

Putnam County Florida and Large-Scale Data Centers

Preparing Putnam County for Large-Scale Data Center Development:

A Proposal for a Temporary Moratorium and Fact-Finding Committee

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The discussion of data centers has reached an all-time high, from the scuttlebutt of land being marketed within our county, to people confusing the FPL Battery project as a data center. I would like to bring clarity on the matter from a research standpoint and start the conversation on what we can do now to protect our resources. This type of development is not within our comprehensive plan or within the land development regulations but still needs to be discussed to allow the county to have a full understanding of what this industry is and the impact on the county. In this paper I will discuss legislation that has allowed this to take hold within the state, actions other municipalities are taking, and what we can do for our county.

The first piece of legislation that positioned Florida to attract large-scale data center investment was Florida HB 7031, which introduced a tax exemption covering the equipment, infrastructure, electricity, and construction materials used exclusively at the data center. This law was amended in 2025 to require a cumulative capital investment of at least \$150 million and a critical IT load threshold of 100 MW or higher to receive the tax exemptions (Sutton, 2026). New data centers whose initial applications are filed after June 30, 2037, will not be able to enjoy this tax exemption, which further will expedite construction of such facilities.

The next piece of legislation, SB 484, is the most recent and this is a walk back from eroding home rule and giving local municipalities regulatory power and protection (The Florida Senate, 2026). The bill text states that "Local governments shall maintain the authority to exercise the powers and responsibilities for comprehensive planning and land development regulation granted by law with respect to large load customers" and further defines a data center as "A facility that primarily contains electronic equipment used to process, store, and transmit digital information" and a "Large-scale data center" as a facility "with a data center on site, that

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has an anticipated monthly peak load of 50 megawatts or more, calculated as the highest average load over a 15-minute interval" (The Florida Senate, 2026).

One example of why Putnam should be paying attention to this now, rather than after an application is filed: a parcel currently listed for sale sits adjacent to the East Putnam Regional Wastewater Facility (EPRWWF), which already disposes of treated effluent via an on-site spray field, meaning a reclaimed water source exists at this location. The county is currently pursuing state funding (LFIR #2584, sponsored by Sen. Thomas Leek) to expand EPRWWF's capacity by 450,000 gallons per day, including additional effluent spray fields and connecting piping, an expansion driven by the need to convert septic-dependent homes near the St. Johns River to sewer service, not by any anticipated industrial demand (The Florida Senate, 2025).

Still, the practical effect is that the reclaimed water infrastructure adjacent to this parcel is expanding in both capacity and reach. Under s. 373.262, F.S. (created by SB 484), if a large-scale data center were sited here, and reclaimed water distribution to the site proved feasible, the water management district would be required to mandate its use over new groundwater or surface water withdrawal (The Florida Senate, 2026). Whether the existing or soon-to-be-expanded infrastructure could support that kind of extension is a question the county should be asking now, rather than during a permit review under pressure.

Putnam is not alone in grappling with this. Clay, Nassau, and Citrus counties have already enacted formal moratoriums on data center development, pausing new applications while they study the impacts on water, energy, and local infrastructure. Lake and Hernando counties are close behind, having advanced moratoriums through initial votes with final adoption expected soon. St. Johns and Levy counties are actively considering the same step. Across North

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and Central Florida, more than a dozen counties have now taken this route rather than a wait-and-see approach, using the authority SB 484 explicitly preserves local government. I believe Putnam should do the same: enact a moratorium now, so the county has time to fully understand this industry and its impacts before a single application forces the issue.

That authority is not unlimited, however. While SB 484 preserves local governments' power to regulate data centers, it does not authorize an outright ban — any such regulation must still be reasonable, legally defensible, and capable of withstanding judicial scrutiny under Chapter 163, Part II, F.S. This is precisely why Nassau County structured its own response as a temporary moratorium paired with a fact-finding committee, rather than an outright prohibition (Nassau County, 2026). I am proposing the same model here.

My formal request of the commission is to adopt a moratorium on large-scale data center development in unincorporated Putnam County, effective for six months, with the option to renew once for a total of twelve months. During that time, I am asking the Board to formally establish a fact-finding committee consisting of the following nine (9) members with no active industry contracts:

- One (1) County Commissioner or designee, who shall serve as Chair (or Co-Chair, at the Board's discretion), to ensure the Committee's work remains accountable to the Board.
- One (1) representative of Public Works, to address water and wastewater capacity, including reclaimed water availability.
- One (1) representative of the electric utility or utilities serving the affected areas of the County, to address grid capacity and large-load service impacts.

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- One (1) member of Putnam County Planning & Zoning staff, to address land use and comprehensive plan consistency.
- One (1) representative of the Putnam County Property Appraiser's Office, to address tax base and assessed value impacts.
- One (1) representative of the local agricultural community or Farm Bureau, in recognition of the County's significant agricultural land base and its competing demands for land and water.
- One (1) representative with environmental or water-management expertise, which may be a liaison from the St. Johns River Water Management District or a representative of a local environmental organization, to address aquifer and water-withdrawal impacts.
- One (1) or two (2) resident/homeowner representative(s), drawn where practicable from the district(s) nearest to areas of development interest (e.g., East Palatka).
- One (1) representative of the local business or economic development community, to ensure the Committee considers claimed economic benefits alongside potential costs.

Their function is to study how large-scale data centers would affect our water supply, our power grid, our roads, and our tax base, and to report back to this Board at least 60 days before the moratorium expires.

I'm also asking that, during this same window, we update our ordinances to define 'large-scale data center' consistent with the State of Florida's definition under Senate Bill 484, a facility with 50 megawatts or more of monthly peak electric load and prohibit the County from entering into any non-disclosure agreement with a data center company unless the existence and general terms of that agreement are disclosed to the public first. This is not about blocking growth. It is

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about giving this county the time and the facts it needs to write the rules before the deals get signed, not after.

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