

Questions to Ask Your Board or Council

Before any discretionary approval vote, ask for written answers to these questions, and ask which commitments can be made legally enforceable through approval conditions, permits, or binding agreements. “We will provide that later” can mean after the vote, when the community’s leverage is sharply reduced.

ASK THE APPLICANT, THROUGH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

1. Show the full build-out, not phase one.

Total buildings, acreage, and megawatts at completion, plus every neighboring parcel under common control or option, and who holds them.

2. How much water, at peak and in a drought, at every phase?

Peak, average, annual, and drought figures, the cooling method, and the water provider’s written confirmation, measured against available capacity. If “reclaimed” water or “closed-loop” cooling is promised: what is the source, does any part evaporate or release mist, and what fresh-water backup is needed? What are the effects on nearby wells, springs, and streams at full build-out?

3. What goes down the drain, and what is in it?

Wastewater and cooling-blowdown volume, temperature, chemicals, and discharge point; whether the sewer system has room; and safeguards for leaks, pathogens, and Legionella wherever cooling towers release mist. **Hyperscale Limits:** For instance, an [Amazon data center](#) in Louisa, Virginia, is permitted to discharge up to **460,000 gallons per day** into Northeast Creek, while another Amazon site in the state is permitted up to **280,000 gallons per day** into Sedges Creek

4. How many megawatts, and who pays for the wires?

Load at each phase; every substation, line, and right-of-way needed; and a utility letter confirming service. Who pays for each upgrade, under what tariff or agreement, and what costs could fall on other customers or taxpayers?

5. Will there be any power generation on site — ever?

A plain yes or no on gas turbines, fuel cells, microgrids, or small nuclear reactors, including if the grid connection is delayed. Plus diesel generators, air permits, operating-hour limits, fuel and lithium battery storage, and a fire/EMS plan, including who pays for training and equipment. **Lithium-ion battery fires in data centers represent a major critical hazard due to thermal runaway — a self-sustaining, high-temperature chain reaction that is difficult to extinguish and prone to reigniting**

6. What will it sound like at the neighbors’ property line?

Independent noise modeling, including low-frequency sound, not only dBA, for normal operation, testing, and outages, with enforceable limits and verification after it is built. “We will meet your ordinance” is only as good as the ordinance.

7. How many permanent jobs go to people who live here?

On-payroll jobs counted separately from contractors, with annual public reporting of how many are held by local residents. note: **right now employees of outside management companies contracted to run the data center are counted as local jobs - even if they do not live here**

8. What does our locality collect, and what does it spend?

Tax revenue year by year, set against every cost the project creates, and a direct answer on whether any tax break, abatement, or rate change will be sought, now or later. **Right now it’s estimated that Virginia gets back only about 48 cents of every dollar it gives up through the data center tax exemption — that’s it.**

9. Who pays to take it down and clean it up?

Legally enforceable financial assurance for decommissioning and cleanup, with an independent cost estimate, periodic updates, and the locality attorney’s explanation of how it holds through sale, insolvency, or abandonment.

10. Who are we actually dealing with?

The parent company, the operator, and any tenants, and which promises survive if the property is sold.

ASK YOUR OWN OFFICIALS DIRECTLY

- **Does Virginia Code § 15.2-2209.5 apply?** For projects expected to need 100 MW or more, it requires a site assessment — sound on homes and schools within 500 feet, and at the locality’s option ground and surface water, farmland, parks, historic sites, and forestland — plus a utility disclosure of substations and transmission voltage, before a rezoning, special exception, or special use permit. Where are they?
- **Is anyone on staff or the board under a non-disclosure agreement?** NDAs have restricted public access to data-center water and power information in Virginia.
- **Is this by-right, or will there be a public hearing?** Ask for the zoning determination in writing.
- **Which approvals expire, and what keeps them valid?** Which later changes would require a new public review?
- **Who monitors each commitment?** How often are results made public, and what happens if the applicant fails to comply?

THE CLOSING ASK: FOUR REQUESTS FOR THE RECORD

One. Is there anything material to this project — water, power, noise, emissions, phasing, ownership, finances — that we have not asked about?

Two. A written list of every question not fully answered today, with a date by which each will be answered.

Three. Three facilities you have run for two years or more: what was proposed versus built, actual water and power use, jobs, taxes, complaints, and violations, plus the planning director’s contact in each.

Four. Which commitments made today would you not accept as enforceable conditions of approval?

Nothing here requires opposing a project. It requires that the project be described accurately before it is approved.

