to cool densely packed servers which can create up to 90 decibels of noise (similar to a lawnmower or jackhammer).

Depending on the size of the DC, the noise escaping the DC can be from 50-90 decibels, or higher. Typical "quiet neighborhood" standards limit noise to a maximum of 40-50 decibels. Based upon locations and individual township, city, or county standards, an average seems to be 50-65 decibels during the day, and 45-55 at night.

I am uncertain if technology is being developed to use quieter equipment, or the ability to sound-proof the building.

WILL DATA CENTERS PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES? WILL THEY PROVIDE TAX REVENUE?

Promises have been and will be made about the employment opportunities that DCs will provide. But according to one report (not substantiated by me), the Switch DC near Grand Rapids originally pledged 1,000 jobs at the operation. By 2022, that DC provided just 26 jobs, yet continues to receive \$1,000,000 annually in tax breaks.

Excluding temporary jobs during the construction of a DC, the number of permanent, direct jobs is relatively small compared to the substantial capital investment.

Based upon the size of the DC, and the value of the equipment within, DC's can significantly increase the property tax base. DCs are classified as a commercial use, and the equipment within the building would be taxed as commercial personal property.

COULD DATA CENTERS BE A TARGET FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS?

It's hard to say. As a former law enforcement official, it seems logical that attacking data centers would certainly disrupt what many of us consider our way of life, which depends on the availability of functioning data centers. If terrorists attacked strategic data centers, could we all get by without so much of the technology that we are accustomed, or addicted to?

ARE THERE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY DATA CENTERS?

Generally speaking, the most environmentally friendly DCs do the following:

- Use water and energy efficient equipment practices that are confined inside of the DC
- Use electricity sources that require low water use and emissions that do not threaten or damage the environment
- Construct a facility that minimizes exterior sound
- Target thoughtful site locations that are tolerable to the local community, and that avoid sensitive lands/habitat
- Commit to a decommissioning plan that not only removes the facility at the end of facility life, but restores the property to the original state, or in compliance with a mitigation plan designed by the local government

CAN ANYTHING BE DONE TO PROTECT OUR COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES?

Contrary to what many people think, a local government, for example, a township, cannot arbitrarily deny a company from purchasing property and building a business. This is a question for the local unit of government to be answered by legal counsel. If a local government cannot prohibit DCs, zoning efforts may need to consider restricting and controlling DCs, rather than trying to simply 'outlaw' them. For example:

- Require that DC developers specifically state the electrical and cooling demands (water), and anticipated noise levels of the proposed project
- Require an environmental impact study to be completed, considered, and approved by the board
- Require the developer to provide information regarding fire and explosion risks, or other potential safety concerns, to determine if existing emergency response capabilities can adequately respond to and mitigate an emergency
- Require that DC developers produce their own, clean energy (as established by the Michigan mandate for 2040)
- Require that DC developers use a "closed loop" water recovery system, or other system that does not threaten the local water supply whether from existing ground water or municipal water systems
- Require "noise deadening" technology to be installed in the operation that will comply with established or acceptable noise standards for the community; and that the noise emitted will not be unreasonable, unnatural, or unusual
- Require that DC developers post significant bonds to be recovered by local residents and/or governments in the event of unforeseen negative environmental impacts, including but not limited to ground water or municipal water supply issues, and to include site remediation and restoration

- Require that the DC developer pay for an assessment of nearby residential water delivery systems, including but not limited to the volume of water supplied to the residence prior to construction, and a contaminant baseline test prior to construction

This list of restrictions should not be considered exhaustive. Based upon each location of a proposed DC site, and upon local ordinances, and perhaps most importantly, the interest of your community members, restrictions can be added or deleted.

I am hopeful that this summary is helpful as you consider the future of data centers in your own communities. I encourage you to act now- do not wait until property is purchased, and plans are submitted for consideration. Good luck!

**BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP
MECOSTA COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

DATA CENTER TEMPORARY MORATORIUM ORDINANCE

At a meeting of the Township Board of Big Rapids Charter Township, Mecosta County, Michigan, held at The Township Hall, 14230 Northland Drive, Big Rapids Charter Township, Michigan 49307 on the 23rd day of February, 2026, at 5:00 p.m., the following moratorium was offered by Township Board Member Marek and supported by Township Board Member Bechaz.

An ordinance enacting a temporary moratorium for a period of one year, subject to an extension by resolution, on the permitting, consideration, approval, location, construction, review, and/or installation of any Data Center facilities.

