

A Data Center May Be Coming Near You

What to do now, before it's built — Goshen & Augusta County, Virginia

This is not a call to panic — it's a call to prepare. The decisions that matter are made early, in county meetings and permits, often before most people know a project exists. Here is what to do while it still counts.

1. Protect your water — do this first, it can't be done later

If a well's flow or quality changes later, you'll need to prove it was fine before. Get a dated baseline now:

- Test your well: coliform bacteria, nitrates, pH, hardness (VA Dept. of Health or a certified lab). Keep dated results.
- Measure and record your flow rate (gallons per minute) with the date.
- Photograph and file everything; store a copy off-site. Encourage neighbors to do the same.

2. Learn one key fact: “by right” or “special use permit”?

If data centers are allowed “by right” in the zoning, no public hearing is required. If they need a special use permit, every project gets a public hearing and Board vote. Ask the Augusta County Planning Department which applies — and if it's by-right, ask the Board to require special use permits.

3. Ask these questions — on the record, at public meetings

Water: “What cooling design, how many gallons/day, from where, and who has priority in a drought?”

Generators: “How many diesel backup generators, what DEQ air permit, what emission limits, how often run?”

Noise: “Projected decibels at the nearest property line, day and night, vs. our county's limit?”

Power lines: “What new transmission and substations, across whose land, and will eminent domain be used?”

Stated use: “Is any future data center or industrial use contemplated for this parcel or adjacent parcels, and will any change of use require a new public hearing?” A genuine farm has no trouble saying yes.

4. Act

- Call the Augusta County Planning Department; ask the project's status and get on the hearing-notice list.
- Attend meetings and speak — specific questions beat general opposition.
- Request public documents: site plans, water studies, DEQ air permits. Ask the Board to require an independent, developer-funded water study before any vote.
- Organize with neighbors and share this guide. Keep dated records of every conversation.

Know what you have before you spend it. Test the well before the water changes. Get the study before the vote. Ask the question before the concrete is poured.

Full guide, sources, and downloadable PDF: thelastwindow.com · This handout is informational, not legal advice.