



**OCONEE COUNTY**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION**  
415 S. Pine St. Walhalla, SC 29691  
864.638.4218  
OconeeSC.com  
planninginfo@oconeesc.com

**COMMISSION MEMBERS**

David Nix, District 2  
Teresa Spicer, District 1  
Joe Fravel, District 4  
Mike Johnson, At-Large  
Mickey Haney, At-Large  
Brit Adams, District 3  
Jake Marcengill, District 5

**AGENDA**

6:00 pm, Monday, February 2, 2026  
Oconee County Council Chambers

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Approval of minutes from January 5, 2026
5. Public Comment for *Non-Agenda Items* (4 minutes per person)
6. Commission Member Comments
7. Staff Comments
8. Discussion regarding Oconee County's approach on ordinance changes related to data centers.
  - a. Public Comment
  - b. Discussion/Vote
9. Adjourn

*The meeting will be broadcasted live on the County's YouTube channel, which can be found on the County's website at [www.oconeesc.com](http://www.oconeesc.com).*



**OCONEE COUNTY**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION**  
415 S. Pine St. Walhalla, SC 29691  
864.638.4218  
OconeeSC.com  
planninginfo@oconeesc.com

#### COMMISSION MEMBERS

David Nix, District 2  
Teresa Spicer, District 1  
Joe Farvel, District 4  
Mike Johnson, At-Large

Mickey Haney, At-Large  
Brit Adams, District 3  
Jake Marcengill, District 5

#### STAFF

Elise Dunaway

#### MINUTES

6:00 pm, Monday, January 5, 2026  
Oconee County Council Chambers

1. Call to Order – Miss. Dunaway called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.
2. Invocation was led by Mr. Nix
3. Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Johnson
4. Election of Officers
  - a. Chairman – Mr. Johnson nominated Mr. Nix for Chairman; Mr. Haney Seconded. Approved unanimously.
  - b. Vice Chairman – Mr. Marcengill nominated Mr. Haney for Vice Chairman; Seconded by Mr. Fravel. Approved Unanimously.
  - c. Secretary – Mr. Johnson nominated Miss. Dunaway as secretary; Seconded by Mrs. Spicer. Approved Unanimously.
5. Approval of minutes from December 1, 2025 – Mr. Adams made a motion to approve the minutes; Seconded by Mr. Haney. Approved unanimously.
6. Public Comment for *Non-Agenda Items* (4 minutes per person): N/A
7. Commission Member Comments:

Mrs. Spicer introduces the conversation on data centers.  
Mrs. Spicer made a motion to add the discussion of data centers to the agenda for the February 2, 2026 meeting. Seconded by Mr. Adams. Approved unanimously

Mr. Nix thanks Mr. Johnson for his work the last 2 years as the chairman.

*The meeting will be broadcasted live on the County's YouTube channel, which can be found on the County's website at [www.oconeesc.com](http://www.oconeesc.com).*

Rev. 07/2025



**OCONEE COUNTY**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION**  
415 S. Pine St. Walhalla, SC 29691  
864.638.4218  
OconeeSC.com  
planninginfo@oconeesc.com

8. Staff Comments: N/A
9. 2026 Meeting Calendar Revision  
Mrs. Spicer made a motion to approve the revised 2026 meeting calendar;  
Seconded by Mr. Johnson. Approved Unanimously.
10. Discussion regarding Section 32-602 - Major and Minor Recreational Vehicle Parks definitions.
  - a. Public Comment: N/A
  - b. Discussion / Vote:  
Mr. Johnson made a motion to change Sec. 32-602 Definitions Minor Recreational vehicle park to say "4-10 recreational vehicles" and Major Recreational vehicle Park to say "11 or more recreational vehicles".  
Insert Sec. 26-5 (b) paragraph into Sec. 32-613 (2)(b) and (3)(b) as the county attorney sees fit.  
Seconded by Mrs. Spicer. Approved Unanimously.
11. Discussion regarding final revisions to Chapter 26 and Chapter 32 of the Oconee County Code of Ordinances to send to County Attorney for final draft.
  - a. Public Comment: N/A
  - a. Discussion / Vote:  
Mr. Johnson made a motion to ask the county attorney to bring all the motions that have been made thus far in Chapter 26 and 32 into a document and any unknown information be highlighted for review.  
Seconded by Mr. Haney. Approved unanimously.
12. Adjourn – The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:40 PM.

# Gigawatt data center proposal draws opposition from SC Lowcountry residents, politicians

The 860-acre data center campus, if approved, would mark the first 1,000-megawatt center in the Palmetto State

BY: **JESSICA HOLDMAN** - DECEMBER 19, 2025 4:21 PM



Interior of a modern data center. If approved, an 860-acre data center campus proposed for South Carolina's Lowcountry would mark the state's first gigawatt center. (Stock photo by Imaginima/Getty Images)

WALTERBORO – An 860-acre data center campus proposed for South Carolina's Lowcountry, if approved and built, would mark the first gigawatt center in the Palmetto State.

