



Maine Conservation Voters

Data Center Community Action Toolkit

A practical guide for Maine volunteers and local advocates

Across Maine, communities are asking important questions about large-scale data center development.

These projects can affect electricity demand, water use, wastewater, noise, local infrastructure, tax agreements, and public decision-making.

This toolkit is to help you get started. You do *not* need to be an expert. The most important thing is to ask your town to slow down, gather information, and put clear safeguards in place before any major data center project moves forward.

THE MAIN ASK:

If your town is considering, discussing, or being approached about a data center, the best first ask is:

Please adopt a temporary moratorium on large-scale data centers to give the town time to study the issue, hear from residents, and develop strong local safeguards.

Note that a moratorium is not necessarily the final answer. It is a temporary pause that gives the community time to understand the impacts before decisions are made.

Step 1: Find out what is happening in your town

Start by checking whether a data center has already been proposed, discussed, or hinted at.

Look at:

- Town council or select board agendas
- Planning board agendas
- Economic development committee agendas
- Recent meeting minutes
- Local news articles
- Public notices
- Zoning or land use applications
- Tax Increment Financing, TIF, or other tax agreement discussions

You can also email your town manager, planner, code enforcement officer, or local elected officials and ask:

“Has the town been contacted by any company, developer, or representative about a possible data center project?”

Step 2: Build a small team

You do not need a big group to get started. A few organized people can make a real difference.

Try to connect with:

- Neighbors who are concerned
- People who regularly attend town meetings
- Local conservation, climate, public health, taxpayer, or community advocates
- People with experience in planning, water, energy, law, municipal government, or communications
- Residents who can write letters, make calls, speak at meetings, or help track information

Create a simple list with names, emails, phone numbers, town, availability, and what people are willing to help with.

Step 3: Contact local officials

Reach out to your town council, select board, planning board, town manager, planner, or code enforcement officer.

Ask them to:

- Publicly share any information they have about proposed data center development
 - Hold a public workshop or community meeting
 - Consider a temporary moratorium
 - Review local zoning and land use rules
 - Require clear information from any developer before moving forward
 - Make sure residents have meaningful opportunities to weigh in
-

Step 4: Ask the right questions

Data center proposals can raise big questions for towns. Here are some of the most important questions to ask:

Electricity and ratepayers

- How much electricity would the facility use at full buildout?
- Would new poles, wires, substations, transmission, or distribution upgrades be needed?
- Who would pay for those upgrades: the developer, local customers, or ratepayers more broadly?
- Could this project affect grid reliability?
- Would the facility use renewable energy, and how would that be verified?

Water, wastewater, and cooling

- How much water would the facility use each day and each year?
- What water source would be used?
- Would water use increase during heat waves or droughts?
- What cooling technology would be used?
- Would there be wastewater discharge?
- What chemicals would be used on site, including in cooling or wastewater systems?
- What standards would protect rivers, streams, drinking water, and aquatic habitat?

Noise, generators, and air quality

- Would the facility operate 24/7?
- What noise levels are expected at the property line?
- Would backup generators be used on site?
- What emergency response resources would the town need?

Land use and community impacts

- Would the facility affect nearby homes, schools, farms, waterways, conservation land, or downtown areas?
- Does the town currently define data centers in its zoning ordinance?
- Are there limits on size, energy use, water use, noise, emissions, or generator testing?
- Would the project require a tax agreement, TIF, credit enhancement agreement, or other public incentive?

Transparency and public process

- What information has the developer provided to the town?
- Has the town held a public workshop or hearing?
- Are any tax, infrastructure, or development agreements public or anticipated?
- Has the town consulted independent experts?
- Will residents have meaningful opportunities to comment before any approval?

Potential local economic effect

- Would the facility create long-term local jobs, and how many?
- Is there an estimated salary range for the permanent jobs?
- What is the estimated property tax value from the development?
- Has there been an assessment of the effect of such a facility on nearby residential property values?

Step 5: Show up and speak

Public meetings matter. Even a short comment can show that residents are paying attention.

Use the sample public comment, sample email, and meeting checklist below to help organize your next steps.

Sample public comment

My name is [Name], and I live in [Town].

I'm concerned about the possibility of large-scale data center development in our community. These projects can use significant amounts of electricity and water, and they can raise serious questions about wastewater, noise, local infrastructure, emergency response, tax agreements, and costs to ratepayers.

They may also raise questions about whether backup generators would be used on site, what fuel they would use, how often they would be tested, and what air or noise permits would be required.

I'm not asking the town to rush to a final answer tonight. I'm asking the town not to rush into approving something before we understand the impacts.

I urge the town to adopt a temporary moratorium on large-scale data center development and begin a transparent public process to evaluate what protections our community needs.

Thank you.

Sample email to town officials

Subject: Please consider a temporary moratorium on large-scale data centers

Dear [Town Official],

I'm writing as a resident of [Town] because I'm concerned about the potential impacts of large-scale data center development in our community.