WHEREAS, due to concerns from the public and Township officials about appropriate regulations to regulate Data Centers, among other issues, associated with Data Centers; and

WHEREAS, Data Center means a facility used primarily for the storage, management, processing, and transmission of digital data, which houses computer or network equipment, systems, servers, appliances and other associated components related to digital data operations. The facility may also include air handlers, power generators, water cooling and storage facilities, utility substations, and other associated utility infrastructure to support sustained operations at the Data Center; and

WHEREAS, the typical physical characteristics of Data Centers include, but are not limited to the following: (1) power systems; (2) cooling systems (3) battery energy storage energy systems (4) use of equipment to cool the hardware and operating space; and/or (5) power generators; and

WHEREAS, the Township has a legitimate purpose in addressing the proper design, size, location, and operation of a Data Center in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the amount of water and energy consumed by, and noise produced by, Data Centers raises concerns that necessary regulations may be required to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare; and

WHEREAS, the Township is reasonably concerned future Data Centers, without proper regulations, would be established in inappropriate or inadvisable locations within the Township; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to forestall such issues for the Township and to enact a temporary moratorium on such Data Centers for one year or until any necessary regulations can be enacted; and

WHEREAS, the United States Supreme Court has upheld imposing moratoriums as tool to temporarily pause the consideration of potential development to study appropriate regulations and ordinances. *Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council v Tahoe Regional Planning Agency*, 535 US 302, 341; 122 S Ct 1465; 152 L Ed 2d 517, 552 (2002). Temporary moratoriums of a year or less in length are generally presumed to be valid; and

WHEREAS, Michigan courts have upheld the enactment of moratoriums to study and adopt new regulations. See *Central Advertising Co v St Joseph Twp*, 125 Mich App 548, 554; 337 NW2d 15 (1983). This includes Michigan courts upholding the enactment of moratoriums even by resolution and have held that the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act does not require moratoriums to be enacted by zoning ordinance amendment due to their temporary nature and governance over ministerial functions. *Metamora Twp v Am Aggregates of Mich, Inc*, ___NW2d___; 2021 Mich. App. LEXIS 2090, at *45 (Ct App, Apr. 1, 2021); and

WHEREAS, the Township determines that the adoption of this moratorium, which is necessary to preserve the public peace, health, and safety, by preventing the inappropriate location and establishment of Data Centers in the Township during the time needed to study and review, due to conditions within the Township.

NOW, THEREFORE, Big Rapids Charter Township, Mecosta County, Michigan, Ordains:

Section 1. Title: This Moratorium shall be known and cited as the Big Rapids Charter Township Data Center Moratorium Ordinance.

Section 2. Definition: Data Center means a facility used primarily for the storage, management, processing, and transmission of digital data, which houses computer or network equipment, systems, servers, appliances and other associated components related to digital data operations. The facility may also include air handlers, power generators, water cooling and storage facilities, utility substations, and other associated utility infrastructure to support sustained operations at the Data Center.

Section 3. Moratorium: The Township enacts a temporary moratorium on the permitting, consideration, approval, location, erection, construction, review, and/or installation of all Data Centers in the Township for one year, subject to six month or less extensions by resolution, or the Township's implementation of regulations governing Data Centers. For the purposes of this moratorium, Data Center encompasses all like operations, whether referenced in the Big Rapids Charter Township Zoning Ordinance.

Section 4. Severability: The provisions of this moratorium are hereby declared to be severable and if any part is declared invalid for any reason by a court of competent jurisdiction it shall not affect the remainder of the moratorium which shall continue in full force and effect. In addition to being considered an ordinance upon publication, the above-mentioned provisions shall also be deemed to be passed as a resolution of the Township Board governing an issue on a temporary timeline and regulating the internal affairs of the Township (e.g., when the Township will accept applications for the Data Center land use and when it will schedule the review of such applications versus adoption of new regulations and standards that would bind third parties).

Section 5. Repeal: All ordinances and resolutions or parts thereof in conflict with this Moratorium are hereby repealed.

Section 6: Waiver: In the event that the Township Board decides by resolution to extend this moratorium for an additional period over 12 months, and a landowner will suffer immediate and irreparable harm for the duration of the extension by resolution, or such an extension otherwise violates applicable provisions of the state or federal constitution or other applicable law, a landowner may apply in writing for a waiver of the extended moratorium from the Township Board. At a public hearing held on such an application, the landowner must bear the burden of demonstrating immediate and irreparable harm because of the extended moratorium. The Township Board, upon a sufficient showing, may grant a waiver of the extended moratorium to the degree necessary to avoid the demonstrated immediate and irreparable harm.