ABOUT NUCLEAR POWER FOR DATA CENTERS

- **Three Mile Island.** Unit 1, renamed the Crane Clean Energy Center (835 MW), is being restarted to supply Microsoft under a 20-year deal, backed by a \$1 billion federal loan. The NRC has not yet approved the restart; the company targets 2027. (The 1979 partial meltdown was Unit 2.)
- **Small and “portable” reactors.** As of October 2026, none is supplying a U.S. data center. The first construction permit for a commercial small modular reactor was issued in September 2026; most projects target 2030–2035.
- **Close to home.** A developer has proposed a small modular reactor of up to 650 MW in Amherst County, with a rezoning request expected in 2027. Virginia law already lets utilities charge customers some small-reactor development costs before anything is built.
- **Ask:** Where will spent fuel go? (The U.S. has no permanent repository.) How large is the emergency planning zone? Federal rules now allow it to shrink to the site boundary. How much water will it use, and who pays if the project is cancelled? **There are currently between 95,000 and 100,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel stored across the United States. This massive stockpile has been accumulating since the 1950s and continues to grow at a rate of roughly 2,000 metric tons per year.**

WHO DECIDES

County and City Governments in the Staunton Region

These boards and councils make major local zoning and fiscal decisions. Planning commissions, zoning staff, utilities, and state agencies may also have approval roles; ask which decisions apply to a proposed project. Public comment is open at regular meetings. Call the clerk to confirm the time and sign up to speak.

COUNTIES

Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
434-296-5843 (Clerk) · clerk@albemarle.org
1st & 3rd Wed, 1 PM; hearings 6 PM · County Office Bldg, 401 McIntire Rd
albemarle.org/government/board-of-supervisors

Amherst County Board of Supervisors
434-946-9400 (County Administrator)
1st Tue 3 PM · 3rd Tue 7 PM · Administration Bldg, 153 Washington St, Amherst
countyofamherst.com/supervisors

Augusta County Board of Supervisors
540-245-5600 (Government Center)
2nd & 4th Wed, 7 PM · Government Center, 18 Government Center Ln, Verona
co.augusta.va.us/government/board-of-supervisors

Bath County Board of Supervisors
540-839-7221 (County Administration)
2nd Tue, evening (check notice) · Courthouse, 65 Courthouse Hill Rd, Warm Springs
bathcountyva.gov/government/board_of_supervisors

Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors
434-591-1910 x1059 (Clerk) · csolis@fluvannacounty.org
1st Wed 5 PM · 3rd Wed 6 PM · Courts Bldg, 72 Main St, Palmyra
fluvannacounty.org/bos

Greene County Board of Supervisors
434-985-5201 (County Administration)
2nd & 4th Tue, 6:30 PM public session · Administration Bldg, 40 Celt Rd, Stanardsville
greenecountyva.gov

Highland County Board of Supervisors
540-468-2347 · hcboard@highlandcova.org
1st Tue, 6 PM · 165 W Main St, Monterey
highlandcova.org/board-supervisors

Madison County Board of Supervisors
540-948-6700 (County Administration)
2nd Tue 4 PM · 4th Tue 6 PM · Administration Bldg, 414 N Main St, Madison
madisonco.virginia.gov/217

Nelson County Board of Supervisors
434-263-7000 (Administrator / Clerk)
2nd Tue, 2 PM; 7 PM session as needed · Courthouse, 84 Courthouse Sq, Lovingston
nelsoncounty-va.gov/government/board-of-supervisors

COUNTIES, CONTINUED

Page County Board of Supervisors
540-743-4142 (County main line)
1st & 3rd Mon, 7 PM · Board Room, 103 S Court St, Luray
pagecounty.virginia.gov/208

Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors
540-463-4361 (County Administrator)
2nd & 4th Mon, 5:30 PM · Administrative Office Bldg, 150 S Main St, Lexington
co.rockbridge.va.us/144/Board-of-Supervisors

Rockingham County Board of Supervisors
540-564-3000 (Administration Center)
2nd Wed 3 PM · 4th Wed 6 PM · Administration Center, 20 E Gay St, Harrisonburg
rockinghamcountyva.gov/172/Board-of-Supervisors

CITIES

Buena Vista City Council
540-261-8601 (Clerk) · sarah.burch@buenavistava.gov
1st & 3rd Thu, 6 PM · Municipal Bldg, 2039 Sycamore Ave
buenavistava.gov/government/city-council

Charlottesville City Council
434-970-3113 (Clerk of Council)
1st & 3rd Mon; business meeting 6:30 PM · City Hall, 605 E Main St
charlottesville.gov/677

Harrisonburg City Council
540-432-7701 (City Clerk)
2nd & 4th Tue, 7 PM · City Hall, 409 S Main St
harrisonburgva.gov/city-council

Lexington City Council
540-462-3700 (City Clerk) · kbeard@lexingtonva.gov
1st & 3rd Thu, 7 PM · 150 S Main St (county building)
lexingtonva.gov/government/city-council

Staunton City Council
540-332-3810 (Clerk of Council)
2nd & 4th Thu, 7 or 7:30 PM (confirm) · Council Chambers, City Hall
ci.staunton.va.us/government/city-council

Waynesboro City Council
540-942-6669 (Clerk of Council)
2nd & 4th Mon, 7 PM · Municipal Bldg, 503 W Main St
waynesboro.va.us/178

Make it count: Email the whole board, not one member. Ask for answers in writing. Ask the same question at two meetings and compare the answers. Bring a neighbor. Download this form at: www.thelastwindow.com

Our Water • Our Land • Our Choice

Contacts from official locality websites, October 2026; call to confirm. Not legal advice.
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