Data centers can require significant amounts of electricity, water, land, and local infrastructure. They can also raise questions about wastewater, noise, emergency response, tax agreements, and costs to ratepayers.

I'm asking the town to consider a temporary moratorium on large-scale data center development so local officials and residents have time to study these issues and develop appropriate safeguards before any project moves forward.

At a minimum, I hope the town will require clear public information on projected electricity demand, water use, wastewater discharge, cooling technology, noise, emergency response needs, infrastructure costs, any tax agreements or public incentives, and whether backup generators would be used on-site. If generators are proposed, residents should know how many there would be, what fuel they would use, how often they would be tested, and what air or noise permits would be required.

Thank you for your service to our community. I hope you will support a careful, transparent public process before any large data center project is approved.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Address or Town]

Checklist before a town meeting

Before the meeting:

- Check the agenda
- Email town officials
- Invite neighbors to attend
- Prepare a short public comment

During the meeting:

- Ask for a temporary moratorium
- Bring or share a sample ordinance, petition, or resource
- Take notes on what officials say

After the meeting:

- Follow up after the meeting
- Keep building your local team

Step 6: Ask for a moratorium, ordinance, or stronger restriction

Different towns may choose different tools depending on what is happening locally.

Temporary Moratorium

A moratorium is usually the best first ask when a town needs more time. It temporarily pauses certain development or permits so the town can study the issue, hear from residents, and decide what rules are needed.

A moratorium may make sense if:

- A data center has been proposed or rumored
- The town does not have clear rules for data centers
- Residents need more information about energy, water, wastewater, noise, whether backup generators would be used, emergency response, tax impacts, or ratepayer costs
- The town needs time to draft an ordinance
- The community wants a transparent public process before approvals are granted

In Maine, municipal moratoria on development permits or licenses are time-limited. A moratorium generally cannot last longer than 180 days at a time, though it may be extended if the municipality finds that the problem still exists and reasonable progress is being made toward solving it.

Local ordinance

An ordinance is a local law. For data centers, an ordinance, and zoning ordinances in particular, can set standards developers must meet before a project is approved.

A strong ordinance could address:

- Where data centers may or may not be located
- Size thresholds
- Electricity demand reporting
- Water use reporting
- Cooling technology
- Wastewater discharge
- Chemicals used on site
- Backup generators and fuel storage, if proposed

- Noise limits
- Emergency response planning
- Decommissioning plans
- Public notice and hearing requirements
- Independent review paid for by the applicant
- Transparency around tax agreements and infrastructure costs

A good message to municipal elected officials might be:

Please adopt a temporary moratorium and use that time to develop a local ordinance with strong safeguards for water, energy, noise, wastewater, emergency response, ratepayer impacts, and public transparency.

Ban or prohibition

Some communities may want to prohibit large-scale data centers entirely, especially if residents believe this type of development is not compatible with the town's water resources, energy infrastructure, land-use goals, or community character.

A ban is the strongest option, but it can also be more legally and politically complicated. Residents should work closely with town officials and the town attorney before circulating or adopting ban language.

(This toolkit is general information for organizing, and should not take the place of legal advice.)

Step 7: Use citizen petitions wisely

In some Maine towns, residents may be able to use a citizen petition to place an article on the town meeting warrant or bring an issue forward if they have not had success in encouraging municipal officials to address the issue. The process depends on the town's form of government, charter, and local rules.

Before collecting signatures, ask the town clerk:

- How many signatures are required?
- Is there a required petition format?
- What are the filing deadlines?
- Would the article go to town meeting, referendum, council, or another process?
- Should the town attorney review the language first?

If possible, get the exact requirements in writing before circulating a petition.

Helpful resources

Start with one or two strong resources. Do not overwhelm people with every link at once. Here are some good places to begin:

- [Safer States' data center policy and organizing resources](#)
- [Climate XChange's state policy toolkit on data center transparency and accountability](#)
- [National League of Cities / AAAS / EPI Center fact sheet on community strategies for data center development](#)
- [North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit: Mapping local, state, and federal policy interventions to stop or restrict data center development](#)
- [Maine's municipal moratorium statute](#)
- [Maine's town meeting petition statute](#)

Examples of municipal actions across the state

- [Draft Citizens' Petition from Sanford, Maine](#)
- [Data Center Moratorium from Brunswick, Maine](#) (*passed 6/1*)
- [Data Center Moratorium from Bangor, Maine](#), found on page 6 (*passed 4/13*)

How to plug in

If you are interested in organizing around data centers in your town, you can:

- Attend your next town council, select board, or planning board meeting
- Ask whether any data center projects have been proposed
- Share this toolkit with neighbors
- Ask your town to consider a temporary moratorium
- Contact Maine Conservation Voters (MCV) for additional support, resources, or connections to advocates in other communities

For support, please reach out to:

**Maggie Somers (maggie@maineconservation.org) or
Sarah Woodbury (sarah@maineconservation.org)**