Section 7. Effective Date: The moratorium shall take effect as an ordinance immediately upon passage by the Township Board upon roll call vote and publication.

YEAS: 6

NAYS: 0

ABSENT/ABSTAIN: 1 ABSENT, SAEZ

MORATORIUM ORDINANCE DECLARED ADOPTED.

Bruce Borkovich, Big Rapids Charter Township Supervisor

Hannah Saez, Township Clerk

STATE OF MICHIGAN)
) SS
COUNTY OF MECOSTA)

I, the undersigned, the duly qualified and acting Clerk of Big Rapids Township, Mecosta County, Michigan do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a Resolution adopted by the Township Board at a Special Board meeting on February 23, 2026 of which the original of which is on file in my office. Public notice of said meeting was given pursuant to and in full compliance with Act No 267, Public Acts of Michigan, 1976 as amended, including in the case of a special or rescheduled meeting, notice by posting at least eighteen (18) hours prior to the time set for the meeting.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereto affixed by official signature on this 23rd day of February, 2026 BV.

Hannah Saez, Clerk
Big Rapids Township

MASTER PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

The Big Rapids Charter Township Master plan was updated in 2015, and it is valid until 2035. A township master plan is required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Section 31 (1) of Act 33 of 2008 states “A planning commission SHALL make and approve a master plan as a guide for development within the planning jurisdiction subject to section 81 and the following...

A township Master Plan is a roadmap to promote public health, safety, and general welfare (police powers) by coordinating growth and preventing incompatible land uses. It serves to guide future development and land strategies; it is the basis for zoning; it allows for public input and the community vision for the future; it allows for infrastructure planning; and it is used as a decision-making tool when considering re-zoning and special land uses.

The Big Rapids Charter Township Master Plan begins with a Vision for 2025, which is a snapshot of what we might imagine, or hope the Township would look like in 2035. In the first sentence, it states “has maintained much of its rural quality” and this paragraph also states “Prudent land use planning has been instrumental in maintaining open space within the Township, with the land west of US-131, many areas east of the Muskegon River, and areas in the south and northeast directed at low density residential and agricultural uses including hobby farming and equestrian uses.”

As we move on through this vision of 2035, the Master Plan recognizes the importance of the Muskegon River, which runs through much of the Township. “Then water quality of the river is favorable for a growing sport fishing environment.” The vision also states “Additionally, the area is water-rich due to its **plentiful, deep aquifers.**” This vision also talks about the tributaries to the Muskegon River, and states that “Land adjacent to these streams and lakes frequently sustains wetland habitats that serve as organic filtration systems.”

The snapshot of 2035 also recognizes the abundant vegetation and wildlife in the Township. “The abundance of natural wildlife makes the area a popular recreational destination for hunting and fishing activities.” “Major impacts on growth and direction will come from development within Ferris State University, Michigan’s economic recovery, Big Rapids City’s success and failures, **and the direction chosen by Township residents and officials.**”

The Master Plan concludes by stating “The goals and objectives voiced in this document and the desires and opinions of Township residents recorded in earlier surveys and interviews indicate a future not greatly different from the present context. Economic growth and the maintenance of a rural character will remain important factors.”

The Master Plan then recognizes the **FUTURE LAND USE GOALS**. Included in these goals are:

- **The Natural Environment-** Preserve the Muskegon River and other Township lakes, rivers and streams as a resource for recreation and enjoyment.
- **Land Use and Township Character-** Maintain the rural pace and comfort of a rural lifestyle for Township residents.
- **Residential Growth and Development-** Provide for orderly residential growth within the Township that provides value and variety in housing while **maintaining environmental quality**
- **Commercial and Industrial growth and Development-** Promote the area’s primary commercial and industrial centers, while avoiding unnecessary sprawl into rural Township locations.
- **Public Services and Infrastructure-** Provide appropriate services and infrastructure to existing and planned development without unnecessary and costly extensions.
- **Quality of Life-** Promote a high quality of life in Big Rapids Township through planning and zoning with healthy, balanced and appropriate land uses.

As we contemplate ordinances to address potential changes in the Township, it is important that we as a board do not make decisions based upon what we may or may not like personally; we cannot as a board say “I don’t like data centers, and they don’t belong in our Township”. As we consider any new technology or industry, we need to use the Master Plan as our guide to determine the needs of Township residents now and into the future, and how new technology and development might impact what has been established as priorities in the Master Plan.