Colleton County residents and other opponents of the \$6 billion project packed the auditorium of the county civic center Thursday, voicing their concerns and seeking more information on the project that is in the early phase of development. Such massive energy hogging centers are facing pushback nationwide even as more are planned to power technical advancements being driven by artificial intelligence.

The first hurdle the developers of the nine-building campus face is securing a zoning exception for the property that would allow for a more industrial use. The project is proposed for a timberland tract about four miles southeast of Walterboro.

Only Ken Loeber, co-founder of the Charlotte-based development firm Eagle Rock Partners, spoke in favor of the project.

“The AI race that our country is in with other countries around the world is real,” Loeber said of the need for the center.

Opponents took up the remainder of the three-hour meeting, which grew rowdy at times with chants, heckling and multiple threats by the board to end the meeting if the disruptions continued. In addition to residents, opponents included environmental activists, a state senator and a Democratic gubernatorial candidate.



Colleton County residents and other opponents of the \$6 billion data center project packed the auditorium of the county civic center Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025, voicing their concerns and seeking more information on the project that's in the early phase of development. (Screenshot of Colleton County government livestream)

## The ACE Basin

At the heart of the matter is the campus proximity to South Carolina's beloved ACE Basin.

The 350,000-acre undeveloped estuary named for the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto rivers that feed it is home to nine federally endangered species, including peregrine falcons, wood storks and leatherback turtles. There are also six species federally designated as threatened and 30 other state protected species.

“The most significant conservation achievement in the state of South Carolina, I'd dare say on the entire East Coast, is the protection of the ACE Basin,” state Sen. Chip Campsen, R-Isle of Palms, told members of the county zoning board.

While the site does contain about 235 acres of wetland, Loeber said the campus would impact just 1 1/2 of those wetland acres with roads needed to access the property.

Meanwhile, the Ashepoo River lies about six miles south of the data center site. Residents were worried about how much water the center might pull from the river and groundwater system that they also rely on for their own homes and farms.

“To the extent that they use any water at all it will pose a great risk to the Ashepoo River system and the ecology of that river system,” Campsen said.



📷 Kayakers paddle along the Edisto River in South Carolina's ACE Basin. (Photo courtesy of SC Coastal Conservation League)

“Rural South Carolina is under attack by for-profits who seek to steal God’s gift to us – our water – right out from underneath our feet,” added Mullins McLeod, a Democratic candidate for governor who grew up in Walterboro.

The answer to the water use question, according to Loeber: about 12,000 gallons of water a day, the equivalent of 14, four-bedroom homes.

It amounts to a tenth of 1% of the 4.2 billion gallons available in the county annually,

according to Loeber.

“So the amount of water that we’re using every day is not billions and billions of gallons,” he said. “That is the way data centers in the past might have been developed. It’s not the way the modern data center is used.”

The center accomplishes this by continuously recycling the water it uses to cool the hundreds of thousands of servers it stores. That means the center operator would only have to fill the cooling tanks once. Most of the daily water usage would be from an estimated 500 employees hired to operate the facility, Loeber said.

## A gigawatt of power

While this type of system is less water intensive, it can be more power intensive.

Loeber told the SC Daily Gazette he estimates the center will need 1,000 megawatts of electricity.

That would take up nearly all of Santee Cooper’s share of a 2,200-megawatt, natural gas-fired power plant that the state-owned utility company is seeking to build, in partnership with Virginia-headquartered Dominion Energy, in nearby Canadys.

By comparison, other large data centers in the state operated by tech giants, such as Google and Meta, use about 200 megawatts each.

The \$5 billion Canadys gas plant and a \$431 million natural gas pipeline needed to power it have only just started the state and federal permitting process. Operations won't begin until the 2030s, so it would likely take power providers at least that long to produce the amount of energy this proposed gigawatt center needs.

Loeber went on to tell the zoning board that his company is developing this project speculatively meaning it does not have a specific tenant lined up at this time. However, data centers of this size often appeal to those same major technology users, such as Amazon.

## Other concerns

Colleton County residents, both those that have lived in the area for decades and newcomers, raised concerns about how the data center would impact the landscape, as well as the value of the homes where they had planned to spend their retirement years. One man suggested a data center is better suited for an industrial area, rather than chasing cheap, rural land in an area traditionally used for agriculture.

"The main question is why here? Why now? The answer is not here, not now, not ever," said Richard Burke, whose parents live near the site.

Another woman called into question the jobs and pay being promised by the developers.

