Ralls County Planning and Zoning Meeting Minutes

Meeting Information

Date: October 28, 2026

Location: Ralls County Courthouse

Purpose: Working session to review the draft for data centers and receive updates from the Data Center Risk Assessment Team. No formal data-center rezoning application was pending, and no final ordinance or approval was considered.

Call to Order and Opening

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM and opened with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. McClelland introduced the county commissioners, newly appointed Saverton Township board member Jeff Valle, and existing Planning and Zoning Board members.

Officials and Board Members in Attendance

Shane McClelland, Administrator of Planning and Zoning; John Lake, Presiding Commissioner; John Wieczorek, Western District Commissioner; and Junior Muehring, Eastern District Commissioner. Planning and Zoning Board members present included David Locke (Clay Township), Glen Wiley (Road Supervisor), David Talbott (Salt River Township), Lowell Jackson (Center Township), Jeff Thompson (Spencer Township), Kaleb Thompson (Saline Township), and newly appointed board member Jeff Valle (Saverton Township). Legal counsel Joe Brannon and county staff member Kristal Hiner were also present. There was a total of 41 in attendance, including the board members and staff.

Approval of Prior Minutes

The minutes of the October 14, 2026, public working session were read. A motion was made by David Locke to approve the minutes and seconded by David Talbott, the motion passed unanimously.

Scheduled Presentations and Special Committees

Kevin Jacobson presented an update on behalf of the Data Center Risk Assessment Team. Mr. Jacobson reported that the volunteer team has completed its baseline preparation and identified 22 initial items for evaluation across areas including power reliability, utility rates, water cooling systems, backup generator emissions, and noise. He noted that the committee currently has seven to eight volunteers with backgrounds in power, security engineering, and server farms, and is actively seeking a volunteer with environmental or hydrology expertise prior to their kickoff meeting before Thanksgiving. Mr. Jacobson emphasized that the team cannot finalize risk evaluations or make formal recommendations to the commissioners until a formal project proposal with site specifications is submitted.

Working Session: Regulatory Draft Review

Following the presentation, the board pulled tables together for a working session to review the preliminary Chapter 30 data center draft line by line:

- **Permits, Audits, and Fee Structure (Articles 2 & 14):** Board members discussed requiring developers to pay upfront fees—similar to a performance bond—so the county can independently hire qualified third-party construction management and inspection firms for post-construction audits and annual compliance checks. Members agreed that the county should also incorporate administrative overhead fees and road-use permits into the draft.
- **Utility Grid and Water Oversight (Articles 5, 15, & 16):** Lynn Hodges of Ralls County Electric Cooperative addressed the board regarding grid capacity, noting that large loads (such as 30 megawatts) would connect

directly to transmission lines rather than local substations, with developers required to pay upfront for all infrastructure upgrades and demand deposits to protect cooperative members from rate increases. Board members noted that grid capacity assessments, three-year utility prepayments, water peak-pull restrictions (Cannon Water), and wastewater regulations (Missouri Department of Natural Resources) fall under utility and state jurisdiction rather than county enforcement.

- **Cooling Systems (Article 6):** Members discussed mandating closed-loop, chillerless, dry-cooled, direct-to-chip liquid cooling systems filled via a broken connection rather than a direct water line. This approach was favored to minimize water usage, prevent runoff contamination, and eliminate compressor noise associated with traditional chillers.
- **Facility Size Tiers, Noise, and Aesthetics (Articles 7 & 8):** The board favored applying the strictest noise, vibration, and compliance standards uniformly across all data centers rather than separating rules into small, medium, and large tiers. Members also discussed requiring stormwater retention, engineering for large, paved surfaces and removing overly residential exterior requirements (such as shutters and vinyl siding) in favor of commercial aesthetics suited to the surrounding area.
- **Setbacks and Zoning Classification:** A discussion occurred regarding the draft's property-line setbacks (ranging from 1,000 to 4,000 feet, and up to 6,000 feet from waterways). Legal counsel advised that courts evaluate whether zoning regulations have a rational basis compared to existing standards (such as the county's 30-foot commercial/industrial setback) to ensure ordinances are not arbitrary. Members discussed distinguishing setbacks from property lines versus neighboring residences, creating a dedicated data center zoning district, and reviewing how Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) on agricultural land align with the 1994 Comprehensive Master Plan.
- **Construction Workforce and Emergency Services:** Members expressed consensus on prohibiting temporary "man camps" for construction workers. They also discussed requiring developers to fund specialized training and equipment upgrades for local rural fire districts.

Public Discussion and Announcements

- Officials announced that an informal open house for the public to meet the prospective data center company is scheduled for November 11, 2026, from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at The Junction, followed by a formal presentation to Planning and Zoning on November 18, 2026.
- Members of the public voiced strong opposition to locating data centers on agricultural land, questioned whether the county is legally obligated to allow them, and debated whether rezoning or Conditional Use Permits violate the County's Master Plan. Board members said they are drafting protective regulations before any application is received so the county is prepared.

Decisions and Formal Action

No data-center ordinance, rezoning, conditional use permit, site plan, tax incentive, or project approval was adopted. Other than approval of the prior meeting minutes, the session was a work session and no final action on a data-center proposal was taken by the board.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

Hearing no further business, a motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting officially adjourned at approximately 8:25 PM.

Approval of Minutes

Date Approved: 11/18/2026

Motion Made By: David Talbott

Seconded By: David Loche