



## A Deal with the Data Center

On May 27th, at 1:30 pm, on a hot and sunny day, the Jackson Planning Board held a meeting with a fully packed room. There were a few things on the docket but the biggest issue was that the board was petitioned by Saxon Investment Company to rezone 190 acres of land to a heavy industrial district in northwest Jackson, just miles from neighborhoods off Northside Dr. This is the only way they'll be able to start development of Jackson's first large data center. Around 80-90 people packed into the conference room to voice their opposition to this rezoning in hopes of stopping the development in its tracks. Multiple times chants of "No Data Centers" filled the large conference room and interruptions were common as people let their frustrations fly.

One of the first people to learn and tell others about this rezoning was Matt Casteel who owns and operates WurmWorks, a compost service that also sells worms and soil to local gardeners. His company runs on the land that the current developer is hoping to rezone and then potentially create a network of buildings, generators, battery banks, and small power plants to service the largest AI companies in the world. In Southaven, MS, data centers have driven local residents mad with constant humming sounds heard from the power generators. The centers have polluted the air making health outcomes worse for local residents, and raised demand on the local electricity and water system, which in Jackson is already recognized as one of the worst water systems in the country. Pair that with MS having one of the highest poverty rates, and it starts to make you wonder what do these data centers have that could make up for all of that?

The head legal counsel for the Saxon Investment Group was at the meeting. Mr Robert Ireland. He was there to ask the Planning Board to postpone their decision until next

month. The reason given was "After the city council meeting last week and continuing conversations, we believe it's in the best interest of all involved to postpone." He added, "The city has committed to present data center specific standards to address the city's concerns about noise emissions, utility burdens and other issues. Saxon encourages the city to adopt those standards." This spurred more heated debate between the crowd and the board, some of the residents saying they should go ahead and vote today. This is the time the "No Data Center" chant erupted and the crumbling security guard had to use his stern voice. Ultimately the request to postpone was approved and the next meeting will take place on June 24th, 1:30 pm at 200 S President St.

## Why Bother?

So what's the argument for having one in Jackson? At a recent city council meeting, Mr. Ireland showed up to make a public comment in support of building a data center, and doing it quickly. He did this because the council was voting to pause data center construction for 6 months to give them time to put a framework and ordinances in place that would protect the health and wellbeing of residents. He urged them to not pause, and said that if they did, this, and other opportunities in the future would likely not be available. I listened multiple times and there was only one benefit he mentioned and that was the amount of money that the city would receive in the first 10 years. He threw out some big numbers like 62 million and 84 million over ten years but later said that the size of the center can vary widely. It's clear that a final investment price is not settled, and there's a large dip in income after the initial building phase. For comparison the city's full budget for the next 10 years is \$3.3 billion. And the money isn't directly paid to the city but rather mainly through indirect means like tax from the initial

investment phase, and property tax, which is often subsidized to make the deal.

## Public Comment

Ireland was the only person there in support of a data center but there were plenty opposed.

**Erin Ory** is a longtime Jackson resident and showed up in support of pausing any new developments. She reminds the council that MS Senate Bill 2001 granted data center developers fast-track permits, strict confidentiality agreements, and exemptions from normal rules to accelerate data center construction. She says “Those regulatory steps that were removed were not bureaucratic red tape, they were community protection mechanisms such as environmental impact reviews, public comment periods, and utility rate oversight which were designed to catch problems before they become crises.” “These facilities rely on diesel backup generators that continuously emit particulate matter and nitrogen oxides. These pollutants are directly linked to cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses.” She cites research that has found the noise from living near a data center can cause sleep deprivation, hearing loss, and chronic stress. “What we are seeing across the country are increased energy bills, water depletion/contamination, noise pollution, and billions in public tax breaks to multi-trillion dollar tech companies. Once built, these facilities require very small crews to run it, providing very few permanent and local jobs to justify the taxpayer cost.”