Loeber said about 30% of the 500 permanent jobs would be in IT. Another 30% would be facility management and maintenance jobs, ranging from entry-level to highly technical. The last 30% would be security personnel, plus another 10% of administrative workers.

But Shannon Wait said her experience working at one of Google's data centers in Berkeley County was not the opportunity she expected. For the two years she was there, Wait said she and others were kept on as temporary workers rather than full-time employees, earning \$15 an hour on contracts that she had to renew every three months.

"I was constantly on the job hunt," she said.

Residents also worried about how quickly the project seemed to be moving, with one man calling it "governance run amok." The request came about a month after the Colleton County



Colleton County residents gather at an informational meeting Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025, hoping to learn more about a proposed data center project in the county. (Photo courtesy of SC Coastal Conservation League)

Council amended its zoning code to make exceptions for data centers.

The zoning board took no action, saying it would vote on the request at an unspecified future meeting.

In addition to the rezoning request, the center still needs to complete numerous county and state level permits for noise, construction, water use and permission to drill wells. It also will need a study from electric providers to determine when there might be enough power on the grid to meet the center's needs.

1

Because there is a demand for cloud computing and AI applications, data centers are now considered to be essential infrastructure.

In many cases, local governments across the country are trying to figure out how and if these energy-hungry, water-hungry data centers fit into their zoning framework.

It's difficult to see where they fit in the Oconee County Code.

Are data centers considered to be a commercial entity?

The Comp Plan defines "Commercial" as

**Commercial** – Land used to conduct businesses, trade activities, professional activities or services, administrative activities, or personal services. Included are establishments for wholesale or retail sale of goods and services, restaurants, entertainment facilities, administrative or professional offices, gas stations, grocery stores, personal services, furniture stores, clothing stores, car sales, hotels and motels, and nursery or garden centers.

Ch. 1

Are data centers considered to be an industrial entity?

**Industrial** – Land used to manufacture, assemble, process, or fabricate goods and/or to store or transport goods. Examples include manufacturing plants, industrial parks, truck terminals, and warehouses.

Ch. 11

Should data centers be a distinct category for land use in Oconee County?

What makes Data Centers unique?

data centers are distinct from other industrial and commercial uses due to their high energy consumption, large-scale backup power systems, significant water usage, and potential impacts on surrounding communities through noise, heat, and traffic;

They require security features such as fencing, surveillance, restricted access and lighting. Screening for rooftop equipment, noise mitigation measures for back-up generators and produce a constant hum to the annoyance of their neighbors.

Because our County lacks a clear definition of a data center in our Code; there is no zoning or development regulations tailored to the unique infrastructure demands and environmental impacts of a data center, a moratorium should be established.

Since March 2025,

over 8 counties and cities in GA have passed moratoriums temporarily halting any data center development. (These are Bartow, Clayton, DeKalb, Troup, Fayette, Douglas, South Fulton, and Coweta, ~~and~~ Macon, Hampton, Cartersville and Griffin.)

From Maryland to Missouri at least 14 states are home to towns or counties that have implemented moratoriums to pause data center development

MO - St. Charles - one year

KY - Oldham

NC - Gates County

OH - Ashville, Washington Twp, Jerome Twp, Lordstown<sup>Twp</sup>

TN - Bristol - 2 year

CA - Monterey Park

WI - Madison - one year

IA - Johnson County

KS - Harvey County

MI - Freedom Twp, Howell Twp, Pontiac, Sylvan Twp

IL - Godfrey Village

IN - White County, Marshall County, Starke County  
Putnam County

MD - HB 120 - prohibit constructing data  
center in state  
- Rep from Carroll County

Because the Planning Commission can make recommendations to the County Council concerning land use and zoning within the unincorporated areas of Oconee County

and since these types of facilities present unique challenges and potential impacts not adequately addressed by the County's current Ordinance Code;

and because technological advancements have precipitated the growth of data centers nationwide, expediting the need for provisions to guide responsible development and mitigate impacts such as

- Extremely high energy consumption and strain on existing utility infrastructure;
- Significant noise generation from cooling systems and backup generators, affecting adjacent residential areas and general quality of life;
- Substantial water usage for cooling purposes;
- Potential environmental impacts, including hazardous material storage and electronic waste disposal; and
- Land use compatibility concerns, particularly in rural or agriculturally zoned districts; and

Because the County's existing regulations were not developed with these specific types of high-impact uses in mind, and the County needs time to develop appropriate, comprehensive standards to ensure that any future development of such facilities is consistent with the County's long-term land use plan and protects the public interest;

It seems a temporary moratorium on accepting and processing new applications for such facilities is a reasonable and necessary measure to allow County staff and the Planning Comm. sufficient time to study the issues, engage with stakeholders, and draft appropriate amendments to

the Comp Plan and Ch 38 Article 10 sec 38