**Jason Haley** is a Southaven resident who lives a half mile from the turbines that have been constructed to power a data center. He spoke from memory and had this to say: “The noise has been excruciating torture since August.” “We’ve talked with our mayors, talked with everyone about it, it’s just ‘economic benefits’ is all you’re gonna hear. We were told the same as a lot of people were ‘This is going to be different

under my watch.’ Every city, every mayor thinks ‘Hey this is going to be different, they’re not gonna do it the same, we’re gonna protect y’all.’ That’s not what happens.” “They’re going to skirt every law, every loophole that they can possibly do. We have close to 60 turbines on site now, they were only approved for 40. They’re currently running them all the time.” “From inside my house I hear this” “My walls vibrate. Losing sleep over it. I don’t even have the words to explain how this has made us feel in Southaven.” “We had no public input, no insight into what was happening to us. The announcement was made August 1st and the noise was there 2 weeks later. And it’s continued every day since. There’s a lot of other concerns too with air pollution. [Developers] say ‘Hey we’ve done our research, it’s not going to use your water, it’s not going to pollute the air. The same people are the ones who told us the noise would have no adverse effects on us and I promise you it does. So do I believe their consultants and the people they’re paying very well to tell everyone ‘Hey this is not going to be like everywhere else?’” “Look around, look at other cities, other states that have been through this.” “Money isn’t everything”

**Shannon Samsa**, another Southaven resident shares her experience: “Every single guardrail and guideline that was meant to protect us has failed. Every single one. On a local, state, and federal level.” “I would give anything that would have prevented xAI from being in Southaven in the first place.” “I was told noise would not be a concern and that all due diligence had been done, clearly that has not been the case. Even after the addition of two different sound walls.” “I was told water use would be zero because of closed loop systems specifically and we filed record requests for xAI’s water bills and the facts say otherwise. We don’t know if it will be sustainable for our aquifer and may not know before it’s too late.” “These big tech companies coming into our state do not care about us. They don’t care about you or me or our families or our neighbors. They care about money and they’re here cause they’re getting huge tax breaks on cheap land.”

## The Vote

So this was the trickiest bit. When they got to the part where they vote on whether or not to pause all development for 6 months, there was a lot of disagreement about the legality of the moratorium and debate over whether or not it was a “zoning ordinance.” Because if it’s a zoning ordinance, the public has to be given 15 days advance notice or else it could be invalidated later in court. Grizzell seemed unconcerned with the City Attorney’s warning as he felt there was a misunderstanding at the time it was made. Someone from the City Attorney’s office was there to follow up and say that since it restricted the use of land that is owned or marketed then that makes it a zoning ordinance. “In other words, the measure restricts the use of private property. That makes it a zoning issue.”

Clay then expressed her support for passing the measure that day. She said the City Attorney has done a great job giving them the memo but she feels they need to go ahead and act on it and in between, give the notice that they’re asking for.

Mr Hartley then questioned Pieter Teeuwissen how quickly the administration could come up with a proper zoning ordinance for a new data center? 30 days was the response. Hartley wanted MDEQ to approve it but Teeuwissen said they would likely “sidestep” any request to do that.

Parkinson then chimed in urging the council to take the advice of the City Attorney to which Clay responded they didn’t need to because it wasn’t a zoning ordinance. Grizzell and Clay were clearly on their own here, and the vote showed that out. Brown motioned to table the issue, it was properly seconded, and the vote to

table passed 4-2. Brown and Grizzell are the two that voted against tabling it. Stokes was absent. It now appears that there will need to be a majority vote to bring it back.

The numbers for your elected officials will be on the last page.

### Upcoming Events:

June 2nd 10:00 am - City Council Meeting - City Hall

June 22nd - Public Hearing on Data Centers and Rezoning - City Hall

June 24th - Public hearing with Rezoning Board - 200 S President St.

## **City Council Contacts:**

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### **Ward 5**

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### **Ward 6**

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### **Ward 7**

Kevin Parkinson - 601-960-1063  
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## **Zoning Board Contacts:**

Call the general inquiry number  
(601) - 960 - 1111 M-F and ask to speak to  
the member in your ward.

### **1.**

Christopher Meyers  
Mitchell Monsour

### **2.**

Michael Booker  
Bertha Thames

### **3.**

Joyce Jackson  
Geneva Johnson

### **4.**

Eric Norwood

### **6.**

Florine Keeler  
Emon Thompson

### **7.**

Emily Pote  
Jennifer Welch

### **At large:**

Vick Hudson